



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Executive Office of Health and Human Services

Department of Public Health

250 Washington Street, Boston, MA 02108-4619

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August 23, 2023

Dear Friends of Public Health,

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health is seeking public comments for the State Plan for the Women, Infants, and Children Nutrition Program (WIC) for federal fiscal year 2024. Attached you will find a WIC Nutrition Program summary, which includes fiscal year 2023/2024 funding and the 2024 State Plan for your information.

We have scheduled a public hearing on Thursday, September 21, 2023, from 2:00 – 3:00 PM via Microsoft Teams at:

[Click here to join the meeting](#)

Meeting ID: 296 786 287 076

Passcode: HipaWC

Or call in (audio only)

[+1 857-327-9245, 358242117#](#) United States, Boston

Phone Conference ID: 358 242 117#

Written comments may also be sent to:

Rachel Colchamiro, Director - Nutrition Division
Massachusetts WIC Nutrition Program
Bureau of Family Health & Nutrition
250 Washington Street, 6th floor
Boston, MA 02108-4619
Email: rachel.colchamiro@mass.gov

This hearing provides a forum for WIC local programs and agencies, as well as other public health professionals and consumers, to share their thoughts with the Department concerning priorities for the WIC program. I encourage you to participate on September 21st. If you have any questions about the public hearing, you may contact me at my email address above. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Rachel Colchamiro, MPH, RD, CLC
Director – Nutrition Division
Massachusetts WIC Program

WOMEN, INFANTS AND CHILDREN NUTRITION PROGRAM (WIC) SUMMARY

FEDERAL ALLOCATION FISCAL YEAR 2023

\$114,163,568

STATE BUDGET FISCAL YEAR 2024

\$13,353,791

The Massachusetts WIC Nutrition Program is a federal program supplemented by state funding which serves low and moderate income families and foster families. Massachusetts residents can apply if they are pregnant or postpartum, infants and/or young children certified as medically or nutritionally at risk. A network of 31 local programs with 118 sites and approximately 850 retail stores in communities across the Commonwealth supports WIC activities. All programs provide both in-person and remote services.

Funded Services:

- Nutrition education and counseling
- Breastfeeding/ chestfeeding education and support
- Dietary assessment and certification for program benefits
- Information and referral to, and coordination with, other health & social service programs
- Childhood immunization assessment and follow-up
- Benefits for nutritious foods
- Farmers' Market coupons for fresh produce (funded by USDA grants to the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources)

WIC works in collaboration with community health care providers and other local health and human service agencies to provide coordinated, comprehensive services to families in need during a critical time in a child's development. Studies show that participation in WIC reduces infant mortality and morbidity and improves participant health outcomes. WIC participation also has a positive impact on preschoolers' diets and is associated with cognitive and academic benefits.

The Massachusetts WIC Nutrition Program functions as a major service component within the Nutrition Division of the Bureau of Family Health & Nutrition (BFHN), Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH), Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EHS). WIC program services are responsive to family and community needs, sensitive to cultural and ethnic differences, and oriented to the prevention of health problems and the improvement of health outcomes. The program collaborates with the other nutrition programs in the Nutrition Division—the Growth and Nutrition Program and the Metabolic Food and Formula Program—and works directly with the other maternal and child health programs in the BFHN. Particularly, WIC coordinates with program services in the Divisions of Pregnancy, Infancy and Early Childhood, Children & Youth with Special Health Care Needs, and Early Intervention and with programs in the Bureau of Community Health and Prevention, including those in its Divisions of Health Access and Violence & Injury Prevention, as well as with its Prevention and Wellness branch on obesity and physical activity initiatives.

WIC also coordinates activities on issues affecting young families with other DPH Bureaus and offices: Substance Addition Services, Tobacco Cessation, HIV/AIDS, and Health Equity, as well as

with Immunization and Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention. Strong intra-agency networking and lateral communication with other DPH programs and committees on key initiatives—such as infant mortality, safe sleep, parenting support, healthy weight, and wellness—ensure integrated policy and program development, planning and implementation.

