

OVERVIEW OF THE WIC PROGRAM

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children, better known as WIC is a nutrition program for pregnant, postpartum, and breastfeeding women, infants, and children up to age five, who have been determined to be at nutritional risk, meet income eligibility and reside within South Dakota.

MISSION

WIC's mission is to promote and maintain the health and well-being of nutritionally at-risk women, infants and young children by providing comprehensive nutrition services including supplemental foods, nutrition education and access/referral to other health services. The Program serves as an adjunct to good health care during critical times of growth and development. Program goals include preventing the occurrence of health and nutrition problems including substance abuse, improving pregnancy outcomes, reducing infant mortality and improving the health status of all program participants.

HISTORY

The WIC Program began in 1972 when Congress found substantial numbers of pregnant, post-partum and breastfeeding women, infants and young children from families with inadequate income to be at special risk with respect to their physical and mental health by reason of inadequate nutrition, health care, or both. Since its inception, WIC has been envisioned to be a preventive program whose goal is to reduce and improve nutrition-related health problems.

The WIC Program is complementary to the Special Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and other programs under which foods are distributed to needy families and are in receipt of food or meals from soup kitchens, shelters, or other forms of emergency food assistance.

The first WIC services provided in South Dakota were in 1974. Currently there are 80 sites throughout the state.

ADMINISTRATION/FUNDING

WIC is implemented and funded by the United States Department of Agriculture under Public Law 95-627, Child Nutrition Amendments of 1996 and P.L. 104-98, Section 17 of the Child Nutrition Act of 1966. Final regulations were issued in July 1988 with consolidation of WIC Regulations published in the Federal Register, Part 7 CFR 246, January 2002.

Funds for food and administrative costs are transferred from USDA, Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) to the State Agency, which in South Dakota is the State Department of Health, Health and Medical Services – WIC Program. It has responsibility for all aspects of management, fiscal and operational requirements of the program in accordance with federal regulations and instructions.

WIC is not an entitlement program as Congress does not set aside funds to allow every eligible individual to participate in the program. WIC is a Federal discretionary grant program which Congress authorizes a specific amount of funds each year.

THE PROGRAM PROVIDES

- Selected food to supplement diets lacking in nutrients needed during the critical time of growth and development.
- Nutrition education and counseling to improve eating behaviors and to promote sound food buying habits.
- Access to preventive health and social programs and referral to health providers.

ELIGIBILITY

Women

- Pregnant (during pregnancy and up to 6 weeks after the birth of an infant or the end of the pregnancy)
- Postpartum (up to six months after the birth of the infant or the end of the pregnancy)
- Breastfeeding (up to 12 months after delivery)

Infants (birth through 12 months)

Children (up to age 5)

Residential

Applicants must live in the State in which they apply. Applicants are not required to live in the State for a certain amount of time to meet the WIC residency requirement.

Income

Applicants must have income at or below 185% of poverty level or be determined income eligible based on participation in other programs.

Nutrition Risk

Applicants must be seen by a health professional who determines whether the individual is at nutrition risk. "Nutrition Risk" means that an individual has medical-based or dietary-based conditions that directly impair the nutritional health of a person. At a minimum the applicant's height and weight must be measured and blood work taken to check for anemia.

BENEFITS

WIC is considered to be one of the most successful of all public health programs. The benefits of WIC participation have been documented in numerous studies. Not only does WIC improve the health of mothers and babies, but also reduces health care costs. Some of the effects and national research findings of WIC have been:

- Every dollar invested in WIC for pregnant women produces Medicaid savings for newborns and their mothers.
- Prenatal WIC participation reduces the likelihood of infant death, reduces Medicaid costs and has relatively low administrative costs.
- WIC decreases the risk of low birth weight babies and reduces medical costs for very low birth weight births.
- WIC motivates women to seek prenatal care earlier in their pregnancies.
- WIC has had a major impact on reducing anemia among children.
- WIC significantly increases the head size of infants whose mothers received WIC foods during pregnancy.

- Children who participate in WIC appear to be better prepared for school, including having higher vocabulary test scores.
- Children who participate in WIC are better immunized.
- WIC has been recognized for its success in improving birth outcomes. It has been one of the most respected programs nationally in making a difference in the lives of people.

THREE-PART SERVICE DELIVERY

Nutrition Education and Counseling

Nutrition education and counseling is intended to foster long-term use of nutritious foods and encourage positive nutrition and health habits after participation in the program. Nutrition education is directed toward achieving positive changes in client knowledge, attitude and behavior about food consumption. It is designed for the participant to know the relevancy of the nutrition education received based on nutritional risk criteria. It also helps to emphasize the relationship between proper nutrition and good health, assists the participant in achieving a positive change in food habits, promotes breastfeeding and provides support to pregnant women and new mothers. Nutrition education is provided in the context of the participant's ethnic, cultural and geographic preferences and with consideration of educational limitations experienced by participants. Individual nutrition care plans are developed for each person. Participants are certified for 6 months or through pregnancy and scheduled for counseling appointments by a nutrition staff person during that period of time.

Supplemental Nutritious Foods

Foods are intended to supplement the foods normally purchased by participants through other means such as family income or benefits received from other programs. WIC authorized foods contain nutrients determined to be beneficial for the at-risk eligible persons and are high in protein, iron, calcium and vitamins A and C. Food packages are individually prescribed to participants. Food packages contain items such as milk, cereal, juice, cheese, eggs, peanut butter, dried or canned beans/peas, fruits and vegetables, whole grains and infant formula, cereal, fruits/vegetables and meats. Certain breastfeeding women may also receive canned fish. Participants come to the WIC Office monthly or bi-monthly to pick up food checks and receive nutrition education. Participants take the food checks to pre-approved local retail grocery stores and exchange the food checks for the foods listed specifically on the food checks. No cash is exchanged at the grocery store. In turn, the retailers are reimbursed by the State WIC Agency.

Linkages/Referrals

WIC often serves as the bridge that links participants to preventive health care and as an entry point into the public and private health care system. WIC facilitates referrals, coordinates activities and links participants with services such as physician and other health care services, alcohol and drug abuse treatment, well-baby care, immunizations, family health, family planning and social services programs. Referral to these services is an important part of WIC. Immunizations are also given to WIC participants on WIC clinic days. Recipients of Medicaid, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, SNAP and others are adjunctively income eligible for WIC. WIC also gathers a wide variety of health data that can be shared with other health care providers with release by the participant.

WIC STATE PLAN

The State Agency annually submits a State Plan with goals and objectives that describe the manner in which the State Agency implements and operates all aspects of program operations, administration and service delivery. The WIC Policy and Procedure Manual is part of the State Plan requirements.

Suggestions for improvement in the methods of operation and for the program should be shared with WIC staff on a routine basis. Suggestions should be submitted, in writing, to Regional Managers who will assure suggestions are shared with the State Office. Good communication between local clinics, regional and supervisory staff, and the State Office is essential for efficient and effective operation of the program.