California WIC and the Power of Community

For nearly a half century, WIC has been a reliable community resource for families. More recently, communities are facing extreme circumstances, including a pandemic, climate tragedies, renewed immigration threats, geopolitical wars and housing shortages. Systemic racism persists.

Yet there is hope for change as state and national leaders are finally recognizing the complexity of problems facing young families requires an openness to innovation. Deep and far-reaching change will ensure equitable and inclusive access to social drivers of health and financial security.

WIC agencies have always been steadfast community partners, but also an untapped resource for impacting complex challenges. WIC staff live in the communities they serve. They understand the needs of children and families.

As our leaders in health and human services look for ways to create systemic improvements and reform health care, WIC should be a high priority when it comes to integrating community resources, workforce needs, and new technology, among other valuable assets.

For those of you joining us for our 30th Annual Conference, The Power of Community, and enjoying this spring edition of the WIC Watch, you will see many examples of how WIC agencies excel in their service, educate decisionmakers, work in partnership, and focus on community health and preventive care.

How fortunate we all are for WIC in our communities! Every day about 3,000 committed individuals in California - and thousands more across the nation - attend to innumerable details to connect with and serve parents, infants and children. Their heart is in their work, and they are a vital power in the community.
We are so excited to share our 30th Annual Conference with you! This year’s theme, The Power of Community, reflects what those of you working in and collaborating with WIC do every day. You bring the power of education and support - from nutritional to emotional - to families in your communities with every appointment, phone conversation, class, and in-person or virtual interaction. CWA’s Annual Conference is designed to support you in turn, bringing you leading-edge continuing education, networking opportunities, and fun to help fuel your power!

We are also excited to bring you our third virtual conference! A virtual platform can increase equitable access to educational and networking opportunities for ALL levels of WIC staff, students, and allied health professionals who come together as collaborators, teachers, and learners. Thanks to our Conference Planning Committee comprised of representatives from multiple WIC agencies and organizations, as well as all who attended earlier conferences (yes, we do read every evaluation!), it promises to be better than ever.

A stellar line-up of speakers in plenary and concurrent sessions are ready to offer 30+ continuing education units for RDs, IBCLCs, and RNs. Since there are two simultaneous learning tracks for certain portions of the conference, all attendees will have until July 15 to watch recordings of any missed sessions - a chance to earn more CEUs on your own timeline. So, if you can’t attend all four days and 24 sessions, remember there’s a no-stress solution!

Below are just a few conference highlights. In between sessions, don’t forget the well-timed wellness breaks, many led by motivational, local agency volunteers!

**PLENARY SESSIONS:** We have some superstars delivering plenary sessions this year - don’t miss them! On Monday, we are honored to host [Dr. Tomás Aragón](#), M.D., Dr. P.H., Director, CA Department of Public Health, and [Michelle Baass](#), MPPA, Director, CA Department of Health Care Services, as they update us on key Opportunities for WIC - COVID Lessons & Health Care Reform during this critical time, ripe for collaboration.

Next, [Bryant Terry](#), James Beard & NAACP Image Award-winning chef and author of Black Food, will share insights on Food Justice at the Intersection of Food, Politics, Poverty, Public Health and the Environment. To follow in this vein, Rev. [Christopher Carter](#), PhD, Department of Theology & Religious Studies at UC San Diego and author of The Spirit of Soul Food: Race, Faith, & Food Justice, will dive with us into Eating Soulfully: Food Justice as Practicing Compassion. Thursday’s closing plenary brings [Joyce Mikal-Flynn](#), PhD, MPH, FNP to help us explore Challenges, Adversity and Trauma: Opportunities for Resilience and Growth.
WORKSHOPS: Each 60- to 90-minute session focuses on topics richly relevant to the challenges and changes WIC staff face. This year’s learning track titles may look familiar, but we have refocused topics to reflect your evaluations from the last Conference.

For starters, more workshops this year focus on ethics; look for three different E-Cerp sessions, including Meeting Clients Where They’re At: Ethical Guidelines when Talking about Complementary Therapies with Lisa Marasco, MA, IBCLC, FILCA.

We have a really strong selection of breastfeeding and nutrition offerings this year, including Equity in Infant Feeding Support: Meeting WIC Participants Where They Are, one of several great panels CDPH-WIC put together this year.

We are excited to have Yaffi Lvova, RD, author of Beyond a Bite: Activities for a Mindful Mealtime, who will lead a session about Sensory Food Exploration for the Neurodiverse Population.

We are thrilled to feature a large panel of diverse perspectives sharing voices from the Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) Lactation Collaborative of California: about Changing narratives in AANHPI health.

Bryan Post, PhD, LCSW will be joining us, one of America’s foremost child behavior experts, an internationally recognized speaker, consultant, and best-selling author, to facilitate a session on The Earliest Blueprints: The Critical Importance of Zero to Five.

We will also welcome some incredible thought leaders who will help us to better understand ourselves and our coworkers, to build more cohesive and functional work environments. Lou Cozolino, PhD, who specializes in the areas of psychotherapy, neuroscience, and attachment, will be talking to us about learning styles and executive functioning.

Other workshop presenters are also focused on bringing you cutting-edge research and promoting equity for staff, families, and communities - from incorporating cultural foodways or critical thinking in client counseling, to more deeply understanding epigenetics, preterm birth disparities, or confirmation bias. This rich diversity of topics is sure to peak your interest!

VIRTUAL (& FUN!) TRADE SHOW: The Virtual Trade Show features 35 wonderfully tech-savvy vendors, providing on-demand learning as well as allowing you to view materials and chat with exhibitors in real time. Vendors and community partners can reach out to attendees on the platform and vice versa. You can also meet with our trade partners via links available throughout the conference. And the fun comes when you participate in Q&A sessions, lunch & learns, scavenger hunts, and contests.

WIC is already a fabulous source of Power in the communities you serve. We hope you find the Conference offers you valuable education that’s equally powerful in an accessible and flexible format. While we will miss being with you in person, there are so many opportunities on a virtual platform to network and stay engaged. Whether it is participating in a very active chat, offering thought-provoking questions in our Q&A feeds, showing up and having fun in our virtual contests, or revisiting the platform to ensure that you take all of this knowledge back to your colleagues, we hope you stay engaged and find renewed power in your CWA Community!
**WIC Champions for Lactation Accommodation**

CWA is honored to recognize four individuals for their collaborative efforts to improve lactation accommodation for US Postal Workers across the Bay Area. Charnae Easton, a participant of the Contra Costa WIC agency, was determined to continue her lactation journey upon her return to work. When she experienced an unsupportive work environment, she decided to advocate for her legal rights. Working with Comfort Nwamuo, San Pablo WIC office and Katie Wutchiett and Julia Parish, Legal Aid at Work (an organization that provides free advice and representation to working parents seeking paid leave or accommodations for pregnancy, lactation, or parenting), they fought for Charnae’s rights for leave and lactation accommodation. Charnae received compensation for emotional distress, and the USPS agreed to provide training to Richmond’s USPS supervisors and management, as well as to instruct all USPS managers and supervisors across the Bay Area to affirmatively tell employees about their lactation rights when they ask about parental leave and on their first day back at work after having a baby. Because of their efforts, policies and systems were improved and other parents and infants will benefit. Thank you, Charnae, Comfort, Katie and Julia! They received the WIC Champion award during the opening plenary of the CWA conference. You can read about their advocacy here.

**Phyllis Bramson Awardees**

To honor the memory of an inspiring WIC champion, CWA established the Phyllis A. Bramson Advocacy Award in 2013. The Bramson Award recognizes an outstanding WIC employee whose advocacy efforts on behalf of the California WIC Program achieved a demonstrated impact at the local, state, or national level. This year, we have two such WIC advocates to recognize!

Blanca Vargas, MPA, RDN, CLE of PHFE WIC started as a center Nutritionist and worked her way up to site Supervisor, Area Manager and is currently a Senior Manager in the Operations Department where she oversees the Outreach staff. She began her role as a WIC ambassador in 2009, providing powerful WIC stories from the perspective of a WIC staff member as well as a former WIC participant AND former WIC baby! She strengthened her advocacy with mentorship from PHFE Deputy Director Samar McGregor and recently retired Senior Manager, Shelly Lewis. This year, Blanca worked with a team from PHFE and Lundquist WIC and Assemblyman Mike Gipson’s office to create a WIC video. She’s a powerful and valued team member in the effort to increase awareness and strengthen support of the WIC program!

