



FEDERAL GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN: TALKING POINTS AND FAQs **JANUARY 2019**

With no spending agreement reached, the partial federal government shutdown has lasted since December 22. Please direct any questions or concerns about the shutdown to Brian Dittmeier at bdittmeier@nwica.org or 202-232-4150 and Ali Hard at ahard@nwica.org and 202-719-5129.

The National WIC Association recommends the following talking points:

Immediate Messages

- **WIC IS OPEN FOR BUSINESS DURING THE SHUTDOWN.** WIC state agencies have enough reserve funding to remain open during the shutdown if it does not become protracted.
- **WIC CLINICS REMAIN OPEN DURING THE SHUTDOWN.** WIC participants should be assured that clinics will maintain normal schedules, appointments will not be cancelled, and WIC clinic staff are available to assist them.
- **WIC TRANSACTIONS AT GROCERY STORES WILL BE PROCESSED NORMALLY.** Food-instrument redemption will be honored by state agencies pursuant to normal procedures. Authorized WIC vendors and retailers should expressly inform cashiers and other staff.
- **CONGRESS AND THE ADMINISTRATION SHOULD ACT SWIFTLY TO RESTORE FUNDING TO CRITICAL FEDERAL PROGRAMS.** Funding should be restored before programs like WIC run out of reserve funding. Even though WIC agencies have adequate funding to remain open for at least the month of January, the uncertainty of a shutdown discourages participants from reaching out to WIC for support.

Long-Term Messages

- **A PROLONGED SHUTDOWN WILL DRAIN WIC AGENCIES OF CRITICAL RESOURCES, POTENTIALLY RESULTING IN CLINIC CLOSURES AND OTHER ADVERSE CONSEQUENCES TO PARTICIPANTS.** If the shutdown lasts past January, WIC agencies may be forced to adopt mitigating measures, including enacting waiting lists, freezing new applications, furloughing staff, or closing clinics.
- **A SHUTDOWN THAT AFFECTS WIC OPERATIONS WILL HAVE NEGATIVE HEALTH CONSEQUENCES FOR BABIES, YOUNG CHILDREN, AND PREGNANT WOMEN.** Over 7 million mothers, pregnant women, and children rely on WIC for access to nutritious food to ensure healthy pregnancies and positive growth and development. The program's targeted support is especially crucial for infants, who will lack access to breastfeeding support, breast pumps, or infant formula.
- **A SHUTDOWN DISCOURAGES PARTICIPANTS FROM REACHING OUT TO WIC FOR SUPPORT, EVEN AFTER THE SHUTDOWN CONCLUDES.** Even though WIC agencies have adequate funding to remain open through at least the end of January, the uncertainty of a shutdown and heightened media attention has a negative impact on perceptions of federal programs.



A shutdown spreads confusion and deters participants from accessing WIC services. WIC can most effectively fulfill its public health goals if participants can trust that the government will be open and administered efficiently.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

WILL THE SHUTDOWN AFFECT THE CASH FLOW OF WIC AGENCIES AND CLINICS AND THEIR ABILITY TO OPERATE?

First and foremost: **WIC remains open for business** for the time being. FNS has confirmed that all state agencies have enough funds on hand to remain open through the month of January. Beginning January 3, FNS has taken measures to make additional funds available to help agencies remain open past the end of January. The date at which states will run out of funds varies by state. FNS has committed to working with states to ensure that all agencies can operate as long as possible. If the shutdown runs into February, some WIC agencies may run out of reserve funds, which could potentially result in clinic closures and other adverse consequences to participants. But for now, WIC staff, participants, and retailers should go about business as usual.

WHAT SHOULD LOCAL AGENCIES TELL WIC PARTICIPANTS?

With heightened media coverage of the shutdown and a focus on federal-government programs that provide direct services, there is a greater chance for confusing and conflicting messages to reach people. You should inform participants that WIC is still open and operating as usual. Participants should be assured that operating hours of clinics remain normal, clinics are open, no services are being cut back, and no appointments are being canceled. It may be helpful to proactively send out these messages through social media, emails, and other means of communicating with participants. Feel free to download any of these graphics ([simple](#) | [graphic with signupwic.com](#) | [Spanish](#)) and post them on their own social media sites.

WHY IS WIC AFFECTED IN THIS SHUTDOWN?

Parts of the federal government, including the US Department of Agriculture, which administers WIC, are currently running on a continuing resolution (CR) that expired at midnight on December 21. A CR, which temporarily authorizes spending at current levels until an appropriation for the new fiscal year is made, is necessary to sustain government operations because Congress has yet to pass seven of the 12 appropriations bills that fund critical federal functions.

In order to end the partial government shutdown, Congress must pass and the president must sign a spending bill for the parts of the government that were under the CR. Congress considered the option of passing another continuing resolution, either a short- or long-term one. Legislators could have also passed full appropriations bills, setting the funding level for the

remainder of the fiscal year and delivering more certainty for government agencies and programs. In September 2018, the Senate approved the Agriculture-FDA appropriations bill, which would have funded WIC for the 2019 fiscal year; however, the House did not move their version forward. On January 3, 2019, the first day of the 116th congressional session, the House passed a bipartisan package of bills to reopen the government, but the Senate has yet to take up a measure in the new Congress.

The debate over funding came to an impasse around the issue of funding for the southern border wall with Mexico, which is authorized by the Homeland Security appropriation. President Trump requested funding at the level of \$5 billion, and Democratic leaders have remained steadfast at a level of \$1.6 billion and no higher. In a meeting between the President and Democratic leaders Nancy Pelosi (CA) and Chuck Schumer (NY), President Trump stated that he would be “proud to shut down the government” over this issue. As a result, Congress abandoned its effort to pass a CR that would fund the government through February 2019. On January 4, 2019, the president echoed in a meeting with congressional and administration leaders that the shutdown could continue for months and even years.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO US DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE (USDA) STAFF?

Some USDA staff who work on WIC are furloughed, though some WIC staff at both the national and regional USDA offices are considered essential and continue working. Generally, this includes USDA staff who deal with program funding and operations. More information is detailed in the [Food and Nutrition Service’s Contingency Plan](#), last amended in January 2018.

Federal staff deemed essential, including regional office administrators, are working diligently to support state agencies to avoid funding lapses.

WHAT HAPPENS IF THE SHUTDOWN IS PROLONGED?

It is hard to tell how long the shutdown could last, as both Congress and the president have indicated that they will not compromise on the contentious issue of border wall funding. President Trump has suggested that the shutdown could continue for “months and years.” FNS has confirmed that states currently have enough funds on hand to last until the end of January, and they have taken action to make funds available to states beyond what they currently have on hand. However, it is not clear at what point those additional funds will run out, and this will vary between states. It is critical for Congress and the president to take swift action to end the shutdown in order to avoid harm to the nation’s families.