Introduction to WIC

Objectives

After completing this lesson, you will be able to:

- ☞ Describe the participants served by WIC.
- ☞ Describe how WIC improves the health of participants.
- ☞ Identify the history and purpose of WIC.
- ☞ Identify the source of WIC funding.
- ☞ Describe the services provided by WIC.
- ☞ Describe the purpose of nutrition education and breastfeeding promotion.
- ☞ List the basic foods provided by WIC.
- ☞ List the four WIC eligibility requirements.

Overview

If you are new to WIC, you probably have many questions. What does WIC stand for? What is WIC? Who does it help and how? Read on to find the answers to these and other questions.

What is WIC?

WIC stands for **W**omen, **I**nfants, and **C**hildren. WIC's official name is the *Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children*. It is a public health program designed to improve the health of the families who participate. Nutrition education and counseling, referrals, and healthy foods are the key components of the WIC Program. Counseling and education help participants learn about healthy eating and make behavior changes that can have a positive impact on their health for the rest of their lives.

In addition, WIC focuses on these specific areas to improve the health of WIC participants:

- Reducing complications during pregnancy.
- Increasing the number of breastfeeding mothers.
- Reducing iron-deficiency anemia.
- Decreasing the number of low birth weight and premature infants.
- Improving growth and development of young children.

- Improving access to health care.

Who is Eligible for WIC?

To receive WIC services, applicants must meet four eligibility criteria:

1. Live in a **residential area** served by the WIC agency:
    - WIC services are available throughout Minnesota.
    - Each WIC agency in Minnesota serves a specific geographical area or special population.

2. Be in a **category** served by WIC:
    - Pregnant woman.
    - Breastfeeding woman with an infant under 12 months of age.
    - Non-breastfeeding woman up to 6 months of postpartum.
    - Infant under 12 months of age.
    - Child 1 to 5 years of age.

    Note: Fathers, grandparents, foster parents or other guardians may apply for WIC for their children.

3. Have an **income** below the WIC Income Guidelines (see the Income Eligibility lesson for more information).

4. Have a **nutrition risk** – a health condition or nutrition need that can be helped with nutritious WIC foods and nutrition education. Some examples include:
    - Anemia (low blood iron).
    - Pregnant teen.
    - Poor growth.
    - Health conditions like diabetes or high blood pressure.
    - Food allergies
    - Medical problems like hepatitis, cancer and eating disorders.

What Services Does WIC Provide?

The WIC Program is committed to serving all eligible participants. When needed, WIC will make available bilingual staff, interpreters and materials in other languages and formats.

Nutrition Education

When families have nutritious food and practice better eating habits, they are healthier. WIC offers nutrition education to all WIC participants and their families. Through WIC nutrition education, families learn to make healthful food and lifestyle choices. WIC nutrition education is participant-centered, designed to meet the needs and interest of each participant.

Breastfeeding Education and Support

Breastfeeding is the healthiest feeding choice for both mother and infant, and it is the way babies were meant to be fed. As a public health program, one of WIC's roles is to promote and support breastfeeding. WIC does this by:

- Providing education to women about breastfeeding – during pregnancy and after delivery.
- Training breastfeeding specialists and breastfeeding peer counselors to help women with breastfeeding questions and concerns.
- Participating in community efforts to support breastfeeding.
- Providing additional food to women who are exclusively breastfeeding to meet their increased nutrition needs.
- Providing breast pumps to women who need to pump their milk.

All employees in WIC have a role in breastfeeding promotion. You will learn more about your role in the WIC training module on breastfeeding.

Healthy Foods

An important benefit of WIC, are the nutritious foods available to participants. WIC gives participants special vouchers to buy nutritious foods at the stores. Each participant receives a set of vouchers for each month they are on WIC.

The foods that WIC provides help meet the special nutrition needs of pregnant and breastfeeding women and growing children. WIC foods are high in protein, calcium, iron and vitamins. The foods WIC provides are meant to **supplement** the participant's diet; WIC does not provide all the food and nutrients that a participant needs. The foods each WIC participant receives will vary, depending on their "category" (e.g., pregnant; breastfeeding; etc) and their particular nutritional needs.

