Celebrating 50 Years and Protecting the Future

Many meaningful examples come to mind when reflecting upon half a century of providing WIC benefits to families. Families are provided support and expertise not only at critical, and in some cases lifesaving moments of need, but also in celebrating the magic of their journey in pregnancy, birth and their child’s development. WIC staff, trusted providers, experience fulfillment knowing they are truly helping families and the community. WIC instills economic opportunities into communities with food manufacturing and retailing. Commercial real estate benefits from WIC clinics as tenants. The farming community has had a boost since 2009 when the food package added fruits and vegetables, and the current benefit directs even more funding to fruits and vegetables. Educational publishers and industries involved in technology and lactation supplies benefit from WIC business partnerships. Health care providers have the reliable and expert WIC workforce to support patient care. Childcare providers and teachers appreciate that WIC graduates are better prepared for school when their families have access to healthy food and sound advice. Legislators can be confident that decisions to fund and support WIC are a sound investment.

Families are clamoring to participate in WIC. The recent full funding for WIC will ensure families can participate and not be turned away. This investment will have immediate and multi-generational benefits.

We hope you enjoy this special edition filled with updates on CWA’s wide-ranging commitments. Be inspired by the stories from local agencies. We are proud to produce Looking Forward: WIC Celebrates 50 Years, our 32nd conference and trade show, showcasing our partners while we celebrate and learn together.

Cheers and gratitude to California WIC and this outstanding national program!

Karen, Lena, Sarah, Vanessa and Jenn

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It is time to celebrate and learn together during CWA’s 32nd Annual Conference and Trade Show. This is a very special year, as we look back on the half century of service WIC has provided to families and look ahead to the opportunities and challenges for a bright future.

Many thanks to the dynamic conference curriculum planners for accomplishing the challenge of providing a wide-ranging program including early childhood development, perinatal health and nutrition, equity and inclusion, lactation, leadership, innovation and wellness. As usual, continuing education units will be provided for IBCLCs, RDNs, and RNs. The virtual conference reduces speaker travel costs, providing us the opportunity to offer an agenda with national experts, and this year a speaker from Ireland.

CWA is very pleased to be able to include more WIC staff in the on-line platform who would otherwise not be able to leave the clinic, considering staff shortages and budget constraints. We always welcome other providers to attend the conference and are extending invitations to community health workers and doulas, including reduced registration.

We are honored to have USDA FNS Deputy Undersecretary Stacy Dean talk with us about the the Biden-Harris Administration’s vision for the future of WIC.

One of the hallmarks of WIC expertise and success is addressing childhood obesity. Starting with the preconference, and extending through the conference, we welcome national experts. Cynthia Ogden, NHANES Branch Chief, CDC, will provide insights into the data. Christopher Carter, University of San Diego, Professor of Theology and Religious Studies, will address social justice approaches to obesity prevention. Michael Goran, Professor of Pediatrics, USC School of Medicine, will present on obesity and diabetes. Physicians Dr. Fatima Stanford, from Massachusetts General Hospital and Harvard University and Dr. Rachel Gross, from New York University, will round out the experts as practicing clinicians and researchers.

Lactation is a favorite with experts addressing a wide range of topics including the ethics of social media, perinatal mood disorders, lactation assessment, workplace rights and more. A session on motivational interviewing will also provide needed communication continuing education units.

Diversity, equity and inclusion are foundational to the conference and featured in presentations, such as one on disaggregating lactation data on Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders. We welcome Tlein Tlaa Cindy Gamble, Tlinglit, of the American Health Commission who will examine cultural humility as it relates to racism and cultural bias.

CDPH/WIC staff are presenting on a wide range of topics including modernization, food package updates, breastfeeding communications, and inclusive gender language.

CWA is grateful to exhibitors and sponsors, some who have presented for over twenty years. Partnerships play a big role in the success of WIC. Healthy foods, lactation supplies, grocers, and educational publishers all contribute to the provision of WIC benefits. CWA wishes to express our gratitude and acknowledge this partnership.

Wellness is a big part of the conference in workshop offerings and morning activities. This year our days start with meditation, qigong, yoga and mindful breathing. Our thanks to the wellness leaders, some who are WIC staff.
WIC Turns 50

Goodbye checks: CRP WIC staff Ivon Gutierrez, Hilda Lara and Juliya Yegorov enjoy a check shredding challenge.

Siskiyou WIC staff in 2019 Tracy Sandahl, Dana Kent, Amber Cason and Heidi Nettles celebrate the new WIC card.

