Introduction to WIC Module

WIC Overview

SECTION 1

Objectives

After completing this section, 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 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 Women, Infants, and Children. 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, breastfeeding support, 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.

**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, custodial grandparents, foster parents or other guardians may apply for WIC for their children.

3. **Have an income** below the WIC Income Guidelines.
   - Current income guidelines and adjunctive eligibilities are posted on the WIC website. (You will learn more about income eligibility later).

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).
   - Poor growth.
   - Health conditions like diabetes or high blood pressure.
   - Food allergies
   - Medical problems like hepatitis, cancer and eating disorders.
   - Inappropriate nutrition practices
   - Failure to meet dietary guidelines
What Services Does WIC Provide?

**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. 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 all WIC (Competent Professional Authority (CPA) staff 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 and don’t have another source for getting a breast pump with no cost.

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 food benefit cards to buy nutritious foods at the stores. Each participant receives a set of food benefits 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.
WIC Food Categories

- **Fruits and Vegetables**
- **100% Juice**
- **Milk, Cheese, Eggs, Yogurt**
- **Cold and Hot Cereals**
- **Whole Grains: Brown Rice, Oatmeal, Bread, Pasta and Tortillas**
- **Canned Fish – For Fully Breastfeeding Women Only**
- **Canned Beans, Dry Beans, Peas, Lentils and Peanut Butter**
- **Tofu and Soy Beverage**
- **Infant Foods: Cereals Meats, Formula, Vegetables and Fruits**
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)
- 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 also refers participants who might be behind on immunizations to their health care provider.

Your local WIC agency may have local organizations that they also refer participants to for help. You will learn more about your local agency’s referral resources later in your training.

The WIC Program is committed to serving all eligible participants. WIC makes available bilingual staff or interpreters and materials in other languages and formats when needed.
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.

Pregnant 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 provider 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.

MN WIC Health Outcomes

For information on how WIC has helped improve the health of women, infants and children in MN, refer to the most recent MN WIC Factsheet and other health outcomes data found on the Reports and Data section of the MN WIC Website.

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.
INTRODUCTION TO WIC

Practice Activity - A:

1. Review the following pamphlets and video. 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
   - Welcome to WIC video

2. Go to the Minnesota WIC website. From the menu on the left of the webpage, click on “Information for Local Agencies”. Investigate the resources available in this tab.

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?
INTRODUCTION TO WIC

Who Works at WIC?

SECTION 2

Objectives:

After completing this section, 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 (CPAs) 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 food benefits
- 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 education 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

Categories of CPA’s

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

Para-Professional CPA:
A para-professional CPA is employed by a local agency to provide nutrition services in another language or cultural context. They must meet the educational requirements for paraprofessional CPA staff as outlined in the Minnesota Operations Manual (MOM) Chapter 4. They may speak another language and/or be of another cultural group served by the local agency. The individual is trained by WIC to certify and counsel participants. The para-professional CPA is supervised by a nutrition professional and serves low-risk participants only.

High Risk CPA
Each local WIC agency will have on staff (or by contract) qualified nutrition professionals to provide nutrition services to high-risk participants. These qualified nutrition professionals may be 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

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

Note: Breastfeeding support is the responsibility of all WIC staff. All CPA’s are trained in breastfeeding education and support and talk with participants about breastfeeding as part of WIC services.

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 decisions and answering questions
- Managing WIC clinic flow and the appointment schedule to assure clinic runs smoothly
- Ensure that all applicants/participants are treated fairly and not discriminated against based on race, color, national origin, age, sex, or disability.

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.
Who Works at the State WIC Office?

The state WIC agency has a wide range of people on staff with varying backgrounds and expertise. Some areas of expertise include:

- Nutrition
- Breastfeeding
- Clinic Management
- Budgets
- Grant Management
- WIC Policy
- Outreach and Referrals
- Information System (HuBERT)
- Reports and Data Analysis
- Vendor (store) Relations
- Food Package and Shopping

Every local agency has a State Consultant assigned to them. This is your primary contact for questions. If your State Consultant doesn’t know the answer to your question, they will refer you to other State WIC staff with expertise in that area or will research out an answer for you. In most agencies, the WIC Coordinator will be the main person who will contact the State Consultant.
Practice Activity - B

- 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?

