



# KEY WIC MESSAGES: FALL 2022

## NWA'S MISSION

The National WIC Association (NWA) provides its members with tools and leadership to expand and sustain effective nutrition services for mothers and young children.

## COVID-19 PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY

The Public Health Emergency (PHE) declaration for COVID-19 provides federal agencies with flexibilities but can only be extended for a period of 90 days. The Secretary of Health and Human Services recently extended the PHE through mid-January 2023. Ongoing WIC waivers - allowing for remote certifications, deferral of anthropometric data collection, and food package substitutions - are in place through 90 days of the PHE's expiration. The Secretary has also committed to providing 60 days notice before phasing out the PHE, meaning that WIC providers will have 5 months notice before program flexibilities expire.

NWA has called on the PHE to remain in place until Congress can consider longer-term reforms that incorporate lessons learned while operating programs during COVID. Other federal programs, including Medicare and Medicaid, have telehealth and other administrative flexibilities in place through the PHE. This broad coalition must continue to advocate for extension of the PHE until Congress modernizes access to health and public health programs.

WIC flexibilities responding to the infant formula shortage are not explicitly tied to the PHE, but NWA would urge they similarly remain in place until supply is fully replenished.

## CHILD NUTRITION REAUTHORIZATION

Congress is running out of time to advance WIC reforms. This summer, the House Education and Labor Committee considered the first Child Nutrition Reauthorization bill in six years. If the Senate does not act before the end of the calendar year, Congress will have to start from scratch. Passing a Child Nutrition Reauthorization bill is particularly urgent, because Congress will focus on the Farm Bill in 2023. If Congress does not act in the next few months, WIC and other child nutrition programs may not be reauthorized until 2024 or later.

WIC cannot wait until 2024 or later. WIC's experience operating during COVID demonstrates that necessary reforms to physical presence can reverse the longstanding declines in WIC participation. Since February 2020, WIC has recorded an **11% increase in child participation**. Long-term reforms to physical presence are key to setting the stage for future WIC innovations that will expand the program's reach and better coordinate care with healthcare. Other key reforms - including eligibility expansions for postpartum women and young children, streamlined certification periods, shopping modernization, and investments in breastfeeding - depend on a reauthorization bill's passage.

## FOOD PACKAGE RULE

This fall, USDA is expected to publish the proposed rule reviewing WIC's food package in accordance with the science-based recommendations of the National Academies. Although USDA has not indicated what will be included in this proposed rule, NWA has called for the rule to codify the fruit and vegetable increase and include additional investments that reflect the National Academies recommendations and align with the Dietary Guidelines - including boosted seafood issuance across food packages, package size flexibility to expand healthy choices for WIC shoppers, and standing strong on WIC's nutrition standards to drive increased consumption of key food groups like whole grains and reduce intake of added calories from added sugars and saturated fat. As part of this process, the WIC community will have the opportunity to participate in **public comment**, and NWA is committed to providing template comments and supporting frontline staff in engaging in this process.

## EXTENDING THE FRUIT AND VEGETABLE BUMP

In September, Congress passed a Continuing Resolution extending current federal funding levels into December. As part of this agreement, the enhanced Cash Value Benefit levels for fruits and vegetables will remain available through the end of the calendar year. Benefits were recently adjusted to account for inflation, resulting in \$45 per month for pregnant and postpartum participants, \$49 per month for breastfeeding participants, and \$25 per month for child participants. This accounts for 50 percent of DGA-recommended fruit and vegetable intake, per independent analysis by the National Academies of Sciences. As families across the country are confronted with rising grocery costs, including a 9% increase in fruit and vegetable prices over the past year, Congress once must again extend these enhanced benefits in any full-year spending package to support the nutritional needs of 4.85 million participating women and children.