The basic foods WIC provides include:

Fruits and Vegetables

100% Juice

Milk, Cheese & Eggs

Cold and Hot Cereals

Canned Fish – For Fully Breastfeeding Women Only

Canned Beans, Dry Beans, Peas, Lentils & Peanut Butter

Whole Grains: Brown Rice, Oatmeal, Bread & Tortillas

Soy Products: Tofu & Soy Beverages

Infant Foods: Cereals, Meats, Formula, Vegetables & Fruit

Referrals to Other Health and Social Service Programs

Partnerships with other public health and social service programs are a key to WIC's success. WIC encourages all participants to receive complete health care.

WIC refers participants to **health care** services such as:

- Prenatal care
- Well-child care
- Family planning
- Immunizations
- Breastfeeding counselors
- Community health nurses
- Drug and alcohol counseling
- Mental health clinics

WIC also refers participants to **social services** programs such as:

- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)(formerly known as Food Stamps)
- Food shelves
- Emergency shelters and housing
- Public assistance
- Domestic violence programs
- Head Start
- Parenting classes

WIC refers participants who are not already receiving Medical Assistance, to that program. WIC is also refers participants who might be behind on immunizations to their health care provider.

Is WIC Effective?

Since the WIC Program began in 1974, it has gained a reputation for being one of the **premiere public health programs**. WIC improves the health of nutritionally at-risk women, infants and children, and promotes positive lifestyle choices that lead to lifelong health. Studies have shown that the WIC program is cost-effective in protecting or improving the health and nutrition status of low-income women, infants and children.

P**regnant women** who participate in WIC:

- Eat more foods rich in key nutrients (i.e., vitamins A and C, and iron) needed for healthy fetal development.
- See their health care provide earlier in their pregnancy.
- Are more likely to deliver full-term babies, with healthy birth weights.

Infants, whose mothers participated in WIC:

- Are born with fewer health problems.

Children who participate in WIC are more likely to:

- Eat foods rich in vitamin A, vitamin C and iron.
- Have healthy blood iron levels, important for growth and development.
- See a doctor regularly for check-ups & get their immunizations on time.

It has been documented in government and university research that WIC saves health care dollars!

Who Funds and Administers the WIC Program?

The WIC Program is federally funded by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA). The federal funds are given as a grant to state WIC programs to administer the WIC program locally. The Minnesota State WIC office, located in St. Paul, administers grants to local WIC Programs throughout the state to provide WIC services. The state WIC agency is responsible for ensuring that local WIC Programs comply with federal regulations and state WIC policies and procedures, and that they provide quality nutrition services.

US Department of Agriculture, Food and Consumer Services
(Washington, DC)

- Administers national WIC Program
- Funds WIC Programs
- Issues rules and regulations

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Midwest Regional Office of USDA, Food and Consumer Services
(Chicago)

- Clarifies federal regulations & USDA policies
- Oversees State WIC Programs in the Midwest Region

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MN Department of Health MN WIC Program
(St. Paul)

- Manages federal WIC grant
- Establishes state policies
- Provides resources & support to WIC local agencies

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Local WIC Programs
(throughout Minnesota)

- Manages the local WIC budget and clinic operations
- Plans and provides WIC nutrition services to participants

Practice Activity - A

1. Review the following pamphlets. Highlight or underline the information that will be most helpful to share with new participants.
   - *Every Child in Minnesota can be healthy and well fed*
   - *Welcome to WIC*

2. Go to the Minnesota website at: http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/fh/wic/index.html
   - Scroll to the bottom of the screen to find your local agency.
   - Using the 'menu' on the left of the screen, click on the "Information for Local Agencies" link and investigate the resources available.

Skill Check - #1

1. What are the four eligibility criteria for participating in WIC?

2. What four services does WIC provide?

3. Where does the money for WIC services come from?

Section 1: Who works at WIC?

Objectives

After completing this lesson, you will be able to:

- ☞ Briefly describe the role of each member of your WIC staff.
- ☞ Identify your responsibilities in WIC
- ☞ Describe how the state WIC agency helps local agencies

Overview

People with a variety of training backgrounds and skills work together to provide WIC services. All local agencies have a **WIC Coordinator** and **Breastfeeding Coordinator** who oversee the nutrition and breastfeeding services in their agency. Every agency also has **Competent Professional Authorities** (**CPA**s) who work with participants and provide the nutrition services. Each agency has a **Local Systems Administrator** (**LSA**), and some agencies employ a **clerk**. The number of WIC staff usually depends on the number of WIC participants the agency serves.

