

## Congress Needs to Fully Fund WIC for FY 2024

WIC provides nutritionally at-risk pregnant and postpartum people, infants and children up to 5 years old with low-incomes, supplemental nutritious foods, nutrition education, breastfeeding support, and referrals to health care. WIC is a discretionary program with a set budget determined by Congress each year.

Since 1974, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) has strengthened food security, improved diet quality, and supported a strong start in life for millions of families with low incomes. Today, the program meets the nutritional needs of 6.7 million women, infants, and children across the country. A combination of enhanced fruit and vegetable benefits, innovative outreach, and rising food prices has fueled the recent rapid growth of WIC participation. It is critical that funding for WIC keep pace with increased participation and increased costs.

Yet the annual fiscal year (FY) 2024 funding bills proposed in both the House and the Senate fail to provide sufficient funding to protect WIC's projected participation level. Under both proposed bills, the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities estimates that approximately 600,000 eligible postpartum adults, toddlers, and pre-schoolers will be turned away from the program.

The House bill would slash the science-backed fruits and vegetables benefit, which has been a game-changer for families.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Congress made significant investments in WIC. This included increasing the monthly value of the fruits and vegetables benefit for women and children consistent with the National Academy of Science recommendations. This enhanced WIC fruits and vegetables benefit, an increase from \$9 to \$26 a month for children, and from \$11 to \$47 a month for pregnant and postpartum participants and to \$52 for breastfeeding participants, has improved nutrition and increased the value of the WIC food package. The WIC food package also is designed to keep pace with food costs — guaranteeing families will be able to get the full complement of healthy WIC foods even during this time of high inflation.

### Protect Access to WIC

The current funding bills run counter to decades of overwhelming bipartisan support in Congress that has provided WIC with the necessary resources to serve all eligible women with low incomes and their infants, and young children. This bipartisan support is needed now to provide WIC with critical additional funding in the next short spending bill (Continuing Resolution) as a downpayment, with full funding in the full year FY 2024 appropriations package to ensure no interruption in WIC's benefits and services or waiting lists.

### The WIC Program:

- reduces food insecurity;
- alleviates poverty;
- supports economic stability;
- improves dietary intake;
- protects against obesity;
- improves birth outcomes;
- improves health outcomes;
- supports learning and development;
- reduces health care and other costs; and
- improves retail food environments.