CDPH/WIC staff at the CWA conference, Patti Paddock, Carolyn Waggoner, Pat Graziel, and Sandi Anderson.
Smile, California serves as the promotional campaign for the Medi-Cal Dental Program, aiming to educate over 15.5 million members about their covered dental services, how to access care, and the vital connection between oral health and overall well-being. WIC agencies and valued partners play a paramount role in effectively assisting Medi-Cal pregnant and new mothers with their needs. Good dental health is crucial at every stage of life, particularly during pregnancy. Regular brushing and flossing, along with a balanced diet and regular dental visits, can significantly reduce dental problems often associated with pregnancy, such as cavities, tooth decay, gingivitis, and periodontal disease, which may impact pregnancy results.

Smile, California acknowledges the vital role played by WIC staff and valued collaborators in improving pregnancy outcomes by ensuring that providers and patients are well-informed about pregnancy care and related services available to new and expecting Medi-Cal moms-to-be. In recognition of this, the California WIC Association partnered with Smile, California to participate in the Smile, California annual Brand Ambassador Stipend Program (BAP) that ran from June to August 2023.

Through this initiative, Smile, California harnesses the influence and relationships of community-based organizations and local oral health advocates to emphasize the importance of dental health and raise awareness about services covered under the Medi-Cal Dental Program among the members they serve.

As part of the program, the WIC Association promoted Smile, California and the Medi-Cal Dental Program through various channels to reach community members. This included featuring information about Smile, California in the August edition of the Flash Newsletter, posting an array of social media posts on Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn, utilizing Smile, California e-mail signatures and website banners, embedding Smile, California resources on the WIC website, and extending an invitation to local WIC agencies to request complimentary samples of Smile, California’s educational Medi-Cal Dental resources specifically tailored for new and expecting parents. These resources provide valuable information on dental health for pregnant women and newborns.

Some of the popular resources offered include the Healthy Smiles from Pregnancy Through the Toddler Years Brochure, the Flyer for Pregnant Members, the Toothy Tips for Parents Flyer, the Kindergarten Oral Health Assessment Flyer, and the Medi-Cal Has Dental Covered Flyer. If you are interested in obtaining free samples of Smile, California resources, please click here to fill out the request form.

If you have any questions about the Smile, California campaign, please reach out to us at hello@smilecalifornia.org.
Welcome Jenn to the CWA Team

We are thrilled to welcome our new program manager, Jenn Duran-West, to the CWA team! With her wealth of WIC experience at Lundquist WIC and proven track record working with CWA on our annual conference and other projects, we are confident that she will bring fresh insights, innovative strategies, and a dynamic approach to our team. As we embark on this journey together, we look forward to her leadership, collaboration, and dedication to achieving our goals. Let’s extend a warm welcome and support as she settles into her new role. Welcome aboard!

Fall WIC Celebration and Education!

CWA and CDPH/WIC staff invite you to join us in Sacramento to celebrate and learn together.
In an effort to provide a celebration for WIC and include the most local agency staff, we are planning a celebration at the Capitol in combination with the Fall CWA Education and CDPH/WIC Meetings.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS:
Tuesday, September 24
• WIC Celebrates 50 Years, State Capitol
  10:30-11:30 AM
• CWA Education Day - Hilton Arden West
  1:00-5:00 PM
Wednesday, Sept. 25-Thursday, Sept. 26
• CDPH/WIC Fall Meetings (details coming!)

NEW LOOK!

Exciting News! We’re thrilled to announce that we’re giving our website a fresh new look! As part of this update, we’re also unveiling a brand new logo that reflects our dedication to serving the WIC community and our commitment to meeting the changing needs of our membership. Our goal is to provide you with an even better online experience, making it easier than ever to access our member resources, publications, and information on our events and training. Stay tuned for more updates as we roll out these exciting changes!

Connect with CWA

Visit CWA on Facebook!
Follow us on Twitter! • Find us on Instagram!
(Search for California WIC Association or calwic.)

Diana Bonta, Director, California Department of Health Services, speaks at WIC’s 25th Anniversary, 1999.
California WIC Engages in CalAIM Initiatives

It has been another productive six months with WIC local agency and CDPH/WIC staff engaging in opportunities provided by the historic CalAIM health reforms.

