



Ohio Department of Health WIC Report on Increasing Access to and Use of WIC June 6, 2025

(As required by House Bill 7 – 135th General Assembly)

Background

Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) is a federal program funded by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS). WIC provides nutrition education, nutritious foods, breastfeeding support, and healthcare referrals to pregnant and post-partum women, infants, and children up to age 5.

Participation in WIC reduces fetal and infant deaths, premature birth rates, low and very low birth weight, and incidence of low-iron anemia. WIC also increases access to prenatal care earlier in pregnancy, access to general healthcare, pregnant women's consumption of key nutrients such as iron, protein, calcium, and Vitamins A and C, and overall diet quality.

Ohio WIC operates via 75 local WIC agencies covering all 88 Ohio counties.

Increase Access and Use of WIC

House Bill 7 (135th General Assembly) charged the Ohio Department of Health (ODH) with investigating and determining the services and tools available at the federal level and the services and tools implemented in other states that could be implemented in Ohio to increase access to and use of WIC.

ODH and its local WIC agencies continue to ensure that qualified Ohioans can apply for benefits and be served by our state and local WIC teams. To date, ODH WIC has applied for every federal waiver and extension of such waivers that have been made available and that Ohio would be eligible for that would increase enrollment including waivers to allow:

- Virtual training and monitoring for vendors and the Farmers Market Nutrition Program.
- Flexibility in food package substitutions which allow appropriate substitutes for the types and amounts of certain WIC-prescribed foods if their availability is limited.
- Minimum stocking requirements adjustments to ensure WIC participant access to authorized retailers.
- Physical presence waiver that provides participants with the option to forego the physical presence requirement under certain circumstances.

For calendar year 2024, the average monthly caseload was 179,237. In 2025, initial participation for April was 180,504. This is an increase of 2,351 from the initial participation in March of 178,153. Ohio WIC's caseload mirrors national trends with a decline in participation noted from 2010-2021 and incremental increases since then.

Per the USDA Economic Research Service, administrative flexibilities put in place in response to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic may have helped support participation, especially among children. Starting in federal fiscal year (FFY) 2020 and continuing through FFY 2022, USDA waivers temporarily allowed State agencies to conduct remote or hybrid certifications for applicants and recertifications for WIC participants and to extend certification periods for certain WIC participants. Additionally, waivers allowed Ohio WIC participants to make food package substitutions such as purchasing multiple milk types and various package sizes of whole grains and significant increases to the fruit and vegetable voucher were well-received.

WIC agencies in other states are implementing changes to modernize and streamline WIC services which will result in increases in WIC access and usage. These efforts have encompassed streamlining certification processes, updating Management Information Systems and Electronic Benefits Processors, creating online applications, enhancing coordination with related programs to leverage adjunctive eligibility, piloting online shopping, providing statewide texting services, creating electronic forms, translating forms and educational materials, and implementing electronic solutions to the Farmers Market Nutrition Program.

Ohio WIC has made strides in these areas which will result in increased access to and use of WIC services. To date, the efforts below have been made.

- Implemented the cross-enrollment initiative to reach out to potentially eligible SNAP, TANF, and Medicaid recipients who consent to being contacted.
- Extended WIC participant certification timeframe from 6 months to 1 year for women and children.
- Rolled out statewide texting for all local WIC projects.
- Provided a participant app available for download with important announcements, authorized WIC foods lists, nutrition and lactation educational resources, WIC nutrition card balance information, and the ability to scan products in the store to check for WIC authorization.
- Updated Price Look Up (PLU) mapping for grocery store produce to improve redemption of fruits and vegetables.
- Participated in the USDA FNS WIC Workforce Workgroup that has a goal of assessing the national WIC workforce to understand the current challenges to recruiting and retaining WIC Health Professionals, specifically Registered Dietitians to provide individualized nutrition education and counseling to WIC families.
- Implemented an ongoing customer service survey to assess participant satisfaction with WIC appointment experiences. Survey feedback is being evaluated to implement improvements to WIC appointment processes.
- Participated in the annual National WIC Association Multistate Participant Survey that assesses WIC participant views of the program to inform improvements.

- Provided WIC 101 presentations to social service agencies; maternal, child, and family health programs; and academic institutions to educate these partners on the basics of WIC and increase the likelihood of referrals to the program.
- Provided outreach, recruitment, and retention resources to local WIC agencies.
- Supported local WIC project outreach via events, farmers' markets, social media, billboards, and advertisement (publications, media).
- Created a WIC taskforce workgroup for WIC agencies and ODH representatives to collaboratively explore opportunities to modernize policies and processes to deliver quality, efficient services to Ohioans.

Additionally, Ohio WIC is actively working on:

- New Management Information System to streamline clinic services and participant appointment requirements.
- Online Electronic Benefits Processor to allow for online and real-time benefits issuance.
- E-solutions for Farmers Market Nutrition Program to move from paper vouchers to an electronic application.
- Ohio WIC food package updates to align with the new USDA Food Rule. The new USDA Food Rule provides a wider variety of healthy foods and provides WIC state agencies with greater flexibility to prescribe and tailor food packages that accommodate participants' special dietary needs and food preferences and address key nutritional needs to support healthy dietary patterns. All food package updates are due by April 2026 except for vitamin D in yogurt which is due by April 19, 2027.
- Social media messaging related to WIC education, eligibility, and services to increase WIC participant recruitment and retention.
- Increasing access to WIC education materials by providing electronic resources via WICHealth.org, local and state agency websites, and a WIC participant-facing mobile phone application.

The actions mentioned above are modernizing Ohio WIC resulting in an increased visibility of the program, its enrollment processes, benefits, and clinic locations; will reduce clinic wait times and streamline appointment process. These activities will improve the participant shopping experience; increase access to fresh produce and ultimately increase WIC caseload while enhancing the health and wellbeing of Ohio women, infants, and children.