Advancing Health Equity to Achieve Diversity and Inclusion: AHEAD in WIC
Results from the National Landscape Scan – Organizational Structure

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.

In 2019, the National WIC Association (NWA) received a grant from the Walmart Foundation to support a two-year project aimed at Advancing Health Equity to Achieve Diversity & Inclusion (AHEAD) in WIC. One of the key goals of AHEAD in WIC was to systematically build capacity among WIC agencies and staff to incorporate a health equity framework into WIC research, policy, and practice. As part of the AHEAD project, NWA worked with Nutrition Equity and Justice Partners, a nutrition and health equity consulting company, to conduct a national landscape scan targeting WIC stakeholders to identify emerging and promising practices being implemented at the state and local level to promote equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). Specifically, the purpose of the landscape scan was to:

1) Learn more about the existing policies, procedures, and practices being used to promote equity, diversity, and inclusion in WIC and

2) Help NWA understand gaps, systems/training needs, and areas for expanding collaborations to achieve a more equitable WIC environment for staff, clients, and other stakeholders.

BACKGROUND

In the last decade, there has been increased awareness about the need to build a diverse and inclusive culture in community nutrition programs to ensure equitable access nutrition services. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) has made a commitment to promoting equity and inclusion through federal nutrition assistance programs to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse client population. This one-pager presents results from the landscape scan related to barriers and facilitators to creating an organizational infrastructure to support equity, diversity, and inclusion.

For NWA, health equity is the ability of all individuals to achieve optimal health, irrespective of their identity, race, ability, or class. This requires equitable access to nutritious foods, breastfeeding support, chronic disease prevention and management services, safe living environments, and good jobs with fair pay. It necessitates removing obstacles to families' short- and long-term health and well-being including poverty, discrimination, institutional racism and other forms of bias expressed though housing, healthcare, education, labor, and other public policies.

METHODOLOGY

The national landscape survey was conducted from November 2020-February 2021 via Survey-Monkey. Questions on the survey were informed by previous EDI surveys and frameworks and the existing EDI literature. Respondents were asked about their knowledge, capacity, prioritization, and clinic approaches for promoting EDI and to provide personal demographic information and general information about their WIC agency. In addition, state and local WIC Directors were asked to provide information about agency-level policies and procedures being implemented to support EDI efforts (e.g., updated mission and vision, hiring, training, contracting, etc.). Survey questions covering each EDI topic area were separated into sections (e.g., EDI in client services, training and education, hiring, etc.). Participants were informed that they were not required to answer questions that made them feel uncomfortable. All State WIC Directors were sent an introductory email about the AHEAD in WIC project and were asked to complete the survey, as well as share with state and local WIC staff. Additionally, surveys were widely distributed through NWA newsletters, workgroups, and listservs.

Only State/Local Directors were asked questions about organizational infrastructure within their WIC agency. Two-hundred seventy-three State/Local WIC Directors initiated the survey. Consistent with recommendations to maximize data quality in online surveys, respondents who completed at least 50% of the questions in each specific section were retained in the analysis.[1] This yielded a final nonprobability sample size of 243 respondents for the section on organizational infrastructure.[2]

Table 1: Demographic of Respondents (n=1243)

Age in years	
18-24	9.5%
25-34	18.5%
35-44	29.6%
45-54	32.9%
55-64	9.5%
65+	7.8%
Time working at WIC	
Less than 1 year	2.1%
1-3 years	5.4%
4-6 years	6.6%
6-8 years	8.6%
8-10 years	6.2%
Over 10 years	70.4%
Educatoinal attainment	
≤ High school degree	0.8%
Some college, no degree	3.7%
Associate degree	3.7%
Bachelor's degree	46.5%
Master's degree	41.2%
Professional degree	2.9%
Race	
Hispanic or Latino/a/x	9.5%
White/Caucasian	70.4%
Black/African American	9.5%
American Indian/Alaska Native	2.9%
Asian	2.5%
Other race/More than one race	2.9%
Gender	
Cisgender Female	91.8%
Cisgender Male	4.9%
Transgender	0.0%
Other gender identity	3.3%
Sexual orientation	
Heterosexual or straight	92.2%
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Queer, Asexual	2.9%
Disability status	
Yes	3.7%
No	94.2%

AUGUST 2022   Please direct all questions to NWA or 202.232.5492

National WIC Association
Your child has you. And you have WIC.

