



# FISCAL YEAR 2024 WIC APPROPRIATIONS

## NWA RECOMMENDS:

The National WIC Association (NWA) calls on Congress to fully fund WIC in FY 2024, accounting for rising food costs and increased caseload, while also sustaining enhanced fruit and vegetable benefits for nearly 5 million WIC participants.

## WIC: INVESTING IN A HEALTHIER NEXT GENERATION

For fifty years, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) has improved birth and early childhood outcomes, setting children up for future life success with targeted nutrition support. In fiscal year 2022, WIC served about 6.3 million pregnant and postpartum women, infants, and children up to age five - including 43 percent of all infants born in the United States.

WIC's record of public health success returns more than double its investment and delivers proven healthcare cost savings. With chronic diet-related disease driving about 15% of Medicare and Medicaid costs, WIC's early nutrition intervention builds healthier eating patterns and overall dietary quality for young children and has demonstrated impact in curbing conditions like obesity and diabetes. For decades, bipartisan support in Congress has ensured WIC is adequately funded to serve all eligible families as a down payment on the health of the next generation.



WIC funding has faced increased pressure in recent years, as caseloads have consistently increased since fiscal year 2021, reversing a decade of downward trends. **NWA estimates that WIC will serve 7 million participants in fiscal year 2024.**

WIC program improvements and broader economic trends likely contributed to this surge in WIC utilization. Modernization efforts, like remote appointments, have made it easier to connect with and remain on WIC. Enhanced fruit and vegetable benefits have been crucial for WIC's nutritionally at-risk families dealing with higher grocery prices.

Increased participation requires a larger funding commitment from Congress to assure that every eligible individual can access WIC's vital nutrition support. For more than 25 years, there has been a bipartisan agreement in Congress to "fully fund" WIC-- to provide the

resources to serve projected caseloads, so that every eligible individual who seeks WIC services can receive them.

**The National WIC Association (NWA) strongly urges Congress to honor its longstanding commitment to fully fund WIC and stands opposed to any funding level that would cut benefits or access to WIC services.**

If Congress does not adequately fund WIC, providers would have to institute waiting lists for the first time in three decades, turning eligible individuals away from the program. According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, funding WIC at FY23 levels would require states to turn away an estimated 2 million postpartum women and children. Failure to provide WIC with the resources to serve projected caseloads jeopardizes the health and well-being of thousands of mothers and young children.



## ENHANCED ACCESS TO FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

WIC's life-saving nutrition support is having a broader impact as Congress enhanced the value of the fruit and vegetable benefit in both fiscal years 2022 and 2023. **NWA urges Congress to sustain this increased issuance of fruits and vegetables to improve nutrition outcomes for WIC's population.**

The Cash Value Benefit (CVB) for fruits and vegetables was introduced to the WIC food package in 2009, and has been a driver of increased fruit and vegetable consumption. Prior to 2021, WIC's fruit and vegetable benefit, known as Cash Value Benefit (CVB), was \$9-11 per participant per month. Since September 2021, Congress has worked on a bipartisan basis to align WIC's fruit and vegetable benefit with science-based recommendations.

Current levels of CVB are \$26/month for children and \$47-52/month for pregnant and postpartum participants. These targeted, science-based increases are based on a 2017 nutrition expert report that recommended CVB levels that would provide half of DGA-recommended intake. Any efforts to cut WIC's fruit and vegetable benefit mark a stark departure from precedent-- in WIC's 50 year history, Congress has never cut the food package to defray program costs.

**"It would crush me.** I rely on this assistance to keep my toddler on fresh fruits and vegetables. I am proud of how much he loves produce and feel that it is perhaps the healthiest part of his diet. With less money, I wouldn't be able to feed him as well."

**- Alex Spencer  
Ithaca, NY**

Enhanced fruit and vegetable benefits support more than 5 million WIC participants (3.6 million children and 1.5 million pregnant women and new moms).

This increase is associated with improved consumption of fruits and vegetables among WIC enrolled toddlers, enhanced variety of fruit and vegetable purchases, and higher total purchases of fruits and vegetables by WIC families. Consistent with WIC's mission of building healthier eating patterns, NWA supports recent USDA proposals to make these amounts permanent. Until those proposals can be finalized, Congress must act to sustain these science-based recommendations that support fruit and vegetable consumption in FY24 Appropriations.

## PROTECT THE INTEGRITY OF WIC'S EVIDENCE-BASED FOOD PACKAGE

WIC's public health success is rooted in science, with healthy foods issued to address key nutrient gaps. In November 2022, USDA proposed evidence-based updates to the WIC food packages, closely aligned with consensus expert recommendations from the National Academies of Sciences and the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. The National WIC Association is in strong support of USDA's proposed updates to the WIC food package and opposes any Appropriations riders which would interfere with its implementation or undermine the success of the program. The final food package rule is anticipated in April 2024.



## INVESTING IN WIC BUILDS A HEALTHIER AMERICA

WIC's vital nutrition services are critical in building healthier outcomes and seeing families through the transformative periods of pregnancy, childbirth, and early childhood. Inadequate funding could lead to a spike in hunger rates among WIC's at-risk target population, while also reversing progress in improving dietary quality, closing health disparities, and boosting health outcomes for young children. Failure to adequately fund WIC could send thousands of new moms and toddlers to waiting lists, taking healthy food from their mouths. Congress must fully fund WIC to continue to foster a healthier next generation.

