This study builds on a consistent evidence base, including landmark studies from 1992 demonstrating Medicaid cost-savings associated with prenatal WIC participation. Prior research has also associated prenatal WIC participation with reduced risk of low birthweights, mitigating long-term health, cognitive, and developmental conditions. Both preterm birth and low birthweights are significant drivers of healthcare expenditures in both the short- and long-term.

In July 2019, new research from UCLA, PHFE WIC, and the City of Los Angeles measured the economic effects of WIC participation during pregnancy. The study determined that every dollar invested in WIC returns an average of $2.48 in medical, educational, and productivity costs. The study’s model was limited to cost savings associated with preterm birth, suggesting that the program’s total cost savings are actually higher. The study also suggests that increased WIC participation among the eligible population would be associated with even further cost-savings.

In December 2019, the Journal of the American Medical Association published a national cohort study led by researchers at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, identifying a 16 percent reduction in the risk of infant mortality that is directly attributable to WIC participation. The study evaluated over 11 million birth certificate records between 2011 and 2017.
WIC BENEFIT BUMP

Beginning in April 2021, WIC providers could issue higher benefits for fruits and vegetables, ensuring enhanced access to nutritious foods through a more robust benefit. Over 4.7 million WIC participants are receiving this WIC benefit bump, which amounts to an additional $15/month for children and an additional $32-36/month for adult participants.

In fall 2021, the National WIC Association and Nutrition Policy Institute conducted a survey of WIC participants across five State WIC Agencies. The survey received over 10,000 responses and identified a measurable increase in fruit and vegetable consumption after the WIC benefit bump was enacted, with an average increase of 1/4 cup per day for children. Research for similar interventions suggest that consumption will only increase with time, as purchasing behaviors and attitudes shift.

MODERN SERVICES FOR WIC FAMILIES

WIC providers swiftly adapted to adjust services during COVID to assure uninterrupted services. The National WIC Association and Nutrition Policy Institute surveyed 26,000 WIC participants across 12 State Agencies in spring 2021, identifying broad satisfaction with remote service delivery, with a strong desire to sustain remote options and provide balanced choices to participants beyond the public health concerns of the pandemic. The study also identified participant interest in modern options for WIC shoppers, including online ordering with in-store pickup, although initial data suggests that delivery fees could pose a barrier to WIC participants accessing home delivery options.

HEALTHY KIDS

After decades of advocacy from the National WIC Association and broader public health community, USDA revised the WIC food packages in 2009 to provide healthier options, including fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.

Following these changes to the food package, childhood obesity rates for WIC-enrolled toddlers age 2-4 declined from 15.9 percent in 2010 to 14.3 percent in 2018. During this same time period, the national obesity rate among toddlers age 2-5 increased from 12.1 to 13.4 percent in 2018. As these rates have declined in light of population-level increases, this trend demonstrates the protective effect of WIC participation on childhood obesity.

HEALTHY MOMS

In September 2019, JAMA Pediatrics published a study by researchers at the UCSF exploring the impact of the 2009 food package revisions on maternal health outcomes. The research used birth certificate and hospital discharge data from over 2.4 million mothers, comparing outcomes before and after the 2009 food package revisions. The study found that the revised WIC package was associated with reduced risk of excessive weight gain during pregnancy and maternal preclampsia, the latter of which is a leading risk factor for maternal mortality and morbidity.

WIC’s proven outcomes help grow a healthier next generation