

Making WIC Work Better: Welcoming Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

Grandparents raising grandchildren can play an important role in maximizing participation in Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). The opioid epidemic, methamphetamine addictions, increased incarceration of women, economic stress, and military deployments all have contributed to a rise in the number of grandparents raising grandchildren. Grandparents are the primary caregiver for 6 percent of children under 6 years old.¹ According to USDA, over 5 percent of WIC-eligible infants and children live in families without parents; 3.6 percent live with a related nonparent caretaker, and 1.7 percent live with an unrelated nonparent caretaker.² The recommendations below focus on specialized outreach, policies, and services that can be used to help overcome barriers and maximize participation.

Recommendations

- **WIC partners should integrate WIC resources and referrals into agencies and programs serving grandparents raising grandchildren.** WIC has an opportunity to pioneer new connections, since many of the relevant agencies and organizations do not currently offer any information on WIC for grandparents raising grandchildren. WIC can reach grandparents caring for grandchildren by integrating WIC into the resources and referrals offered by state and local kinship care programs, and the state Department on Aging, and Area Agencies on Aging senior services. These programs and agencies should include information about WIC for grandparents raising grandchildren in their resource packets and fact sheets, guides, webpages, and referral systems.

State WIC agencies can partner with agencies serving kinship care givers — grandparents and other relatives raising children. States may offer services or subsidy for kinship caregivers through the department of human services, social services kinship care programs, child protective services, or foster care divisions, or the state Department on Aging. These may be administered through local social service agencies and organizations. State and local kinship care navigators and caseworkers should let grandparents know they can enroll eligible grandchildren in WIC and offer them a referral to the nearest WIC clinic.

WIC also can target outreach and generate a referral stream through the State and local agencies responsible for foster parents. Key messages can focus on

WIC benefits and the convenience of streamlined eligibility due to the foster child being deemed automatically income eligible for WIC.

- **WIC agency programming and practices should facilitate the inclusion of grandparents raising grandchildren.** A common barrier created by WIC clinic staff is the mistaken belief that a grandparent must be the legal guardian or have legal custody to enroll grandchildren in WIC. Due to financial or other difficult circumstances, not all grandparents have legal guardianship or custody status despite the fact that they are the sole caregiver for the child. The law does not require grandparents to have legal custody or guardianship to apply for WIC for a grandchild. The grandparents just need to be able to prove that the grandchild lives with them.

WIC staff can make grandparents feel welcome by acknowledging their experience in raising and feeding children as part of WIC clinic intake, nutrition education counseling, or in group sessions.

Spotlight:

The Virginia Department for the Aging uses [*The Grandparent's and Other Relative Caregiver's Guide to Food and Nutrition Programs for Children*](#), which includes helpful information about WIC benefits, eligibility, and contacts. The Virginia Department for the Aging's Kinship Care Initiative Statewide Task Force and Information Network uses this guide to assist grandparents and other kinship caretakers throughout the state. Kinship care navigator initiatives provide information, referral, and follow-up services to grandparents and other relatives raising children to link them to the benefits and services that they or the children need. This positive attention is unusual, since many of the navigator initiatives in other states overlook WIC.

¹ Livingston, G., PEW, (2014). Children Living with or Being Cared for by a Grandparent. Available at <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2013/09/04/children-living-with-or-being-cared-for-by-a-grandparent/> Accessed July 27, 2018.

² Johnson, P., Betson, D., Blatt, L., & Giannarelli, L. (2018). National- and State-Level Estimates of Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Eligibles and Program Reach in 2015, and Updated Estimates for 2005–2013, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Policy Support.