Megan Esparza, RD, CLC, and director of the Camino Health WIC program started interning for WIC while attending UC Davis. She was fortunate to have had Jeanette Newman-Velez and Maureen Clarke at CRP WIC as her first WIC mentors. It was there that she developed a passion for breastfeeding support and the WIC Program, but for the past 8 years has been a part of the Camino Health Center WIC team. She truly feels that the support and information WIC offers should be a standard part of prenatal and pediatric care, the results of our collective efforts are well documented – which is why she is an excellent WIC Ambassador! Last year Megan was a huge help in working with Congresswoman Katie Porter’s office on producing a video regarding the bump to the WIC fruit and vegetable increase, a huge boost in visibility for an important discussion! Megan really enjoys being able to share the work WIC is doing with legislators and staffers and seeing how interested and supportive they are of the program.
CNC Scholarships

The California Nutrition Corps is a scholarship fund established to support employees of California local WIC programs who are advancing their professional careers within the WIC program. This year we are excited to award 15 outstanding and dedicated individuals.

**DIETETIC INTERNS**
- Rocio Avila, PHFE WIC – Stefan Harvey Scholarship
- Mai Duong, PHFE WIC – Anne Peterson Memorial Scholarship
- Leonel Gradillo Manrique, SDSU WIC – Shirlee Runnings Scholarship
- Susan Herrera, PHFE WIC – Anne Garrett Memorial Scholarship
- Ricardo Licona, Scripps Mercy WIC Program
- Estefania Ramos, Northeast Valley Health Corp
- Patricia Garcia, Northeast Valley Health Corp
- Isaac Diaz, PHFE WIC
- Carlo Tueros, Contra Costa Health
- Lucia Botta, Northeast Valley Health Corp

**GRADUATE STUDENTS**
- Ian Lloyd, Northeastern Rural Health Clinics
- Grace Huang, PHFE WIC
- Fatima DeHaro, Community Action Partnership of Kern
- Glenda Miranda, Northeast Valley Health Corp
- Maria Rodriguez, Northeast Valley Health Corp

Join us in congratulating the 2021-2022 CNC Scholarship Recipients!

Welch’s is proud to be a Gold Sponsor of the California WIC Association’s 2022 Annual Conference!
With a revamped program of leadership development with the conscious inclusion of equity and a commitment to anti-racist awareness, culture, and practices, Rita Sever and Dr. Melissa Franklin guided 37 participants through a year-long journey of personal growth and professional development! These devoted WIC Staff chose to participate in this program, in addition to their regular duties, during an unprecedented time of challenges. Please join us in celebrating their accomplishment!

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<td>Tina Benitez</td>
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<td>Samantha Slaughter</td>
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<td>Shannon Sneade</td>
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<td>Brittney Vaughn</td>
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What the Leadership Academy attendees say:

As a manager of people, and as a leader, you always want to demonstrate effective leadership skills, provide effective support, and possess the abilities to do so. After attending the Leadership Academy, I feel more confident in my role. Both Rita and Melissa validated my capacity as a leader and, in addition, provided more skills for my toolbox. I am grateful to Rita, Melissa, and the rest of the amazing WIC managers that helped shape my learning. I feel like a great problem solver with effective communication skills, and a motivator to the people I lead. Thank you.

Jenniffer Duran-West  
Lundquist Institute - SLAHP WIC Program

I really loved attending the Leadership Academy because it allowed me to connect with other WIC leaders throughout the state. We were able to collaborate, share and learn from each leader’s WIC story …which was truly invaluable. Special shout-out to Rita/Melissa for leading such an amazing training and for encouraging growth mindset.

Brittany Vaughn  
American Red Cross WIC

I found Leadership Academy to be a supportive resource for self-guidance for not only work and organizational settings but also for personal relationships. I have gained valuable management skills that have positively shaped my perspective as a leader and person.

Vanessa Cagatin  
PHFE WIC

Participating in the Leadership Academy was a great experience. I felt really welcomed, supported and understood; without fear of judgment when expressing my opinions and views. The connection with the other attendees also boosted my confidence and resilience, especially when sharing our common day-to-day challenges and struggles.

Maira Simeone  
Sonoma County WIC

The Leadership Academy has fulfilled me in many unexpected ways. My greatest hope is to remain connected to my leadership colleagues, that I now call friends! Huge shout out to our AMAZING facilitators, Melissa and Rita who kept us engaged, encouraged, informed, and laughing.  
In Solidarity,

Aqueelah Russell  
Antelope Valley Medical Center
Model Hospital Policy Recommendations Updated

In case you missed the announcement, CDPH has released an updated edition of the California Model Hospital Policy Recommendations. We are so grateful for the collaborative leadership of California’s experts in lactation and birth practices in providing the detailed recommendations, first released, now several decades ago. Along with the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative, the California Model Hospital Policy Recommendations support California’s hospitals in ensuring parents experience lactation supportive birth practices.

The California Department of Public Health, Maternal, Child, and Adolescent Health Division, in a partnership with the Perinatal Advisory Council: Leadership, Advocacy and Consultation, is pleased to announce the release of the fourth edition of Providing Breastfeeding Support: Model Hospital Policy Recommendations.

These Model Hospital Policy Recommendations serve to meet the requirements of California regulations that must be fulfilled by January 1, 2025. The recommendations utilize evidence-based practices that promote, protect, and support breastfeeding across the continuum of parent-child care. They are intended to serve as a framework to allow hospitals to modify and construct policies and procedures that best suit their facility and can be incorporated into standard parent-baby care.

We invite you to help us bring awareness to this newly revised resource by promoting it to your hospital contacts and sharing it through your newsletters and social media platforms. The document can be found here.

If you have any questions or comments about the content of the Model Hospital Policy or would like to request a presentation to provide an orientation to the document and how to use it, please contact Mari Taylan at Mari.Taylan@cdph.ca.gov.

Lactation Scholarships Awarded!

CWA provided 7 scholarships to recipients from different WIC Agencies to cover the cost of Riverside University Health’s Grow Our Own Lactation Consultant/IBCLC Prep Course this year! We are thrilled to be able to support our own, who otherwise would not be able to participate, in furthering their lactation education goals.

Ashley Fasking, Tehama County WIC
Ana Rivera, Solano County WIC
Maribel Pedro, United Health Centers WIC
Sarah Jaafar, Community Resource Project WIC
Arely Brown, Santa Barbara County WIC
Hilda Vega, Stanislaus County WIC
Veronica Vasquez, Alameda County WIC
The success of ongoing health care reform will require genuine commitments to equity and justice and establishing ways for more people to access social drivers of health. In California, much of this work is being driven by the reforms in state health care under the big umbrella of CalAIM (California Advancing and Innovating Medi-Cal). The upcoming renewal of Medi-Cal Managed Care health plan contracts will include new requirements. And there is finally a greater acceptance and an urgency for real progress on data sharing, business collaborations, and innovations to enable people to access needed care and services.

Long-awaited opportunities for WIC to be part of modernizations and integration with health and social services are starting to become real. In March, the Department of Health Care Services released Medi-Cal’s Strategy to Support Health and Opportunity for Children and Families, calling out the need to maximize enrollment of eligible children and their families in WIC. Data and information sharing on behalf of participants or patients is not new in WIC, health care or social services, but when these transactions shift from paper to electronic, important details come to light.

There is good news here with some meaningful efforts to figure out how to connect to WIC to make referrals, share clinical data, and coordinate care, and also how to make referrals for participants from WIC to other programs, in electronic formats.

In January 2024, when the new Medi-Cal health plan contracts are in place, there will be requirements to work with community programs to provide care that is in addition to medical care, use more community health workers, and focus on prevention. Sounds a lot like WIC, right? WIC agencies will be valuable partners in these reforms so health care systems can better address food security, lactation, birth practices, family nutrition and preventable chronic disease.

Integrated care, used by some WIC local agencies for years now, taps WIC staff to work with health care providers outside of WIC services. We can expect there to be more interest in this by health centers, but also health plans and medical groups. Even more broadly, there could be opportunities for cross training of WIC staff as community health workers, housing navigators, or in a business relationship with health plans.

To support local WIC agencies and California State WIC in being included in these historic opportunities, CWA is working on a few fronts to support all of us in understanding the changes and meeting new partners.

First, we are providing monthly meetings (the first Thursday of the month, 11am-12:30pm) for:

- updates on Medi-Cal benefits, CalAIM developments, solicitation of comments on benefits, and stakeholder meetings
- sharing among local agencies on developments in linking with electronic health records, (EHR) health and community information exchanges (HIE/CIE), and health care providers
- introducing resources and guides to assist local agencies in replicating linkages with EHRs, hospitals, HIEs/CIEs, CalFresh and other points on the continuum of care, established by other local agencies
- introducing partners, including Insuring the Uninsured Project and Connecting for Better Health

Also, CWA has been busy meeting with industry experts from health plans, EHRs, HIEs, and CIE.

Lastly, CWA is hosting Dr. Tomás Aragón, Director, CDPH and Michelle Baass, Director, DHCS, at our Annual Conference to provide a plenary discussion on “Opportunities for WIC- COVID Lessons and Health Care Reform,” plus a workshop panel of health plan representatives.

