

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), a federal nutrition program, is widely recognized as an important safeguard for protecting and improving the health and nutrition of pregnant, postpartum, and breastfeeding individuals, infants, and children up to 5 years of age from households with low incomes. Poor nutrition, poverty, and food insecurity have detrimental impacts on infant, child, and maternal health and well-being in the short and long terms. One critical strategy to address these issues is connecting vulnerable families to the life-saving benefits of WIC.



WIC's Benefits

WIC provides eligible nutritionally at-risk pregnant, postpartum, and breastfeeding individuals, infants, and children up to 5 years old, with nutritious foods, education and counseling, and referrals to health care and social services.

Definitions for WIC eligibility:

- Pregnant (during pregnancy and up to six weeks after the birth of an infant or the end of the pregnancy)
- Postpartum (up to six months after the birth of the infant or the end of the pregnancy)
- Breastfeeding (up to the infant's first birthday)

Women, infants, and children are eligible for the program, if they meet the income guidelines (i.e., at, or below 185 percent of the federal poverty line), or are deemed automatically income-eligible based on participation in other programs, such as Medicaid, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, and Food Distribution

Program on Indian Reservations. In addition to being income-eligible, applicants must be at nutritional risk (e.g., underweight, overweight, anemic, have poor dietary intake) as determined through a nutrition assessment conducted by a health professional.

How WIC Operates

WIC is federally funded through the U.S. Department of Agriculture and is operated through local clinics by state WIC agencies and Indian Tribal Organizations. Food packages are prescribed to WIC participants based on nutritional needs and include a variety of foods intended to supplement their diets, not to be a full diet.

WIC-authorized foods include fruits and vegetables, milk, soy milk, yogurt, cheese, tofu, eggs, vitamin C-rich juice, iron-fortified cereal, tuna, peanut butter, beans, whole-grain bread, tortillas, and rice, as well as infant formula, baby food, and infant cereal.

The WIC food packages were updated in 2024. The updates enhance equitable access to nutritious food, improve the nutritional quality of the foods offered, and make WIC more participant-centered. Of central importance, this update makes permanent increases in the Cash Value Benefit (CVB) for fruits and vegetables.

WIC agencies distribute monthly WIC food package benefits to participants by providing a WIC Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card (smart card). Participants use the EBT card to shop for WIC foods at authorized grocery stores and other WIC-approved vendors.

WIC guarantees a specific amount of each WIC food (for example, one dozen eggs), with the exception of the fruit and vegetables benefit, which has a Cash Value Benefit that allows the participant to “purchase” fruits and vegetables. For fiscal year 2025, the CVB is \$47 for pregnant and postpartum participants, \$52 for mostly or fully breastfeeding participants, and \$26 for children per month.



Research Shows WIC’s Value

A very large body of research shows that WIC is a profoundly important program with well-documented benefits for infants, children, pregnant women, and their families. Research shows that WIC improves participants’ health and well-being, dietary intake, and birth and health outcomes; protects against obesity; and supports learning and development. WIC benefits are cost-effective, generating major savings in federal, state, local, and private health care, as well as special education costs. Studies demonstrate that WIC improves the food and economic security of participants by reducing food insecurity, helping to alleviate poverty, and supporting economic stability.