

Abstract

The California WIC Program leads the nation in coverage of WIC-eligible women, infants and children¹, yet providing the full value of WIC to certified participants remains challenging, especially to those from 1 to 4 years of age. With each successive year of life, the number of WIC child participants drops, reducing their opportunity to receive the full value of WIC while still age eligible (up to 5 years of age). This characteristic of participation is referred to as “child retention”. We seek to improve participation levels of WIC families to increase rates of child retention, enabling them to benefit from the full value of WIC services. When WIC participants forego available services as indicated by unissued or unredeemed vouchers, missed appointments or loss of contact, they miss out on the full value of WIC. Many factors contribute to these missed opportunities, some beyond our locus of influence or control, but some we can influence to improve retention and re-engagement of WIC participants.

We propose to enhance our relationship with WIC families to identify, understand, and address factors that will leverage opportunities for them to obtain the full value of WIC. To improve our understanding of challenges and facilitators to full participation, we will conduct focus groups of participants and WIC staff, and conduct an assessment of the relative importance of modifiable factors. Using existing WIC MIS data, we will develop more robust participation measures to analyze, monitor, detect, and address challenges based on individual participation patterns. We propose enhancing two elements of our relationship with our WIC participants. (1) Establishing our Relationship – putting care into introducing **Newcomers** to WIC. We will increase opportunities to connect with newcomers during their first year of WIC through additional person-to-person phone contact with a Participant Liaison, as well as automated messaging, providing quick prompts with reminders and information about available resources. (2) Strengthening our Relationship – The second enhancement in relationship building with participants will increase our participants’ recognition of the **Pathways** to obtain the full value of WIC. We will encourage our participants to see the full picture through use of Journey Cards and/or a Journey App for mobile devices, where WIC staff can validate the effort and engagement of our WIC families. By building the relationship, we expect to engage the participant more fully in the WIC experience. WIC families will develop a longer view of the time course and range of WIC benefits available to them and their children, thereby increasing active participation that endures throughout the first five years of each child’s life. Each intervention strategy will have treatment and comparison groups. Exposure to one, both, or neither intervention will allow evaluation for impact on child retention rates, participation patterns, and “dose” of WIC.

The project team of WIC staff will complete the work in three main phases: 1) an inquiry phase to identify, analyze, and improve our understanding of challenges and facilitators of full participation and to tailor the intervention accordingly; 2) an intervention phase, to test the impact of strategies to improve child retention relative to those not receiving enhancement strategies initially; and 3) a transferability phase to extend successful strategies throughout our agency and prepare materials (tools) to assist other local WIC agencies to identify, implement, and evaluate similar successful strategies.

¹ National and State-Level Estimates of Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Eligibles and Program Reach, 2013 Final Report. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/national-and-state-level-estimates-special-supplemental-nutrition-program-women-infants-and-childr-2>