



Making WIC Work Better: A Summary of Strategies to Reach More Women and Children and Strengthen Benefits Use

Sample Talking Points

Shared value:

Every mother and child should have access to the nutrition they need to be healthy.

- As we gear up to honor and celebrate mothers across the nation on May 12, it's important to note how critical the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) is to mothers and families in our state who struggle against hunger.
- WIC is a federally funded program that provides low-income pregnant women, new mothers, infants, and children up to 5 years old with nutritious foods, nutrition education, breastfeeding support, and improved access to healthcare.
- In fiscal year 2018, WIC served an average of 6.9 million participants each month, down 23 percent from a high of 9.2 million each month in fiscal year 2010. Participation is associated with not only better diets for both mothers and children, which reduces childhood obesity, but healthier births, lower infant mortality, increased immunization rates, and access to regular health care.
- Children who participate in WIC are also likely to have better academic outcomes than low-income children who do not benefit from the program.
- Share a story about how WIC is helping women in your state.

The issue:

Far too many pregnant women, new mothers, and their young children in the U.S. are missing out on the many benefits of WIC, putting their health and overall well-being at risk.

- WIC reaches just three out of five eligible people nationally. Coverage rates vary significantly by state, but almost all states follow the national pattern of having the highest coverage rates for infants, lower coverage rates for women, and the lowest coverage rates for children. The highest coverage rates for children are in California (57.2 percent) and Vermont (61.2 percent).

- Provide information for your state.

The ask:

More must be done to remove barriers and connect more eligible women and children to WIC.

- Many eligible families face significant barriers to participating in the program, including:
 - misconceptions about who is or is not eligible (particularly about the eligibility of low-wage working families, members of immigrant families, and children ages 1 to 5 years old);
 - lack of knowledge of the program;
 - language and cultural barriers;
 - negative clinic experiences (e.g., long wait-times and poor customer service); and
 - dissatisfaction with the prescribed food package and difficulty redeeming benefits (limited selection of WIC eligible-foods and embarrassing check-out experiences).
- State agencies, local clinics and their partners must work to overcome these barriers and effectively reach and serve more eligible pregnant women and mothers and their young children.

The vision:

By following the recommendations outlined in Making WIC Work Better, we can create healthy, hunger-free, and equitable communities in our state and across the country, where mothers and families will thrive.

- *Making WIC Work Better* provides 10 recommendations that target outreach to specific populations such as grandparents raising grandchildren and college students with infants and young children, improving the WIC clinic experience, adopting technology to modernize the program and optimize the shopping experience for WIC recipients, and retaining and recruiting families with eligible but unserved children 1 to 4 years old.
- (Provide examples of successful WIC strategies being implemented in your state)