Three years ago, we would not have thought we would find ourselves in this moment in time straddling the end of a pandemic, recovery and discovery of what new norms will be established. It is mind boggling to reflect on all that has taken place. Related to WIC, in March 2020, California was just completing the final stage of rollout of the WIC WISE MIS system, WIC EBT card and WIC app. That is a lot of technologies for a large program to adopt, but the pandemic pushed forward other necessities including video conferencing, texting and emails. With these changes other adaptations are underway, including management of remote services and hybrid staff.

In the last few months, signs have pointed to other potential opportunities to move more quickly, with USDA support, for program modernizations and upgrades that could turn around longstanding sagging participation. Workforce challenges will need to be addressed in order to capitalize on improvements. Despite losses and fatigue, California WIC state and local agency staff maintain their exceptional commitment and drive. They have been unflagging through not only a pandemic but an infant formula crisis. WIC partners, now many more with new technologies, grocers and community partners all contribute to WIC’s success serving family’s needs.

As we turn to spring, we hope signs of rejuvenation will overshadow the losses and fatigue. Here at CWA, we will take every opportunity to express our appreciation and support for healing and good outcomes.

A welcomed spring activity in California is our conference and trade show. We are proud to offer another outstanding curriculum, time to meet with partners, nourishing wellness activities and friendly competition and silliness. We hope you relax with this edition of the WIC Watch. There is a lot to enjoy and, as always, lots of impressive stories.

With gratitude,
Karen, Jodi, Lena, Sarah, and Vanessa
Can you believe this is our 31st Annual Conference? We are incredibly excited and proud to share it with all of you. This year’s theme, Embracing Opportunity and Health for Children and Families, touches on many aspects of who we are. Even when faced with many challenges, we embrace the opportunity to find new ways to serve our participants, and value the health and well-being of our staff and the families we serve over everything. The people who make WIC work are continually striving to find a work/life balance for their staff while helping WIC families to thrive.

This will be our fourth virtual conference. Our staff and many attendees miss seeing one another in person. We hear you and we understand. None of us here at CWA could have predicted this new virtual conference platform as a viable option for the foreseeable future, but we can’t deny the positive feedback on increased access to educational and networking opportunities for ALL levels of WIC staff. This conference also provides a learning environment for students and allied health professionals who come together as collaborators, teachers, and learners with WIC to make a better program for Californians. 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!), every year brings something a little different and pulls in subject matter experts from many different fields.

This year’s line-up of speakers will set a high bar once again. Our plenary and concurrent sessions will offer 25+ continuing education units for RDs, IBCLCs, and RNs, over four convenient half-days. Since there are two simultaneous learning tracks for certain portions of the conference, all attendees will have until June 15, 2023 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 22 sessions, remember you can come back and watch any sessions you missed when it works for your busy schedule!

Below are just a few conference highlights. And remember to join us for Mindful Mornings, our wellness sessions that will start Tuesday - Thursday with yoga, barre, and some quick healthy eating tips and tricks. In between sessions, remember to visit our Virtual Tradeshow and take part in our daily contests, post your upcoming events in the live feed, and stay active in chat. We love to see everyone’s questions and interactions.

PLENARY SESSIONS: We are excited to hear from Dr. Jane Heinig, Executive Director of the UC Davis Human Lactation Center, and Director of the Master’s Degree Program in Maternal and Child Nutrition at UC Davis. Dr. Heinig is a Board Certified Lactation Consultant, and a true pioneer and leader in the areas of public health nutrition, maternal and child nutrition, and infant behavior.

Next, we will be doing something a bit different this year. Make sure you dive into your welcome boxes, arriving at your agencies, and pull out those juggling balls as we welcome speaker Greg Ben-nick. Greg is an award-winning speaker who asks his audience to reinvest in their reasons for doing what they do, and invites them to start building the future they want using a combination of ideas and laughter to inspire and promote growth. Get ready to laugh and maybe learn a new skill in Greg’s session Build a Better Now: Life’s Big Juggling Act.

Journalist and author Richard Louv will remind us how time in nature can help the health of parents and young children, and share the growing body of scientific research on the value and application of nature in the field of physical and mental health as prevention and therapy. Richard is the author of ten books, including Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder; The Nature Principle; Vitamin N, and Our Wild Call-ing. We are really looking forward to Richard’s session as it is a needed reminder to put our devices down and get outside or unplug and spend time with the people we love.
WORKSHOPS: This year’s learning track titles may look familiar, but with the help of your detailed evaluations and the planning committee’s representation of staff requests out in the field, we are better able focus each 60- to 90-minute session on topics relevant to current challenges and needs.

We have a well-built selection of Leadership, Early Childhood Development/Perinatal Health and Nutrition, Health and Birthing Equity, and Human Lactation topics to choose from.

We welcome Anna King, LCSW, PMH-C, from Maternal Mental Health Now, to lead us in a session on Holding Space: How To Have Tender Conversations With Perinatal Clients. The topic of how to have vulnerable conversations with participants around pregnancy or infant loss, challenges with lactation, postpartum depression, or other situations in which the caregiver and infant are separated or are experiencing distress has come up in both evaluations and in planning committee meetings. You talked and we listened.

On Wednesday, we will hear from Cassie Christopher, MS, RD, CD, about Evidence-Based & Compassionate Management of Adult & Pediatric Obesity. Attendees can choose to Fill the food allergy knowledge gap: and Support families with up-to-date nutrition education with Susan Krahn, MS, RDN, CD, CLC. Or a long-awaited and much-requested update on Gestational Diabetes: What do inquiring minds want to know? with Dr. Lauren Hanley, MD, FACOG, IBCLC.

On Thursday, we will hear from Wyonda Cotton-Curtis, MPH and Detrich Galloway, on their important research around Doulas’ Perspectives about Providing Support to Black Birthing Families During COVID-19. CDPH/WIC speakers Jakeem Lewis, PhD, and Adrian Young, PhD, will share about Data and Equity - Breastfeeding and Benefit Utilization by Race/ Ethnicity. Brushing Up on Inequities in Children’s Oral Care with Dr. Humairah Shah, DDS and Edwin Rivera, MBA, will be a welcome session on a topic that many participants are concerned about.

Friday will close us out with sessions centered on human lactation. We will hear from two wonderful speakers Camie Jae Goldhammer, MSW, LICSW, IBCLC, and Kimberly Moore-Salas, IBCLC, on Experiences in Indigenous Breastfeeding and Chestfeeding Education, Training, and Certification. International speaker and author Marsha Walker, RN, IBCLC, will talk to us about Insufficient milk: Etiology and interventions (or where has all the milk gone?). CDPH/WIC and California Breastfeeding Coalition speakers Marissa deCrom, Jen Goldbronn, and Robbie Gonzalez-Dow, will be getting the crowd excited for The WIC Breastfeeding Curriculum: It’s Here! And Melissa Cole, MS, IBCLC, will be delivering two great sessions this year focused on Infant Oral Assessment: Exploring Anatomy and Function Beyond the Frenulum and Common Infant Digestive Concerns: Dietary Sensitivities, Reflux and Beyond.

The above are just a few of the long list of great topic areas and sessions to choose from, and please remember you can revisit anything you miss at a later time.

VIRTUAL (& FUN!) TRADE SHOW: The Virtual Trade Show features over 20 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 show partners via links available throughout the conference. And don’t forget to participate in the scavenger hunts and contests.

