

TIME FOR A CHANGE GUIDE: MAXIMIZING THE BENEFITS OF THE NEW WIC FOODS



The WIC program will be offering a new WIC food package which will:

- Improve the nutritional quality of the foods in the program,
- Increase participants' choices, and
- Include fruits and vegetables and cultural food options states can choose to offer, such as, corn tortillas, rice, bulgur, lentils, tofu and soy milk.

As of October 2009, all WIC agencies are offering the new WIC food package.

Participating women receive WIC vouchers for \$8 for fruits and vegetables each month: children receive \$6 in fruit and vegetable vouchers. When a recently passed provision is fully implemented participating women will receive \$10 in WIC fruit and vegetable vouchers each month.

Partnerships Key to Success

Stakeholders on the state and local level and WIC can work together to make sure the new WIC food package reaches its full potential to:

- ✓ Improve the health of women, infants and children on WIC,
- ✓ Offer the best cultural food choices needed to allow families to follow their dietary practices, religious requirements, and traditional food ways,
- ✓ Provide clear relevant messages in the necessary languages to effectively communicate the changes and positive health and nutrition value,
- ✓ Open up access to nutritious foods in grocery stores in low-income communities, and
- ✓ Help to create healthy families – reducing overweight and obesity.

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) is a very important source of nutritious foods and nutrition education for many pregnant women, new mothers, infants and children up to age five in low-income families. The program provides a monthly package of WIC checks that can be used in the grocery store to buy specific healthy foods.



Healthy New WIC Food Package Changes = New Opportunities

The new WIC package is structured around the addition of fruits and vegetables and whole grain bread to the basic WIC food package with a set of key state options. States can choose the best cultural food options and general options for the communities they serve. In some cases the food options can be offered as a substitute. For example, whole grain tortillas can be offered as a substitute for whole grain bread. Options can also be offered for additional convenience and choice, such as offering canned beans or a variety of beans.

The WIC food package retains the basic WIC foods: milk, cheese, eggs, fruit juice, cereal, beans, peanut butter, infant formula and (for breastfeeding women) tuna. The amount of milk, cheese, eggs, fruit juice and in some cases infant formula has been reduced. Infants 6-12 months will receive fruit and vegetables in the form of baby food.



States should maximize the options available to offer an ideal WIC food package which gives families the choices they want and need to make the best use of the WIC foods. In addition to the basic required WIC foods, milk, cheese, whole grain bread, eggs, fruit juice, fruits and vegetables, iron-fortified cereal, beans, peanut butter, and for breastfeeding women tuna, an ideal WIC food package should:

- ✓ Allow appropriate substitutions for whole grain bread, such as:
 - Whole Grain Tortillas
 - Brown Rice
 - Other whole grains, as appropriate (whole grain oatmeal & grits)
- ✓ Allow substitutions for milk, including:
 - Soymilk*
 - Tofu* if appropriate
 - Lactose Free Milk or Buttermilk
- ✓ Allow a variety of canned fish in addition to tuna for fully breastfeeding program participants, such as:
 - Salmon
 - Sardines
- ✓ Allow canned beans as a substitute for dry beans and a variety of beans including kidney, pinto and lentils.
- ✓ Allow the WIC fruit and vegetable checks to be used for the purchase of fresh, frozen, and canned fruits and vegetables. (In many states, limiting participants to purchasing only fresh produce would limit choice and the ability to secure the best prices throughout the year.)
- ✓ Allow WIC fruit and vegetable checks to be used at local Farmer's Markets.

**Tofu and soymilk are available to all women who request it but only to children with a prescription.*



Partnership Opportunities

Partnerships are key to effective strategies for maximizing the value of the new WIC food options to better serve the women, infants and children participating in WIC.

WIC participants, members of organizations, associations or providing services to WIC families who feels that they have a stake in the issues surrounding the new WIC food package can, and should, take the initiative to form a partnership in an effort to create positive change within the community. WIC State Agencies and the surrounding communities have completed a significant amount of planning. The partnerships will continue to be important during the implementation of the new food package and in the evaluation stage that will follow.

In the **implementation stage** coordinated communication opportunities will be key. Partners can:

- Provide assistance with marketing the new food package to clients,
- Distribute WIC educational and marketing materials,
- Offer consistent good nutrition messages emphasizing fruits and vegetables, whole grains, lower fat milk and healthy cultural foods,
- Visit local stores on a periodic basis to make sure they are offering a good selection of the new foods at reasonable prices,
- Work on the new WIC foods as part of Corner Store Initiatives, and
- Provide technical assistance to create a seamless interface with Farmers' Markets.

In the **evaluation stage** community partners can provide:

- Valuable input on the impact of the new food package,
- Assistance in creating and administering surveys, and
- Recommendations for adjustments WIC should make to the delivery system, food package, nutrition education, or other key areas.

Pursuing Shared Goals: WIC Supporting the Health and Well-Being of Women, Infant and Children from Immigrant Families

Community Partnership Options

There are a variety of successful methods of working with the community, services providers and WIC as partners to achieve shared goals for the new WIC food package, including:

- **WIC Advisory Councils:** Groups of 10-20 people, representatives from immigrant community partners, WIC participants and the state, who meet on a regular basis to discuss the WIC program providing feedback and recommendations to the state agency on implementation of the new WIC food package and other WIC issues.
- **Workgroup Meetings:** Workgroups can take the form of a series of meetings focused on issues relating to planning, implementation and evaluation of the new WIC food package in the community.
- **Listening Sessions:** One or more open meetings designed to allow people to ask questions about the new WIC food package, discuss concerns and listen to friends, neighbors, and community members do the same in an open environment.
- **Summits:** A meeting in which key decision makers are thoroughly involved; alternatively, a larger summit may be held to update key stakeholders on the implementation of the new WIC food package and opportunities for action in the community.
- **Surveys:** A relatively inexpensive way to collect information from WIC participants, and thus can be used to determine the level of client satisfaction with the new WIC foods, their perceptions of the availability and quality of new foods in the store and options for optimizing new nutrition education and marketing messages; allows state agencies or community organizations to gain valuable feedback for evaluation and planning any necessary changes.
- **Corner Store Initiatives:** Partnerships that exist to bring healthier food, such as fresh produce, into neighborhoods where grocery stores are lacking and corner stores serve as the primary shopping site for most residents will be key to making the new WIC food package work in some low-income urban and rural communities.



- **Marketing Initiatives:** Marketing the changes in the WIC package provides a great opportunity to involve people throughout the community, as well as WIC clients, in the process.

For additional information consult FRAC's Time for a Change WIC Food Package Tool Kit: <http://www.frac.org/WIC/index.htm#wictoolkit>

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