We have a lot to work on together in the next couple of years and we can do this together. Want more information? Have questions or want to be included in the meetings? Email Karen, kfarley@calwic.org.
State and Federal Policy Updates

Pregnant Workers Fairness Act

Pregnant workers in the United States often still face workplace discrimination – in all industries, across race and ethnicity, and in every state. The Pregnant Workers Fairness Act would promote healthy pregnancies and protect the economic security of pregnant people and their families by: Clarifying that employers must make reasonable accommodations for workers affected by a known limitation related to pregnancy, childbirth or related medical conditions; Requiring an interactive process between employers and pregnant workers to determine appropriate reasonable accommodations, similar to the Americans with Disabilities Act; Providing an exemption for businesses if an accommodation imposes an undue hardship on an employer; Protecting pregnant workers from retaliation, coercion, intimidation, threats or interference if they request or use an accommodation. The new law would apply to employers with 15 or more employees and provide protections for both job applicants and employees. The Pregnant Workers Fairness Act was introduced in the Senate in 2021 with bipartisan support and passed in the House of Representatives in an overwhelmingly bipartisan vote, 315-101! In August 2021, the Senate Health Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee voted the PWFA out of committee in a strong bipartisan vote and it is now ready for a vote on the Senate floor.

Child Nutrition Reauthorization

Every five years, Child Nutrition Reauthorization (CNR) provides Congress with an opportunity to improve and strengthen the child nutrition (including WIC) and school meal programs. Although the current law, the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 (Public Law 111-296), expired on September 30, 2015, the programs continue to operate. Congress has a narrow window of opportunity in 2022 to improve these programs by passing a strong – and overdue – reauthorization bill. The COVID-19 pandemic made it clear that more flexibilities would go a long way toward improving the user experience for WIC participants, and we are pleased to see some robust modernization proposals to this effect on the table for the CNR. Key reforms at stake include:

- WIC Act (H.R. 2011/S.853): Extending postpartum and child eligibility to address gaps in WIC’s nutrition support
- MODERN WIC Act (S.3226/H.R. 6781): Revising physical presence rules to enable remote services beyond the pandemic
- WIC for Kids Act (H.R. 4455): Streamlining child certifications
- WIC Healthy Beginnings Act (S. 3216): Ensuring transparency in infant formula bid solicitations

For more details on these Child Nutrition Reauthorization marker bills, check out this fact sheet from NWA: https://s3.amazonaws.com/aws.upl/nwica.org/cnr-priorities.pdf.

Paid Family Leave

After the expiration of SB 95 supplemental paid COVID-19 leave at the end of September, the California Work and Family Coalition (of which CWA is a member), was a strong advocate with lawmakers to get supplemental COVID-19 leave reinstated. Nearly one million adults in California reported that they were not working because they had coronavirus symptoms or were caring for someone who was ill at the peak of the Omicron surge, and as a result higher numbers of low-wage earners and minority workers reported food and housing insecurity. CA Legislature in early February approved a bill that requires employers with more than 25 workers to provide up to 80 hours of paid sick time for employees who test positive for COVID-19, need to quarantine after exposure, or who need to care for a sick family member or child whose school is closed due to an outbreak. The law is retroactive to Jan 1, 2022 and extends through September 30, 2022. For more details, see this fact sheet from CA Dept. of Industrial Relations: https://www.dir.ca.gov/dlse/COVID19resources/2022-COVID-19-SPSL-Poster.pdf. CWA will continue to join our friends at CA Work and Family Coalition this year in the fight for more equitable family leave policies, including working on an initiative to raise the wage replacement rate for CA paid family leave.
Meeting Our Elected Representatives Online!

Virtual is the new normal when it comes to meeting with legislators and doing advocacy work, and CWA is no exception – we and our mighty team of WIC staff have been holding virtual meetings with our state and federal elected representatives over the past two years, and over the last six months have been busier than ever. We kicked off visits with our state representatives in mid-November during our CWA Fall Conference. In addition to giving them important updates regarding goings-on at WIC and what was happening in their districts, those visits coincided with the need at the Federal level to renew the WIC fruit and vegetable increase that was first implemented in June 2021. We held dozens of meetings, and fourteen state lawmakers signed onto a letter urging their federal counterparts to include the CVB increase in December’s continuing resolution (which it was)!

In mid-February, we met with our congressional and senate offices, again holding dozens of meetings to educate staff and members on all things WIC, discuss how the fruit and vegetable increase had been so critical for WIC families, and flag opportunities for important WIC improvements that could be made during Child Nutrition Reauthorization this spring. Staff and members were very receptive and conversations around WIC issues and the CVB increase were very positive – a big thank you to all the local agency staff who participate in these meetings. As both constituents and WIC experts, your voices are invaluable, and you make the meetings as successful as they are!

If you are interested in participating in meetings with your elected representatives, get in touch! sdiaz@calwic.org

CWA Tools to Advocate for the WIC Fruit and Vegetable Bump

In June 2021 when the WIC fruit and vegetable benefit was bumped from $9-14/month up to $35 per participant per month (and in September when it was extended at $24-47 per NASEM recommendations), we knew we had to do our best to capture the difference it would make to the way that WIC families were able to shop and eat, and do our best to advocate for the bump to stay. We reached out and asked WIC staff from around the state to send us quotes and testimonials from their WIC families, and we also organized a series of WIC storytelling video sessions, where we invited WIC participants to come tell us about their WIC experiences, with special emphasis on how they felt about the fruit and vegetable benefit before and after the increase. We took the quotes and videos we’d collected and organized them into a library of graphics and a YouTube playlist to be used on social media. We’ve also used them in our meetings with state and national elected representatives to communicate just how important the fruit and vegetable benefit bump is. Currently, the increase to the WIC fruit and vegetable benefit is funded through the end of September, and we hope that the change will be made permanent by USDA through the food package review process, but we are prepared if we need to use these tools again this summer to fight for the increase to be extended once more!

WIC agencies and staff are welcome to use these resources. The YouTube playlist can be accessed here https://bit.ly/3qQQyCu, and the graphics here https://bit.ly/3uzdVkJ.
At Alameda County WIC, wellness is an integral part of our everyday functions. We strive to find creative, new, and interesting ways to support the health and wellness of our staff by cultivating a culture of health at home and in our office.

Our Wellness Board features a new topic monthly, such as how to make coffee healthier, the significance of naps, foods that help with healthy skin, and new recipes that save our employees time while continuing to remain healthy. Each month, the new topic often offers activities or recipes that incorporate a seasonal fruit or vegetable. Nutritional benefits are highlighted along with colorful food photos. Staff often bring garden-grown fruits and veggies to share, and smart snacks are encouraged daily, promoting whole grains, yogurt and cheese, and other healthy options.

In addition to dietary and nutrition improvements, activities are posted to improve focus, reduce stress, encourage mindfulness, or build physical fitness. Alternative ways to accomplish activities, like including low- and high-impact options, encourage staff at all levels to participate.

When shelter-in-place office protocols were in effect, staff created a 5-Minute Workout Board to provide physical activity breaks multiple times per day when staff could not go outside. The board features cardio, stretching, yoga and strength activities designed to be done indoors in short bursts at various levels of impact. Yoga mats, jump ropes, and stretch bands were on hand. The equipment and links to online workouts provided a variety of choices for staff to exercise at their own levels. Not to be impeded by COVID, staff were able to maintain mask and distancing requirements and choose the day, time, and type of activity to benefit from a quick workout.

In the spirit of wellness, our agency also finds various ways to support the mental health and wellbeing of our staff. In the past, summer Health and Wellness Retreats for staff were accomplished outdoors, but because of Covid wellness activities were adjusted to a video format. Chi Gong/Tai Chi, mindfulness and stress reduction training, and holiday food demonstrations were presented for our staff members. We continue to contribute to the wellness and health of our staff by providing activities they can implement in their daily lives.

Wellness Success Story: Ana

In the atmosphere of a pandemic, it is common to hear of health issues which occur from sedentary lifestyles, stress eating, and the challenges of juggling responsibilities at work and at home.

Ana, a Clerk II at our Hayward clinic, has overcome these issues by finding the motivation and time to do something for herself by optimizing her lunch break to increase physical activity.

She spends time at the gym where she utilizes elliptical equipment as well as a 30-minute circuit to provide a variety of exercises designed to train various areas of the body. She also makes time at home for physical activity, and includes her children in workouts involving simple exercises like walking, dancing, jumping jacks, and squats.

Though holidays and other priorities sometimes interfere with a consistent workout schedule, Ana pushes through and balances it out with something else, like increasing her activity on another day or modifying her food choices on the day she can’t exercise. If she cannot manage it all on a particular day, she doesn’t stress about it.

Portion control and healthier food choices combined with her increased activity helped Ana lose 25 pounds over two months. By monitoring daily what she eats, as well as being conscious of her amount of daily physical activity, Ana has maintained her weight loss as well as managed a healthier lifestyle.
WIC Works to Improve Maternal Health Outcomes.

WIC supports healthier pregnancies and births by providing nutritious foods, nutrition education, breastfeeding support, and referrals to essential maternal care resources.
The Relay Challenge: A Winning Wellness Strategy!

