



SUPPORT THE MODERN WIC ACT (S. 3226)

The More Options to Develop and Enhance Remote Nutrition in WIC Act (MODERN WIC Act), sponsored by Sens. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) and Roger Marshall (R-KS), is critical legislation that seeks to incorporate lessons learned from operating WIC during COVID-19 to build a stronger, more accessible program. Recognizing WIC's record of success in improving maternal and child health, the MODERN WIC Act would thoughtfully balance remote options while preserving the program's public health character.

STRIKING A BALANCE ON REMOTE SERVICES

During the COVID-19 pandemic, WIC providers were empowered to conduct remote certifications of new and continuing participants through phone or video appointments. This significant shift in service delivery ameliorated longstanding barriers to access, such as transportation, time off work, and arranging child-care.

After physical presence was required starting in 1998, WIC has never reached more than 65 percent of the eligible population. Children, in particular, phase off the program as recertifications are required each year. As a result of pandemic-era flexibilities, child participation in WIC increased by 10 percent during the first year of remote services.

Remote certifications were established with some haste in the first weeks of the pandemic, and the MODERN WIC Act offers a path forward that can sustain these flexibilities while more thoughtfully incorporating the health screenings

THE MODERN WIC ACT WOULD:

1. Relax physical presence requirements to allow for remote certifications, while preserving WIC's health screenings
2. Allow for remote issuance of benefits on the e-WIC card
3. Invest in annual funding for WIC technology improvements

that have been deferred during the pandemic. The MODERN WIC Act offers applicants more flexibility and urges WIC to collaborate with physicians to conduct health screenings, reducing duplicative tests and assuring coordinated care for families. While this change will require new innovations to securely connect systems holding patient records, the MODERN WIC Act's reforms will promote efficiency and reduce burdens on families, WIC, and the healthcare system.

MODERNIZING BENEFIT ISSUANCE

WIC must clarify that remote benefit issuance is permitted, reducing in-person touchpoints to support sustained participation. With paper vouchers, families would come in to the clinic at least every three months to pick up benefits as part of a nutrition education touchpoint. With e-WIC rolled out nationwide, nearly all State Agencies have the capability to securely load new benefits to a participant's EBT card while providing nutrition education over the phone. This step promotes convenience for participating families while assuring program integrity.

INVESTING IN WIC TECHNOLOGIES

The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 provided \$35 million each year to support WIC Management Information Systems. This funding was especially critical as WIC adapted to roll out e-WIC. As the program innovates to incorporate remote certifications, a broader range of appointment options, and online shopping, consistent funding that supports a broader range of WIC projects related to technology is essential. The MODERN WIC Act would provide \$60 million each year to support WIC technology projects, including modifications to WIC Management Information Systems.

The MODERN WIC Act includes necessary reforms that will prepare WIC to serve a new generation of WIC families. WIC must build on the lessons learned during COVID-19 to provide families with a modern and accessible experience consistent with other healthcare settings.