You are all examples of how to embrace opportunity and health for children and families and we hope you find the conference offers you valuable education that inspires and sustains you. There are plenty of opportunities to engage in chat and Q&A with the speakers and moderators. You can also have some fun with the contests and learning what your colleagues are doing as part of the Local Agency Sharing Booths, or participating in some yoga or barre in the morning before the conference sessions begin. This flexible format allows for each attendee to make the most out of their days and take advantage of all of the educational tools they can immediately use within their own communities. We look forward to spending this time together and learning from each other.
Each year, CWA honors the memory of the inspiring and passionate former state WIC director, Phyllis Bramson, by recognizing one or more outstanding WIC employees whose advocacy efforts on behalf of the California WIC Program achieved a demonstrated impact at the local, state, or national level. Bramson Award recipients are honored at our conference and receive a cash scholarship to help cover the costs of participating in national and state WIC legislative conferences in Washington, DC and Sacramento.

Erika Costanzo, MAS, CLE, and RBL for Community Bridges WIC, joined the WIC team in 2018 as a Regional Breastfeeding Liaison (RBL) with the Peninsula Regional Breastfeeding Collaborative. She is a member of the State Breastfeeding Committee, chair of the Santa Cruz County Breastfeeding Coalition, and a member of California Breastfeeding Coalition’s Lactation Action Network. As a WIC Ambassador, she has helped CDPH/WIC conduct interviews with participants for a story time video promotion, collected input from participants for statewide social media campaigns, and arranged and participated in numerous legislative visits at local, state, and national levels. She believes in the importance of connecting families with the services WIC offers and working to improve program offerings through outreach, education, and advocacy.

Claudia Ulloa has worked for the Northeast Valley Health Corporation – WIC Program for more than 20 years. She started her career with WIC as a Nutrition Assistant and became a WIC site supervisor. Currently, she is the Community and Vendor Relations Coordinator and serves as the liaison between WIC and vendors, numerous community partners, and elected officials in the San Fernando and Santa Clarita Valleys. Legislative visits have provided Claudia with the opportunity to raise awareness of WIC with elected officials and their staff. Claudia completed her bachelor’s in Human Services and master’s in Public Sector Management and Leadership. Claudia states that “WIC is not just a job, it is a career with a purpose that allows me to work with the unserved communities and provide them with other community resources.”
California Nutrition Corps Scholarships

Join us in congratulating the 2022-2023 CNC Scholarship Recipients!

**Dietetic Interns**
- Dina Perez, PHFE WIC – Stefan Harvey Scholarship
- Julia Araiza, PHFE WIC of Heluna Health – Anne Peterson Memorial Scholarship
- Carla Arvizu, PHFE WIC of Heluna Health – Shirlee Runnings Scholarship
- Glenda Miranda, Northeast Valley Health Corp – Anne Garrett Memorial Scholarship
- Katia Elizabeth, PPOSBC WIC Agency
- Dora Luque, PHFE WIC of Heluna Health
- Naty Hernandez, Northeast Valley Health Corp
- Katie Horton, Moreno Valley WIC
- Kanale Rodrigues, Riverside University Health System-Public Health Riverside Cty WIC

**Graduate Students**
- Aqueelah Russell, Antelope Valley Medical Center
- Miriam Lopez-Sanchez, PHFE WIC
- Ambar Mendoza, Santa Barbara County
- Lauren Yowell, American Red Cross WIC

Congratulations!

Welch’s is proud to be a Gold Sponsor of the California WIC Association’s 2023 Annual Conference!
WIC as a Key Partner in California’s Health Reforms

The statewide efforts required to transform California’s health systems are many and complex, but there is evidence at all levels across California that change is underway. California WIC staff are engaging with partners at the state and local levels to lift up the value of WIC for achieving the desired health systems changes and health outcomes. To facilitate this learning and new partnerships, CWA is providing opportunities for engagement with WIC and the key partners.

Each month, WIC state and local agency staff meet to review and discuss relevant updates for the new Medi-Cal Managed Care Plan contracts and initiatives that are rolling out addressing CalAIM strategic plans. In January, Dr. Pamela Riley, Assistant Deputy Director & Chief Health Equity Officer, Quality & Population Health Management, California Dept. of Health Care Services (DHCS) met with WIC staff from across the state to provide updates on efforts to improve child and family health, focusing on population health management. We heard that leadership at DHCS and CDPH/WIC are meeting to address how WIC will be integral in the reforms for data linkages including referrals, access to data and care coordination. Data linkages are a longstanding challenge for WIC local agencies with USDA safeguards.

WIC staff have also received updates on the community health worker (CHW) and doula services benefits in Medi-Cal. Some WIC agencies are engaging with new models for WIC staff to be also trained as CHWs. This is not unlike the long standing staff collaboration with WIC lactation staff and the California Comprehensive Perinatal Services Program with WIC staff working part-time in their WIC agency and part-time in a health center.

In each county, Providing Access and Transforming Health (PATH) meetings are underway with health plans and partners identifying collaborations and creating working partnerships. WIC local agency staff are participating in these meetings where they see familiar community partners, and also many new partners, and learn about the details of what will be expected for being part of CalAIM initiatives. It is a steep learning curve with many new concepts, requirements and language to describe the efforts. WIC staff are to be congratulated for stretching and stepping up to learn and engage, alongside many other individuals from diverse organizations and businesses, about how together we will create California’s health systems reforms.

In another effort to lift up the value of WIC and also encourage new collaborations, CWA, in partnership with Insure the Uninsured Project and Blue-Path Health, provided a virtual summit, Harnessing the Power of WIC: Advancing California’s Health System Reforms bringing together health leaders and WIC state and local agency staff. State leaders spoke to the importance of WIC in meeting child health and population health outcomes. WIC local agency staff and partners from health plans, health information exchanges, and health clinic administrations shared examples of data linkages and workforce collaborations between WIC and health care.

Plans for 2023 include continuing the monthly meetings with WIC staff, reviewing results from a recent survey of WIC local agency data linkages, updating a survey conducted in 2018, and continued support for local agency ongoing efforts to establish data linkages and create workforce collaborations with health and community partners.

Introducing Vanessa

Welcome Vanessa!
CWA would like to welcome our new administrative coordinator to the team, Vanessa Garcia! A former WIC participant, Vanessa comes from a background in direct services and holds a lot of passion for improving the lives of others. Born in Guanajuato, Mexico and raised in Los Angeles, she is the first in her family to go to college. Finishing her studies during COVID, Vanessa graduated from UC Davis with a degree in Psychology in 2021. Her bilingual skills and direct service experience are great assets to our organization. We are excited to have her in the office, and if you receive an email from her or see her at a meeting or event, be sure to say hello!
Meet Our Stefan Harvey Scholarship Recipient!

Dina Perez, a WIC Dietetic Intern, has been working at PHFE WIC for the past 4½ years. As a child, she was first exposed to diabetes when her father was diagnosed with the disease. After that, she knew she wanted to focus her education on a field that could provide her with the knowledge and skills to help others in preventing, treating, or even reversing diabetes; thus she began her education in nutrition!

After completing her degree in Nutritional Sciences from California State University Los Angeles, she began her career as a dietary director at a nursing home where she met residents who had diabetes for years and other chronic diseases as a result of diabetes. Though satisfying to help residents, her goal was to prevent this disease from developing in the first place.

After joining PHFE WIC, she has been a dedicated nutritionist able to promote nutrition education and healthy life habits to participants hoping to make small, but significant life changes. Devoted to serving families, she provides resources and counseling to enable lifestyle changes that will positively impact the present and future health of pregnant women and young children.

Congratulations Dina!

WIC Ambassadorship and Advocacy

CWA continues to carry out our advocacy work by way of Zoom whenever possible. We find that we are much more able to include local agency WIC staff from around the state when no travel is required! The last three years have been a very busy time for WIC on the advocacy front, with the ongoing effort to extend the bump to the fruit and vegetable benefit, the push to generate comments for the WIC food package revisions during the public comment period, and the need to let members of Congress know how valuable some pandemic-era changes to WIC – like remote services for participants – have been. In February, CWA participated in NWA’s annual Policy Conference, and as part of that effort conducted several weeks of meetings with California’s Congressional representatives. A big thanks to those of you who joined us in those meetings! Constituent voices are a key part of our success in forming a good rapport with our elected officials and their staff! If you are interested in participating in future meetings with your elected representatives, get in touch! sdiaz@calwic.org.

