Over 40 Years of WIC: Experiences and Lessons Learnt

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Overview

• What is WIC?
• How has WIC changed over 40+ years?
• Why am I talking about WIC?
• Healthy Start.
• The importance of data and research.
• The role of nutrition education and breastfeeding incentives in WIC.
• Value of advocacy networks.
What is The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children?
Background

WIC intervention model assumption:

knowledge + financial support = purchase and consume healthy food
Context

- **90** State agencies (50 States, The District of Columbia, 34 Indian Tribal Orgs and 5 territories)
- **1,900** local agencies
- **10,000** clinic sites
- **8 million** participants
- **53%** the infants in the US
- **47,000** Authorized retailers
- **$43.56** Average food cost per participant, per month
4 Pillars of WIC Service

- Nutrition Education
- Breastfeeding Promotion and Support
- Referrals to Healthcare and Social Services
- Nutritious Food Package
3 Policy Areas

- WIC Food Packages
  - Regulatory
  - 10 years

- Annual Appropriations
  - Legislative

- Child Nutrition Reauthorization
  - Legislative
  - 5 years
2 Main Impacts of WIC

1. Improve Health outcomes
2. Decrease Healthcare Costs
The WIC Client Journey

- pre-clinic
- travel To clinic
- enter clinic
- nutrition education session
- receive checks
- leave clinic
- post clinic

- pre-retail outlet
- enter retail outlet
- produce section
- other grocery sections
- checkout counter
- leave retail outlet
- post retail outlet

- “pre”-preparing meals
- preparing meals
- serving meals to family
- post-serving meals to family
Client makes appointment for WIC services or makes decision to walk-in for services.

Staff document client’s income or participation in Medicaid, SNAP, or TANF to determine income-eligibility for WIC.

Client waits in WIC clinic waiting room. Clients know they are waiting for WIC services.

Nutritionist determines nutrition risk level and counsels client and discusses food package options.

Nutritionist makes referrals to health care and social services when necessary.

Client may meet with a breastfeeding peer counselor or lactation consultant.

Client receives three months worth of WIC checks or electronic benefits (EBT) on a card to purchase WIC-approved foods at retail outlet.

Food items are written on the checks.

Client receives list of WIC-approved foods that can be purchased with their WIC benefits.

WIC staff discusses how to redeem checks/EBT cards at the grocery store.
How has WIC changed over 40+ years?
1972: WIC was piloted as a supplemental food program aimed at improving the health of pregnant mothers, infants and children.

1974: The first WIC site opened in Kentucky in January.

1974: WIC was operating in 45 States.

1975: Eligibility was extended to nonbreastfeeding women (up to 6 months postpartum) and children up to age 5.

1992: WIC introduced an enhanced food package for exclusively breastfeeding mothers to further promote breastfeeding.

1997: USDA implemented Loving Support Makes Breastfeeding Work campaign to increase breastfeeding rates and support for breastfeeding.
2004: Breastfeeding Peer Counselor Initiative was launched.

2009: Based on Institute of Medicine recommendations, USDA updated the food package to align with dietary guidelines for Americans and established dietary recommendations for infants and children over two years of age.

Fruits and vegetables were added to the food package.

Mothers who exclusively breastfeed receive a more enhanced WIC food package.
Why am I talking to you about WIC?

Well, we're both fruit.
The UK and the US...

• ...similar, but very different.
• Both have government supported nutrition programs/programmes for low-income families.
• Politically and socially different.
• Similar public health concerns.

http://imgur.com/gallery/45kpk4j
1940: The Welfare Food Scheme
2006: Healthy Start IN, Welfare Food Scheme OUT

https://www.healthystart.nhs.uk
How is Healthy Start different to the Welfare Food Scheme?

• Combines upstream and downstream intervention

• Information and support from health professionals

• Focus on changing eating habits as well as supplementing nutrition

• More foods then just milk and infant formula

• Incentivize early contact with a health professional
Ways that Healthy Start and WIC are similar

- Combines upstream and downstream intervention
- Information and support from health professionals
- Focus on behavior change
- Supplemental foods
- Breastfeeding promotion and support
Is WIC a model for Healthy Start?
Which aspects of WIC can inform future discussions on Healthy Start?

