



WIC'S FRUIT AND VEGETABLE BUMP: BUILDING THE FOUNDATION FOR HEALTHIER CHILDREN

NWA RECOMMENDS:

Congress should support swift implementation of WIC's revised food packages, including uninterrupted increases in WIC's fruit and vegetable benefit.

PROVEN BOOSTS TO NUTRITION SECURITY

Since spring 2021, WIC has enhanced monthly fruit and vegetable benefits for nearly 5 million young children and women. This science-based increase, sustained in fiscal year 2022 and 2023 appropriations, increases access to nutritious foods and builds on WIC's strong record of improving children's dietary quality and curbing childhood obesity.

WIC's fruit and vegetable benefit, known as Cash Value Benefit (CVB), was increased from \$9-11/month to \$25/month for children and \$44-49/month for women, depending on breastfeeding status. This enhanced amount reflects 50% of recommended intake per the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. USDA is reviewing public comment on its proposed updates to the WIC food packages, which would make this increase permanent.

Enhanced CVB is associated with increased fruit and vegetable consumption. After the bump was implemented in 2021, a sample of 10,000 WIC participants recorded an average increase of 1/4 cup per day in fruit and vegetable consumption for WIC-enrolled toddlers. These shifts promote further alignment between WIC participants' diets and the DGAs, bringing children closer to dietary targets. Enhanced value shifts the balance of fruit issuance within the WIC benefit, aligning with the DGAs to provide more whole fruit than 100% fruit juice for the first time ever.



With added value, WIC participants are purchasing a greater variety of fruits and vegetables. As early childhood is a pivotal time for developing taste preferences, the capacity to experiment with new types of fruits and vegetables will expose WIC children to a greater selection of tastes and textures, setting the stage for a lifetime of varied preferences.

Alignment with the DGAs and higher consumption of fruits and vegetables helps fortify WIC's public health role, improving child health outcomes. When fruits and vegetables were first introduced to the WIC food packages, the healthier options contributed to a 9% decline in childhood obesity for WIC-enrolled toddlers. As children with obesity are five times more likely to have obesity in adulthood, early nutrition interventions are an effective strategy in reducing chronic diet-related diseases and bending the curve on the nation's healthcare expenditures, particularly in Medicare and Medicaid. Even with the modest increases, WIC remains an efficient and worthwhile investment.

CREATING NEW MARKETS

Enhanced fruit and vegetable benefits have already increased engagement from producers, distributors, retail grocers, and farmers markets in the WIC space. The CVB remains the most redeemed food category offered in WIC (outside of infant formula), ensuring that increased investment is flowing back up the food supply chain. Although the majority of WIC shopping occurs in retail stores, new mobile payment models rolled out in Maine in summer 2022 pave the way for CVB redemptions at farmers markets and farm stands.

Enhancing the value of the WIC food packages is immensely popular, with a September 2021 poll identifying that 76% of likely voters wanted to increase federal funding to provide more nutritious foods to WIC families. Sustaining the fruit and vegetable bump and swiftly rolling out updated food packages will strengthen the foundation for healthier outcomes.