Dollars and Sense
WIC Program Health Outcomes

WIC’s Impact on the Nation’s Health Status
Numerous studies have confirmed WIC’s impact in avoiding health care costs. Specifically, a 1997 study reconfirmed the original 1988 research in North Carolina, documenting WIC’s effectiveness in avoiding the health care costs to the Medicaid program by reducing the number of premature and high-risk births. Also, a 2002 analysis of longitudinal data concluded that there exists a significant positive association between WIC participation and normal birth weight in newborns.

Infant-feeding practices play a major role in the development of childhood obesity. In an effort to address this issue, the California WIC Program partnered with the UC Davis Human Lactation Center to develop classes to help WIC parents have more realistic expectations about their infants’ behavior and to recognize and respond appropriately to infant “cues.”

The impact of WIC Baby Behavior Study was notably successful in helping caregivers understand and accept normal baby behaviors, such as sleeping and crying. As shown in the graphs below, caregivers are more likely to continue exclusive breastfeeding and less likely to use excessive amounts of formula. After attending Baby Behavior classes, the study resulted in better compliance with infant-feeding recommendations among WIC participants and fewer infants whose body weight was above 95% of normal infants (see graph below). New WIC staff statewide have received the training.

WIC’s Impact on the Nation’s Health Status

* Families grow healthy with WIC

WIC is the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children. A 100 percent federally funded nutrition and health program that provides education and food to low-to-moderate income families nutritionally at-risk pregnant and breastfeeding women, infants and children up to the fifth birthday.

- The program is designed to provide temporary assistance during those brief periods in lives made vulnerable by reason of pregnancy, the first two years of life or having a young child with nutrition and/or health conditions.
- WIC responds with nutrition food, parenting and nutrition education, support for breastfeeding mothers and babies, referrals for services needed by the family, and requirements for medical care to continue participation.

Impact of Baby Behavior Parenting Education

**Exclusive Breastfeeding**

- Parents received Baby Behavior Education: 26%
- Parents received standard education: 22%

**Infants Weight, ages 5 to 7 months**

- Before Class: 15.0%
- After Class: 14.8%

- Parents received standard education: 23%
- Parents received Baby Behavior Education: 22%

- Weight more than 95% of normal weight: 19%
- Weight less than 95% of normal weight: 20.3%

For more information:

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- California WIC Association:
  - www.calwic.org
  - USDA/Food and Nutrition Service, WIC:
  - www.usda.fns.gov/wic
  - National WIC Association:
  - www.nwica.org

- National Food and Policy Research Institute:
  - www.nfprdi.org

- State of California:
  - www.ca.gov

- EDMUND G. BROWN JR. Governor

- CA WIC
  - www.ca-wic.ca.gov

- Program Services include:
  - customized individual and group nutrition education;
  - breastfeeding promotion, education, assistance and community strategies;
  - referrals to health and social services; and
  - checks to buy specific foods: milk, cheese, eggs, corn, juice, laranja, beans, peanut butter, whole grains, fruits, vegetables and infant formula (for infants not fully breastfed).
WIC in California (CA) is a program of the Department of Public Health which administers contracts with 84 local agencies—half local governments and half private, non-profit community organizations—which operate WIC centers in 650 locations statewide.

Approximately 3,500 local WIC staff members assess and document program eligibility based on residency, income, and health or nutrition risk, and issue 7 million food checks each month. Each check is valid for a 30-day period and is payable for a specific type and quantity of food. The retail value of the checks is about $60 per month per participant.

California in the nation’s largest WIC program, serving 9.2 million people in 2010. The CA WIC program has received the highest (three stars) performance rating from the US Congress budget agency, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). OMB uses a standard questionnaire called the Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) which asks questions about a program’s performance and management. The answers determine a program’s overall rating, so the public can see how effectively tax dollars are being spent. KICW infuses approximately $90 million in federal funds into the California retail food economy each month. The benefits of this economic boost extend beyond WIC families, spurring activity throughout the local economy. About 40 percent, or 1,983 of the retail outlets authorized to accept WIC checks in California are single-store, owner-operated small businesses that benefit substantially from this income.

CA WIC awards federal regulations to conduct quality assurance, which includes review of local agencies and compliance activities at authorized stores. Monitoring occurs on-site and off-site which leads to further investigation and prosecution of approximately 15 percent of authorized sites per year. CA WIC is a leader in WIC program management staff with responsibility for tracking and following up on reports of program abuse and fraud pertaining to local agencies and authorized food vendors.

### Infant Formula Rebate

Mothers participating in WIC are encouraged to breastfeed and the majority of mothers are successful in initiating and continuing to nurse for the first few months postpartum. If breastfeeding is discontinued or for any reason, WIC provides iron-fortified infant formula to infants until the first birthday. WIC State agencies are required by federal law to implement competitively bid infant formula rebate contracts with infant formula manufacturers to support both milk-based and soy-based infant formulas. The contract stipulates that the State Agency agrees to provide infant formula in return for a rebate from the manufacturer who provided the lowest bid for each formula type for each can of contract formula purchased with WIC checks. By negotiating rebates with infant formula manufacturers, States are able to generate income beyond the federal grant, supporting a average of 2.5 million additional participants (increase of 25 percent) served nationally each month. California’s current infant formula rebate contract is with Mead Johnson Nutrition and it generates approximately $18.5 million in revenue each month. This contract will expire in July of 2012, by which time WIC expects to have a new rebate contract in place.

### WIC’s Impact on California’s Retail Food Economy

WIC absorbs approximately $90 million in federal funds into the California retail food economy each month. The benefits of this economic boost extend beyond WIC families, spurring activity throughout the local economy. About 40 percent, or 1,983 of the retail outlets authorized to accept WIC checks in California are single-store, owner-operated small businesses that benefit substantially from this income.

### ExpectMore.gov, a Federal Program Ranking. Give WIC its Highest Rating!

ExpectMore.gov is a website that presents Federal program performance evaluations conducted by the U.S. Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) which asks questions about a program’s performance and management. The answers determine a program’s overall rating, so the public can see how effectively tax dollars are being spent. WIC is among just 11 percent of federal programs that received the highest rating, three stars and labeled “Effective.” Programs rated “Effective” set ambitious goals, achieve results, are well managed and improved efficiency.