



## Women, Infants and Children Supplemental Nutrition Program

### Program Description:

WIC provides nutrition and food assistance services to low-income families with pregnant and breastfeeding mothers, infants and children up to the fifth birthday. Program services include nutrition counseling and classes, breastfeeding promotion and support, referrals to health and social services and food checks that can be used to buy specific foods: milk, cheese, eggs, cereal, juice, beans, peanut butter and infant formula.

### Clientele:

WIC clients are called participants. Each month, WIC serves over **1.4 million** participants statewide. Over **950,000 California families** are enrolled and **60 percent of all infants** born in California participate in WIC.

Most families are employed with incomes up to 185% of the poverty level. About 65% of WIC participants are enrolled in Medi-Cal; about 18% are enrolled in the Food Stamp Program and 15% in the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families program. Over 90% of infants and children have health coverage.

### Funding/Budget:

The budget for current fiscal year is **\$1.3 Billion** including \$980 Million from an annual federal grant and \$310 Million in reimbursements from food manufacturers' rebates. Approximately, \$952 Million is used to purchase food, with \$248 Million used for all program services and operations.

The federal grant is awarded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture which administers the program. It is a capped grant, subject to the annual federal budget appropriation. There is no General Fund in the WIC Program.

### Program Operations:

WIC has contracts with 82 local agencies—half are local governments and half are private, non-profit community organizations—which operate WIC service sites in 675 locations statewide.

WIC agencies evaluate and document program eligibility, provide nutrition education in individual and group sessions, make referrals to health and social services in their communities and issue 6.6 million food checks to participants each month. Each check is valid for use for a 30 day period and is payable for a specific type and quantity of food. The retail value of the food checks is about \$62.00 per month per participant.

WIC checks can be redeemed at any of the 3,800 grocery stores statewide that have entered into “vendor agreements” with the WIC program. Stores authorized:

- 2,450 chain stores (multiple stores under ownership)
- 700 neighborhood stores (one owner, single store)
- 540 WIC-only stores (serve solely or predominantly WIC customers)

The authorized stores are placed in peer groups based on where they are located and their size as determined by the number of cash registers. Stores may charge WIC their shelf prices for the foods purchased up to a maximum allowable amount calculated for each peer group and updated every two weeks.

### **Information Technology:**

WIC has automated nearly all of its business functions and operates two mission critical information technology systems. The **Integrated Statewide Information System (ISIS)** is used by local agency staff at the service delivery sites to assess an applicant’s eligibility for the program, record all federally required eligibility and encounter information, issue food checks, schedule appointments for WIC families and produce program operation reports. **ISIS** is used by State WIC staff to account for all participants enrolled and served, maintain fiscal information associated with food expenditures, produce required federal reports, maintain records for vendors authorized to redeem food benefits and produce management/operations reports

The **Vendor WIC Information System (VWIX)** is used by authorized vendors to report redemption of WIC checks in order to be paid, retrieve information about status of WIC checks they have redeemed and obtain information about maximum allowable amount they can charge for WIC foods. **VWIX** is used by DPH WIC staff to pre-approve WIC checks for payment, establish a maximum allowable amount for each check and communicate information to vendors about checks and maximums.

### **Program Integrity and Quality Assurance:**

WIC has a Program Integrity section with responsibilities for follow-up on reports of program abuse and fraud pertaining to participants, local agency staff and grocery stores. This section also evaluates business integrity for owners of grocery stores applying to be WIC authorized, assesses store prices to ensure they are competitive and provides training on fraud prevention for local agencies.

Federal WIC regulations require states to conduct quality assurance/compliance reviews of local agencies at least every other year. Accordingly, WIC completes a review of program operations and fiscal accountability at half of the local agencies every year. WIC also complies with federal regulations to conduct compliance activities at authorized stores through on-site monitoring visits and investigations at approximately 15 percent of authorized stores each year.