The most recent employee wellness challenge at TrueCare WIC, The Relay Challenge, was a huge success! We had nearly 100% staff participation during the three-month challenge last fall. None of our previous wellness challenges have engaged so many employees. We believe this happened because the staff had the freedom to choose from among a list of activities they wanted to complete. The challenges were varied in nature and scope and included options to fit all preferences and body types. (See the chart below.)

As in a relay, a ‘baton’ was passed, from one staff member to the next within their respective team, when a challenge was completed. The Wellness Champion on one of our teams, Christina, creatively changed the baton each month: a small Halloween-decorated bucket for October, a turkey/planter for November, and a music-playing snow globe for December.

Each of our three teams completed as many challenges as they could each month. At the end of the three months, the number of challenges completed was totaled and the winning team was announced during our monthly staff meeting. The staff had a lot of fun competing together as a team. Each member of the winning team received a gift card to either Target or Starbucks, a popular incentive!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OCTOBER</th>
<th>NOVEMBER</th>
<th>DECEMBER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drink 32 oz of water</td>
<td>Eat celery</td>
<td>Walk a mile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete Workout Wednesday video</td>
<td>Use the resistance band for 5 min. during the workday</td>
<td>Stand up and stretch every hour while at work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walk for 10 min. during lunch break</td>
<td>Complete Workout Wednesday video</td>
<td>Eat a piece of fruit with lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eat breakfast</td>
<td>Write a thank you note for a coworker</td>
<td>Drink water instead of soda at lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eat a salad with lunch</td>
<td>Bring lunch to work instead of getting takeout</td>
<td>Place a gratitude note on a coworker’s desk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Park your car in the furthest spot in the parking lot</td>
<td>Use the hula hoop or resistance band during break instead of being on the phone</td>
<td>Walk up and down the office hallway (or other area) several times at break/lunchtime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breathe in deeply and exhale slowly, several times, between phone appointments</td>
<td>Bring cut-up veggies to snack on at work</td>
<td>Pick a nutrition topic you want to learn more about and read about on eatright.org (or other website, choosemyplate.gov), share with team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Select a new recipe on wichealth.org (or another website - pulses?) to try</td>
<td>Drink 64 oz. of water in one day, for 2 days in a row</td>
<td>Complete Wednesday Workout or 10-minute workout on your break</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eat five colors in a day of fruit, vegetables, and/or beans combined. Potentially in an omelet or a salad.</td>
<td>Complete 1 min. of side reaches with a coworker, 2x in 1 day</td>
<td>Complete this routine for arms w/no weights [YouTube URL provided]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take pictures and share with team.</td>
<td>Walk for 20 min. during your lunch break</td>
<td>Create a new music playlist with 5 new songs; if you don’t know how, engage a coworker to learn how</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete this stretching routine: [YouTube URL provided]</td>
<td>Turn off technology before bed for 2 nights</td>
<td>Eat breakfast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tell 2 jokes to your team, even if you have to look them up. The goal is to make others laugh.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
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</table>
Since January, a group of 10 undergraduate and graduate students in San Diego State University’s Foods & Nutrition program have created the 2022 WIC Wellness Newsletter Team at American Red Cross WIC. Each person was selected for their unique talents and expertise to craft our wellness newsletter. Every month we curate timely wellness topics into five succinct sections to create our final product—the W3 Newsletter. The team provides credible and concise wellness information to inspire and empower WIC staff to thrive. Below are the faces, some details, and “words to live by” of this distinctive team.

Ashlyn Taylor grew up in tiny Fortuna, CA and is a senior. Words to live by: “No one is you, and that is your power.”

Ana Hernandez was born in Yuma, AZ, grew up in San Diego, loves traveling, making memories with friends and loved ones, and making pottery. “Always be true to you.”

Iveth Lagunas is from Los Angeles and currently an undergraduate student. Words to live by: “Failure is a feeling long before it is an actual result” from Michelle Obama’s book, Becoming.

Jillan Arizcuren is from Sacramento, graduates in May, and is currently applying to dietetic internships to eventually become a Registered Dietitian. Words to live by: “What is meant to be will be.”

Alexis Skinner grew up in San Diego and is now a senior. “Growth begins at the end of your comfort zone.”

Janelyn Neves is from San Diego, is currently a senior, loves to volunteer and can often be seen helping out her community by serving food at the United Portuguese SES Inc. and The Portuguese Market.

Janeza Bridges is from Coronado, CA, is in her final semester, has a strong passion for fitness and is always striving for growth, whether it’s in or out the gym. Words to live by: “There is no greater thing you can do with your life than follow your passions - in a way that serves the world and you.”

Samantha Camacho is from San Diego, an undergraduate student, and enjoys working at the campus food pantry, and hopes to continue serving their community after graduation.

Pedro Guzman is from Yuba City, CA, a Dual Masters student in Exercise Physiology and Nutritional Sciences, a veteran, a French bulldog dad, a traveler, and loves working out and playing sports (particularly soccer and basketball). Words to live by: “Be stronger than your strongest excuse.”

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At Lundquist WIC (previously LA BioMed WIC) we have begun a new tradition to celebrate our diversity. Executive Director Marisela Montoya suggested that staff members periodically share personal stories with their colleagues. During Black History Month, we heard from two African American staff members via Zoom. We will continue with stories of Asian American colleagues and, later, our Hispanic and Native American teammates. We kicked off our diversity series in Fall 2021 with personal stories shared by Filipino colleagues, Lourdes Braga and Vicky Solis Adeva. Here, we share them with the wider WIC family.

Lourdes (Lu) Braga was born in Mindanao on an island in the Philippines. Lu smiles as she remembers her early childhood, playing with her cousins and going to school. When she was still young, her father emigrated to the United States. Lu and the rest of the family stayed back. Seven years later, her dad petitioned the government to enable the family to come to Hawaii.

When Lu moved to Hawaii at age 14, she was frightened. “Everything was new. There were so many nationalities.” Speaking English was difficult. Eventually she became friends with other Filipino teenagers. At age 16, she started working on the weekends as a cashier for Zippy’s Restaurant. She loved school: science, math, home economics and typing. During high school she worked for four summers at the Dole cannery as a “trimmer,” trimming little bits of skin off pineapples.

After accounting school, Lu and her future husband moved to California. She was hired by LA BioMed WIC 16 years ago, and today is an administrative assistant in the Fiscal Department at Lundquist WIC. “I am grateful to be in the U.S. I don’t know what life would have been like if I had stayed in the Philippines. I’m living the American Dream.”

Vicky Solis Adeva was born in Bacoor Cavite, south of Manila. Her dad left the Philippines to do construction in Guam. Her mom worked in a cigarette factory. Vicky grew up under Martial Law. “We had curfews. I learned discipline and patience.” As a child, she owned neither shoes nor toys. “We played barefoot, with empty cans.”

Vicky studied food and nutrition in the Philippines, becoming a registered dietitian (RD). Eventually she left the Philippines for the U.S. “When I came here, my diploma and certifications were worth nothing.” She worked part time, simultaneously studying to become a dietary service supervisor. “Our Filipino culture was far different from American culture,” she said. “I had to adapt.”

Vicky, along with other Filipino RDs, had created the United Filipino American Nutritionist Dietitian Association. Their goal was that the American Dietetic Association would consider Filipino and American curricula equivalent, and they succeeded! After becoming an RD in the U.S., Vicky was hired as a dietary supervisor for skilled nursing and assisted living facilities. She left to work for Long Beach WIC as a site RD, and continued to be promoted. Vicky was hired by LA BioMed WIC in 2020. Today she is Lundquist WIC’s MIS unit coordinator.
Having received a Kaiser Permanente Community Benefits grant and a USDA Special Innovation Grant in 2021, CinnaMoms - a program within PHFE WIC - has been able to greatly expand our team, pictured below, to improve services to families. Under the direction of Dr. Toncé Jackson, CinnaMoms co-creator and Senior Health Equity Manager, as well as K’Lynn Mitchell, Project Coordinator, we’ve added three CinnaMoms Project Specialists.

Tia Welton, Brand Ambassador, conducts outreach to WIC families to inform them of CinnaMoms’ services and is instrumental in increasing participation. Reina Black, Brand Coordinator, assists with organizing our events in order to deliver quality content that is relevant to our families. Kyla Haylock, Brand Content Coordinator, plays an essential role in advertising CinnaMoms outside of the WIC agency and garnering support through social media and unconventional partners.

With this Team expansion, we have seen a rising number of attendees at CinnaMoms Support Circles offered via Zoom. Our support circles encompass more than breastfeeding and seek to support African American mothers as a whole. We address various topics including pregnancy, breastfeeding, and self-care. These biweekly circles provide a safe, culturally appropriate space to empower African American families through education, support and encouragement. We seek to have generational impact by improving the health outcomes of our prenatal moms and their unborn children. Social relationships between families who attend support circles have emerged and flourished through dialogue and sharing of similar lived experiences. So far this year, we provided a breastfeeding Q/A, highlighted different love languages and the connection to our breastfeeding experiences, and discussed milk supply.

