The Massachusetts Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Nutrition Program provides free food and nutrition information to help keep pregnant women, infants and children under five healthy and strong. Many working families are eligible. To learn more, look inside.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page 1.</th>
<th>Massachusetts WIC Nutrition Program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Page 2.</td>
<td>We Know Breastfeeding!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page 3.</td>
<td>Health Outcomes Research: WIC Works!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page 4.</td>
<td>Shopping with WIC Stretches the Healthy Food Budget for Your Patients!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page 5.</td>
<td>Shopping with WIC is Easy!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page 6.</td>
<td>A Whole Lot More!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page 7.</td>
<td>What Does WIC Need from Healthcare Providers?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page 8.</td>
<td>Working with WIC for Patients Who Need Special Formula</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Massachusetts WIC Nutrition Program

WHAT IS WIC?

WIC is a health and nutrition program that can benefit many of your patients. WIC provides personalized nutrition and health education, healthy food, breastfeeding support, immunization screening, referrals, and other services free of charge to Massachusetts families who qualify.

WIC’s goal is to help keep pregnant and postpartum women and kids under age 5 healthy. Each local WIC program has a variety of nutrition and lactation staff, many of whom hold advanced degrees and/or are Registered Dietitians, Licensed Dietitians/Nutritionists, Certified Lactation Counselors, and International Board Certified Lactation Consultants.

WHO IS WIC FOR?

- Pregnant women
- Breastfeeding women, up to 1 year postpartum
- Non-breastfeeding women, up to 6 months postpartum
- Infants and children under 5

Important WIC Eligibility Facts:

- Families with a household income at or below 185% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) are WIC eligible (see income guidelines on the last page). Many working families are eligible!
- Individuals currently receiving certain MassHealth/Medicaid health insurance plans, TAFDC or SNAP are automatically income-eligible for WIC.
- Foster parents can enroll their babies and children under 5 regardless of their household income.

HOW CAN WIC AND HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS WORK TOGETHER?

Clinicians play a key role in the referral process for patients to obtain WIC services. The medical guidance you provide helps identify nutrition services and information patients need.

Local WIC nutritionists are pleased to collaborate on patient care and to reinforce and follow up on recommendations with the patients’ consent. Clinicians may also request a copy of patients’ nutrition assessments by checking the box on the Medical Referral Form (MRF).

HOW CAN I HELP MY PATIENTS RECEIVE WIC BENEFITS?

Clinicians strongly influence patients’ decisions about their health and therefore a referral to WIC from a provider carries a lot of weight. Referring patients to WIC:

- Mention WIC when patients call to schedule appointments, and make it a part of the routine – pregnant women can receive WIC services before they have their first OB visit and as soon as they think they may be pregnant
- Mention WIC at every patient visit
- Put a WIC brochure in every new patient packet
- Display WIC posters and brochures in your office in the language(s) patients speak
- Complete the Medical Referral Form (MRF)
We Know Breastfeeding!

Refer your patients to WIC for breastfeeding education & support!
FREE breastfeeding support services at WIC include:

- Access to CLCs and IBCLCs at all local WIC programs
- Individualized breastfeeding education, assessments, and counseling
- “Mother to Mother” Breastfeeding Peer Counselors
- Assistance in planning to return to work/school
- Assistance in accessing breast pumps
- Culturally and linguistically appropriate educational materials
- Support programs and classes available at many WIC programs
- Referrals to community breastfeeding support for families, including those who are not WIC-eligible, via ZipMilk (www.ZipMilk.org)

Visit www.mass.gov/dph/breastfeeding for provider resources.
Health Outcomes Research: WIC WORKS!

