



# What Docs Should Know About...WIC

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**The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) provides nutritionally dense foods, information on healthy eating, and referrals to health care and social services to pregnant, breastfeeding or postpartum women, and infants and children up to age 5.**

- The USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) administers the WIC Program at the federal level. Ninety state agencies administer the program across the country through 2,200 local agencies and 9,000 clinic sites. State agencies are responsible for determining participant eligibility and providing benefits and services.
- To be eligible, pregnant and postpartum women, infants and children up to age 5 must meet income eligibility guidelines, a state residency requirement, and be individually diagnosed by a health professional to be at "nutritional risk."<sup>1</sup>
- Most WIC participants receive checks or vouchers that enable them to purchase food specifically designed to provide them with a more nutritious diet. Some participants receive WIC food through state agency warehouses or delivered to their home.
- WIC provides foods high in five target nutrients: protein, calcium, iron, and vitamins A & C.

WIC Income Eligibility	
Effective from July 1, 2006 to June 30, 2007	
48 Contiguous States, DC, Guam and Territories	
Household Size	Annual Gross Income (Before taxes)
1	\$18,130
2	\$24,420
3	\$30,710
4	\$37,000
5	\$43,290
For each additional member add	+\$6,290

Source: Food and Nutrition Service, WIC Income Eligibility Guidelines 2006-2007

WIC PROGRAM PARTICIPATION AND COSTS		
Year	Program Participation Total	Avg. Monthly Food Cost Per Participant
FY2005	8,022,615	\$37.42
FY2004	7,904,435	\$37.55
FY2003	7,631,008	\$35.28

Source: Food and Nutrition Service, <http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/wisummary.htm>

- In addition to providing nutritious foods to supplement diets, WIC provides information on healthy eating and referrals to health care and social services to participants at no charge.
- Almost half of all infants and about one-quarter of all children 1-4 years of age in the United States now participate in WIC.<sup>2</sup> In 2005, WIC served over 8 million participants, and the average monthly benefit was \$37.42 in vouchers.<sup>3</sup>

**WIC participants are women and children up to age 5 who are below a certain income level and determined to be at nutritional risk.**

- Based on federal guidelines, a health professional such as a physician, nurse or nutritionist determines if an individual is at nutrition risk. This screening is available free of charge for program applicants. Nutritional risk is categorized into medically-based or dietary risks. Medically-based risks include anemia (low blood levels), being underweight, or a history of poor pregnancy outcomes. An example of a dietary-based condition is a poor dietary pattern.
- Participants must have incomes at or below 185% of the federal poverty line (\$35,798 for a family of four for FY 2006).
- Individuals who receive or have a family member who receives Food Stamps, Medicaid or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) automatically meet the income eligibility requirement for WIC.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Women, Infants and Children: Frequently Asked Questions. Food and Nutrition Service. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/FAQs/FAQ.HTM>.  
<sup>2</sup> Oliveira, V., et. al. (2002). The WIC Program: Background, Trends and Issues. <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/fanrr27/>  
<sup>3</sup> Food & Nutrition Service. (2004). WIC program participation and costs. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/wisummary.htm>  
<sup>4</sup> The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children. Nutrition Program Facts. Food and Nutrition Service. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/WIC-Fact-Sheet.pdf>.

## Research shows that WIC is effective in improving children's birth outcomes and nutritional status.

- A five-state study conducted in 1990 found that participation in WIC during pregnancy was associated with increased birth weight and a lower chance of preterm birth. In addition, the study concluded that every \$1 spent through the WIC program on pregnant women resulted in savings of up to \$3.13 in Medicaid costs over the first 60 days after birth.<sup>5</sup>
- Children participating in WIC increased their intake of iron, B<sub>6</sub> and folate (by 21%, 23% and 91% of the nutrient RDA respectively).<sup>6</sup>
- In a multi-site surveillance study conducted of the WIC program, infants who participated in WIC showed better nutrition and health outcomes than their counterparts in families who were eligible for WIC but did not receive it. These outcomes include infants being significantly taller, less likely to be underweight and being in good health.<sup>7</sup>

## WIC received an appropriation of \$5.3 billion from Congress for FY 2006, representing an increase of \$1.4 million from FY 2005.<sup>8</sup>

- WIC is not an entitlement, but a grant program. Congress is not mandated to allocate funding to serve all eligible participants. Congress authorizes a specific amount of funding each year for program operations.<sup>9</sup>
- Other Child Nutrition Programs included in the Child Nutrition Act are: National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs, Summer Food Service Program, After-School Snack Program and Child and Adult Care Food Program.

1974	\$20.6 million
1980	\$750 million
1985	\$1.5 billion
FY 2006	\$5.3 billion

Source: Food and Nutrition Service, WIC Fact Sheet

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## Docs can get involved by helping families access WIC and other support services, and by advocating for reduced waiting lists and elimination of barriers to access.<sup>10</sup>

- Docs can help ensure that families know about WIC and have the assistance they require in applying for benefits. In order to apply, individuals must contact the WIC state or local agency to schedule an appointment. A list of toll-free numbers of WIC state agencies can be found at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/Contacts/tollfreenumbers.htm>.
- Contact Docs For Tots for help in advocating for WIC and other child nutrition programs and policies.

## Additional Resources for Docs

- Food and Nutrition Service, WIC Program, <http://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/resources/>
- Food Research and Action Center, <http://www.frac.org/index.html>
- WIC Works Resource System, <http://www.nal.usda.gov/wicworks/>

<sup>5</sup> Oliveira, V. and Gundersen, C. (2001). WIC increases the nutrient intake of children. *Food Review*, 24, 27-30.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Black, M. et al. (2004) Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children Participation and Infants' Growth and Health: A Multisite Surveillance Study. *Pediatrics* 2004; 114:169-176

<sup>8</sup> The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children. Summary of FY2006 Grants. Food and Nutrition Service. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/fundingandprogramdata/grants2006.htm>.

<sup>9</sup> The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children. Nutrition Program Facts. Food and Nutrition Service. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/WIC-Fact-Sheet.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> Black, M. et al. (2004). *Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children Participation and Infants' Growth and Health: A Multisite Surveillance Study*. *Pediatrics* 2004; 114:169-176