During our first support group of the year, our Zoom room reached capacity with over 100 attendees wanting to join. We have since enlarged our Zoom capabilities and have welcomed around 120 attendees. We have received an abundance of positive feedback, with moms expressing appreciation and joy for having joined the support group. In addition to the biweekly support circles, the CinnaMoms team is looking forward to hosting our first virtual conference in June!

California Breastfeeding Coalition Conference 2022

In January 2022 K’Lynn Mitchell, CinnaMoms Project Coordinator, presented at the California Breastfeeding Coalition. She was one of four panelists presenting on improving layers of support for breastfeeding in the community health setting. She shared how CinnaMoms transitioned from in-person to virtual lactation support during the coronavirus pandemic in partnership with Kaiser Permanente. She also shared “lessons learned” on how to conduct virtual support circles effectively and how CinnaMoms increased the number of families that attend each support circle by re-evaluating recruitment strategies. This presentation helped provide guidance to our internal Breastfeeding and Nutrition Education Services Department on ways to increase participation in their virtual support groups. It further guided our sister WIC Agency, Planned Parenthood WIC, to begin implementing their first virtual support group in March 2022.

For more information about CinnaMoms, visit www.cinnamoms.org and follow us on social media (IG/FB/Twitter: CinnaMoms_) and www.phfewic.org.
San Diego County WIC Agencies’ Regional Landing Page

When COVID-19 began two years ago, the six San Diego County WIC agencies – SDSU Research Foundation WIC, Scripps Health WIC, American Red Cross WIC, TrueCare WIC, San Ysidro Health WIC and Clinicas de Salud del Pueblo WIC – banded together to create an online landing page informing participants and healthcare providers of their adjusted services.

After reassessing the purpose of this page as the pandemic continued, they created an entire regional website geared toward reaching its three main audiences: parents/guardians, healthcare providers and community organizations. It features easy-to-digest information, quick-access resources and forms to refer individuals to WIC with the click of a button.

In order to evenly distribute the caseload, both forms and the parent/guardian locator tool sort potential participants by zip code and send the referral to the agency closest to them. See all of this and more at www.sdwic.com.

Cash-Value Benefit Increase Revives Farmers Market Tradition

Before COVID, one American Red Cross WIC participant and her family would visit their neighborhood farmers’ market in San Diego each week to purchase produce. While there, the children joined a reading circle and heard a new book while eating their fresh fruits and veggies. When the pandemic began, this tradition went on hold. However, after the cash-value benefit increase affected the amount of money this family had to shop for produce, they returned to the farmers’ market to resume their long-standing tradition.

Fallyn enjoys a strawberry.

Lynne Ongficer, an RDN and IBCLC with American Red Cross WIC and her daughter Fallyn.
Hundreds of WIC families in Stockton are receiving free children’s books each month from Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library thanks to the efforts of San Joaquin county’s three WIC agencies. Community Medical Centers WIC, Delta Health Care WIC and San Joaquin County Public Health Services WIC have partnered with Read to Me, Stockton!, the local Imagination Library affiliate, to make sure all of their Stockton participants with children under five are enrolled in the free book program. WIC staff assist with program sign-ups as part of their clients’ regular WIC appointments.

Each month the Imagination Library mails free, age-appropriate books to children from birth to age five. If a family has more than one child under the age of five, they can each be signed up to receive books. Children signed up at birth will have a library of 60 free books by the time they enter kindergarten.

"Delta Health Care is proud to collaborate with Read to Me, Stockton!," says Barinderjeet Bhabra, Delta Health Care WIC Director. "It allows us to positively impact young minds and promote early literacy. Programs such as these hold an invaluable place in the community and leave an everlasting impression on young children as they begin their lifelong reading adventures."

Wendy Howard, Breastfeeding Coordinator for SJCPHS WIC, strongly agrees. “For me, reading opens so many windows and opportunities. A child who loves to read becomes an educated adult. The fact that WIC, which strives to give children the best chance to grow healthy, has partnered with Read to Me, Stockton! just makes sense. Both nutritious food and reading books stimulate brain growth and give children a great start for healthy eating habits and a love of reading that we hope will carry them into adulthood.”

Adriana Ortiz, CMC WIC Nutrition Aide, remembers one participant in particular, “She was so grateful for the free books because growing up she did not have the opportunity to go to school. Now her kids get free books every month.”

Since October 2011, Read to Me, Stockton! has mailed over 7,000 books to children in all zip codes in Stockton. It is the largest Imagination Library affiliate in California, and the nonprofit organization has no paid staff. With the help of the three WIC agencies, Read to Me, Stockton! reached a major milestone in April: 25,000 Stockton children have received free books! WIC agencies have played a key role in this fruitful partnership.

For more information about Imagination Library, visit imaginationlibrary.com (website available in English and Spanish). Contact information for other California Imagination Library affiliates may be found at: https://imaginationlibrary.com/usa/find-my-program/ or you can check for eligibility by zip code at: https://imaginationlibrary.com/check-availability/.

About Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library

Since launching in 1995, Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library has become the preeminent early childhood book gifting program in the world. The flagship program of The Dollywood Foundation, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, has gifted over 160 million free books in the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, Australia, and The Republic of Ireland. The Imagination Library mails more than 1.8 million high-quality, age-appropriate books each month to registered children from birth to age five. Dolly envisioned creating a lifelong love of reading, inspiring them to dream. The impact of the program has been widely researched and results suggest positive increases in key early childhood literacy metrics.
Getting Children Moving in Santa Barbara County

As we know, during the pandemic there has been an increase in childhood obesity. In response, Santa Barbara County WIC created the Kids and Teens Resource Guide for Physical Activity. This bilingual resource includes online videos and a webpage dedicated to the General Nutrition Class on Physical Activity. Since the development of this resource, our local pediatricians have jumped on board to use it with their patients as well.

WIC created flyers with QR codes for the waiting rooms, the Public Health Department created an opt-in text message to send the information out to those in our community, and some of the Electronic Medical Record systems turned it into an after-visit summary handout.

One outcome of moving to virtual resources is their ability to be utilized by all! Pediatricians are looking to WIC for added value for their patients and more families are being directed to our WIC Website. It’s been a win-win!

To date, the English video has 465 views, Spanish 1088 views, and Mixteco 142 views - and these numbers are climbing every day! We are proud of our WIC staff for seeing the need to move ahead virtually in our resources and making something that benefits WIC and all our community members.

To view our Physical Activity Resources, visit https://www.countyofsb.org/3259/Physical-Activity.

Ad Campaign Boosts Enrollment

The Santa Clara County Public Health Department WIC team was busy with enrollment in January and February due to a successful advertising campaign. As WIC staff know and see every day, the pandemic has added to the stress that families experience. The ad campaign invited eligible pregnant people, new parents, and families to visit our website and call the State of California phone number to enroll in WIC and access healthy foods. Outreach was especially important during the surge in COVID-19 cases and community transmission experienced across the state, when families were less connected to services, or were required to isolate or quarantine out of work and school, sometimes without adequate support and resources to maintain nutrition for all family members.

The approved ads were carefully tailored to reach people most likely to be eligible for WIC, delivered online to parents and pregnant people matching certain income, education, and geographic characteristics. The ads ran for three weeks in Spanish and English, and included 600 radio spots, digital ads on seven media outlets, printed newspaper ads, and social media ads.

During the campaign, Santa Clara County’s WIC web page analytics showed an impressive increase of 3,000 unique visitors compared to the same time last year. Not surprisingly, our WIC program staff also noticed they were busier than usual with texts and inquiries. There was a 23 percent increase in total Certifications and P-Certifications together during the weeks of the campaign, compared to an equivalent period before the campaign, and that boost persisted a few weeks after the end of the ad campaign as new enrollees navigated through the certification process. Net program participation jumped for the campaign period, compared to the smaller increases experienced during non-campaign periods.

We were very pleased with the outcome of the campaign, which underscores the value of paid advertising to connect eligible people to WIC, and would be happy to share more lessons learned with programs planning similar work.
In past issues of the WIC Watch, we’ve reported on the challenges of providing WIC services during natural disasters. In California, we might first think of wildfires. But in late December 2021, Nevada County saw a winter storm that resulted in a state of emergency, impacting many local WIC staff and families. Over 300 trees and power poles fell on homes, cars, and across roads. Many WIC families ended up in warming shelters, staying with family elsewhere, or improvising with available resources.

Some families and WIC staff stayed in motels when their homes were damaged, while others who elected to stay in their homes borrowed generators or obtained wood for wood stoves. There were designated locations for free firewood for families critically low on wood, including Nevada County WIC director Debra Wilson. Without power for wells, some families had to seek free bottled water or buy their water. Lack of propane, shortage of propane trucks, and a shortage of drivers was also an issue. Libraries and many churches with power opened their doors to allow families to charge their phones and stay warm during the day.