In some clinics, one person may function in more than one role. For example, the WIC Coordinator might also be the Breastfeeding Coordinator. Some agencies have only one or two people working in the WIC Program. Some agencies designate one or more CPAs to serve all the agency's "high risk" participants. A few WIC agencies have **breastfeeding peer counselors**. As you read the following descriptions of WIC roles, think about your role and where you fit in.

Who works in your WIC Clinic?

★ *Clerk/Receptionist*

A WIC applicant's first contact with WIC is sometimes with the Clerk or Receptionist. The WIC Clerk's responsibilities might include:

- ➢ Screening families for residency, identity and income eligibility
- ➢ Scheduling and rescheduling appointments
- ➢ Promoting breastfeeding and nutrition education
- ➢ Issuing vouchers
- ➢ Issuing ID folders
- ➢ Answering phone calls

★ *Competent Professional Authority*

Competent Professional Authority (CPA) is the "official" name for WIC staff who certify WIC applicants/participants to receive appropriate WIC benefits. They conduct the nutrition assessment and provide nutrition services. CPAs are sometimes called **"certifiers"** or **nutrition educators**. The CPA's responsibilities might include:

- Determining whether or not an applicant qualifies for WIC
- Taking height and weight measurements
- Testing blood iron by a finger-stick
- Assessing and documenting health and nutrition risk
- Providing nutrition education and counseling
- Assisting the participant in setting nutrition goals
- Providing breastfeeding education and support
- Prescribing a food package
- Making referrals

There are two categories of CPAs – professional and locally-trained:

Professional CPA:
A professional CPA might have a bachelor's or master's degree in a health profession, such as nutrition, nursing or health education. A professional CPA might be registered dietitian or public health nurse.

Locally-Trained CPA:
A Locally-Trained CPA is employed by a local agency to provide nutrition services in **another language** or **cultural context**. A Locally-Trained CPA has at least a high school diploma (or equivalent) <u>and</u> speaks another language and/or is of another cultural group served by the local agency (e.g., Somali or Hispanic). The individual is trained by WIC to certify and counsel participants. The Locally-Trained CPA is supervised by a professional CPA.

NOTE: Refer to Chapter 4, Local Agency Staffing, in the Minnesota Operations Manual for more information in the requirements for CPAs.

★ *High Risk CPA*

Each local WIC agency should have on staff (or by contract) qualified nutrition professionals to provide nutrition services to high risk participants. These qualified nutrition professionals are referred to as "**high risk CPAs**". The high risk CPA's responsibilities may include:

- Certifying and counseling high risk participants
- Addressing more complex nutrition conditions and issues
- Writing nutrition care plans for high risk participants

- Training other agency CPAs on nutrition topics

★ *Breastfeeding Coordinator*

Each local agency has a **Breastfeeding Coordinator**. The Breastfeeding Coordinator usually has advanced training in lactation (breastfeeding) counseling, education and support. The Breastfeeding Coordinator's responsibilities might include:

- Coordinating breastfeeding promotion activities.
- Answering breastfeeding questions from participants and agency staff.
- Helping participants who are having problems breastfeeding.
- Creating a clinic environment that supports breastfeeding.

★ *Breastfeeding Peer Counselor*

A Breastfeeding **Peer Counselor** provides basic breastfeeding information and encouragement to WIC pregnant and breastfeeding mothers. She is a mother who has personal experience with breastfeeding and is participating (or has participated) in the WIC Program. The Breastfeeding Peer Counselor Program is not available at every local agency.

