



HEALTHIER FUTURES: INTRODUCTION TO WIC SERVICES

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) serves 6.4 million participants across the country, delivering healthy foods and nutrition services to improve health outcomes for the next generation.

PROVEN OUTCOMES

Established in 1974, WIC has a long record of public health success by delivering priority nutrients and nutrition education at critical periods of growth and development. A cost-efficient investment, every federal dollar spent on WIC support returns approximately \$2.48 in healthcare cost savings.

WIC's targeted nutrition intervention contributes to healthier pregnancies and birth outcomes by reducing the risk of preterm birth and low birth-weight. As a result, WIC participation is associated with a 16% reduced risk of infant mortality. Lower risk of short- and long-term hospitalization at birth is also associated with reduced healthcare expenditures, saving Medicaid dollars.

WIC's public health record also extends to infant and child health outcomes. Healthier WIC foods offered after the 2009 revisions were associated with improved dietary quality and variety for children and a 9% reduction in childhood obesity among WIC-enrolled toddlers.

WIC's structural focus on supporting and empowering families on their breastfeeding journey is also connected with improved breastfeeding rates, helping to overcome income- and race-based disparities. Since 1998, WIC has improved breastfeeding initiation among participating mothers by 30%.



FIVE PILLARS OF WIC SERVICES

WIC's community nutrition model empowers nutrition support and services that are tailored toward individual families and communities. WIC services rely on five pillars:

1. Access to Healthy Foods

The WIC food packages deliver prescribed quantities of nutritious foods to participants to be redeemed at retail grocers with an EBT card. In 2020, the average benefit amounted to only \$36/month, but recent increases in the fruit and vegetable benefit have improved WIC's overall value and boosted consumption of key food groups.

2. Nutrition Education

WIC offers routine, individualized nutrition counseling with professional staff to help families navigate questions during these particular life stages and build healthier shopping and cooking patterns.

3. Breastfeeding Support

As the nation's largest breastfeeding support and promotion program, WIC works with families to set and meet breastfeeding goals, including access to professional and peer lactation support to navigate challenges such as milk supply and latching.

4. Health Screenings

WIC works with families to chart and assess growth (length/height, weight) and screen for diet-related concerns, such as low iron status. Although in-person health assessments were largely deferred during the pandemic, WIC agencies are now better equipped to partner with healthcare to meet families' needs while continuing to offer flexibility into the future.

5. Referrals

WIC is a gateway to other services, particularly working to assure access to healthcare coverage, as well as other public health priorities such as immunizations and tobacco cessation.