Many in Nevada County were without power for weeks, and cell service was critically impacted county-wide due to damaged and de-energized cell towers and the overall lack of power. Due to this communication issue, it was difficult if not impossible to deliver WIC services for a time, or even to communicate the degree to which WIC services had been impacted. However, WIC staff resumed services as soon as they were able, even before some resource centers or medical facilities were able to reopen. “We are so grateful for the ability to provide remote WIC services during these difficult times,” noted the Nevada County team.
Data Shows Benefits of Providing Diapers to Families in Bay Area

While one in three families nationwide experiences diaper need, there has been a lack of scholarship on the issue and its impacts on children and families. To help advance system and policy changes that address structural inequities and support the conditions needed for families and children to thrive, First 5 Alameda County invested in an evaluation that could build upon the body of evidence in support of families’ essential needs. The evaluation was performed in partnership with Help A Mother Out (HAMO) and Public Profit, and the partners recently released the final Alameda County report and a joint report for Alameda and San Francisco counties.

The data clearly demonstrates that diapers as a form of economic support reduce the stress that families are under to make ends meet, help improve parent-child relationships, and promote overall health and well-being. Some of the key findings include:

- 98% say their family feels less stressed
- 97% say their child is healthier
- 95% have more money in the budget for food
- 94% say it’s easier to pay their bills

In alignment with WIC’s diaper distribution efforts, First 5 intends for the reports to inform and accelerate advocacy for long-term, effective policy change that addresses equity and families’ basic needs. To learn more, read their 2022 Policy Agenda.

Molina Healthcare of California is proud to support the California WIC Association and conference attendees.

No matter how the world may change, one thing remains the same: At Molina Healthcare, our highest priority is good health. Thank you for all you do to help Californians get the quality care they deserve.
Celebrating National Nutrition Month

Antelope Valley WIC has a diverse staff of RDs and DNs who chose to celebrate National Nutrition Month 2022 by introducing our staff to foods and spices that may have been foreign or new to them. The countries of El Salvador, Fiji, Germany, Nigeria, and Pakistan were represented.

To introduce us to the cuisine of El Salvador, Melissa used the unusual spices of achiote and annatto to season her “pastelitos” - chicken and veggie filled half-moons of flaky pastry. Her meal was accompanied by an “ensalada” beverage made with oranges, apples, pineapples, mangoes, lettuce, water, and a bit of sugar.

Ashna prepared a Fiji style butter chicken with a green salad and whole wheat tortillas. The spices used included a mixture of cumin, turmeric, curry powder, paprika, cayenne, chili powder, salt and pepper. Yogurt was added, giving this dish a creamy feel. Delicious and fragrant!

A traditional German meal, which included homemade “spaetzle” (noodles), red cabbage, applesauce, pork and chicken “schnitzel,” was prepared by Ardy’s. Cinnamon, cloves, caraway and mustard were highlighted. This meal was topped off with a gooey butter cake.

Vivian shared some local herbs used in traditional Nige-

rian holistic medicine. “Uziza” and “Uda” both are believed to help prevent heavy bleeding after delivery. “Onugbu” is said to help lower blood pressure and stabilize blood sugar.

Nuzhat treated us to food from Pakistan. She used cumin, black seed and turmeric to season tofu, eggplant and basmati rice. Yum! A special thank you goes to all who participated and to our test tasters!

Learning about public policy and advocacy is a key part of the WIC Dietetic Internship at Clinica Sierra Vista. March 2022 was officially declared National Nutrition Month in Kern County, thanks to Claudia Aguilar, our current Dietetic Intern. Claudia requested and did the advocacy work needed to get the proclamation approved. First District Kern County Supervisor, Phillip Peters, introduced the proclamation to the community and Board of Supervisors.

Claudia Aguilar and Supervisor Phillip Peters.
We are heartbroken to report the passing of Amy Avelar on April 5th. Amy worked for the Ventura County WIC Program for close to 18 years, and was a beloved and respected friend and colleague. She was an integral part of the program, taking on numerous roles over the years, including Public Health Nutritionist, WIC Staff Trainer, Breastfeeding & Nutrition Education Coordinator, Regional Breastfeeding Liaison, International Board Certified Lactation Consultant, Public Health Manager, and supervisor to many.

Amy was truly special in many ways: a hard worker, always full of energy, as productive as two people on any given day, and always ready to help or step-in before being asked. She was a problem-solver; always practical, straightforward and never a complainer. She was generous and fun to be around. For those of us that worked with her, she was a source of strength and a role-model. Amy was first diagnosed with ovarian cancer in 2017, at the age of 42, and was more recently battling complications brought on by a recurrence. To say she was a fighter is a grand understatement of her courage and poise. We will remember Amy as the vivacious, energetic, strong and beautiful woman she was. She is survived by her husband and three children.

Amy shared her desire to bring awareness to ovarian cancer and its early symptoms. Please visit the link here to learn more. https://www.cancer.org/cancer/ovarian-cancer/detection-diagnosis-staging/signs-and-symptoms.html

In honor of Amy’s love of the outdoors her family plans to establish a memorial bench in Ventura near a local hiking trail where people can sit and look at the Pacific Ocean and Channel Islands views. Memorial donations may be made to The Ventura Botanical Gardens, P.O. Box 3127, Ventura, California, 93006. Please be sure to include a note stating that it is a gift in memory of Amy Avelar.
Inspiring WIC Participants with My Personal Story

Noelia Serrano, Breastfeeding Peer Counselor with the County of San Luis Obispo WIC team since 2012, not only supports the WIC families she sees at work, but - like many WIC staff - shares her personal experience to help inspire and encourage parents when breastfeeding is challenging. Here is her story.

“I must say working at WIC as a Peer Counselor helped me to guide and support my daughter, Brandi, breastfeed when my grandson Greyson was born four weeks premature, weighing just 4 lbs 9 oz.

“As I was patiently waiting for my grandson to be born, I remember thinking about breastfeeding and how this will work when Brandi’s body is stressed because of all that she had gone through in the delivery. Would she have enough milk for the baby?

“As soon as Greyson was born, I encouraged Brandi when she was ready to ask for a pump and start pumping. Even though she didn’t see any milk, I kept reminding her, ‘it’s a little delayed, but for sure if you continue pumping, you will increase your supply.’ Inside, I was praying that I was right!”

Brandi and Greyson enjoy the bond nurtured by breastfeeding.

Noelia holds healthy, breastfed Greyson.

A story-sharing bulletin board is designed to motivate breastfeeding WIC parents.

Brandi donated the rest of her pumped milk to the Milk Bank for other NICU babies.
San Diego WIC and Community Partners Celebrate Black Breastfeeding Week

The six San Diego County WIC agencies – SDSU Research Foundation WIC, Scripps Health WIC, American Red Cross WIC, TrueCare WIC, San Ysidro Health WIC and Clinicas de Salud del Pueblo WIC – collaborated with Black Infant Health and Healthy Start San Diego to hold the 7th annual San Diego Black Breastfeeding Week Event in August 2021. The drive-thru swag bag pick-up was open to the public and attended by more than 80 families.

The event’s goal was to celebrate and support Black prenatal and breastfeeding families, bring awareness to the disparities in breastfeeding rates among Black women, and to provide practical and educational items. One of the most important aspects of this event was to show Black families that there is a community of support available and they are not alone in navigating parenting and breastfeeding.

Families had a chance to connect with representatives from WIC, Black Infant Health, and Healthy Start San Diego as they drove through and were offered the swag bags. Bags included nursing covers, breastmilk cooler bags, diapers, and other baby care/maternal care items. As Latrice Reid, WIC Breastfeeding Peer Counselor, noted: “It’s amazing to see other women of color represented here and knowing that they can get the support they need.”

A repeat drive-thru event is being planned for August 2022. To learn more about national Black Breastfeeding Week visit https://blackbreastfeedingweek.org. For more information about holding your own BBW community event, please contact jennifer.nolan@redcross.org.

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The Indigenous Breastfeeding Counselor (IBC) training was a five-day, 45-hour foundational breastfeeding course for those who identify as Indigenous/First Nations/Native. The goal of the training was for IBC’s to learn the clinical skills to begin serving lactating families in our community.

The training, offered in February 2022, was open to United Indian Health Services WIC clients and staff. Thirteen completed the week-long course, including six WIC staff, a doula, a doctor, four community health representatives, and one WIC client. More clients could not attend because only babies in arms were allowed due to COVID safety protocols.

Everyone who attended left the training with so much wisdom, plus new connections with the others who attended. It was amazing! We shared our stories of resilience as native women from our grandparents’ and parents’ experiences as well as our own experiences breastfeeding.

We infused culture into the training in several ways, from a traditionally-smoked salmon lunch one day to creating beaded breast pins filled with traditional medicines: sage, sweetgrass, cedar and tobacco. We prayed, kept good thoughts, and listened to the training while creating these beautiful pins to carry our medicines. They make excellent teaching tools and conversation starters when we talk with parents about the breast and nipple.