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

- 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.

- Ask your WIC supervisor for the name and contact information for your State Consultant. 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 a 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 and email?
Confidentiality

SECTION 3

Objectives

After completing this section, you will be able to:

• Follow procedures for protecting the confidentiality of WIC information.

Overview

As a WIC employee, you will regularly have access to 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 that person’s 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 MOM Section 1.7, Data Privacy, and MOM Section 5.9, Clinic Environment, in the Minnesota Operations Manual (MOM). Read any other agency policies on confidentiality as requested by your supervisor.
Skills Check - #3

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

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

Final Skills Check

1. **T or F** WIC helps improve the health of participants by reducing iron deficiency anemia.

2. **T or F** WIC’s official name is the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants and Children.

3. **T or F** A woman must be pregnant or breastfeeding to qualify for The WIC Program.

4. **T or F** A medical condition, such as high blood pressure, would qualify an applicant for a nutrition risk.

5. **T or F** Foster parents may apply for WIC for their foster children.

6. **T or F** Breastfeeding education and support is one of the services provided by WIC.

7. **T or F** WIC is required to refer participants not receiving Medical Assistance that program

8. **T or F** There have been no studies that demonstrate the cost effectiveness of The WIC Program

9. **T or F** WIC is federally funded by the United States Department of Health and Human Services.

10. **T or F** Only the breastfeeding coordinator can counsel a pregnant woman on what to expect with breastfeeding.

11. **T or F** Not all local agencies have Breastfeeding Peer Counselors.

12. **T or F** WIC Staff must protect the privacy of participants at all times.
Dictionary of WIC Lingo

Certification (cert.) Initial appointment to determine if someone meets eligibility requirements to participate in the WIC program. This appointment involves verification of income and residency, a complete health and nutrition assessment, nutrition counseling, referrals, and food package assignment with education on shopping for WIC foods.

Recertification (recert.) Appointment to reevaluate eligibility for the WIC program. Recertification generally occurs every 12 months, with some exceptions.

Midcertification (midcert.) Appointment scheduled between recertifications. Midcerts. Differ from recerts. in that they don’t require income and residency verification and the nutrition assessment has a different focus.

Infant midcert.—WIC visit for babies at 9-10 months of age, scheduled when the baby is exactly 9 months or older. Length, weight, hemoglobin are checked. Nutrition assessment and education is provided.

Breastfeeding Midcert.—WIC visit for breast feeding women either scheduled around 6 months post-partum, or scheduled at the same time as the infant midcert. Nutrition assessment and education are provided.

Child Midcert.—WIC visit for children about 6 months into the certification period. Ht/wt are checked. Nutrition assessment and education are provided.

Food Package The amount and type of food a participant receives from WIC each month. There are some foods that participants have choices about, other foods are automatically assigned.

FDTU/LDTU Acronyms referring to the first day to use food benefits and the last day to use food benefits. This date is important since more than one month of food benefits is usually issued at a time so a participant must wait until the FDTU before using.

WIC ID Folder (WIC Card) Cardboard folder that lists proxies on the outside and certification information on the inside. Clients must bring the WIC ID Folder to the WIC clinic and the store. This is their WIC identification.
**Proxy** A person 16 years or older listed on the WIC folder. This person has been given permission from the participant to pick up food benefits at the WIC clinic and use the food benefits at the store.

**State WIC ID** Individual ID number assigned to every individual as soon as they are prescreened in HuBERT. This number is unique to each individual and never changes.

**Household ID** ID number that is assigned to everyone in a household that is on the WIC Program. This number links individual’s in the same family together. This number can be changed for an individual, if there are custody changes or some other reason an individual is removed from a family.

**HuBERT** Acronym for *Health Benefits Real Time*. It’s the name of the WIC information system (computer program). It was named after Senator Hubert Humphrey who was from MN.