Save the Date!

We are back in-person to bring you a 2-day state training!

2023 Fall Management Meeting
October 10 – 11, 2023
Holiday Inn Sacramento

More details to come. We can’t wait to see you in person!
Federal Policy Updates

December Omnibus Package

At the end of December, Congress passed and President Biden signed an omnibus package that included an extension of WIC’s increased fruit and vegetable benefits (CVB) through September 30, 2023. While it was disappointing to not see more pieces of the Child Nutrition Reauthorization bill package included in the omnibus, we were glad to see the CVB bump, which was a high priority for WIC, included. The package also included two important labor bills to expand employment protections for pregnant, postpartum, and lactating workers: the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act and the Providing Urgent Maternal Protections (PUMP) for Nursing Mothers Act. While Californians already have most of the rights and protections included in the PUMP Act, having those rights and protections backed by a federal law increases the stakes for employers that were not in compliance with the California policies.

Food Package Review

In November, the USDA opened the comment period for their proposed changes to the WIC food package. CWA and the National WIC Association were very supportive of the proposed changes, which were in line with the recommendations from the 2017 National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) report and recommendations, Improving Balance and Choice. Changes included making the increase to the fruit and vegetable benefits permanent, making canned fish available in more of the food packages, tremendous expansion of whole grain options, more flexibility of package size and dairy choices, the option to exchange juice and jarred baby food for more produce, and potential for non-dairy milk options. The public comment period closed on February 21st with over 15,000 comments submitted, and we are crossing our fingers for the speedy finalization of the food package revisions.

Child Nutrition Reauthorization

Last year, we were optimistic when the House introduced Child Nutrition Reauthorization (CNR) legislation in the form of the Healthy Meals, Healthy Kids Act. The CNR contained several marker bills that pertained to WIC, including The WIC Act, which would extend WIC eligibility for children through the age of 6 and for postpartum parents for two years, and the WIC for Kids Act, which would extend child certification for two years and expand the pool of adjunctive eligibility programs to include Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) and Head Start. It also includes the Modern WIC Act, which would provide a permanent fix for the option of remote services. Unfortunately, the CNR did not progress beyond the House Education and Labor Committee, and was not included in the omnibus package in December. At press time, the Modern WIC Act has been reintroduced, and we are hopeful that one or more pieces of the CNR may yet be passed into law this year.

State Policy Updates

Doula Coverage in Medi-Cal

In 2021, California added doula care as a new Medi-Cal benefit. As of January 1, 2023, Medi-Cal managed care plans (MCPs) are required to provide full-scope doula services for eligible pregnant and postpartum members. Doula support is seen as part of the solution to high maternal mortality rates, particularly among women of color. Having doula care has been shown to significantly lower rates of caesarean birth, as well as incidences of perinatal mood and anxiety disorders. The benefit has the potential to affect more than 150,000 California families every year—over 50% of births in the state are covered by Medi-Cal. California’s Department of Health Care Services developed the new doula benefit in collaboration with a workgroup of doulas, maternal health advocates, and other stakeholders.

Community Health Worker Services Benefit in Medi-Cal

Another new Medi-Cal benefit was the addition of the services of Community Health Workers (CHW), effective July 1, 2022. Also developed by California’s Department of Health Care Services, through a collaborative process with CHWs, health care providers and stakeholders, the services provided will include health education and navigation, screening and assessment, and individual support and advocacy. While CHWs and promotores have been serving in communities for many years, this will expand access to this care, especially in addressing social drivers of health and equity. Collaborative efforts will continue to firm up training requirements and needs, provide support for building and greatly expanding CHWs networks, and enhance processes for reimbursement.

(continued next page)
STATE POLICY UPDATES (contd)

Paid Family Leave

On the last day of the legislative session in September 2022, Governor Newsom signed SB 951 (Durazo), increasing the wage replacement percentage for lower-income Californians. The new law will extend the state’s current wage replacement rates through 2024 and increase them starting on Jan. 1, 2025, from 70% to 90% for low-wage workers earning less than $57,000 a year and from 60% to 70% for all other eligible workers. Low-income Californians (including WIC families who need time to bond with their babies and establish breastfeeding) have been less likely to use paid family leave (PFL) despite contributing to the program. This is a big win for California families! This benefit is available for up to eight weeks. Thanks to the California Work and Family Coalition and many partners for taking the lead on this effort!

Members of the California Work and Family Coalition celebrate the Governor signing SB 951.
For the past six years, the annual American Red Cross WIC Wellness Celebration has been the pinnacle of the agency’s events. In 2022, that legacy continued at the San Diego History Center’s breathtaking Junipero Serra Museum for their Hispanic-inspired event entitled *Dia De La Celebracion.* “Our folks loved the location, the time spent together, the decorations, the activities, and, of course, the food. To date, this was one of our most popular and exciting wellness celebrations since its inception” WIC staff reported.
The wonderful W3 Newsletter is in its third year. W3 is a WIC Worksite Wellness Newsletter that brings myriad health and wellness topics to all WIC agencies and community partners. Issues might focus on personal goal setting, eating healthy on a budget, mindfulness, stress reduction, or different ways to move your body at work, at home, or on the go. To make it even more fun and engaging, we now have short cooking demos to share. Email Jodi at jmulligan-pfile@calwic.org to get on the listserv.

The W3 team is headed by American Red Cross WIC and put together by an awesome group of 10 undergrad and graduate students from San Diego State University (SDSU) and Point Loma Nazarene University (PLNU). They all possess unique skills and personal attributes, and we are grateful to have them as volunteers!

Aneth Gonzalez: Anetha was born and raised in Tijuana, Mexico. He moved to San Diego at the age of 15 to finish high school and became interested in food and dietetics because of family health issues. Now, he is a nutrition student in his junior year at SDSU. A quote he sticks by is “you don’t need a lot of money to be successful, you are already successful when doing what you truly love.”

Ashley Gubicza: Ashley is from the San Fernando Valley in Los Angeles, California. She is in her 2nd year of the Nutritional Science Master’s Program at SDSU. Ashley will become a registered dietitian and plans to work in the field of research, specifically involving neurological and other geriatric-related conditions. A quote to live by is “Life is tough but so are you.”

Chelsie Miller: Chelsie is from Goodyear, Arizona but relocated to San Diego after a 6-year enlistment in the US Air Force. She is a senior dietetic student at SDSU and works as an undergraduate research assistant in the nutrition and biochemistry departments. Chelsie volunteers with Heaven’s Windows and sits on the California Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics SDD board as the SDSU student representative. A quote that has helped her through hard times is the reminder that “you never know how strong you are until being strong is the only choice you have.”

Edgar Doolan: Edgar grew up in a small town on Long Island, NY. He is currently a 2nd year dual MS student in Exercise Physiology and Nutritional Sciences at SDSU, working towards becoming a registered dietitian. A favorite of his is: “Do or do not—there is no try.”

Grace Klein: Grace grew up in North County San Diego and is currently at school at PLNU. She is studying Dietetics and working toward starting her masters in integrative wellness. She wants to work in integrative medicine for women's health as a registered dietitian.

Kacey Van Duzer: Kacey grew up in San Diego and is currently a senior at SDSU. She is majoring in psychology with a minor in counseling and social change. She’s planning on attending graduate school for school psychology. An important quote to her is “we never know the stories of the people we meet. A little kindness and love are all that is needed to make a change in someone’s day.”