RESULTS

Evidence indicates that developing an organizational infrastructure to critical for advancing EDI.[3,4] Only respondents who identified as State or Local WIC Directors (n=243) were asked questions about their organizations infrastructure due to their leadership position within their agency.

Mission and Vision Statements

Respondents were asked if their agency had a mission and/or vision statement outside of the statement for WIC nationally and how well either of those statements demonstrated a commitment to EDI. Most respondents (approximately 59%, see Figure 1) reported that their organization did not have a separate mission (68.3%) and/or vision statement (78.6%) but was guided by the mission or vision statement of their governing division/organization (e.g., Department of Health and Human Services (Figure 1). Of respondents who indicated that their WIC program had a separate statement, a greater number of respondents indicated that their WIC program had a mission statement (26.8%) compared to a vision statement (15.6%).

Figure 1: Outside of the mission statement and vision statement for WIC nationally, do you have a mission statement or vision statement specifically for your WIC program?
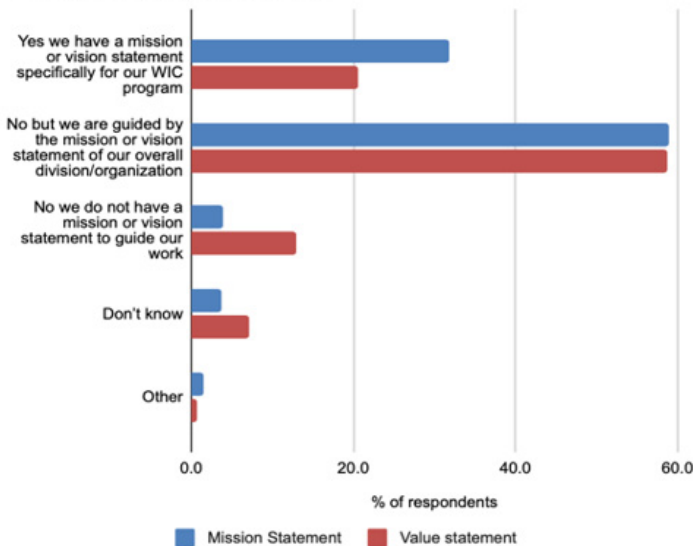
Strategic Planning

Additionally, respondents were asked if their agency has a strategic plan that guides their work. Most respondents indicated that their WIC program engages in strategic planning (70.0%), while 24.7% reported no and 4.9% were unsure.

When asked how well their organization's strategic plan demonstrated a commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion, most respondents selected extremely well or very well (38.7%) (Figure 3). Only 3.3% of respondents felt that the strategic plan did not demonstrate a commitment to EDI.