Quality nutrition services focusing on individual service needs form the centerpiece of the program. The WIC Nutrition Program stresses the importance of good nutrition during pregnancy and early childhood for optimal growth and development. Emphasis is placed on providing services to high-risk populations, including prenatal and breast/chest feeding individuals, medically or nutritionally at-risk infants and children, members of ethnic minority groups, new immigrants, and pregnant adolescents. The program is a leader in providing lactation education and support services to program participants throughout the state.

The State WIC Office works in collaboration with the greater Massachusetts WIC community – local WIC agencies and staff, WIC Advisory Council, WIC Vendor Advisory Council and Medical Advisory Board members, authorized stores, participants, and advocates to identify challenges, develop solutions and affect change for program improvement. The State WIC Office also maintains the web-based computer system—with personal computers and laptops used at local programs—that produces electronic benefits for participants. Federal regulations, monitoring and evaluation requirements of local WIC programs and vendors are critical components of WIC Nutrition Program operations.

State and federal dollars provide funding for contracted WIC services in the community to serve the current statewide monthly caseload of over 127,000 participants. Local program attainment of service levels beyond this level depends on intensified outreach activities, increased productivity, staff, space, and computer equipment capacity as well as local economic conditions. The rate of inflation in WIC food costs, the levels of federal and supplemental state funding, and the infant formula rebate continue to be the critical determinants of the number of participants the WIC program can serve.

Through strong support of its WIC program, Massachusetts is in the forefront of providing basic nutritional assistance to needy children. Following a 1983 DPH study of nutritional status of low-income children, Massachusetts became the first state in the nation to provide supplemental funds to WIC; seven other states are currently following this example. In 1993, Massachusetts enacted The Childhood Hunger Relief Act—landmark legislation that provides state funding to maintain access for infants, children, and pregnant and postpartum women to participate in WIC in the event of a federal funding shortfall.

Priorities:

The Massachusetts WIC Nutrition Program seeks input from the public and other stake holders on priorities for the program. The program goals present a starting point for review and discussion in formulating the program priorities for the FY2024 State Plan. Each section of the State Plan program goals corresponds to a working unit within the State WIC Office. Units' priorities are highlighted with corresponding objectives following each goal. The program goals are multifaceted activities which will continue to improve WIC participant access to services, quality of service, infrastructure, and management. They are summarized as follows:

- To enhance communication with participants, local programs, and other WIC constituencies to ensure participation and community-centered services.
- To collaborate to address racial and health equity in WIC, including procurement, staff support and recruitment, data analysis, and program development and implementation activities.
- To identify opportunities to add value to program services so that participants continue to receive WIC benefits throughout their full period of eligibility.
- To continue the WIC performance contracting system which focuses on program management and quality improvement at local programs by emphasizing health and management outcome measures.
- To oversee the delivery of program services that are responsive to WIC participants.
- To enhance state and local program breastfeeding promotion, and support efforts to improve breastfeeding rates and duration among WIC participants.
- To continue to monitor and enhance local program nutrition services and program performance, emphasizing quality as integral to WIC operations and excellent participant services.
- To coordinate on data sharing to improve outreach and referrals between WIC, and Bureau of Family Health & Nutrition, other maternal and child health programs, the MassHealth/Medicaid Program, SNAP, and school meals programs.
- To continue social marketing and digital advertising, to enhance and support outreach activities and maximize program participation.
- To upgrade the WIC IT system - Eos -to incorporate necessary modifications, including new state and federal requirements and program enhancements.
- To continue working relationships and communication with the WIC retail store vendor community and enhance vendor management systems.
- To monitor the availability and utilization of WIC food benefits and promote participant purchases.
- To enhance, assist and evaluate local program operations and participant services with regard to retail stores to improve the participant retail experience, including preparing for the pilot WIC online ordering project.
- To enhance The Learning Center programming to ensure standard application of policies and procedures and staff career development.

- To support the attainment of the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) Immunization Program goal: age-appropriate immunization for 90% of WIC infants and children.
- To continue to shape WIC's image as an authority in perinatal and child nutrition.