

## **SECTION I: INTRODUCTION TO WIC**

**Inception** The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) was established by Congress in 1972. WIC was designed to help prevent the occurrence of health problems and to improve the health status of women, infants, and children during critical times of growth and development, with no cost to eligible participants.

**Administration** WIC is administered federally by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). In Missouri, the Department of Health and Senior Services (hereinafter referred to as the Department or as DHSS) receives a grant from the USDA to administer the program. Within the Department, WIC and Nutrition Services (WICNS) is responsible for program management and operation. The Department contracts with community-based organizations and authorizes retail grocery stores and pharmacies to implement the WIC program at the local level. Currently, one hundred and eighteen (118) local providers operate WIC clinics in every county in Missouri. Across the state of Missouri, WIC clinics authorized full service grocers and pharmacies serve the nutritional health needs of approximately 130,000 WIC participants per month.

**Participant Eligibility** Eligibility for program benefits is determined every six (6) months or at the end of pregnancy and is based on category, income, medical and nutritional status.

**All three (3) eligibility criteria must be met in order to be certified as a participant for the Missouri WIC program.**

- Categorical eligibility: Potential WIC participants include infants, children until their fifth (5) birthday, pregnant women, women who are nursing their infants, and women up to six (6) months after the end of pregnancy (postpartum).
- Medical/nutritional health status: Potential WIC participants must have the following assessed by a qualified health professional: health history, anthropometric data (i.e., height, weight, and head circumference), blood iron screening (hemoglobin or hematocrit) and adequacy of diet. Based on this assessment, if the applicant has a medical or nutritional risk such as low hemoglobin, abnormal growth, poor dietary intake, high-risk pregnancy or other conditions that affect or are affected by the adequacy of dietary intake, he/she may be certified for participation in the Missouri WIC program.

- Income eligibility: Potential WIC participants may have a household income up to one hundred and eighty-five percent (185%) of the federal poverty level. However, participation in other health, social service or MC+ programs may allow for WIC participation at even higher income levels.

## **Benefits**

The Missouri WIC program provides all eligible women, infants and children with nutrition education, health care screening, breastfeeding support and referrals in addition to supplemental food.

- Nutrition education is what makes WIC unique among other “food” programs. WIC participants receive nutrition education through one-on-one counseling, small group discussion and group classes. The nutrition education provided to participants emphasizes the importance of proper nutrition in good health and assists each participant in changing dietary habits in an effort to improve overall nutrition and health status. The nutrition education topics relate to the participant’s health risk and area(s) of dietary deficiency or concern.
- WIC provides access to health care for families that might otherwise have little or no contact with health care services. When more comprehensive care is needed, participants are referred to other health agencies or programs for assistance.
- WIC foods are prescribed for eligible participants, as a supplement to help meet the special nutritional needs of a very specific population. WIC foods are prescribed to provide specific nutrients including iron, protein, calcium, folate, zinc, and vitamins A, B6, C and D. These nutrients are critical to growth and development and have been shown to be inadequate in the diets of lower income women, infants and children.
- Once the WIC health professional has prescribed the appropriate nutritious foods, food instruments (WIC checks) are issued to the participant. Each WIC check is an individualized food prescription, listing specific foods and quantities, based on the participant’s category and nutritional need.
- Participants are allowed to use their WIC checks at any authorized retailer within the state.

**The Retailer's Role**

Authorized full service grocery stores and pharmacies are an integral part of the success of Missouri's WIC program in improving the nutritional health status of women, infants and children. The retailers role in the program is to provide participants with only those foods issued on the WIC check, in the specified quantity, brand, size and type. This serves to provide participants with the specific nutrients they need and to reinforce the nutrition education received. Following WIC's policies and procedures, as outlined in the WIC Retailer Agreement and WIC Retailer Manual, WIC participants will receive the nutritious foods prescribed and authorized retailers will receive payment for the items redeemed.

**Retailer Benefits**

The Missouri WIC program is a major purchaser in the retail grocery system in Missouri. Each federal fiscal year, Missouri WIC checks valued at almost \$100,000,000 are used to purchase nutritious WIC approved foods. In addition, when a WIC check is redeemed, the WIC customer spends additional money with the retailer for other non-WIC purchases. Participation in the Missouri WIC program also shows a retailer's commitment to the nutritional health of the residents in the community in which it operates.

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End of Section I: Introduction to WIC