Memorandums of Understanding (MOU)

Not updated since 2004, Medi-Cal managed care plans and WIC will be signing new memorandums of understanding. With local agency input, in late 2022, CWA submitted a draft MOU to DHCS, framed within prevention and CalAIM reforms. During 2023, CDPH/WIC staff worked diligently with California Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) to develop a draft MOU that was released for public comment in October. Quick action on the part of the local agencies, led by CWA and County Health Executives Association of California (CHEAC), resulted in meaningful comments being provided to DHCS. A key issue, challenges in the issuance of therapeutic formula, was elevated and DHCS held the final draft until more comments and discussion were included. Now local agencies and the Medi-Cal managed care plans will be signing a MOU, planning how to collaborate in providing WIC services, with the option of also developing business partnerships for additional services. Recognition goes to DHCS staff for their ongoing partnership and collaboration.

Enhanced Care Management (ECM)

Focused on providing effective care for high risk patients that will reduce health care costs and improve health outcomes, enhanced care management provides intensive support in addition to medical care. Starting in 2024, a population of focus for ECM is high risk birthing parents, especially those who are Black, American Indian/Alaska Natives, or Pacific Islanders. Some WIC agencies are in discussion with Medi-Cal managed care plans to provide ECM benefits. More to come!

Fact Sheets!

Based on the 2023 survey CWA conducted, of all 84 WIC local agencies focused on data linkages and partnerships, CWA released fact sheets summarizing the findings. Check out what WIC local agencies are building for data linkages through electronic health records (EHR) and health and community information exchanges (HIE/CIE) for referrals, access to data and care coordination. The fact sheets also describe the partnerships with hospitals, home visiting, and staff sharing with health care, CalFresh and other programs. For example, check here to see how many hospitals have WIC pump closets!

Data Linkages

CWA has been working with and supporting a number of local WIC agencies to establish data linkages for referrals, access to clinical data and care coordination. This will support a key goal of DHCS to improve referrals between Medi-Cal, WIC and CalFresh. One project underway is with Northeast Valley Health Corporation and Watts Healthcare WIC agencies and LANES, the HIE for Los Angeles. As with similar linkages, all parties are learning together! We will have more to share in the coming months.
Thank You, WIC Local Agencies
for your vital role in nourishing and supporting parents, caregivers, and children for 50 years.
State and Federal Policy Updates

State Policy Updates

Celebrating 50 Years of WIC: Senator Josh Newman Partners with CWA

Thanks in large part to the advocacy of PHFE WIC’s Samar McGregor, California Senator Josh Newman offered his collaboration with CWA and PHFE WIC, in the form of a state resolution to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the WIC program. Senate Resolution 59 (S.R. 59), a tribute to the enduring impact and vital role of the WIC program in supporting maternal and child health across the state, was introduced in the Senate in mid-January, and passed in early February.

As California celebrates the 50th anniversary of WIC, Senator Newman’s leadership and partnership with the California WIC Association and PHFE WIC highlight the importance of collective action in advancing public health and social equity. S.R. 59 stands as a testament to the enduring legacy of WIC and the ongoing commitment to ensuring that every Californian has the opportunity to thrive, regardless of their socioeconomic status.

In commemorating this milestone, let us reflect on the progress made, acknowledge the challenges ahead, and recommit ourselves to serving WIC families with joy, compassion and dignity.

Federal Policy Updates

Fall and winter were an eventful time for WIC advocacy – from a near government shutdown at the end of September to multiple continuing resolutions, the WIC community has been on the edge of our seats hoping for Congress to recognize what we all know and see every day, that WIC is critical in our communities and must be fully-funded to serve all eligible participants.

Proposals that were put forward by the House and Senate last summer fell short of that need and would have required WIC to implement waiting lists for the first time in nearly thirty years had they been successful. We are elated to share that, through the hard work and advocacy from members of the WIC community, WIC received the additional $1 billion it needed to continue serving all eligible participants. The additional funds were missing from earlier House and Senate proposals, which would have led to potentially millions of participants placed on wait lists for the first time in 30 years. The appropriations bill that included WIC funding was passed by the House and Senate the first week in March, narrowly avoiding a government shutdown. The funding, which will carry WIC through the rest of fiscal year 2024, not only allows for WIC to serve its climbing caseload but keeps the fruit and vegetable benefit intact (earlier House proposals would have cut it significantly).

Advocates play a critical role in safeguarding WIC’s funding by raising awareness of its importance and advocating for sufficient resources. By engaging policymakers and the public, advocates can ensure that WIC remains a cornerstone of public health and nutrition assistance. There are multiple opportunities throughout the year for local agency staff to attend meetings with their Congressional representatives or staff members, and WIC staff are WIC experts! If you are interested in participating in meetings with legislators, contact Sarah: sdiaz@calwic.org.

Samar McGregor, PHFE WIC and Irene Salazar, Planned Parenthood WIC met with members of Congress.
LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

WIC Ambassadors with Ken Clifford from Congresswoman Michelle Steel's Office.

