



# WIC'S ROLE IN THE NATIONAL STRATEGY ON HUNGER, NUTRITION, AND HEALTH

## NWA RECOMMENDS:

Congress and federal agencies should move swiftly to fulfill the National Strategy as part of a whole-of-society effort to reduce hunger and curb chronic diet-related disease.

## A HEALTHIER NATION

In September 2022, President Biden convened the first White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health in more than fifty years, joined by a bipartisan coalition from Congress led by Reps. Jim McGovern (D-MA) and the late Jackie Walorski (R-IN) and Sens. Cory Booker (D-NJ) and Mike Braun (R-IN). The last White House Conference focused on food policy was held in 1969 by President Nixon. Within five years, based on recommendations from the 1969 Conference, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) was created and scaled up nationally.

In 2022, the White House Conference set a goal of eradicating hunger and building healthier eating patterns to curb chronic diet-related disease. WIC's clear public health record demonstrates how improved nutrition can reduce the prevalence of obesity and type-2 diabetes. In turn, lower rates of chronic diet-related diseases builds a healthier nation and reduces healthcare expenditures, particularly in Medicare and Medicaid.

As part of the Conference, the White House debuted a National Strategy that listed a series of actions that can be taken by all stakeholders - Congress, federal agencies, industry, philanthropy, and the non-profit space - to reduce hunger and improve nutrition and health.



The National Strategy included bold recommendations that can shape consumer preferences and raise awareness about nutrition, including exploring front-of-package labeling and updates to the "healthy" claim on food packages. The National Strategy also recognized that broader economic security was key to building not only food access, but also access to healthy foods.

## WIC'S ROLE

The National Strategy recognized the important role that federal nutrition programs play in improving food access and affordability. The Strategy called for a series of actions to expand access to WIC, including targeted eligibility extensions, efforts to streamline referrals from Medicaid and other programs, scaling up online shopping, and other efforts to streamline the participant experience. With modernized, easier ways for eligible families to apply and remain on the program, WIC can enhance its reach and assure greater access to nutritious foods.

The National Strategy also elevates how WIC's nutrition standards, alongside improvements in the child nutrition programs, improve diet quality and set the foundation for healthier eating patterns. USDA's recent proposals to update the WIC food packages are one of the earliest and most robust efforts to build nutrition security since the White House Conference. The National Strategy particularly notes how stronger nutrition standards can encourage manufacturers to develop healthier products, benefiting both program participants and the general shopping public.

The National Strategy also highlights WIC's role in increased breastfeeding support. As the Strategy spurs increased focus on nutrition, WIC is positioned to leverage new partnerships, particularly with healthcare, to improve the participant experience, more holistically coordinate care, and fundamentally expand the public health impact of WIC services as a strategy to reduce hunger and build healthier eating patterns.