Karina Montes: Karina was born and raised in a small town in the Central Valley. She attended College of the Sequoias until she transferred to PLNU. Karina is pursuing a Dietetics major with a minor in Spanish. She is a library assistant at the PLNU library and walks dogs part-time. A quote that has challenged and motivated her during difficult times is, “Do what you need to do, so you can do what you want to do.”

Katia Enns: Katia was born and raised in San Diego. She is currently working on her master’s degree in Nutritional Sciences at SDSU and is assisting with research focusing on food insecurity among the Latinx population in San Diego. In the future, Katia hopes to become a registered dietitian and work in maternal and/or child nutrition.

Meghen Bishop: Meghen grew up in Vacaville and has lived in San Diego for 14 years. Meghen is a new mother and full-time business owner in the first year of the master’s Food and Nutrition Program at SDSU. Meghen will become a registered dietitian and plans to work with youth and their families. A quote to live by for her is “Kindness is contagious, spread it where you can.”

Rebecca Muntslag: Rebecca grew up in Brazil, and now is a senior at SDSU. She always had a passion for nutrition, and before pursuing a career as a registered dietitian, worked in the hospitality industry and obtained a culinary degree. Power word for the year is “communication.”
Why WIC Works

Giving California kids a healthy start
WIC is a leader in public health and nutrition. WIC’s nutrition education and nutritious foods improve the health of parents, infants, and young children. Over half of the babies in California benefit from WIC!

California grown nutrition
The WIC farmers’ market programs help increase access to fresh, locally grown fruits and vegetables.

Reduced health care costs
WIC families showed significantly lower health care costs when compared to non-participants.

Local investment
WIC families support local economies through their food purchases.

Breastfeeding support
WIC participants who get breastfeeding support breastfeed longer! California WIC breastfeeding support and peer counseling services help improve family health outcomes.
Big congratulations to ALL who finished the WIC Walks New Year’s Challenge! This was originally supposed to be a one-month challenge and we extended it to two due to the weather. We made it for 59 days of moving and shaking and it was a blast! With over 50 active teams and more than 400 active walkers, we covered a grand total of **74,732.4 miles**! That is phenomenal! Brava to all! Our next challenge will be in July and we are looking forward to it. You don’t want to miss out.

A BIG shout out to all of our winners for this challenge:

- **1st Prize Team:** The Walking Dead, Long Beach, @ 422.1 average miles per person ($200 gift card)
- **2nd Prize Team:** Spring Valley Red Cross WIC, @ 404.3 average miles per person ($150 gift card)
- **3rd Prize Team:** Tie b/w Walking 9 to 5 Long Beach and CRP WIC Walkers, @ 304.4 average miles per person ($75 gift card)
- **Top Individual Walker:** Connie from Zoom Runners, PHFE WIC, @ 872 miles ($50 gift card)
- **Social Butterfly:** Phyllis Leija, Walking on Sunshine, trucare ($25 gift card)

A few special awards go to:

- Maciel Gonzalez - Walking Dead - Long Beach
- Sole Sisters - PHFE WIC
- Christina - WIC Walkies of OC - PHFE
- Amy M. - Walking on Sunshine - trucare
- Gladis and Xochitl - The WAM Walkers - PHFE
- K. Lynn - PHFE Loves Data!
- Stella - Walking on Sunshine - trucare
- Jayne Diamonon Lee - Crocs and Docs-PHFE

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Dietetic Intern Mentorship of Medical Students

As WIC continues to expand our services in the community, PHFE WIC is leaving a mark! In "growing our own" registered dietitians program, mentoring others is an essential part of the dietetic internship experience. For the past two years, PHFE WIC dietetic interns have been mentoring Keck USC medical students in the world of WIC. Medical students participate in nutrition classes, breastfeeding support, follow WIC families through counseling and certification processes and, most importantly, experience the value, worth, and crucial need of WIC services. This experience will play a vital role in the growth of these future MDs. We have received wonderful feedback from the medical students:

“**I loved gaining extra knowledge on resources available for my patients. I enjoyed the breastfeeding class because I am currently expecting as well and plan to implement the newly gained knowledge in my own life and also my patient care.”**

“**I really enjoyed the intakes completed with mothers and the ability of the WIC staff to integrate me into such sessions. In addition, I really enjoyed witnessing the thoroughness of each WIC staff member during these sessions.”**

“**Very friendly staff members. It was a great introduction to the program and what it does and will help me better understand a program I may be referring patients to in the future.”**

Let’s hear from our mentors! **Rocio Avila**, a Registration Eligible nutritionist at PHFE WIC states, "**Some doctors don’t even know we exist, so to have this opportunity is a win-win.”**

**Dora Jackson Luque**, current dietetic intern, shares, "**Mentoring Keck USC medical students was a great teaching and learning experience. Many expressed their gratitude for the knowledge shared during their rotation.”**

**Gaby Gonzalez**, current dietetic intern shares, "**It was a great experience...the medical students were happy to see the collection of handouts available for anyone to access and also pleased to see the family resources available online.”**

Finally, **Ruize Qian**, another current dietetic intern states, “**The WIC exposure made a great impression on the med students. They expressed appreciation for the services that we offer to underserved families. They also commented that they would love to connect patients in need of WIC to help improve their health and nutrition.”**

Thank you PHFE WIC dietetic interns for mentoring the future of medicine!
San Francisco: Nutrition Ed Quality Improvement (QI)

The San Francisco WIC Program explored options for secondary nutrition education to improve completion rates and optimize WIC staffing. During the pandemic, online secondary nutrition education was being provided one-on-one to all WIC participants. This was extremely resource intense and unsustainable since it took staff time away from certification and recertification appointments in the middle of staffing shortages. In addition, participants who preferred the one-on-one contact actually valued the time spent with the counselor rather than the nutrition topic discussed.

The goal of the study was to transition all secondary nutrition education requirements from one-on-one contacts to Doxy.me classes, wichealth.org or San Francisco online nutrition education self-learning modules to make more time available for other appointments. To test the three modes of delivery, staff were asked to schedule 3-month nutrition education contacts as a Doxy.me class, wichealth.org or San Francisco online nutrition education self-learning modules. The only exception was if the family needed interpreter services for languages outside of Chinese and Spanish. In that case, the family was scheduled for a one-on-one nutrition education contact.

To evaluate the Doxy.me classes, workgroup members from each clinic met monthly to provide feedback on class size, number of moderators needed, frequency of classes in various languages, and challenges. Online group classes were pilot tested for over six months. Staff and families enjoyed the classes if they went smoothly, but most of the time there were challenges with technology, processing families, and teaching classes back-to-back. Navigating the various platforms was difficult for some team members. It was challenging to facilitate a class of ten families, so they reduced class size to six. The show rate was 60% for the Doxy.me classes. The team decided to eliminate all Doxy.me classes except for the prenatal breastfeeding education class.

For evaluation of the wichealth.org and San Francisco online Nutrition education, families who chose to complete online nutrition education were offered wichealth.org if their preferred language was English or Spanish. Since wichealth.org modules are unavailable in Chinese, they translated the CDPH/WIC approved modules into Chinese to offer an online option for monolingual Chinese families. Completion rates for the self-paced modules exceeded wichealth.org. Many wichealth.org classes are lengthy, and the login process can be challenging. While completion rates for both wichealth.org and the online Chinese self-paced modules improved once text reminders were sent, the rates of completion for Chinese self-paced modules was significantly higher (over 95%) compared to completion rates of wichealth.org (~50%).

Given the success of the self-paced modules, they have translated the CDPH/WIC approved modules into Arabic, Vietnamese, Russian, Thai and Nepalese.

