

memo

DATE: July 7, 2021
TO: WIC Coordinators and Local Agency Staff
FROM: Carole Kelnhofer, Training Coordinator
SUBJECT: Target Marketing: Topic of the Month

Making nutritious food choices is one of the most important ways to ensure optimal growth and life-long health for our WIC participants. WIC offers a healthy variety of supplemental foods along with education and resources to help participants make informed choices on what they serve to their family and put into their body. Many factors influence participants' eating habits; foods offered at home or daycare, products seen in stores and restaurants, and the general food related marketing everywhere we look.

What is target marketing?

The process of focusing on specific groups or populations to increase the sale of certain products or services.

Why does it work?

It creates ads that attract specific people, usually based on age, gender, education, occupation, income-level, or household type. With the increased use of the internet, digital advertising has exploded; companies can now narrow their marketing down to the individual customer or household.

What is the goal of target marketing?

To influence buying patterns with attractive statements, catchy jingles, colorful pictures, and celebrity filled ads.

Examples of Target Marketing

- A cereal box brand covered in the latest cartoon character with a prize inside, targeting young children.
- An instant meal brand that claims it is a "good source of fiber & made with whole grains", targeting families.
- The latest superstar shown eating a yogurt brand before arriving to the Grammys, targeting adults.
- The "100% juice" brand that comes in a pull top bottle shaped like a mermaid, targeting young children.

How Target Marketing Affects Participants' Health

Many of the foods marketed to children are of poor nutritional quality. Exposure to the marketing of certain foods has been shown to increase the intake of high calorie/low nutrient dense foods, leading to increased rates of adverse health conditions in adults and children. Unfortunately, children are more vulnerable to the effects of target marketing and since many families shop together, they tend to influence their parents' buying patterns as well.

The top three food sources marketed to children are fast foods, beverages, and breakfast cereals. Children in lower-income families are disproportionately targeted by many of these advertisements. These same children often already experience an inadequate intake of many important nutrients, leading to poor health, cognitive deficits, and behavioral problems. Additionally, there is a greater focus on marketing that targets children of color; these ads work by promoting products to specific communities that result in further compromising their health.

With such an expansive and focused marketing reach, how can we support our participants to make healthy choices that include purchasing and using their WIC allowed foods?

Supporting Families

WIC can support families exposed to target marketing by encouraging them to learn more about the foods they are purchasing and recognize when something looks or sounds too good to be true. Encouraging families to maintain an active healthy lifestyle with regular family mealtimes, daily activity, and limiting screen time will ensure they are keeping the focus on their health. Below are some reminders to give to participants.

- **Look at the content:** Monitor the media that children consume and the games they play.
- **Discussion time:** Talk about the ads for foods that children see, explore what is healthy and what is not.
- **Take a screen 'time-out':** Limit time spent on TV, video game, tablet, computer, or cell phone.
- **Lead by example:** Shop, cook, and discuss healthy food choices together.
- **Eat healthy:** Create healthy eating habits by cooking and eating together as a family.
- **Stay active:** Find ways to get daily activity through indoor and/or outdoor playtime together.

The WIC Food Package

The changes made to the WIC food package over the years have brought improvements in the availability of healthy foods, making it easier for families with limited transportation to shop locally. Additionally, the tools available to participants gives them the support to shop for and use WIC foods, right at their fingertips. Despite these improvements, the redemption of WIC benefits has been decreasing. For staff, understanding which foods participants are or are not purchasing is an important part of how we can educate participants.

Explaining the benefits of the foods offered on the WIC food package, how to access, and use them can directly affect the redemption and utilization of benefits. Below are some things to consider that will help participants get the most out of their WIC food package.

Help Participants

- Read through the list of available foods in their WIC food package; use visuals whenever possible.
- Take the time to talk about the benefits of the various foods available.
- Share tips and recipes for using different foods/food groups.
- Suggest that they plan their shopping trip ahead of time; making a list of WIC foods and the ingredients needed for a recipe can help.
- Discuss how to identify and select the appropriate food item at the store, such as how to identify 32 oz. low fat yogurt from all the other products on the shelf or finding the right vegetable needed for a recipe.
- Remind them to pay for their WIC foods separately; save SNAP, cash, or other payment methods for those non-WIC foods.

When discussing WIC foods, it may be helpful to ask participants what influences their decision to purchase certain items over others. Staff can use open-ended questions to ask participants about the use of foods on the WIC food package at each nutrition education contact. Below are some examples to ask about and encourage the use of WIC allowed foods.

Examples:

Staff: “How have you enjoyed using the foods in your food package?”

Staff: “What questions do you have about the different foods available to you with WIC?”

Staff: “What foods were you looking to purchase but could not find or maybe they weren’t available?”

Staff: “Tell me what information I could share to help you shop for and use the (cereal/beans/infant meats) on your food package?”

Staff: “What would you say makes you choose one cereal over another?”