WIC Produces Positive Prenatal and Birth Outcomes
WIC participation is positively associated with gestational age and mean birth weight and negatively associated with the incidence of low and very low birth weight.¹

WIC research indicates prenatal WIC participation is associated with positive health outcomes for women and children.²

WIC Improves Children’s Health and Learning
WIC reduces child food insecurity.³

WIC protects children from low-income families from negative health and growth consequences.⁴

WIC participation is associated with improved diets in children.¹

Children who participate in WIC or whose mothers are on WIC have a greater utilization of both preventive and curative health care services than nonparticipants.¹

WIC participation has a positive effect on mean levels of iron status in children.⁵

Early WIC participation is associated with both cognitive and academic benefits.⁶

Alignment of the WIC food package with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans was a potential contributor to decreased childhood obesity among preschool children between 2008 and 2011.⁷

WIC Improves Immunization Rates
Children in WIC have higher vaccination coverage than WIC-eligible children who never participated and have vaccination coverage comparable to more affluent children.⁸

WIC Has a Positive Effect on Breastfeeding
Prenatal WIC enrollees are more likely to initiate breastfeeding and breastfeed longer than postpartum enrollees. Women who enroll in WIC in their 1st trimester of pregnancy have better breastfeeding outcomes than those who enroll in the 3rd trimester.⁹


WIC Approved Foods
WIC participants receive monthly benefits for healthy foods such as the ones pictured above. The complete WIC Approved Food Guide is available at www.mass.gov/wic.

MORE Fruits & Vegetables
The WIC Program offers a fruit and vegetable benefit for women, infants, and children. Women receive $11, children receive $10, infants 9 months and older are eligible for either $4 or $8 per month. Farmers’ market coupons are offered during the summer months.

Whole Grain Options
WIC offers whole wheat or whole grain products such as bread, pasta, tortillas, rice, and oatmeal. There are gluten-free options available as well.

MORE Dairy Options:
Delicious and nutritious yogurt is available for women and children. They can also choose to purchase string cheese sticks with their WIC benefits.

Cereals Kids Will Love
WIC only offers high-iron and lower-sugar cereals such as Post Honey Bunches of Oats, Multi Grain Cheerios, Kellogg’s Rice Krispies, Quaker Life, Dora the Explorer, and more.

Depending on the household size, the average WIC family can save between $100 and $200 per month utilizing their food benefits.

Shopping with WIC Stretches the Healthy Food Budget for Your Patients!
Shopping with WIC is Easy!

The WIC Card!
Shopping with WIC is easy! With the ‘WIC Card’, WIC transactions at the store are faster, easier and discreet. Families have a great deal of flexibility in terms of how much of their benefits they want to use at any given time throughout the month.

WIC Shopper Mobile App!
Participants have the ability to view available WIC benefits on smartphones and scan product barcodes while shopping to determine if the item is WIC-approved and available in their benefits.

Serving Participants with Special Dietary Needs

Soy Milk and Tofu
A WIC nutritionist can assign these milk substitutes when a participant has a milk protein intolerance or allergy, or when the family follows a strict vegan diet. Women can substitute soy milk for a half portion of their cow’s milk benefit for preference.

Lactose-Free Milk
A WIC nutritionist can assign lactose-free milk to a woman or child who shows signs or symptoms of lactose-intolerance.

Fat-Reduced Milk for Children Less than 2 Years Old
To better align with recommendations of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), fat-reduced milks are available for children 12 months to 2 years of age for whom overweight or obesity is a concern. This substitution is offered to families by WIC nutritionists but is not mandated. Health care providers can also request fat-reduced milk for their participants; however, a prescription form is not required.

Please note that per WIC policy whole milk is ONLY provided to women and children over the age of 2 who have a documented medical condition that warrants the use of a high-calorie special formula or supplement. For special formula requests see page 8.
A Whole Lot More!

Did you know that families also receive these great services through WIC?

Health and Human Service Referrals

- Child care
- Dental care
- Emergency food assistance
- Health insurance
- Home-visiting programs like Healthy Families
- Housing
- Fuel and energy discounts
- SNAP, TAFDC
- Many other referrals that can benefit the whole family such as discounts to the Children’s Museum and the Museum of Science

In addition, 12 local WIC programs across the state offer enhanced referrals and support through Family Support Coordinators.

Health Screenings:

- Adherence to ACIP-recommended immunization schedules
- Substance use
- Domestic violence

Health and Wellness Education:

- Oral health
- Safe sleep practices
- Physical activity
- Breastfeeding education and support

Many WIC Programs also offer:

- Happiest Baby on the Block classes to help new parents learn how to soothe their babies. Classes are held at WIC clinics and various community settings.

- Hands-on food tastings, cooking classes and supermarket tours.