In summarizing the workload, they found that utilizing group online classes freed up 117 hours per month of staff time, or 14 eight-hour days, that they were able to use towards certification, recertification, and mid-certification appointments. It took 4-5 hours per week to process all online nutrition education appointments completed. There were 470 families signed up for online education in December for either wichealth.org or the Chinese online self-paced modules. One hundred and fifty-six additional 45-minute recertification appointments were created with the use of online group classes versus online one-on-one classes.
Exciting Projects at American Red Cross WIC

American Red Cross Streamlined Follow-up for Nutrition Classes

In the past, staff sent email follow-ups after participants attended general nutrition classes. Recently, the team found that this was taking an average of 36 labor hours per month for counselors to set up and send the messages! This was resulting in minimal engagement or confirmation of receipt from the participants, and many participants said they were afraid to open email attachments to resources since they thought it was spam. So, the agency’s team developed a semi-automated process. All the team needs to do is pull the report of participants who took the class, within one week’s time, and drop it into Teletask. This only takes about 15 minutes. The participant then has the option to click onto this website page for additional details. At the three-month mark, American Red Cross WIC will evaluate the effectiveness using website data and counselor experiences, then determine whether to implement this same solution in other areas.

American Red Cross WIC’s Efforts to Increase Blood Donations and Decrease Home Fires

American Red Cross WIC’s parent organization has a mission to increase blood donations and decrease home fires. The WIC agency collaborated to tie these missions to the WIC population.

They highlighted how blood donation can save lives during childbirth (read story here). Education also includes the effects of home fire safety on multi-generational households with young kids, and American Red Cross resources to help keep families safe.

American Red Cross WIC Program Partners with Military Base and Foster Agencies

The American Red Cross WIC program continues its partnership with the Miramar military base in creative ways since ending its satellite location there during COVID-19. The agency provides monthly presentations and developed a blog post specific to military families. Similarly, the agency presented to the network of foster care agencies, through a long-standing connection with Angels Foster Family Network, and is now creating a blog post specifically to help foster families navigate the WIC enrollment process.
WIC Site Murals

At Fresno EOC WIC, each of the sites has decorating themes with murals painted by a local artist. The murals, along with books received from Books for Kids programs, help put the children at ease when they arrive. The largest site, with a caseload of 8,000, recently completed an "outerspace" theme. The photos show the breastfeeding room, a UFO beaming up WIC foods, a bag of breastmilk, and the waiting room.
Last fall, experts warned the public to expect a rough season due to an increase in Flu and COVID cases. Lundquist WIC stepped up. Staff created immunization events at three of its eleven South Los Angeles WIC offices. WIC families were eager to get their Flu and COVID shots.

“We realized that some of our families might not have adequate resources to protect themselves, partly because not many public health centers exist in our area,” Dr. Marisela Montoya, executive director of South Los Angeles Projects, said. “We helped meet our families’ needs and assisted them to remain healthy.”

Approximately 100 families received Flu and COVID vaccinations at each event, thanks to the Los Angeles Department of Public Health. In addition, they were given books for children and a guide for adults donated by First 5 LA, masks, at-home COVID tests, and diapers.

“I am most pleased because contracting either the Flu or COVID—or both—could have led to dire consequences for our families and those with whom they came in contact,” Lizz Santistevan, project coordinator of immunization services, said. “Our families know WIC and could get to their WIC offices easily. The nurses came to us, so our families had easy access.”

Lundquist WIC staff connected WIC families to community health services they may not have been able to access otherwise. “Our events were like mini health fairs,” Dr. Montoya said. “If our families needed additional shots and didn’t have a medical provider, we referred them to COACH for Kids, which provides mobile vans that function like medical offices. COACH for Kids works with families to connect them to a medical provider.”

In addition, they made other resources available including the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health Services, the Los Angeles County Department of Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention, and Head Start programs.

Lundquist WIC will host more immunization events soon. “I am so proud of our wonderful staff and all they do to serve families,” Dr. Montoya said.
In October 2021, Native American Health Center (NAHC) WIC Director Ninoska (Nina) Ayala partnered with Nutrition Matters, Inc. for a Nutrition Education Special Pilot Program. NAHC WIC received approval to pilot Nutrition Matters Online Nutrition Education platform (ONE) to provide nutrition education services. As part of this pilot project, Nina and Nutrition Matters aimed to review ONE educational content for consistency of messaging with CDPH/WIC-developed materials to ensure content met CDPH/WIC nutrition education standards and goals.

While reviewing ONE’s content and making plans for implementation, Nina saw an opportunity to partner with the RDNs and graphic designers at Nutrition Matters to create professional, visually appealing and engaging group class presentations. NAHC WIC has been successfully developing and providing nutrition education through group classes for years. A partnership with Nutrition Matters was efficient as the team of RDN’s has WIC experience and a history of creating education that aligns with USDA, AAP, WIC, and MyPlate guidelines. Nutrition Matters also has a team of professional graphic designers with experience in creating colorful, visual education that aligns with health literacy guidelines, which was key when developing engaging group class resources.

NAHC WIC identified topics they wanted for new group class presentations, and the Nutrition Matters team went to work writing online lessons and creating group class presentation slide shows. The group class presentations, along with a corresponding individual lesson for those who cannot attend the group class, are housed on ONE. Staff can access ONE’s group classes from any computer or tablet, giving them the flexibility to present in person or over video conference from anywhere.

Today, NAHC WIC Nutritionists simply log into ONE to access both group classes and to recommend individual lessons. Talking points to support the group class presentation are included, making it easy for staff to consistently present the curriculum. At the end of each virtual group class, participants receive a corresponding book to reinforce the education.

The partnership has resulted in 5 new lessons and corresponding group class presentation resources: Veggies for Kids, Vitamin D For My Family, Shop at the Farmers’ Market, Let’s Try New Foods and Flavors and Healthy Drinks for Kids.

ONE’s group class presentations have increased participant satisfaction and engagement. Participant engagement is up fivefold since NAHC WIC started using the individual lessons and group class presentations developed in partnership with Nutrition Matters. NAHC WIC believes participants are more engaged because navigation is more straightforward than on other platforms. A simple link takes participants directly to the class.

“"It has been great! [They] have been very supportive and we have developed a good rapport giving and receiving feedback. I really appreciate [their] openness to try and modify based on our needs.”

Another plus is that group classes and individual lessons are mobile-ready. And like the ONE platform, classes and lessons are easy to read and informative, with lots of imagery to help drive the education points home. When asked what the collaboration between Nutrition Matters and NAHC WIC has been like, Nina replied: "It has been great! [They] have been very supportive and we have developed a good rapport giving and receiving feedback. I really appreciate [their] openness to try and modify based on our needs.”

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www.calwic.org
In Loving Memory of Sharen Vennette Anthony

There are some people who come into your life and make an indelible impression on you. They embody a spirit of spreading joy, creating smiles, crafting friendships and deep, caring supportive relationships with everyone! Their laugh is infectious (and loud and beautiful). They can raise everyone’s spirit by just walking into the room. And when they acknowledge you with a smile...your world lights up and you feel SEEN. Sharen Anthony was one of these rare gems that we were proud to call our own.

Sharen, a friend, colleague, advocate, and public health champion, passed away on February 20, 2023. Sharen worked with the Public Health Foundation Enterprises Women, Infants, and Children (PHFE WIC) Program for over 31 years having begun her WIC career on March 5, 1991. She advanced rapidly within the organization from WIC Site Supervisor and eventually to WIC Program Senior Manager. Several of her roles included being a Public Health Nutritionist and WIC representative to many Los Angeles County health and nutrition programs, Project Coordinator for numerous grants and projects, a PHFE WIC Council on Racial Equity leader, and many more. And she was always everyone’s best cheerleader and support line.

In the early 90s Sharen conceptualized the WIC Empowers Teens program aimed at combating the huge teen pregnancy problem. She selected, trained and kept motivated 40 Teen Facilitators. All were WIC staff, and many had been teen moms themselves. The program was so successful that we credit Sharen for the steep drop in teen pregnancies! She was passionate about prevention and a key trainer who took the Beyond 9 CA State funded Preconception Health Care training program on the road to nearly every WIC program in the state.

