



NATIONAL CONFERENCE of STATE LEGISLATURES

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The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children Factsheet

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Overview. The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) provides nutrition education, supplemental food, healthcare referrals, and breastfeeding support to low-income pregnant and postpartum women, infants, and children up to age five. The WIC Program is a short term resource for some of the country's most vulnerable populations. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) provides grants to WIC state agencies (typically in the Department of Health or Human Services) to administer the program. WIC state agencies in turn recruit and approve local agencies (typically health entities that provide pediatric and obstetric care) to provide health services and nutrition education to clients. WIC is available in all 50 states, 34 Indian Tribal Organizations, American Samoa, District of Columbia, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. In fiscal year 2013, an average of 8.6 million people participated in the WIC Program (4.6 million children, 2.0 million infants, and 2.0 million women) per month. The WIC Program was last reauthorized in the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010.

Eligibility. Applicants must meet all four eligibility requirements: categorical, residential, income, and nutrition risk.

The Four Eligibility Requirements for WIC	
Categorical Eligibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Women who are pregnant, postpartum, or breastfeeding▪ Infants up to age one▪ Children up to age five
Residential Eligibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Applicants must live in the state in which they apply▪ No residency time limit is required
Income Eligibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Income: Between 100% and 185% of the Federal poverty guidelines according to states' discretion▪ Automatic/Adjunct Income Eligibility: Participation in SNAP, Medicaid, TANF or, at the state agency's discretion, in other state-administered programs may automatically qualify a participant
Nutrition Risk Eligibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ A health professional (e.g., physician, nurse, nutritionist at a WIC clinic or elsewhere) must determine whether the individual is at nutrition risk (e.g., anemic, underweight, poor diet) – each state has a list of WIC nutrition risk criteria

Food Packages. The WIC Program provides nutrition assistance through the prescription of food packages according to the needs of participants. There are seven food packages available, outlined in the chart below. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) issued a final rule revising the WIC Food Packages in March 2014 ([NCSL summary](#)).

The use of electronic benefit transfer (EBT) cards is increasing, but most WIC agencies provide checks or vouchers to participants to purchase the foods at state-approved retailers. Some state agencies deliver foods to the homes of participants directly or distribute them through warehouses.

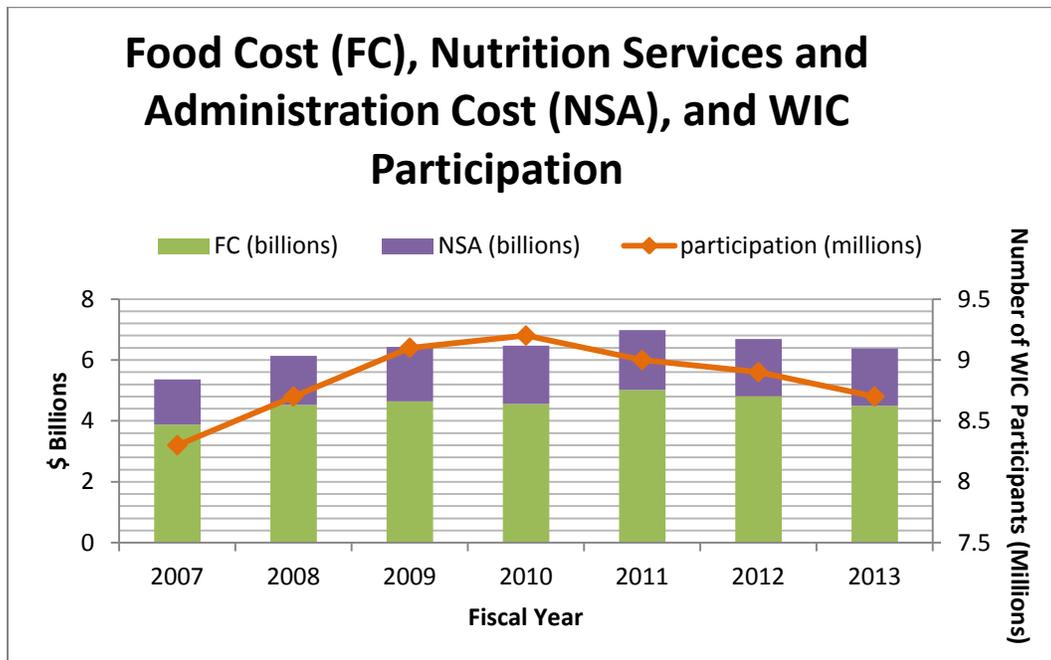
WIC state agencies must provide a list of brands that meet USDA’s food package criteria. See [Idaho](#) and [Texas](#) approved WIC food list as examples. WIC state agencies have some flexibility in determining the most appropriate combination of foods for their clients.