Below are some pearls of knowledge we learned from Camie and Kim, all important in providing culturally-relevant care to American Indians:

- Traditional native parenting values:
  - Children have wisdom and we don’t own them.
  - Children are placed at the center of the nation and they are our sacred responsibility.
- Lack of support is the number one reason so few native women breastfeed.
- Many cultural changes occurred that “eliminated breastfeeding as a traditional practice.”
- Historical trauma - the cumulative emotional and psychological wounding over the lifespan and across generations.
- Removal of our language, religion, culture, food, land and removal from our mothers during the boarding school era.
- Effects of historical trauma include high rates of depression, PTSD, high mortality rates, high rates of alcohol abuse, child abuse and domestic abuse, and vitality in one’s own life seen as betrayal to ancestors who suffered so much.
- Rebuilding our nations from historical trauma must include reclaiming the tradition of breastfeeding as the foundation of food sovereignty and our health.
- Build up the breastfeeding team!
- Say to mom, “You have the perfect breasts for breastfeeding... Look how much your baby loves you... He thinks you are the most beautiful person in the world!”
- Say to the team, “You all have a really great team... I’m so happy she has you, Grandma - your support means so much... You make a really beautiful family.”
- Build up mom in the eyes of the team, saying, “Wow, look at all the milk she made, Grandma!... Dad, come over here! See your baby’s jaw drop? Each time he does that he is getting a big gulp of milk. They are doing a really good job.”

This quote, shared by Annie Kahn of Round Rock, captures the essence of why we need to breastfeed our babies:

“When a mother nurses her baby, she is giving that child her name, her story and her life’s song. A nursed baby will grow to be strong in body, mind and spirit.”
Connecting with Community:
Drive-Thru Events & Social Media Challenges

Here at Fresno EOC WIC we have learned so much over the past couple of years; the pandemic changed not only the way we live, but also the way we serve our clients. Fortunately we, like all WIC agencies, did not shut down but found opportunities to provide our services through other methods! Once we got the hang of remote services, it was time to challenge ourselves and find other ways to connect with our community.

We had already adjusted to hosting our monthly baby shower events and breastfeeding meetups virtually instead of in person. We even managed to host our first ever drive thru event for World Breastfeeding Month last year. This paved the way for how we would host future drive thru events such as diaper distribution and Toys for Tots.

The next step was to engage with our social media audience to expand our reach beyond current WIC clients. We started to set up online challenges and games for our followers, asking them to complete a unique type of task every time, providing a sense of fun and surprise. One example was our scavenger hunt themed challenge featuring a list of questions that required challengers to click all around our website to find the answers.

When it came to Father’s Day, we set up a game called “What’s in our WIC Dad’s Wallet?” Contestants had to guess which items would be found in our fictional WIC dad’s wallet. This led to all sorts of creative ideas and the person closest to guessing them all would win. We even took advantage of the Stories function on Facebook and Instagram, posting trivia questions on certain topics. That allowed us to see who had answered the questions, and we could even share the results.

We definitely urge other programs and agencies to use social media for games and challenges. It’s not just fun for the audience but our staff had an amazing time seeing everyone engage and play along with us.
What is going on!?!” asked all three of the experienced WIC staff who discovered a completely packed parking lot as they arrived for work one Saturday last December. “There was a line of people from the door across the parking lot!” said Edith Tellez, WNA. “I was in shock because I didn’t expect so many people. Most of them were elderly, too - people WIC doesn’t serve,” said Jessica Cardenas, WNA.

What was going on was a COVID Home Test kit give-away during a surge in COVID cases in the middle of the holiday season. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) supported researchers at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Duke University in Durham, North Carolina, to see if the availability of free at-home COVID tests reduced viral spread. United Way administered the program in Merced County, the only county west of the Mississippi River to take part in the study.

Merced County Community Action Agency WIC received 2,700 at-home COVID test kits to distribute free to WIC participants through December 20. Each family who came to their appointment received a test kit (each containing two tests) per family member, up to five kits per family. Saturday, December 18 was set as a day to distribute kits to the community. United Way advertised the event on radio and TV.

Since the agency had staff working to give away test kits, WIC appointments were also scheduled for the two WNAs. Staff expected WIC participants, not the whole community, to come into the office that Saturday. “I didn’t know it was advertised on TV,” said Josie Orozco, Call Center Clerk. Test kits were given away by two staff members for two solid hours while the third staff member did WIC appointments.

Josie continued, “We first gave away all the test kits that were in reception. I then ran and grabbed all the test kits from the WNA desks and gave those away. Then I pulled the extra cases out of storage in the basement. When those were gone, I called the assistant site supervisor at our Atwater office, Gracie Segovia, and asked her how many she had at her site. She was off that day but she drove to her office, loaded up eight cases of test kits [45 kits per case] and brought them to us.”

At the end of the day, the agency gave away over 500 free at-home COVID test kits to members of the community! All WIC staff were also provided with free test kits. Many reported using them prior to going to a family holiday party.

These collaborative endeavors are integral to the resource referral component of WIC services. WIC provides much more than supplemental foods. The study has distributed all of the tests but for more information, please go to https://youandmecovidfree.org/
Reach Your Dietetics Career Goals with WIC

Do you have a bachelor’s degree in Nutrition? Are you interested in becoming a Registered Dietitian (RD) but a little confused about the new graduate degree requirement and wondering if you can still become one? Maybe you’ve also heard that California WIC has internships for WIC employees but aren’t sure if they will still be available. Here is more information for you!

The new graduate degree requirement begins January 1, 2024. If you complete an internship after December 31, 2023, you will need to have at least a master’s degree to sit for the RD exam. The good news is California WIC will continue to offer internships to employees who would like to get their master’s degree or already have a master’s degree. Each CA WIC Internship has different entrance requirements and meets the needs of different CA WIC employees. Please visit the CDPH/WIC Dietetic Internships website (ca.gov) for more information on all the WIC Dietetic Internships.

If you do not work for a local agency that offers a dietetic internship or are unable to relocate to complete the internship, the San Diego Regional WIC Internship may be right for you!

The internship program is 14 months with 12 months of part-time supervised practice, followed by a 2-month RD study program. With the approval of your agency director, you will complete supervised practice hours for the internship in the area where you live and continue to work part-time at WIC. WIC employees may qualify for free tuition or tuition assistance. For graduating classes starting 2024, completion of a master’s degree is required. If you need assistance finding an online master’s program, help is available.

You will also participate in an online RD study program to prepare for the RD exam. The program includes live online classes on testing skills and focus areas such as food service administration and clinical dietetics. You will receive access to the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics’ (AND) eatrightPREP online program which includes study materials and practice exams to assess readiness to pass the exam.

For more information, contact Brenda Reynosa at breynosa@sdsuwic.org or visit our website at Dietetic Internship – SDSU Research Foundation WIC Program (sdsuwic.org).

“My experience with WIC thus far has been equal parts challenging and rewarding and, above all, has validated the reasons I decided to pursue a career as a community dietitian. Completing the San Diego WIC dietetic internship [gives] me the chance to combine my love of personal connection with nutrition... I am impressed by WIC’s devotion to the success of their interns by providing guidance while also helping to foster independence.”

- Megan Borrell
Lourdes Buendia is a Registered Dietitian at the Watts Health Care Corporation (WHCC) WIC program. Here, she shares her story of working in WIC for many years.

"I feel like I belong in WIC and am lucky to practice my profession in this program which aims to raise children, regardless of their heritage and race, to be productive and healthy adults by educating their mothers on nutrition and health, from conception through their formative age.

"Using evidence-based theories, I counsel pregnant women and mothers with their infants and children. I managed and raised my sons - breastfeeding them while working - and they are now successful in their careers. I feel the pain of mothers whose children need lifelong care, as I have a grandson who has autism.

"I was born and educated in Manila, Philippines. I received my Bachelor of Science degree in Home Economics, majoring in Foods and Nutrition, at the College of Holy Spirit. I completed my dietetic internship at the Veterans’ Memorial Hospital. I also passed the board to be a Registered Dietitian, and was the food service director in the only psychiatric hospital in the Philippines.

"I thought of coming to the United States when my son finished high school, [and eventually did so] in the spring of 1984, while they were in college. I was a food supervisor at Harbor UCLA Hospital while working to become an RDN in the U.S. After passing the RD exam in 1997, I was hired by WHCC as WIC clinic supervisor at the Hoover Site. I later became a Certified Lactation Educator (CLE). Around 2008, I asked to be a High Risk RD, where I assess a participant’s nutritional needs and provide nutritional solutions based on those needs.

"In the last 10 years, I have worked three days a week. It was only lately that I realized I am way past (like 20 years past) retirement age! Those 20 years have gone by very quickly. The WIC site where I work is my second home. The staff I work with has been my family - we work together, laugh together and share stories. My supervisors praise me for the work I do and correct me for mistakes I make. We are a good team!