In 2006, Sharen spearheaded and later became coordinator of the Health is Wealth PHFE WIC Employee Wellness Program for more than 500 employees. She recruited a committee and continued to magnificently lead the employee wellness promotion activities throughout these past 17 years. On Wednesday, March 1, 2023, the Health is Wealth group is leading a 90-minute agencywide All-Staff meeting which Sharen helped design and had the role of “Inspirer-in-Chief.” The PHFE WIC Health is Wealth Program served as a model for the California WIC Association’s (CWA’s) WIC Worksite Wellness Program.

Along the way, Sharen earned a Master’s degree in Marriage, Family and Child Counseling (MFCC). While she did not practice officially as a therapist full-time, WIC benefited as she utilized her expertise to provide internal training and specialized assistance on challenging situations involving child abuse, domestic violence, and homelessness. She was the PHFE WIC “go to” and always got deeply invested in following these cases and families. Sharen had the biggest heart!

In the recent past, Sharen was a liaison with the Los Angeles County (LAC) Nurse Family Partnership programs. She participated in many local initiatives, such as the LAC Department of Public Health Early Childhood Obesity Prevention Project, LAC Healthy Weight for Women of Reproductive Age Learning Collaborative, LAC African American Infant and Maternal Mortality Prevention Initiative, and LAC Perinatal and Early Childhood Home Visitation Consortium. She continued to have immense compassion for the youth and young adults and served as co-chair of the Los Angeles Adolescent Health Collaborative Steering Committee, participated in numerous work groups and roundtables focused on teens, including the Inter-Agency Council on Child Abuse and Neglect’s (ICAN’s) Task Force on Pregnant and Parenting Adolescents, the Teen Family Life Network, the Community Network Council, and the Orange County Teen Collaborative Network.

Sharen had unique talents to engage, teach and train. She was a certified True Colors trainer and trained all staff including every newly hired PHFE WIC employee on True Colors, encouraging strong team dynamics, honoring individual strengths, and building cohesiveness. Her early interactions with new employees made for the perfect welcome during the onboarding stage. Recently, Sharen was pursuing a guaranteed income pilot to further support African-American and Black pregnant WIC mothers, actively worked on advancing health and racial equity, and boosting employee engagement activities.

Her compassion, kindness, fun loving spirit, and commitment extended to every individual and part of the WIC Program from WIC families and participants, within PHFE WIC, across many, many California local agency WIC programs, and the California Department of Public Health WIC Division. If your path crossed Sharen’s you would never forget her...and you would want to reconnect, again and again! Such was her aura.

Sharen was a true gift, leader, friend to all. She has left a giant hole in our PHFE WIC heart.

“Those we love don’t go away, they walk beside us every day...unseen, unheard, but always near, still loved, still missed, and very dear.” Unknown
Are there ever enough words to acknowledge a dear colleague, a partner, a mentor, loving wife and mother, a friend?

Liza Matias Scammahorn, RDN, MPH, CLE was a cherished nutrition professional who worked in both Orange and Los Angeles counties in different roles. Liza first joined the Orange County Health Care Agency (HCA) WIC program over 25 years ago as a Public Health Nutritionist I. She was a High-Risk Nutritionist, supervised clinics, part of the Senior Team but more importantly was our first WIC MIS Coordinator. She was part of the batch of WIC RDs who was there when WIC MIS first rolled out statewide. They say you get to know a person well when you must work together under challenging circumstances. The WIC MIS roll out was one of them and we got to see the Liza who was thorough, patient, flexible, caring, thoughtful, accountable, creative, a motivator, friendly always and just fun to be with. She was able to coordinate effectively with our staff, the County IT departments, and CDPH/WIC so that our implementation would be effective. Everyone said it was so nice to work with her and she made things work! After WIC MIS was implemented, Liza left HCA soon after she gave birth to her first child so she could be there for her family. She remained in contact with her colleagues and regaled us with stories of her growing family and her adventures. She was one person that you knew you could be “friends for life” with. Dedicated to her career as a nutritionist, she pursued part-time employment and worked in Head Start in Los Angeles County and various Nutrition Consultant positions. Her colleagues there all shared that she presented the same traits that made her beloved to HCA WIC.

In 2017, with her children now older and interested in working full-time, Liza returned to HCA. She now served as the Orange County’s Health Care Agency Breastfeeding Coordinator. For the last five years, she was the Regional Breastfeeding Liaison (RBL) for the county, ensured that our breastfeeding requirements for the Nutrition Services Plan (NSP) were met, mentored our staff, and expanded our role as breastfeeding advocates and Leaders in the County. Demonstrating the same traits when she was earlier with HCA, her role expanded into the community and with partners. She was an active member of the OC Perinatal Council, the OC SoCal BF Consortium, the Nutrition and Physical Activity Collaborative and others. She took part in all the CDPH/WIC meetings and trainings. She was successful in getting lactation accommodation policies in place with multiple employers. She sought key institutions, provided them with grant funding and technical assistance for lactation accommodation, furniture and materials for their employees. This activity received both county and state recognition.

Liza also was our Dietetic Internship Preceptor. Interns’ reports about their public health rotation were consistently glowing with praise. They described Liza as a model RD and were inspired to consider entering the public health field. That’s how strong Liza’s influence was. When news of her passing grew, it was no wonder that so many people reacted. She was that kind of a person who touched so many individuals.

There really aren’t enough words to capture the essence of what Liza Matias-Scammahorn was and is. As you read this, we hope it gave you a glimpse. For her HCA WIC Family, we are thankful to be able to say she was part of us. She will be missed.
We’re Hiring!

The California Department of Public Health/Women, Infants and Children Division (CDPH/WIC) is looking for energetic and innovative individuals who have a passion for improving the lives of California families statewide.

What we offer:
- Professional and personal growth opportunities
- Telework opportunities for all staff
- Wide range of career options
- Generous benefits
- Flexible work schedule

Apply today at go.cdph.ca.gov/workatwic or scan the QR code.
It now is easier for babies with Medi-Cal coverage to get medically necessary pasteurized donor human milk until they are 12 months of age. In November 2022, Medi-Cal clarified coverage in the provider manual update. To qualify, the mother’s milk must be contraindicated, unavailable due to a medical or psychological condition, or available but lacking in quantity or quality. The infant also may qualify if it has a birthweight of less than 1500 g, is at risk for necrotizing enterocolitis or infection, or has a qualifying condition determined by a neonatologist or pediatrician.

The manual update clarifies that providers with prescription-writing privileges can determine if the infant qualifies and write a prescription which the family or health provider takes to either the Mothers’ Milk Bank San Jose or UC Health Milk Bank in San Diego. Both are licensed and approved providers of pasteurized donor human milk. Medi-Cal reimburses the milk bank under HCPCS code T2101 regarding human milk processing, storage, and distribution.

Milk banks recently have seen an increase in coverage by Medi-Cal. Efforts during the California Breastfeeding Coalition Legislative Day highlighted the need to increase reimbursement rates to milk banks so they can meet increased demand, especially during disasters, formula shortages, and for medically necessary needs. Current Medi-Cal reimbursement rates are $2.90/ounce. Nationally, the average reimbursement rate is $5.00-$6.00/ounce.

Due to difficulties with coverage of pasteurized donor human milk in the past, many providers believe that pasteurized donor human milk is not a covered benefit for families whose infant is at home. The WIC community can help clarify this misconception by sharing information with providers from the Medi-Cal manual update (linked above). This Medi-Cal manual update, and efforts by WIC staff to distribute information about the change, also could lead to more hospitals providing pasteurized donor human milk as recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics.