WIC Food Packages	
Food Package I	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Participants:</i> Infants birth through five months ▪ <i>Authorized foods:</i> Although breastfeeding is the preferred method of nutrition for this group, WIC formula may be provided
Food Package II	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Participants:</i> Infants six through eleven months ▪ <i>Authorized foods:</i> Infant formula, infant fruits and vegetables, infant meat, and infant cereal
Food Package III	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Participants:</i> Clients with a documented health condition (e.g., premature birth, metabolic disorders, immune system disorders) ▪ <i>Authorized foods:</i> Infant formula, WIC-eligible medical foods, infant cereal, infant food fruits and vegetables, milk and milk alternatives, cheese, eggs, canned fish, fruits and vegetables, breakfast cereal, whole wheat bread or grains, juice, legumes, and/or peanut butter
Food Package IV	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Participants:</i> Children one through four years ▪ <i>Authorized foods:</i> Milk, breakfast cereal, juice, fruits and vegetables, whole wheat bread or other whole grains, eggs, and legumes or peanut butter (food substitutes are available due to allergies)
Food Package V	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Participants:</i> Pregnant and Partially breastfeeding women ▪ <i>Authorized Foods:</i> Milk, breakfast cereal, juice, fruits and vegetables, whole wheat bread or other whole grains, eggs, and legumes or peanut butter (food substitutes are available due to allergies)
Food Package VI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Participants:</i> Postpartum women ▪ <i>Authorized Foods:</i> Milk, breakfast cereal, juice, fruits and vegetables, eggs, and legumes or peanut butter (food substitutes are available due to allergies)
Food Package VII	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Participants:</i> Fully breastfeeding women up to one year postpartum ▪ <i>Authorized Foods:</i> Milk, cheese, breakfast cereal, juice, fruits and vegetables, whole wheat bread or other whole grains, eggs, legumes, peanut butter, and canned fish

Program Costs There are two types of costs in the WIC Program: “food costs” (FC) and “nutrition services and administration costs” (NSA). Food costs include the use of funds to acquire supplemental foods for participants, warehousing the food, and purchasing or renting breast pumps. NSA costs are funds used to promote nutrition and breastfeeding education and support including salaries of personnel, training for educators, costs of creating and disseminating educational materials, evaluation costs, monitoring of agencies, and laboratory fees and medical supplies. The

graph and chart below show the [food costs, NSA costs, and participation rates](#) of WIC at the national level from 2007 to 2014.

WIC Program Cost and Participation			
Fiscal Year source: USDA	FC (\$ billions)	NSA (\$ billions)	Participation (millions)
FY2007	3.88	1.48	8.3
FY2008	4.53	1.61	8.7
FY2009	4.64	1.79	9.1
FY2010	4.56	1.91	9.2
FY2011	5.02	1.96	9
FY2012	4.81	1.88	8.9
FY2013	4.5	1.88	8.7



Issues

Participation – According to a 2012 Urban Institute report, 60.9 percent of eligible women and children participated in WIC nationally in 2009. At the state level, this ranged from a 45.9 percent to a 76.3 percent participation rate. According to the USDA Economic Research Service, a significant number of women delay enrollment until after having a child and then many leave after the child turns one year of age, not benefiting from the available resources. The reasons for delayed enrollment and early exit included lack of knowledge regarding eligibility, difficulty navigating the program, and scheduling and transportation barriers.

WIC EBT – All WIC state agencies are required to implement a WIC Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) system by October 1, 2020. [WIC EBT](#) is an electronic system that would replace the more

commonly used WIC food vouchers or checks. The benefits are loaded onto a chip in a plastic card that can be used offline at WIC food vendors. A similar online system would allow participants to authorize a direct transfer of funds between the EBT host and the retailer using magnetic strip card.

Cost-containment – As WIC continues to grow, administrators stretch funds through various methods, including state sole-source contracting for infant formula. USDA incentivizes states to reduce WIC costs by separating the food and administration grants. Rising food costs are causing state agencies to authorize WIC vendors with lower prices and participants to purchase low-cost WIC foods and items.

Nutrition Guidelines – The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) issued a final rule revising the WIC Food Packages in March 2014 ([NCSL summary](#)). States will have to come into compliance with these new nutritional requirements when they select WIC-approved foods each year.

Reauthorization – WIC is up for review in the Child Nutrition Reauthorization of 2015.

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[USDA WIC website](#)

[National WIC Association](#)

[NCSL Summary](#)

[GAO Report on WIC \(02/2013\)](#)

[USDA WIC Fact Sheet](#)

[WIC Regulations: 7 CFR Part 246 \(01/2014\)](#)

[USDA WIC Costs Data](#)

[Final Rule: Revision to WIC Food Packages](#)

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