

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 Missouri 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 (hereinafter referred to as the Missouri WIC program) 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.

Participant Eligibility Eligibility for program benefits is determined every 12 months or at the end of pregnancy and is based on category, income, and 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 birthday, pregnant women, women who are nursing their infants, and women up to six (6) months after the end of pregnancy (postpartum).
- Medical and nutritional risk eligibility: Potential WIC participants must have the following assessed by a qualified health professional: health history, anthropometric data (i.e., height and weight), 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 or she may be certified for participation in the Missouri WIC program.
- Income eligibility: Potential WIC participants may have a household income up to 185 percent of the federal poverty level. However, participation in other health, social service, or MO HealthNet 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, group classes, and online sessions. 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 physicians or other health agencies or programs for assistance.
- WIC food items are prescribed for eligible participants, as a supplement to help meet the special nutritional needs of a very specific population. WIC food is 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 food items, an Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card is issued. For EBT cards, one (1) card is issued for the entire household. The WIC EBT card contains the combined food prescriptions for every eligible person within the household, providing the specific foods and quantities. In Missouri, the WIC EBT card is referred to as the eWIC card.
- Participants are allowed to use their eWIC card at any authorized retailer within the state of Missouri.

The Retailer's Role

Authorized full service grocery stores and pharmacies are an integral part of the success of the Missouri WIC program in improving the nutritional health status of women, infants, and children. The retailer's role in the program is to provide participants with only those food items issued on the eWIC card, in the specified brand, quantity, 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 eWIC Retailer Manual, WIC participants will receive the nutritious food items prescribed and authorized retailers will receive payment for the items redeemed.

Retailer Benefits

Each federal fiscal year, Missouri is allocated approximately \$80,000,000 to purchase nutritious WIC-approved food. In addition, when an eWIC card is used, the WIC customer may spend 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.

Civil Rights

The retailer shall comply with the nondiscrimination provisions of federal regulations. No person shall be subject to discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, and reprisal or retaliation for prior civil right activity. The retailer shall comply with the nondiscrimination provisions of Governor's Executive Order #87-6 and all other state laws. No person shall be subject to discrimination on the basis of religion or political affiliation.

End of Section I: Introduction to WIC