



END OF THE COVID-19 PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY: IMPACTS ON WIC FAMILIES

NWA RECOMMENDS:

WIC providers should work with partner agencies - including SNAP and Medicaid - to assure ongoing support for families as pandemic-era flexibilities expire.

FEDERAL PROGRAMS IN TRANSITION

COVID-19 altered the landscape of the United States, and federal programs adjusted dramatically to respond to the unique complications of operating during the pandemic. Under a federal public health emergency declaration (PHE), federal programs were given enhanced flexibility to reduce paperwork burdens for families and enhance access to life-saving health and nutrition supports.

Although the White House announced that the **COVID-19 PHE will expire on May 11, 2023**, Congress proactively phased out several PHE-linked flexibilities as part of the December 2022 omnibus spending package. This includes the end to emergency allotments in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and an end to continuous coverage for Medicaid participants.

Starting March 1, 2023, **households in SNAP will see an end to emergency allotments**. These enhanced payments resulted in an additional \$95 per month for most SNAP recipients, improving access to nutrition support during a time of incredible uncertainty, rising food costs, and supply chain disruptions. Eighteen States had already wound down the SNAP emergency allotments. With reduced support for household groceries, more eligible families may seek WIC assistance to assure a full basket of healthy foods.



WIC providers will also see impacts on healthcare coverage for participating families, as **Medicaid agencies will resume eligibility reviews in April 2023**. During COVID-19, Medicaid programs employed a continuous coverage strategy that reduced paperwork burdens and mitigated churn among the participating population. Healthcare experts predict that reinstating the eligibility reviews, a process that will take place through April 2024, could result in millions of eligible families losing Medicaid coverage due to procedural reasons.

During these significant program transitions, WIC providers are well positioned to counsel participants on these changes, referring back to Medicaid when appropriate to ensure ongoing healthcare coverage. WIC participants may not be aware that eligibility reviews are resuming or may not have updated addresses and contact information in their Medicaid portal. As a gateway to healthcare, WIC providers must proactively work with families to ensure that nutrition support is complemented by primary care, addressing the holistic care needs of families with young children.

NEXT STEPS FOR WIC

WIC providers have relied on COVID waivers for essential flexibilities to reach and serve families during overlapping crises. In February 2023, USDA issued guidance permitting State WIC agencies to **sustain remote certification models, if relevant health data is collected within 60 days** of the remote appointment. This guidance, consistent with authorities in the American Rescue Plan Act, will remain in place through at least September 2026. State WIC agencies will have some time to transition to this new service model, as WIC's COVID-related authorities will not sunset until August 9, 2023.

COVID-related waivers were also essential to supporting WIC through the infant formula shortages in 2022. These waivers are being phased out and will remain in place through June 30, 2023. As WIC transitions to a new generation of operations, Congress should advance permanent reforms that foster strategic investment and innovation to enhance the participant experience.