

memo

DATE: January 12, 2022
TO: WIC Coordinators and WIC Staff
FROM: State WIC Staff
SUBJECT: Helping Participants Locate Food Benefits - #4 in the Food Package Series

This is the final memo in a series of memos highlighting the WIC food package. This month we focus on helping participants locate and select WIC allowed foods.

To obtain the greatest nutritional benefit from WIC, it is important for participants to have a positive shopping experience and to find the WIC allowed foods. Here are some ideas for helping new participants:

Before shopping:

- Remind participants to download the My MN WIC App and register the card.
Recommend setting up the PIN immediately, before they forget.
 - See the May 12, 2021 memo [“Setting the PIN” Sticky Note Reminder](#) for details
- Point out the How to **USE THE APP** section of the MN WIC [Shopping Guide](#). It describes how to use the Food Finder.
- Encourage new participants to practice using the Food Finder at home, before going to the store. Are any of the cereals in their cabinet WIC allowed? How about their peanut butter?
- After reviewing available benefits, suggest they look at the Shopping Guide and write a shopping list of the WIC foods they would like to purchase. Familiarity with the Shopping Guide can reduce shopping time and confusion at the store.

While shopping:

- Request WiFi access. The participant will have a better shopping experience if they are able to use the WIC app in the store.
- Look for WIC shelf labels. (note: Walmart’s WIC store labels are not specific to Minnesota WIC. Participants should use the Food Finder to double check.)
- Ask Customer Service for assistance.
- Ask the store to order WIC allowed foods if not currently available. For example, a store may not carry goat milk or a WIC-allowed size of lactose free milk but can order these when there is a request.
- Chain stores may have their own app that can assist in finding the location of WIC allowed food within the aisles of that store.

Additional ways staff may assist participants:

- Become familiar with the location of WIC foods at your local stores so you can answer questions. For example, some stores keep beans and/or corn tortillas in an ethnic foods section. WIC allowed foods are often on a lower shelf. Staff may use their familiarity with a store the participant shops at to share tips, such as that there is only one WIC allowed bread or one brand of WIC allowed eggs at that store.
- For food items where there may be various non-WIC options, ask what brand the participant likes to buy and verify whether that brand is WIC allowed. For example, if the participant usually buys Skippy or Jif “Natural” peanut butter, explain that those are not WIC allowed because they are peanut butter spreads. Suggest a natural peanut butter brand that is allowed or other peanut butter options. The [UPC Codes - MN WIC APL \(Approved Product List\)](#) lists all WIC-allowed products.
- Encourage participants to contact you with any questions or issues with using their benefits. If there’s an issue with a food item not going through at the register although the food item is available in benefits, have them take a picture of the product and the UPC, or share the receipt, so you can verify if it is WIC allowed or not.
 - See the September 8, 2021 memo [Reporting Mapping Issues](#) for details regarding when allowed fresh produce doesn’t ring up.
 - If staff find a food they think should be WIC allowed, submit a *Minnesota WIC UPC Submission Form* found on the [UPC Codes - MN WIC APL \(Approved Product List\)](#) web page.
- Follow up with new families. Contact new families a week or two after an initial certification. Ask about their WIC shopping experience. Do they have any questions about finding and/or using WIC foods?
- As a staff, review resources available on the MDH website for troubleshooting transaction related questions:
 - See [Vendor Resources for Local Agency WIC Programs](#).

Ideas from other Local Agencies:

- Hennepin and Ramsey County WIC Programs partnered with their local SHIP Programs to promote the increase in the WIC Cash Value Benefit (CVB) and to encourage full redemption of the CVB. See their story in the Wednesday Update this week.
- Olmsted County shared the following:

We have implemented several activities to help clients with their shopping experience. These are activities we found helpful for both clients and staff:

 - We call or text all new participants to find out how their shopping experience is going. We ask if they are having problems locating any items, using the card or if there are general concerns.
 - We feel it is important to ask about the shopping experience at each appointment and educate clients on why foods may not have been WIC allowed and help them identify foods that are allowed. It is also important to look at what foods are remaining on the client’s card and help them identify foods they might like to buy.
 - When we meet with clients for an appointment, we confirm they still have the app and help them download it if they have a new phone. We review how to use the app if they have a lapse in using it or have not used it in the past.

- When clients have an issue at the store, our staff answering the phone are trained to answer questions, help clients find the items they need, or troubleshoot problems at check out.
- If there are food issues at the store, we have one designated staff person who follows up with the stores. She stays in communication with many of our stores maintaining a relationship. This relationship makes it easier when we need to reach out to stores with concerns or questions.
- Since whole grains have been difficult for clients to locate in stores, we have a whole grain guide which lists where to find whole grain items by category and location in some of our larger stores.

Thank you to Olmsted county for sharing their activities to improve the shopping experience!

Average Benefit Redemption

Curious about the Average Benefit Redemption amount for each food package? Here are a few resources:

- [Participants Issued Benefits by PFDTU with Average Benefit Redemption Amount](#). See pages 7-9 of the Guidance Document for **MDH WIC Food Package Cost – April 2021**. Read the Report Overview for a description of how the values were determined.
- [WIC Participant and Program Characteristics 2018 Food Package and Costs Final Report](#)

Reference – Complete Listing of Hyperlinks

[“Setting the PIN” Sticky Note Reminder](#)

(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/wedupdate/2021/05/12pin.pdf>)

[Shopping Guide](#)

(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/vendor/fpchng/shopguide.pdf>)

[UPC Codes - MN WIC APL \(Approved Product List](#)

(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/vendor/fpchng/upc/index.html>)

[Reporting Mapping Issues](#)

(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/wedupdate/2021/topic/0908mapissues.pdf>)

[Vendor Resources for Local Agency WIC Programs](#)

(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/vendor.html>)

[Participants Issued Benefits by PFDTU with Average Benefit Redemption Amount,](#)

(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/reports/infoview/benefits/avefoodcosts.pdf>)

[WIC Participant and Program Characteristics 2018 Food Packages and Costs Final Report](#)

(<https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/WICPC2018FoodPackage-1.pdf>)

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