Staff: “Tell me more about how you incorporate your WIC foods into your daily meals.”

For participants: Using the [My Minnesota WIC App](#) will assist participants in shopping for and using their WIC foods.

For staff: The [Help Participants Use Benefits](#) page has activities for evaluating WIC benefit redemption and utilization both at the local agency level and the individual household level.

Staff Exercise

Education-based marketing is another strategy that involves sharing knowledge to generate trust from your 'target audience' to promote a product or service. At WIC, we can use our knowledge and resources to build trust with participants and promote the healthy foods provided on the WIC food package. Complete the exercise steps below to build your knowledgebase with a variety of tips to share with participants to promote various WIC allowed foods.

Tips

- Use the [WIC Quick Tips- for CPAs](#) to find ideas around using specific foods.
- Explore [WIC Recipes](#) and [Recipes, Cookbooks and Recipe Videos](#) for ideas to help participants get the most out of their food package.
- Explore [MyPlate KITCHEN](#) for more recipes, videos, and other resources.,

Exercise #1

1. Choose one food group and read through the [WIC Quick Tips- for CPAs](#) for that food group.
2. What questions would you ask to get the participant talking about this food group?

Examples:

- Tell me about a time you ate this food.
 - Share with me how your family felt about this food.
 - What resources would help you to use this food in your meal planning?
3. Identify ways to incorporate this food group at meal or snack times.

Examples:

- Packaging WIC foods (fun cups, reusable individual serving size containers, meal prep, using leftovers).
 - Making shapes or faces with foods.
 - Having a 'food of the week'; try in 1-2 different ways and discuss together as a family.
4. What ideas do you have for promoting this food to WIC participants?

Examples:

- Sharing recipes
- Coloring pages
- Pictures of the people enjoying this food on the wall.

Exercise #2

1. Do a search on Google for 'WIC Foods Recipes' or 'WIC Baby Food Recipes'. What did you find?

Examples:

- [WIC Foods Recipes](#) (Pinterest)
- [Tag: WIC Food Package](#) (Dr. Yum Project, Recipes)
- Cookbooks from other State WIC Agencies.

2. Pick one recipe to try at home and then discuss with other staff.

Examples:

- Did you like the recipe?
- How easy/difficult was it?
- Would you recommend others try this recipe?

3. What ways can you share this and other recipe ideas with WIC participants?

Examples:

- Give them a paper copy.
- Share a link.
- Share picture of the food you made.
- Ask participants to bring back pictures of the food they made.

4. What ways can you get participants excited to try new foods?

Examples:

- With fun recipes.
- Encouraging family preparation of foods.
- Pick one WIC food, place it in the center of the table, and talk together about what that food looks like, tastes like, and feels like.

Continue to send your topic suggestions to Carole Kelnhofer at carole.kelnhofer@state.mn.us.

Resources

[Fact Sheet- Food Advertising and Marketing to Children 2019](#) (April 9, 2019, American Heart Association)

[Kids' Everyday Exposure to Food Marketing](#) (January 22, 2017, International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity)

[Making WIC Work Better Full Report](#) (May 2019, Food Research & Action Center (FRAC))

[WIC Works: Addressing the Nutrition and Health Needs of Low-Income Families for More Than Four Decades](#) (January 27, 2021, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities)

[Infographic: The WIC Food Package: From Then to Now](#) (2017 Report, The National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine)

Reference - Complete Listing of Hyperlinks:

My Minnesota WIC App

(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/infosystem/hubert/mnwicapp/index.html>)

Help Participants Use Benefits

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

WIC Quick Tips- for CPAs

(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/nutrition/fpchange/tips/index.html>)

WIC Recipes (<https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/recipes/index.html>)

Recipes, Cookbooks and Recipe Videos (<https://wicworks.fns.usda.gov/resources/recipes-cookbooks-and-recipe-videos>)

MyPlate KITCHEN (<https://www.myplate.gov/myplate-kitchen>)

WIC Foods Recipes (<https://www.pinterest.com/sandiegowic/wic-foods-recipes/?autologin=true>)

Tag: WIC Food Package (<https://recipes.doctoryum.org/en/tags/wic-food-package>)

Fact Sheet- Food Advertising and Marketing to Children 2019 (<https://www.heart.org/-/media/files/about-us/policy-research/fact-sheets/healthy-schools-and-childhood-obesity/food-marketing-and-advertising-to-children-fact-sheet.pdf?la=en>)

Kids' Everyday Exposure to Food Marketing

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RREG2QUUGIU>)

Making WIC Work Better Full Report (<https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/Making-WIC-Work-Better-Full-Report.pdf>)

WIC Works: Addressing the Nutrition and Health Needs of Low-Income Families

(<https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/wic-works-addressing-the-nutrition-and-health-needs-of-low-income-families>)

Infographic: The WIC Food Package: From Then to Now

(<https://www.nap.edu/visualizations/wic-food-packages/>)

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