For additional information, see California Breastfeeding Coalition Connection newsletter, December 2022.
The WIC programs in Tulare and Kings counties have been engaged in a joint project with the Tulare County and Kings County Breastfeeding Coalitions to plan virtual Lunch and Learn sessions. The goal is to impact the work of local breastfeeding coalitions by engaging health care professionals and community members. These sessions have been popular with physicians, health care providers, nurses, lactation experts and community members. Participants join from throughout the state, outside California, and even from Australia. Since May 2021, they have hosted nine Lunch and Learns on Zoom. Free Continuing Education Units (CEUs) are provided to nurses through coordination with the California Health Collaborative.

In May 2021, they kicked off a monthly Lunch and Learn series and by August they realized that it was difficult to manage on top of busy schedules. They transitioned to quarterly Lunch and Learn programs. Average participation for each session has been 180 participants. The most popular session, Pregnancy & Infant Sleep Training: A Health Equity Approach by Christine Staricka, BS, IBCLC, RLC, had 296 participants.

The topic of the recent Lunch and Learn session was Pregnancy & Infant Loss: What Comes After by Elizabeth Krey, IBCLC, Tulare County WIC Lactation Coordinator. Objectives for this sensitive topic included: 1) Learn how to support grieving families with compassion; 2) Educate families on how to manage their milk after loss; and 3) Inform families about their rights and how to set boundaries.

The two breastfeeding coalitions currently are working towards a merger to become one joint coalition but did not want to delay their mission to reach a larger audience with breastfeeding information and education. Other topics covered in these Zoom sessions included: The Hospital Experience: Baby Behavior in the First Days of Life, How Medical Providers Can Support Breastfeeding, Words Matter- Supporting the LGBTQIA+ Community During their Breast/Chest/Body Feeding Journey, and When Exclusive Pumping Becomes the Feeding Plan.

To join them for free breastfeeding Lunch and Learns, email KCBC.TCBC@gmail.com.
CMC WIC: World Breastfeeding Week Celebration

Community Medical Centers WIC celebrated World Breastfeeding Week for the 10th consecutive year. The celebration was held at a local park near their main site, with over a dozen activities including education booths, kid’s games and raffle prizes for all who participated! Over 20 other community programs joined the event to offer and promote their resources and referrals. The celebration continued throughout the month with an event at all three sites. Participants and families from all around the community came to celebrate and CMC WIC welcomed around 450 families during the month!
The Ventura County WIC Agency is proud to announce the opening of the only Milk Depot (milk collection site) in Ventura County! Ventura County WIC provided the space for the Ventura Coast Milk Bank to establish their milk depot in affiliation with the UC Health Milk Bank in San Diego. This is the very first milk depot for the UC Health Milk Bank.

Ventura County WIC is excited to promote the importance and benefit of human milk for all babies, especially those born premature, and to provide this valuable service to the community. Amy Avelar would have been very happy to see the results of her vision and efforts.

The WIC agency is under the umbrella of the local Public Health and Healthcare Agency and no WIC funds or time is used to maintain the milk depot. The milk depot is run by the Ventura Coast Milk Bank and limited time is provided by a designated staff member to receive the donor milk. The donated milk is shipped to the UC Health Milk Bank for pasteurization and distribution to hospitals and babies in need.

To learn more visit: www.vcmilkbank.org
New Directors

Veronica Plaugher

Veronica Plaugher has been in her position as WIC Director for the Stanislaus County Health Services Agency since November 2022. Ten years of experience with WIC in public health nutrition helped to prepare her for the role.

After completing a Bachelor’s in Nutrition and Food Science from California State University, Chico in 2012, Veronica started working as a Degreed Nutritionist for the Stanislaus County WIC Program. At the same time, she pursued a Master’s in Public Administration, from Grand Canyon University, and graduated in 2014.

Veronica soon was promoted to Health Educator with the CalFresh Healthy Living program. She worked on nutrition policy, systems and environmental change in early childcare, school and retail settings. In 2017, Veronica returned to WIC as a program coordinator overseeing clinic operations and special projects. During this time, she participated in the CWA Leadership Academy sessions and completed all but the last one, which she missed when she went on maternity leave to have twins in 2019.

Veronica adores her twins and spends just about all of her time outside work with them “exploring this great big world.” Activities she enjoys are running and traveling. Veronica says “My heart is with the community, especially being that this IS my community. Working for a program that provides eye-opening nutrition education and breastfeeding support is incredibly rewarding.”

Sandy Erb

Sandy Erb recently was promoted to Merced County Community Action Agency WIC Director after serving as interim director since August. Sandy’s career began after earning a degree in Business Administration from California State University, Northridge. Within a few years she enrolled in the nutrition program at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo. She enjoyed her dietetic internship at West Virginia University Hospital in Morgantown because the culture in West Virginia was very different from California where she grew up.

After the WIC rotation during her internship, she said that she would “never, ever work at WIC.” After doing clinical work for a few years, she heard about the WIC Overseas program. The adventure of living in Germany appealed to her. “Once I started working for the WIC program, I loved it because you actually make a difference” she says. Sandy stayed in Germany almost 5 years and visited 26 different countries.

When Sandy decided to move back to the states, she looked for a WIC position because “I was hooked on WIC.”

She was offered a RD position at Merced County Community Action Agency and four years later moved into the Nutrition Education Coordinator position. During that time, she earned a master’s degree through the Great Plain IDEA program, which she says is an excellent virtual program.

When the WIC Director retired last August, she said I will “never, ever apply for the Director position.” After they failed to find a suitable candidate, she decided she could do it. Sandy says “the moral of my story is to NEVER say never.”

Sandy loves to run, hike, bicycle, garden, crochet, hang out with her husband, play with her dogs and travel. She and her husband have gone on hiking vacations in Peru, Chili, Argentina and Canada.
A WIC Story

Tina Lavy, MS, IBCLC
Yuba (Ampla) & Sutter County – WIC

Quite some time ago, a young mother walked into our WIC office. The mom asked if she could enroll on WIC. She had a 2-year-old little boy and was pregnant with her second child. She was eligible, so enrolled onto the program. She and her husband lived on a farm in central California where he was a ranch foreman. The mom was attending college and helping part-time at a local daycare. They had a baby girl in December 1990. She continued going to her WIC appointments with her two young children, attending WIC classes, and going to college.

That young mother is me. Can you believe that little boy is 35 years old and the little girl is a mom and has a degree in psychology?

My story began nearly 33 years ago when I first walked into the Sutter County WIC office. We were not poor, but farm wages didn’t really pay that much and we had no health insurance. WIC was there for our family when we needed it most. I was a college student studying nutrition after deciding nursing was not really what I wanted to do for a career.

I went to my WIC appointments and sat in the classes. I remember using those old paper vouchers – where you would tear out the carbon. The staff I met during my appointments at WIC back then made an impression on me I will never forget. They were wonderful role models who embraced the WIC program in its early years. One of them hired me as a WNA in 1995, after I completed my master’s degree in nutrition, and allowed me to work part-time so I could be home with my kids after school.

I really wanted to become a Registered Dietitian – but it was very expensive and raising our children was more important to us. A few years later, I heard about Lactation Consultant training for WIC staff. It was an opportunity that I did not think would present itself again. WIC would help with the nearly $5,000 it cost to attend the 9-month course and sit for the IBCLC exam in 2004. Waiting until October to find out the results was nerve-racking. I literally cried the morning I looked up my test number and saw the word “pass” next to it. Writing “IBCLC” next to my name was a dream come true and would not have been possible without the help of the California WIC Program and Sutter County.

It has been a privilege to be there for probably thousands of moms who reached out for help with breastfeeding. Many remember me and come back to say “You helped me so much and I will never forget that you gave me the gift of being able to breastfeed my baby.” Thank you to those moms. It was you who stayed awake in the middle of the night, who kept searching for a medical professional who would listen when you said it hurts and needed a tongue tie assessment, who still breastfed past two when others asked “why”, and who stopped hiding in the back of a closet at work. Thank you to the grandma who said “I never breastfed, and I want to help my daughter, but I don’t know how.” YOU helped me keep the faith that eventually we would make a difference.