"My parent company (WHCC) takes care of me by providing me with excellent health insurance and almost everything I need to perform my job; they ensure I enjoy holiday seasons, too. I will surely miss all of these when I go. I would equally miss the kindness of State WIC staff when they come to our site, as well as the CWA conferences. I will miss seeing that ball of sunshine which greets me in the morning when I drive to work and, coming home in the evening, that burning sunset right on my face. I’m getting emotional now, but I have to go, continue to live healthily and maybe travel. Bye for now... but I know I’ll see all of you again!"

I will miss seeing that ball of sunshine which greets me in the morning when I drive to work and, coming home in the evening, that burning sunset right on my face.
New WIC Directors

Mei-Jyh Wang, MS, RD, IBCLC, is the new Program Director for City of Long Beach WIC. She says her roadmap to becoming a Registered Dietitian started when she was in high school. Fresh from her Dietetic Internship in 1996, Mei-Jyh worked as a High-Risk Dietitian at City of Long Beach WIC. Since then she has expanded her public health nutrition knowledge and skills through opportunities provided under former WIC Director Judy Ogunji.

Mei-Jyh learned supervisory skills as a site supervisor, eventually leading to other roles on the administrative team. She strengthened her decision-making, management, and collaborative skills while coordinating the Farmers’ Market Nutrition and Breastfeeding Programs, training new employees, and supervising Dietetic Interns before serving as Operations Coordinator.

About her new role, Mei-Jyh says, “I am excited to embark on this new role as the WIC Program Director with an amazing team of women and men who serve our WIC families! I am humbled to work alongside a self-directed, innovative, passionate, customer-service focused, loving, committed, generous, compassionate, and motivated team that Judy nurtured during her tenure.”

To those starting their career in Public Health Nutrition, Mei-Jyh advises, “Focus on the job of educating our impressionable families and know that there will be opportunities to expand your knowledge in breastfeeding, nutrition education, and leadership. It is rewarding to connect with families whose lives you touch during the individual and group interactions. It has filled my emotional cup and may fill yours as well!”

Whitney Ainslie, MS, RDN, is the new Manager/Director at West Oakland Health Center WIC. An RDN since 2020, Whitney completed undergraduate studies at UC Davis and a combined Masters degree/Supervised Practice at Fontbonne University in St. Louis, Missouri. Her earliest experience with WIC was during her Dietetic Internship, and her first job as a RDN was as Nutrition Education Coordinator with San Benito Health Foundation WIC.

Why has she stayed with WIC? Whitney shares, “I enjoy working with WIC because with WIC we are counteracting disparities, serving and learning from diverse populations, empowering moms, and helping babies in their crucial first few months/years of development.”

About her career journey so far, Whitney says, “I’ve been interested in working with the perinatal population since interning with a perinatal dietitian in 2016. That internship was with a majority Spanish-speaking population. This inspired me to brush up on the six years of Spanish I took in high school [to become] bilingual in Spanish (proficient). Now, I am especially fluent in the Guided Script Jelly Beans and Questionnaires on WIC-WISE.”
Retirements

Vanny Seng

After 30 years working with Alameda County WIC, Vanny decided to retire in March 2022. She started her WIC journey as a Specialist Clerk in 1992, became a Nutrition Assistant I, then was promoted to Nutrition Assistant II in 2000. Vanny had to travel from site to site within Alameda County when she first started and always thought it was fun and helped her grow to work with different coworkers. She recalls when, over 20 years ago, WIC benefits were checks that she needed to slide through a card slider, how her hands would be tired but worth it to help clients get the foods they need.

Vanny’s friendly and caring personality has made her a popular Nutrition Assistant with clients, who ask, “Can I see Vanny for my appointment?” Her special rapport with clients developed from being genuine and often sharing her own experiences; we have seen her laugh and also weep with them.

Over the years, Vanny became an all-knowing WIC employee whom you could ask anything: technical WIC MIS or WIC WISE questions, how to order State supplies or where to find envelopes. Vanny was our go-to person around the office, and would always lend a helping hand with a smile.

Vanny’s many passions include exercising, crocheting and cooking. Everyone in the Alameda County WIC Program has been spoiled by her famous Cambodian salad of shredded purple and green cabbage, green and red bell peppers, carrots, cilantro, chicken breasts or shrimp with a light fish sauce with lime juice. She is definitely walking the talk when it comes to cooking. If you attended the 2002 CWA Conference, you might have tasted her Cambodian salad at her food demo!

While we are sad to see her leave our WIC family, we are happy that she gets to spend her next chapter in life with her beloved family and baby grandson. Thank you, Vanny, for your 30 years of dedication to Alameda County WIC. There is still a lot we can learn from you and we may need to call on your wisdom and guidance in the future!

Linda McClure

Linda McClure retired in 2020 after serving 20 years as the Director of the County of San Luis Obispo WIC Program. Combined with a number of years working for Tulare County WIC, Linda enjoyed a long WIC career.

Linda is remembered by her staff for so many things, but more than anything they knew she wanted the absolute best for all WIC families. Her dedication to the WIC Program is to be commended and celebrated. Thank you, Linda!

Linda enjoys many activities - including walking, swimming, and reading - that hopefully retirement is allowing her more time for. She also recently completed the Master Home Food Preserver certification program, so perhaps she’s cookin’ up something good right this minute!

Linda (upper left) and her staff excitedly anticipated going live with WIC WISE in 2020.

Happy Retirement!
Suzanne Haydu

Suzanne Haydu retired from the Maternal, Child and Adolescent Health (MCAH) Division of the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) after a long and varied career in multiple programs. Before working at the State level, Suzanne served in the Peace Corps (Malawi), was involved in midwifery, and served three California WIC agencies: Native American Health Centers in San Francisco (Director), MaxiCare (Director), and Contra Costa WIC.

She is a Registered Dietitian and holds two Masters in Public Health (Nutrition and Health Education). Statewide, Suzanne led the Sweet Success initiative to prevent and manage diabetes in pregnancy. She also was a leader in lactation accommodation, physical activity, and other key MCAH issues. Suzanne says about her career choice, “I was always interested in upstream health approaches; nutrition and breastfeeding are early health choices that will affect one’s life and the following generations.”

Suzanne is nationally recognized for her work in maternal and child nutrition with special emphasis in breastfeeding promotion and early prevention of obesity. When asked for her “sage advice,” Suzanne replied, “Do the work you love to do. Consider what training will earn you the most respect for the work you want to do. I have always spoken passionately about my work, so it was a healthy decision to remain doing what I enjoyed [rather than becoming a nurse and probably earning a higher salary]. If you aren’t speaking passionately about your work, consider a change.”

Some of you may know of Suzanne’s other passion: painting! She earned an art degree from CSU Humboldt, started out in photography, painted with oils, and now paints bold abstract designs using multiple techniques. See what she’s doing in retirement here: http://suzannehaydu.com.

Thank you, Suzanne, for your passionate commitment to promoting health for parents and children everywhere!

Judy A Ogunji, MS RD

Judy Ogunji’s aspiration growing up was to become a healer and servant by working in a profession that motivates, inspires and assists people to become the BEST that they can. In her chosen career with City of Long Beach WIC, Judy was blessed to have fulfilled her deep passion.

Judy started with the City of Long Beach Department of Health and Human Services WIC Program in 1984 as a Nutrition Consultant. She was promoted to Public Health Nutritionist in 1986, appointed WIC Program Director in 1993, and became the Nutrition Services Officer in 1997.

With her innovation and wisdom, Judy knew early on that rendering exceptional customer service was paramount when interacting with WIC participants. Spearheading this area, she created an internal customer team which flourished into a Coordinator position - someone who would address poor customer service delivery and tackle unacceptable participant behavior when receiving services from her WIC staff.

Judy was always giving. She created our annual Thanksgiving tradition of donating a small amount of money to purchase gift cards to local grocery stores, so that nominated and selected WIC families can gather with their loved ones for a Thanksgiving feast.

Her 37 years at WIC represent an extraordinary period of service by a dedicated and fiercely loyal employee and leader to the WIC program team members. During her tenure, Judy developed, groomed and mentored so many employees who became loyal to her and in return, they’ve worked harder to serve because of her leadership.

As she closes this chapter and opens another one as a retiree, she shared that “my service with the WIC Program has enriched and fulfilled my life by working with such beautiful people over the many years. The Mission and Vision of the Nutrition Services Division has gradually actualized over the years as it continues to grow and develop. We actively work at maintaining a high morale among all team members by creating a family atmosphere filled with enjoyment.”
The WIC family grows stronger with the diverse communities we serve.

WIC is committed to inclusive and culturally competent service delivery for all communities across California.
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Share the link with colleagues, family & friends!

Enjoy the Conference!

“Love the WIC office, it’s always filled with helpful staff. Every time I call someone answers right away and answers all my questions...helps me provide for my child with no judgement...overall the best place.”

- Josephine, Butte County WIC Mom