- Advocacy networks.
- Focus on nutrition education.
- Breastfeeding incentives.
- DATA!!
Data and Research

• Routine data collected.
• Research funded – currently 25 studies in the field, funded by USDA Food and Nutrition Service, USDA Economic Research Service and Census Bureau.
• Driven by issues from the field.
• Some states employ epidemiologists/analysts.
• https://www.nwica.org/research-activities
State and Local Data Utilization

http://www.health.state.mn.us/wic/localagency/reports/
https://www.phfewic.org/Projects/DataMining.aspx
Federal Data Collection Efforts

http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/wic-program

Nutrition Education

- Based on individual needs.
- Opportunity for WIC staff to learn about the environments clients are living in.
- Registered Dietician, Nutritionist.
- In-person, one-to-one, group, online, telecounseling.
- Talk about how to get the most out of the food package.
- Current focus on the millennial mum.
Healthy Start

‘we can find no examples of parents who recall information about the food vouchers provided by health professionals explicitly linked to health and nutrition advice’

Lucas et al p.62

When you say vouchers are you just talking about the vitamins?

Yeah, sorry I’m always going to go to vitamins because I don’t think of the food.

most parents have got the internet so I tell them why don’t you go on the website and you can fill out your details and it will then tell you for definite whether you can apply or not
Incentivizing Breastfeeding

• Breastfeeding support and education.
• Follow-up support from peer-counselors.
• Enhanced food package for fully breastfeeding women.
• Breastfeeding mothers can stay on the program longer (1 year instead of 6 months).
• Breast pumps – 98% State Agencies.
• State food package choices.
• Wide ranging BF rates between states.
• WIC Breastfeeding Policy Inventory: http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/ops/WICBPI.pdf
Breastfeeding Success

% of infants in WIC aged 6-13 months who were ever breastfed

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80%

2014
1998
WIC Breastfeeding Initiatives

1997
USDA implements “Loving Support Makes Breastfeeding Work” campaign to increase rate of breastfeeding among WIC mothers and improve public support of breastfeeding.

2004
Past WIC participants support women learning to breastfeed with launch of Breastfeeding Peer Counselor initiative.

2009
Mothers who are exclusively breastfeeding get more healthy foods with introduction of enhanced WIC food package.

2011
Institute of Medicine holds workshop to update “Loving Support” campaign to reflect changes in today’s millennial moms.

% WIC INFANTS BREASTFED*

*Data may not include all WIC infants.
Advocacy and Partnerships

- Secure funding
- Evidence based policy
- Garner support
- Sharing innovative best practices
- Collective strategies when the program is under threat
National WIC Association

• Non-profit advocacy voice of WIC.
• Membership organization.
• Provide legislative updates, research updates, conferences, training opportunities, advocacy support and best practices to WIC community.
• Leaders in the public health nutrition advocacy space.
The Healthy Start Alliance

http://www.healthystartalliance.org

HEALTHY START ALLIANCE

Promoting, protecting and advocating for the Healthy Start scheme in the UK

Who we are

Healthy Start is the UK’s food welfare scheme for pregnant women and infants and young children in low-income

What we do

Maternal, infant and early years’ nutrition is fundamental to reducing inequalities in health and life chances and in ensuring

Our Alliance Supporters

We are building a broad ranging group of organisations and individuals as Alliance supporters and hope to build this
Stigma of government nutrition programs

The Telegraph

New mothers swap fruit vouchers for booze and cigarettes

Pregnant women on benefits have used NHS fruit and vegetable vouchers to obtain cigarettes and alcohol, a Government report has found.

By Laura Donnelly, Health Correspondent

9:00PM GMT 26 Feb 2011
What am I trying to say?

• WIC at 1972 and 2016 is very different.
• With support and direction, Healthy Start could achieve a lot in the next 3 decades.
• Healthy Start is really important.
• Healthy Start has HUGE potential to become an even better program.
• Deserves continued and increased funding.
• Strategies to push Healthy Start in a direction that has maximum value.
• Starting point: Focus on nutrition education, breastfeeding promotion and support and data.
Thank you!

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References

- PC Report