- Coordinated services for high-risk participants with nutritionists at community health centers and Growth and Nutrition Programs. Collaboration with clinicians, Head Start/Early Head Start, Early Intervention, and other programs to enhance nutrition services in the community.

- Breastfeeding education classes as well as support groups. Some local WIC Programs have Baby Cafes in their offices.

- Online nutrition education.
What Does WIC Need from Healthcare Providers?

Iron Screening

To screen for nutrition needs, WIC requests that clinicians provide results for iron screening tests (hematocrit or hemoglobin). For your WIC patients, bloodwork requirements are:

- Pregnant women - as early as possible in the current pregnancy
- Postpartum women - once during the postpartum period, ideally within 6 weeks after delivery
- Infants - between 9 and 13 months
- Children - between 15 and 18 months and thereafter, every 12 months if blood values are normal or every 6 months if values are low

These requirements follow the CDC recommended schedule for preventing and controlling iron-deficiency anemia in high-risk populations.

Lead Screening

Federal regulations require that WIC screen every child upon enrollment to determine if the child has had a blood lead test. If the child has not had a blood lead test, education is provided to the parent/caretaker and they are referred back to their medical provider for blood lead testing. If the lead test result is available, WIC staff will provide counseling for abnormal lead level values.

Immunizations

In addition, WIC screens for immunizations and asks parents to share their children’s vaccination records. Staff review immunization status and promote adherence to ACIP-recommended schedules by providing education and referrals.

Other Health Information

Providers can also use Medical Referal Forms (MRFs) to share anthropometric data and any other health and/or nutrition concerns they might have about their WIC-participating patients.

MRFs can be downloaded from our website at www.mass.gov/wic
Working with WIC for Patients Who Need Special Formula

- The only formulas that can be issued without a Request for Special Formula and Food (RSFF) form are Similac Advance and Similac Soy Isomil (20 kcal/oz).

- To access special formula from WIC, a RSFF form must be completed and signed by a physician, physician assistant, nurse practitioner, or certified nurse midwife. The form is required at each certification. The RSFF form, instructions for health care providers to complete the form, and a full listing of Massachusetts WIC allowed formulas can be found at www.mass.gov/wic.

- Similac Total Comfort, Similac For Spit-Up and Similac Sensitive (all 19 kcal/oz) are available through WIC, although these are not considered standard formulas. USDA requires medical documentation for WIC issuance of any infant formula that is not 20 kcal/oz. A RSFF is required for these three formulas before issuance will be approved.

- A provider’s prescription pad can be used temporarily in place of the RSFF form. The prescription must include the child’s name, date of birth, formula requested, acknowledgement of a formula’s 19 kcal/oz caloric density (if applicable), complete medical diagnosis warranting need (including ICD code), length of issuance, provider signature, and date of request. One month of benefits may be issued; the participant will need to bring a completed RSFF form to receive additional months of issuance at their next WIC appointment.

- By federal ruling, the Medicaid Program is the first payer for special formula for patients who are also WIC participants. If a WIC/MassHealth participant needs special formula, the formula should be obtained from MassHealth through the Prior Approval process first. MassHealth members requiring Similac For Spit-Up, Similac Sensitive, or Similac Total Comfort will receive these formulas through WIC without needing to pursue prior authorization from MassHealth.

- WIC will issue one month of benefits for the prescribed formula in order to allow for the MassHealth Prior Approval process and will act as a safety net for families should the process take longer.

- Providers must submit a Medical Necessity Review Form for Enteral Nutrition Products to one of the Managed Care Organizations (MCOs) or to the Primary Care Clinician Plan (PCCP) at MassHealth. Note that the Combined MassHealth MCO Medical Review Form can be used for any of the 6 MCOs. The PCCP MassHealth Prescription and Medical Necessity Review Form for Enteral Nutrition Products form can be downloaded from the MA WIC website. Both Medical Necessity Review forms must include the individual’s name, date of birth, formula requested, length of formula issuance, provider signature, and date of request as well as any additional required medical or health information that supports the need of a specialized formula. It is very important that the MassHealth Prior Authorization request form be completely filled out, and that all required information is submitted in order to prevent delays or denials.

WIC’s RSFF form and formula list can be downloaded from our website at www.mass.gov/wic
If you are pregnant, you should count yourself as two.

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

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Massachusetts WIC Nutrition Program

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