



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Health and Human Services
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WIC Advisory Council Meeting
June 20, 2023
10:30 – 11:30 am
Meeting Minutes

Council Members Present: Cynthia Arroyo (DTA), Brian Houghton (MA Food Association), Kathryn Warren-Barnes, Khara Shearion (Project Bread), Rebecca Davidson (MDAR), Kimberly Brace, Alys Nellen, Kevin Reed (MOC), Mary Feuer (Berkshire South WIC), Kinnari Chitalia (Cambridge/Somerville WIC), Rachel Burgun (Greater Boston Food Bank)

WIC Staff: Rachel Colchamiro (WIC Program Director), Diana Hoek (Director for Policy, Marketing & Training), Mary Blocksidge (Vendor Manager)

Guests: Patti Bedics (Healthy Together), Tyler Gomez (Healthy Together)

Projected Funding:

Massachusetts WIC receives both State and Federal funding. The amount of Federal funding for Fiscal Year 2024 is still unknown.

The debt ceiling deal includes a two-year cap on federal spending which freezes non-defense discretionary spending at current levels for fiscal year 2024 while limiting growth to 1% in fiscal year 2025. USDA estimates this amount will result in a \$615 million short fall for the WIC program due to increasing caseloads.

The House Appropriations Committee proposed funding WIC \$185 million below fiscal year 2023 levels. This would cut fruit and vegetables benefits for more than five million WIC participants if passed.

Program Participation

Program participation has continued to increase, and the program now serves over 127,000 participants.

Due to inflation and increasing program caseload, food costs have greatly increased since last year.

Comments Submitted to USDA Regarding Proposed WIC Online Ordering Changes

Massachusetts supports the changes USDA proposed to remove barriers for participants to access their benefits.

The proposed changes include:

- Creating new types of vendors to include internet and mobile vendors.
- Clarifying that all vendors must be authorized separately.
- Allowing vendors to return benefits from online orders to participant's balance.
- Allowing WIC shoppers to pay fees associated with online shopping.
- Extending vendor application and agreement periods from three to five years.

Massachusetts WIC is a grantee of the Gretchen Swanson Center with Washington WIC, the Walmart Corporation, FIS/CDP (eWIC processors), and Fiserv (third party processor) for the online ordering grant. The online ordering will be implemented next summer.

Only Walmart stores that are super centers are allowed as WIC vendors because of the requirement to carry fresh produce. The new proposed USDA regulations have greater flexibilities and will allow stores that only carry frozen or canned fruits and vegetables to be WIC vendors.

End of Public Health Emergency Discussion

The WIC waivers associated with the Public Health Emergency will end in August. New waivers tied to the American Rescue Plan (ARPA) will start then. These waivers only apply to physical presence and remote benefit issuance. They allow for certification/recertification of program participants without anthropometrics with a 60-day deferment policy.

Council members made the following recommendations and comments:

- WIC programs should coordinate more with larger organizations. Head Start can get children's heights and weights.
- WIC programs must collect height/lengths and weight and provide nutrition education. While these do not need to be done at the same appointment, that would be more efficient. Otherwise, another appointment would be necessary.
- Programs should try to make the experience worth coming in for through connecting participants with other programs on site.

OnBase Update

OnBase software will allow participants to upload documents. It will be imbedded in the WIC Shopper app. Participants will select where they are sending forms, what they are sending and then be able to upload the photo of the form. The Shopper App comes in many languages.

Most participants, ~95% have access to the WIC Shopper App. Participants with phones that do not have the capability to take pictures or have limited data plans will not be able to use this feature. Participants who do not have current anthropometrics or hematology measurements can have these taken at their local WIC programs.