For quite some time, I was the only practicing IBCLC in a county of nearly 100,000. I have been with WIC since 1990, doing what I love – helping moms succeed at breastfeeding. Nearly 33 years later, we are the grandparents of three beautiful granddaughters and I am saying farewell to WIC, but the photos of my two children will still sit on my desk. Anthony, that little 3-year-old is now married, a pilot and officer in the United States Air Force. The curly haired daughter, Danielle, finished college and breastfed her daughter past two. I remind them often – don’t forget – you graduated from WIC too.
An unfortunate outcome of the pandemic has been workforce shortages across industries and sectors. WIC programs across the nation, at the state and local levels, are struggling with a large number of vacancies. This month, CWA will wrap up listening sessions with California WIC Nutrition Assistants about their experiences working at WIC. Over the last few months, CWA has met with WIC staff and public health and health care providers to listen to their thoughts on their career experiences.

There has never been a widespread problem with workforce shortages in the half-century since the WIC program was started. In fact, working at WIC has been known to be such a rewarding career choice, staff often retire from their WIC position after decades of dedicated service. While the pandemic is contributing to some of the workforce shortages, some factors, internal to WIC and other stresses being external, have been a growing challenge for a number of years. The recent announcement of efforts by USDA to develop a workforce development initiative, as part of the Biden-Harris Administration, will hopefully identify some actionable steps that can be quickly implemented.

During the listening sessions, WIC staff provided not only a number of challenges they face in deciding to remain in their WIC position, but also why they love their work and the mission of WIC. They expressed great satisfaction serving in their community and impacting the lives of young families. Being part of a program that connects with families and improves lives across generations is a high priority for the individuals we heard from, which makes the challenges with staying in their position all the more frustrating.

This Fall, CWA will publish a report on the findings looking at the challenges, opportunities and rewards for a career in WIC. Actionable steps at the local, state and federal levels to address recruitment and retention will be recommended. With a renewed focus on the importance of nutrition and family support in our health systems, a strong WIC workforce is needed to continue to reach the many health outcomes that have been a hallmark of WIC.
New MCAH Nutrition and PA Coordinator

Joceline Hernandez is excited about her new role as the Nutrition & Physical Activity Coordinator in Maternal, Child and Adolescent Health (MCAH) Division in the California Department of Public Health. She is bilingual, a registered dietitian who has been a lactation educator for over 10 years, and will be completing the IBCLC exam in 2023.

She completed her Master’s Degree in Nutrition & Dietetics at California State University, Northridge (CSUN) and completed her dietetic internship with a concentration in community nutrition through CSUN/Northeast Valley Health Corporation WIC program. In 2014, she received the CWA California Nutrition Corps Scholarship for employees of local WIC programs who are advancing their careers within the WIC program.

Joceline has worked with WIC families in a variety of settings including a community outpatient clinic, completing a yearlong internship at a postpartum unit of a baby-friendly designated hospital under the mentorship of an IBCLC, Los Angeles Unified School District, and the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, MCAH Division. She was designated Breastfeeding Promotion Coordinator for Los Angeles County where she collaborated with other health programs to develop proposals for integrated comprehensive breastfeeding services. She also has experience working abroad, providing prenatal and infant nutrition, instruction on oral hygiene, and breastfeeding education to families without access to care. Her passion and career have always revolved around working with underrepresented communities. Most recently, she was lead author of the newly published California MyPlate for People Who May Become Pregnant and was co-author for the California MyPlate for Pregnant and New Parents Including Breastfeeding. We look forward to working with Joceline!

MyPlate California
For People Who May Become Pregnant

Make half of your plate vegetables and fruits, about one quarter whole grains and one quarter lean protein. The image below represents a 10-inch plate.

Fruit | focus on whole fruits instead of fruit juice.
Choose a variety of colorful fruits and enjoy fresh, frozen, canned or dried fruit without added sugars.

Vegetables | eat more fresh, frozen or low-sodium canned vegetables of different colors.
Enjoy vegetables as a snack or serve them as a side dish. Include dark green, red and orange options.

Tips
- Add healthy fats like avocados, fish, seeds, nuts and plant oils like canola, safflower and olive oil to your meals.
- Choose healthy beverages. Drink water throughout the day and limit caffeinated beverages like coffee and tea.
- Take a vitamin pill with 400 mcg of folic acid every day.

Dairy | choose unsweetened fat-free (0%) or low-fat (1%) dairy or fortified soy products.
Read labels to select foods high in calcium, vitamin D and protein. Teens need more calcium, so add these foods to snacks.

Whole grains | make at least half of your grains whole grains.
Cook with 100% whole grains like breads, pastas, brown rice, corn tortillas and non-instant oats.

Protein | vary your choices and include vegetable proteins like lentils, beans, tofu, nuts or seeds.
Eat cooked fish low in mercury at least twice a week. Choose lean meats like skinless poultry or ground meat with 15% fat or less. Limit processed meats like salami, hot dogs and bologna.

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Heather Duvall’s New Role

Heather Duvall recently was promoted to Stanislaus County Public Health Director after a career including six years as the WIC Program Director. She is excited about the important role that public health plays in our communities and the many opportunities for improved nutrition to enhance overall health.

After earning a bachelor’s in Applied Behavioral Science/Community Health from UC Davis and a master’s in Public Administration from Stanislaus State, Heather started her career with the Stanislaus County Health Services Agency Public Health. At first, she was a Health Educator in Tobacco Prevention and then became the Health Promotion Manager. She left the traditional workforce to be at home with her two children, now in high school and college. Later, she returned to work part-time to coordinate what is now the CalFresh Healthy Living Program and then became the Community Wellness and Prevention Manager. In this role, she was the WIC Director and oversaw all Community Health Promotion Programs. These included CalFresh Healthy Living, Tobacco Prevention, Oral Health and Injury Prevention.

In October, Heather became the Assistant Public Health Director. A few months later, the Public Health Director retired and she was promoted to that position. In this role, Heather oversees more than 200 staff in the Public Health Division. Services include Family Health Services/PH Nurse Home Visiting Programs, Communicable Disease Prevention, Emergency Preparedness, Children Medical Services, Vital Records, Health Promotion and WIC.

The commitment and caring of the WIC staff were highlights for Heather while working with WIC. She stated “Our team was always ready to take on a challenge to figure out better ways to take care of our WIC families. I loved every World Breastfeeding Celebration as the team came together to creatively celebrate breastfeeding moms and babies.”

Regarding her advice for fellow WIC colleagues, Heather replied “Trust in your WIC Teams. I was so challenged during the rollout of the WIC Card and WIC WISE. Our agency went live two weeks before the shut down, due to the pandemic, and I was soon reassigned to the Emergency Operations Center. Our WIC team was incredible working together to serve our WIC families in the toughest of times.” She added “Continue to learn and grown. Managing WIC provided me with so many skills that helped make me a strong candidate for growth in our department.”

Heather has two children who keep her very busy travelling to rodeos throughout the state and beyond. “Being a mom is my favorite thing” she stated. She also enjoys reading and listening to audio books.
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Read this and past issues of the WIC Watch online at http://calwic.org/news-a-publications/wic-watch.

Share the link with colleagues, family & friends!

"I just would like to say thank you to the Delta Health Care WIC Staff in Stockton California. They have been such a blessing, and the increase for fruit and veggies has helped me so much with everything going up in cost. I want to just tell everyone with WIC we are so thankful for this program, and it has helped so many families. You guys ROCK! Thank you Delta Health Care!"

- Jeannel, WIC Mom