National WIC Association

Westat

Feeding the Future: Projecting WIC Funding Needs for FY 2027 and Beyond

Supporting Families, Strengthening Access

July 2026

Using a new forecasting model, developed in partnership with Westat, the National WIC Association (NWA) projects that **funding needs for the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) for fiscal year (FY) 2027 will be at least $8.55 billion in new budget authority** (Kessler et al., 2026). This estimate reflects average monthly participation of 7.14 million pregnant and postpartum women, infants, and young children. Based on these estimates, NWA projects that the President's budget and the House Agriculture Appropriations proposals for FY 2027 would fall short of meeting WIC's needs to serve all eligible individuals seeking services.

A Prophet model was used to predict WIC participation using prior WIC participation since FY 2021, incorporating seasonality and holiday effects. The study team used publicly available WIC Food and Nutrition Services and Administration cost data provided by State agencies to estimate monthly costs.

WIC is a discretionary program funded by Congress through the annual appropriations process. For the past 30 years, there has been a bipartisan commitment to fully fund WIC so that every eligible individual who seeks WIC services can participate. Each year, appropriators must project "full funding" based on anticipated participation levels and food costs for the coming fiscal year. A WIC forecasting model is essential because of this distinct funding process. NWA and Westat leveraged machine learning methods to select, test, and implement a new funding model to project WIC participation and food costs within 1% of real needs.

WIC funding needs have been more difficult to predict in recent years because of changes in participation trends and higher than usual variation in grocery prices. Following years of consistent declines in WIC participation, the number of WIC participants increased steadily from FY 2022 through September 2025 (Food and Nutrition Administration, 2026a; Food and Nutrition Administration, 2026b). Based on NWA's surveys of participants, this increased participation likely reflects efforts to ease barriers to participation, like the use of virtual appointment options related to modernization waivers first authorized by Congress in 2021, as well as participant satisfaction with higher amounts of fruits and vegetables (Lee et al., 2026).

This trend in participation growth was disrupted in October 2025, most likely as a result of the unprecedented 6-week federal government shutdown. However, NWA's forecasting model predicts continued growth in participation as well as food costs, which means Congress will need to increase investment in WIC in FY 2027 to protect the commitment to full funding.

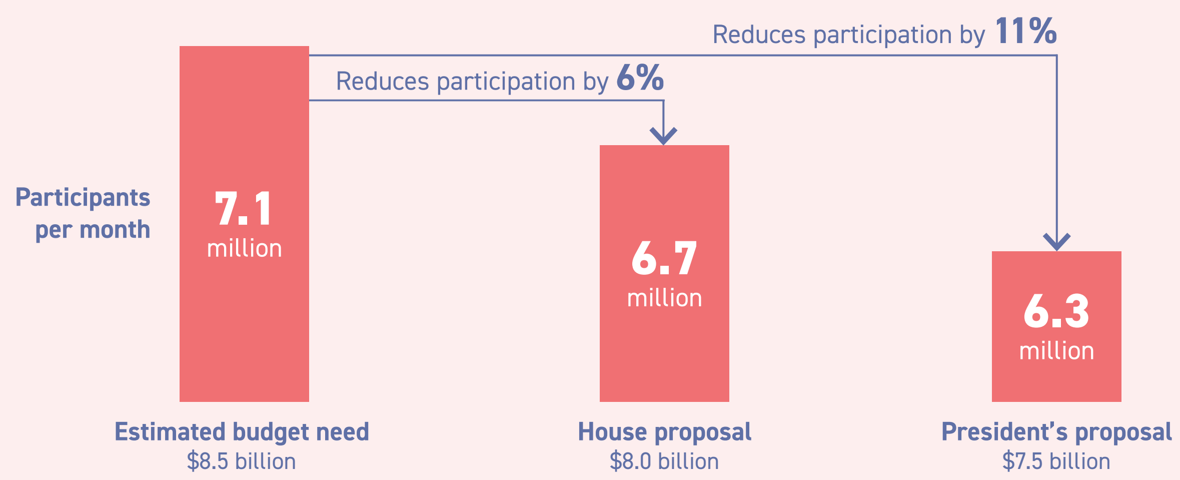
Impacts of the President's Budget

Under the President's proposed funding level of $7.5 billion (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2026), **more than 875,000 eligible individuals would lose benefits each month** if all benefits are maintained (see Figure 1), resulting in the loss of vital nutritional support during critical periods of development. The President's budget proposal would also cut fruit and vegetable benefits from $26 to $10 for children, $52 to $13 for breastfeeding women, and $47 to $13 for pregnant and postpartum women. Survey data from WIC participants suggest some families will elect not to participate in WIC if fruit and vegetable benefits are cut (Ritchie et al., 2022). **As a result of this cut, up to 1 million eligible individuals would lose benefits each month. Additionally, grocery stores and producers could lose between $955 million and $1.23 billion dollars in FY 2027 for fruit and vegetable benefits alone**. Lower program participation would also lead to lost revenue for retailers because fewer participants would purchase other food products with WIC benefits.

Impacts of the House Agriculture Appropriations Proposal

Under the House's proposed funding level of $8 billion, **458,000 eligible individuals would lose benefits each month** (see Figure 1). Although the House proposal includes a more modest fruit and vegetable cut (10%), Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee Chairman Andy Harris (MD-01) has said that this is a first step in a long-term plan to cut fruit and vegetable benefit levels to $10-$13 per month (see Impacts of the President's budget).

Figure 3. Projected WIC funding needs, FY 2027



NWA Recommendations

For FY 2027, Congress should provide at least $8.55 billion in new budget authority for WIC to ensure that all eligible individuals interested in participating can access the program. It is also critical that U.S. Department of Agriculture retain robust carryover funds in the program year over year to be able to meet unexpected funding needs, such as sudden increases in participation or changes in food costs.

In the long-term, NWA also recommends that Congress continue to explore alternate funding models for WIC, such as mandatory program funding. In the months during and immediately following the 2025 federal government shutdown, a significant drop in WIC participation was observed, likely, in part, as a result of the uncertainty of funding availability for the program. Shifting WIC to a mandatory program with funds flowing directly from the U.S. Treasury–without the need for congressional appropriations–would alleviate such disruptions.

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