★ *WIC Coordinator*

The **WIC Coordinator** is the leader of the WIC agency. In some agencies, the WIC Coordinator is also the Breastfeeding Coordinator. The WIC Coordinator's responsibilities might include:

- **Planning** and overseeing WIC nutrition services
- **Training and supervising** WIC staff.
- **Managing** the agency's WIC caseload (i.e., # participants on WIC)
- **Communicating** with State staff and disseminating information from the state WIC program to the local agency's staff
- Making sure that program regulations are followed
- Making decision and answering questions
- Managing WIC clinic flow and appointment schedule to assure clinic runs smoothly

★ *Local Systems Administrator (LSA)*

The WIC Program uses an electronic data system called HuBERT to collect and store information about WIC participants. The LSA is responsible for conducting data system administrative functions in the WIC system.

Practice Activity - B

1. Make a list of staff in your clinic, and note their responsibilities.
   - Work together with a coworker or your supervisor on this activity.
   - Do you have someone listed for all of the jobs you read about in this section?

2. Talk to your supervisor about your role in WIC. Where do you fit into the WIC Team?

3. If you work in a WIC Program that is part of a larger organization, talk to your supervisor about how WIC fits into the organization. Take note of people in the larger organization whom you may need to contact.

Who works at the State WIC Office?

The state WIC agency has a wide variety of people on staff. They are experts in:

- Nutrition
- Clinic Management
- Budget/Grants Management
- Counseling
- Training
- Outreach and Referrals
- Breastfeeding
- Vendor (Store) Relations
- Information Systems (CHIP)
- Policies and Procedures

The state WIC agency staff can answer local agency questions such as:

Does this policy mean we can. . .?

Can the participant buy this type of food?

A participants needs a special formula, what should I do?

Can we use WIC money to buy. . .?

How can we order more nutrition education cards?

How can this CHIP report help us with clinic?

NOTE:
Every local agency has a state **Nutrition Consultant** and **Program Consultant** assigned to them. Your Nutrition Consultant will answer questions about WIC nutrition services and your Program Consultant will answer questions regarding administrative services.

Practice Activity -C

1. Review Section 1.2, State WIC Staff and Role in the Minnesota Operations Manual (MOM) to familiarize yourself with the state WIC program staffing.

2. Talk with your supervisor about your WIC role and in which circumstances you might need to contact the state WIC staff.

Skill Check- #2

1. Who is your WIC clinic receptionist? Clerk?

2. Who in your clinic would answer questions about breastfeeding?

3. Who in your clinic would answer questions about nutrition issues?

4. Who in your clinic would answer questions about the WIC Information System (HuBERT)?

5. Who in your clinic would answer questions about high risk nutrition issues?

6. When should you contact the state WIC staff? What is their phone number?

Section 2: Confidentiality

Objectives

After completing this lesson you will be able to:

- ☞ Follow appropriate procedures for protecting the confidentiality of WIC information.

Overview

As a WIC employee you will regularly deal with participants' personal information. Keeping the information private and confidential is a critical part of your job.

Confidentiality

There are two key points to confidentiality in WIC.

1. Do not release information from a participant's file without consent.
2. Maintain WIC participants' privacy at all times. This is best accomplished by:
   - Providing private space for WIC assessments & counseling
   - Protecting the computer screen from the view of others
   - Ensuring the protection and security of WIC data and equipment

For more information on privacy and confidentiality, read **Section 1.7, Data Privacy**, and **Section 5.9, Clinic Environment**, in the Minnesota Operations Manual (MOM). Read any other local policies on confidentiality as requested by your supervisor.

Skill Check - #3

1. What are three examples of a breach in confidentiality?

2. How will you keep the information on your computer private?

Final Skill Check

1.	WIC helps improve the health of participants by reducing iron deficiency anemia.	T	F
2.	WIC's official name is the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants and Children.	T	F
3.	A woman must be pregnant or breastfeeding to qualify for The WIC Program.	T	F
4.	A medical condition, such as high blood pressure, would qualify an applicant for nutrition risk.	T	F
5.	Foster parents may apply for WIC for their children.	T	F
6.	Breastfeeding education and support is one of the services provided by WIC.	T	F
7.	WIC is required to refer participants not receiving Medical Assistance to that program.	T	F
8.	There have been no studies that demonstrating the cost effectiveness of The WIC Program.	T	F
9.	WIC is federally funded by the United States Department of Health and Human Services.	T	F
10.	Not all local agencies have Breastfeeding Peer Counselors.	T	F
11.	WIC Staff must protect the privacy of participants at all times.	T	F