

# Media Talking Points: North Carolina WIC Program



- The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) is a federal program that provides nutrition education, supplemental foods, breastfeeding promotion and support, and referrals for healthcare and social services. WIC serves low-income pregnant, breastfeeding and postpartum women, infants, and children until the age of 5. WIC has proven effective in preventing and improving nutrition-related health problems within its population.
- WIC is considered one of the most successful social service and public health initiatives in the nation. Numerous studies have shown participation in WIC to be associated with improved nutritional status of pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers and young children as well as a reduction in low birth weight, pre-term delivery and fetal death (Bryan et al 1998).
- The WIC Program is funded by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). In North Carolina, it is administered by the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Public Health, Women's and Children's Section, Nutrition Services Branch. The services are provided by county health departments, community and rural health centers, and community action agencies.
- The North Carolina WIC Program currently serves an average of 270,000 participants each month. In *[insert county or agency name]*, we serve approximately *[insert number of participants]* each month.
- To participate, persons must live in North Carolina, have a household income equal to or less than 185% of the U.S. Poverty Income Guidelines and be at nutritional risk. A person receiving Medicaid, Work First Families Assistance (TANF) or assistance from the NC Food and Nutrition Services (food stamps) automatically meets the income eligibility requirement. A nutritionist or competent professional authority makes a nutritional risk assessment at no cost to the participant, usually at the local WIC office.
- Nutrition education is a large component of the WIC program. A trained nutrition professional can work one-on-one with individuals:
  - To teach about the relationship between nutrition, physical activity and good health.
  - To improve eating and physical activity habits as they relate to the participant's nutritional risk.

- To promote optimal use of the WIC Program's supplemental foods and other nutritious foods.
  - To provide nutrition education appropriate to an individual's age, educational background, household situation, language, cultural and ethnic preferences, and nutritional needs.
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- Breastfeeding promotion and support is an integral part of the WIC Program. WIC strives to increase the initiation, duration and exclusivity of breastfeeding among women enrolled in the program. All WIC agencies have trained personnel ready to assist mothers in making informed decisions about their infant feeding choice. WIC also instructs mothers in the basics of breastfeeding.
  - Prenatal education is done through educational materials or classes. Women can learn about the benefits of breastfeeding, ways to make breastfeeding comfortable, how to tell if the baby is getting enough and fitting breastfeeding into mom's lifestyle.
  - WIC participants are encouraged to breastfeed, but it is understood that breastfeeding is not for everyone. WIC does provide contract milk-based or soy-based iron-fortified formula for the first year of life. All babies receive infant cereal, and infant fruits and vegetables starting at 6 months of age. Fully breastfed babies receive higher amounts of infant fruits and vegetables as well as infant meats.
  - WIC has a shared relationship in the community receiving referrals from healthcare facilities as well as offering referrals for such needs as immunizations, well baby check ups, regular child care, and dental care.
  - The WIC program and the supplemental food offered promote healthy habits for healthy families. These include:
    - Breastfeed your baby
    - Eat more fiber
    - Lower the fat
    - Eat more fruits and vegetables
    - Eat more whole grains
    - Drink less juice and sweetened beverages
    - Make family meals matter