WIC Ambassadors With Clayton Smith from Congressman David Valadao’s Office.

WIC Ambassadors With Senator Alex Padilla.

WIC Ambassadors With Congressman Pete Aguilar.

WIC Ambassadors With Congressman David Valadao’s Office.
In the unfolding chapters of 2024, a surge of anticipation fills our hearts as we usher in a new era for our cherished W3 Newsletter. Imagine this: the birth of this year’s WIC Wellness Newsletter Team, with a seasoned Senior Editor at its helm. This isn’t just a team; it’s an assembly of 9 extraordinary minds, a fusion of undergraduates and graduates from San Diego State University (SDSU) and Point Loma Nazarene University (PLNU), guided by the compass of the American Red Cross WIC.

Gratitude floods us as we contemplate the unique talents each student brings to our collective tapestry working to achieve our goal. It’s not merely about assembling a team; it’s about curating an ensemble of passion, dedication, and ingenuity. Our goal? To infuse every page of the W3 Newsletter with a blend of timely wellness insights, mouthwatering recipes, and valuable resources.

Now the stage is set, the players are in position, and the curtain rises on a narrative that transcends the ordinary. This isn’t just about inspiring our WIC staff; it’s about igniting a spark within each reader. Our tales, intricately woven into the fabric of the newsletter, become beacons of motivation, reminding us all that within vulnerability lies strength, within challenges lies growth, and within a team lies the power to create something truly extraordinary—the W3 Newsletter.

Let’s introduce the stars of our distinctive team:

**Stephanie Alcala (Senior Editor):** Originally from Long Island, NY, Stephanie is a graduate student at SDSU studying Nutritional Sciences and completing the Didactic Program in Dietetics (DPD). Her goal is to become a registered dietitian (RD) and share her love for cooking in food service and/or private practice. A favorite quote of hers is an Italian saying: “Chi mangia bene, vive bene,” which means “He who eats well, lives well.”

**Ashley Woo:** Ashley is from Orange County, CA, and is currently a sophomore at SDSU. She studies Foods and Nutrition with a minor in Gerontology. Ashley is interested in becoming a registered dietitian with an emphasis on geriatric medicine and longevity. She has a strong passion for food and community, and hopes to use her specialty to create an impact in the health and wellness industry. She likes to believe that “Patience Provides Prosperity.”

**Christine Clothier:** Christine grew up in the suburbs outside Sacramento, CA. She is currently a senior dietetics student at PLNU. She also works at her school’s library, and is the secretary for her school’s Student Dietetics Association. Right now, her goals are to: go to grad school, pass the RD exam, become a registered dietitian, and use what she has learned to help and support people in any way she can. “You’re braver than you believe, stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think.” - Winnie the Pooh.

**Emily Hickey:** Emily Hickey grew up in Pleasanton, CA, in the Bay Area. She is currently in her second year of completing her master’s in nutritional science at SDSU. She is completing both her master’s and the Didactic Program in Dietetics (DPD), as well as conducting research with a few faculty members and a team of undergraduate and graduate students. She works part-time at Carruth Cellars Wine Tasting Room in Liberty Station. Her career goal is to begin a dietetic internship in the fall of 2024 and become a registered dietitian. She hopes to enter the wellness space and share her passion for food,
nutrition, fitness, and health with her community. Her favorite quote is: “Comparison is the thief of joy.” - President Roosevelt. She values the importance of focusing on making yourself happy and not letting others take away from that happiness.

**Jack Galliver:** Jack grew up in Orange County, CA, and recently graduated from SDSU with a B.A. in Economics. His newly found passion for healthcare has pushed him to pursue nursing school and he is taking his prerequisites at Saddleback Community College to follow this passion. He is looking to provide help for those with mental health diseases in hospital and outpatient settings. One of his favorite quotes is: “No matter what people tell you, words and ideas can change the world.” — Robin Williams

**Kacey Van Duzer:** Kacey grew up in San Diego, CA, and recently graduated from SDSU with a bachelor’s in psychology. She is currently exploring her graduate school options and working in the field to gain experience. Her overall career goal is to work with health and psychology. A quote she likes is: “It’s only a thought and a thought can be changed.”

**Lauren Flotman:** Lauren grew up in Orange County, CA, and recently graduated from SDSU with a B.S. in Foods and Nutrition with an enrollment in DPD. Her sincere passion for healthcare, specifically patient care, has driven her to pursue an educational journey to become a Physician’s Assistant. She hopes to work for organizations that value the promotion of healthy, consistent lifestyles through outstanding care and education to their communities. One of her favorite quotes is by Tess Guinery: “Keep your eyes lifted high upon the sun, and you’ll see the best light in everyone.”