**Pre-screening** Initial contact with a participant when they are first entered into HuBERT. This usually happens when the participant calls to schedule their first appointment. An appointment cannot be scheduled until an individual is prescreened. Prescreening is only done once, even if a participant is off WIC for a period of time. Once they are in the system and have a state ID number, they never need to be prescreened again.

**Certification Guided Script (CGS)** is the computer procedure that staff go through during a certification or recertification appointment to determine a participant’s eligibility for the WIC Program. It involves screening for demographics/income eligibility, health screening, dietary assessment, risk code assignment, nutrition education and benefit issuance.

**Participant Folder** The location in HuBERT where all of the information about a participant is stored. The folder differs from the CGS in several ways. There are things that HuBERT allows in the folder that it doesn’t allow in the CGS and vice versa. If you have multiple folders and/or Guided Scripts open at the same time, it is important that you know which one you are working in.

**Mid-certification Assessment Guided Script (MAGS)** the computer procedure staff go through in order to complete a midcert. It involves screens for each step of the
assessments. In the MAGS only the anthropometric field is required by HuBERT, however the state requires nutrition assessment and nutrition education.

Additional Nutrition Education Visit (Nutrition Follow-up) These are nutrition education visits that occur at least quarterly, and occur sometime between a recert and a midcert. They are by appointment in some agencies, or are walk in’s in other agencies. WIC staff talk with the individual or family about how they are doing on their nutrition goal or about another topic of interest to the participant. It is also an opportunity to provide anticipatory guidance especially for infants and toddlers. Pregnancy follow up appointments should include conversations about breastfeeding, baby behavior or other pregnancy concerns. Participants receive their next set(s) of food benefits at this visit.

NOTE: Avoid calling this visit a “Voucher Pickup”, because this implies that the participant will only be picking up their vouchers and won’t be visiting with a CPA.

Adjunctive Eligibility Automatically income eligible for WIC if the participant is actively participating in other specified programs who have already performed an income eligibility. This allows WIC to not have to re-determine income.

Verification of Certification (VOC) This is the name of the form that contains pertinent information needed in order to transfer in a person who is within a certification period in another State to MN WIC. A copy of this form containing the necessary information is provided by MN WIC to participants who are moving out of MN to another State.

Minnesota Operations Manual (MOM) This is the policy and procedures manual that contains all the rules and regulations for the MN WIC program. These policies are based on federal regulations and are approved by USDA. MOM is posted on the MN WIC website.

Competent Professional Authority (CPA) The official name for staff who have met the education requirements or training to certify and counsel WIC participants.

Separation of Duties (SOD) Refers to the WIC policy in which the same staff person cannot determine income eligibility and medical or nutrition risk eligibility through the certification process. These two eligibility determinations must be done by two separate people.
**High Risk CPA/Nutrition Specialist** Designated staff person/s who are nutrition professionals who have been trained to see High Risk participants. These appointments are typically scheduled sometime between the Recert. and the Midcert. and count as the additional nutrition education visit. Many high risk situations should be addressed as soon as possible, and this appointment may be best scheduled the next month after certification. (single issue food benefits)

**INCP** Individual Nutrition Care Plan. This is the care plan that is written for high risk individuals that outlines steps to resolve the nutrition condition and also includes a plan for follow up.

**SOAP** This is an acronym for a medical documentation format for recording information during a nutrition assessment and education session. S=Subjective Information O=Objective information A=Assessment P=Plan.

**Participant Centered Services (PCS)** The approach that is taken to interact with families in all aspects of our work. We focus on making our clinics welcoming places for families and providing nutrition education that meets families’ needs and goals for themselves.

**Mentor** Refers to a fellow coworker who has been trained in mentoring and works with staff individually to help them develop and strengthen their PCS skills. Some agencies may have mentors for new staff or for other reasons.

**WICHealth.org** An online education option that participants can choose that allows them to complete their additional nutrition education on their own schedule. A follow up conversation in person or via phone must still occur. After a follow-up conversation has occurred, vouchers may be mailed.