Figure 2: How well does your organization's mission or vision statement demonstrate a commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion?
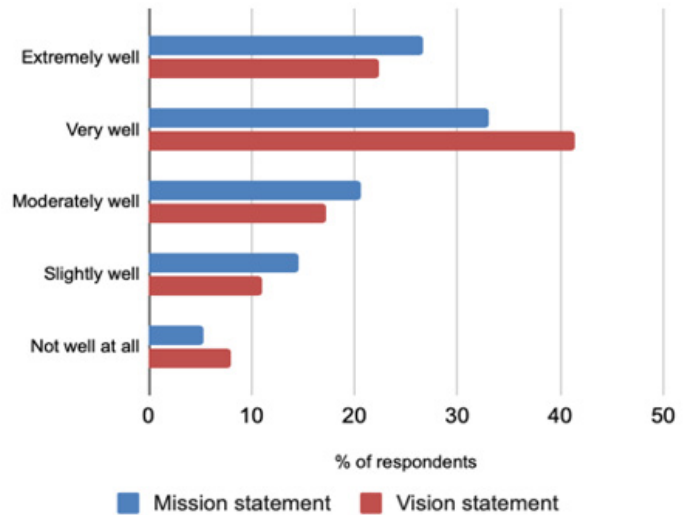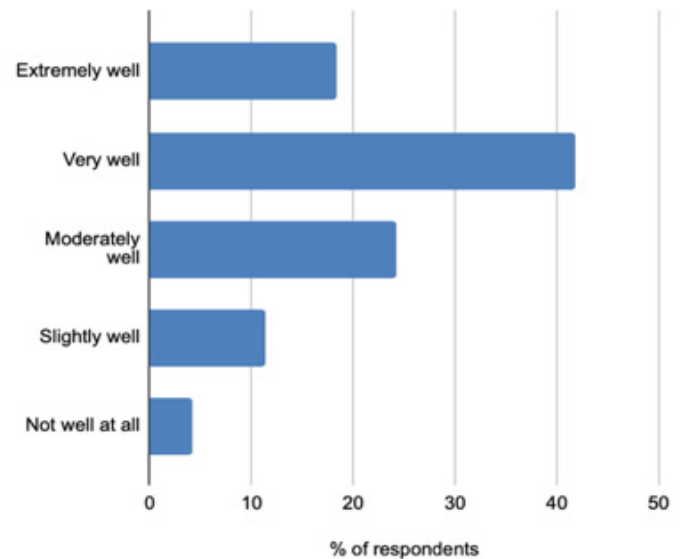

Figure 3: How well does your strategic plan demonstrate a commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion?

Existing Organizational Strategies to Promote EDI within WIC

Respondents were also asked if they use selected organizational strategies to promote EDI within their WIC program. Approximately 57.2% of respondents indicated that they did not use any of the strategies. Only 16.5% indicated that they created a specific policy that provides guidelines related to EDI, 4.9% hired or designated a

a person/position within their WIC program dedicated to EDI (e.g., Chief Equity Officer), and 5.8% created a formal definition of equity.

Open-Ended Response Related to Outreach and Partnerships

"Our city has hired a racial equity coordinator, developed a racial equity plan, held trainings several times a year and has developed hiring practices that increase diversity. In WIC and Public Health, we have an equity committee and have trainings and training materials to encourage a better understanding of other cultures."

- Local WIC Director

Other Organizational EDI Initiatives

Respondents were also asked whether their WIC program has a policy that encourages contracting with people of color or minority owned businesses and whether they provide training for WIC retailers/vendors related to implicit bias. Of the respondents, 50.2% responded "no" to the question regarding policies to contract with people of color or minority owned businesses and 65.0% responded "no" to the question about providing training to WIC retailers/vendors related to implicit bias.

CONCLUSION

Most WIC agencies are guided by the mission and vision statements of their governing department or organization, and most respondents felt that these statements demonstrated a commitment to EDI. There is an opportunity for more WIC agencies to create their own mission and vision statements that are strongly anchored in EDI to guide their work. Most organizations engage in strategic planning, and respondents mostly felt that strategic plans are anchored in EDI. However, there are opportunities to further ground strategic planning and the resulting plans in EDI. Most respondents indicated that their organization did not engage in the recommended EDI organizational strategies in the survey. Therefore, there are opportunities to better understand the organizational EDI strategies that WIC agencies employ in the future.

REFERENCES

1 Kees, J., Berry, C., Burton, S., & Sheehan, K. (2017). An analysis of data quality: Professional panels, student subject pools, and Amazon's Mechanical Turk. Journal of Advertising, 46(1), 141-155.

2 980 was the total number of respondents that completed at least 50% of the survey; sample size varies slightly based on the question as not all respondents answered every question.

3 White, C. Y., Patel, A., & Cossari, D. (2022). Organizational commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion: A strategic path forward. American Journal of Health-System Pharmacy, 79(5), 351-358.

4 Bernstein, R. S., Salipante, P. F., & Weisinger, J. Y. (2021). Performance Through Diversity and Inclusion: Leveraging Organizational Practices for Equity and Results. Routledge.