**Liberti Cornell:** Liberti grew up in Santee, CA and Colorado Springs, CO. She is currently a sophomore at PLNU, majoring in Dietetics. She has a job as a Teaching Assistant (TA) in the Family Sciences department at Point Loma. After she becomes a RD, she would love to be a dietitian for a college sports team, since she has played sports her entire life and has a passion for athletics and nutrition. Her favorite quote is: “I lean not on my understanding,” which encapsulates her beliefs as a Christian, including her belief that God knows more than she does.

**Natalie Yu:** Natalie Yu is from Los Angeles, California. She is currently a junior at SDSU studying Food and Nutrition with a minor in Marketing. She works at Shake Smart on campus. Her goal is to be a registered dietitian and work at a food company in either marketing or nutrition. Ideally, that food company’s goal would be to help others live a healthier lifestyle. One of her favorite quotes is: “Health is not valued until sickness comes.” – Thomas Fuller.

**Valentina Montes:** Valentina grew up in Tijuana, Baja California, Mexico and San Diego, CA. She is majoring in Dietetics at PLNU, with a minor in International Development. As someone who also hopes to pursue a master’s in Public Health, her ultimate goal would be to work as a Public Health Nutritionist. She can see herself working for a government agency, like the US Agency for International Development, or for an international organization like UNICEF or the World Health Organization. She always reminds herself that every moment is a learning opportunity. It’s no wonder one of her favorite quotes is from Paulo Coelho’s the Alchemist: “There is only one way to learn. It’s through action. Everything you need to know, you have learned through your journey.”

**Albert Torres:** Albert was born and raised in San Diego, California. He is attending SDSU, majoring in Foods and Nutrition, and completing the DPD. He works at the YMCA as a Wellness Coach and soon-to-be Lifestyle Coach. He aspires to be a Registered Dietitian and potentially a Personal Trainer and wants to help people live healthy lifestyles. A quote he lives by is from Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The only person you are destined to become is the person you decide to be.”

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www.calwic.org
Our 2024 CWA New Year’s Fitness Challenge participants impressed us with their energy and determination! As the challenge unfolded, our collective efforts tallied up to astounding numbers: 57,929,038 steps in the walking challenge, 6776.3 miles conquered in running, and an impressive 4754.6 miles pedaled in the biking challenge.

Among the standout performers, Daney Kol emerged as a beacon of inspiration. From Walk the Walk Long Beach, Daney accomplished an awe-inspiring 1,004,877 steps and a staggering 794.4 miles on two wheels. Not stopping there, Daney tantalized taste buds with delectable healthy recipes. The crowd-favorites, pizza and chow fun, earned applause and admiration from fellow challengers.

Though the New Year’s challenge has come to an end, our celebration of the determination, team spirit and triumphs of our WIC community is ongoing. Here’s to all participants who transformed aspirations into accomplishments, embodying the true spirit of the 2024 New Year’s Fitness Challenge. Until we meet again on the path to wellness, keep moving, keep inspiring, and keep thriving!

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**Welch’s is proud to be a Gold Sponsor of the California WIC Association’s 2024 Annual Conference!**
Partnership with the Modoc College Center

In March of 2022, Northeastern Rural Healthcare Clinic (NRHC) WIC utilized both federal Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC) and the California Teleconnect Fund (CTF) to obtain internet services for a remote clinic in Alturas, CA. Both USAC and CTF funds are rural broadband grant opportunities.

This grant funding established high speed internet at substantial cost savings from what NRHC WIC was previously paying for mediocre internet speeds/service. A neighbor, Tanja Ramming in the strip mall, utilized the NRHC WIC guest network and realized that their internet speeds were significantly increased. Residents of Alturas also were parking in front of the WIC office to utilize the internet resource based on the inconsistent cell phone coverage that many residents experience.

WIC in Alturas was an oversized facility that was being underutilized due to post-pandemic changes in business practices (nearly 2000 square feet!). Based on the space available and the internet resource, a co-leasing/partnership agreement was established between Modoc College Center and NRHC WIC. The Modoc College Center pays half the monthly rent and operates on Tuesdays and Thursdays, while WIC operates on Wednesdays. WIC in Alturas had become an “Anchor Institution,” making access to college courses, zoom appointments, and online referrals more accessible! This was permitted under the grant funding as long as a formal partnership agreement was entered into.

Entering into this community partnership also allowed for WIC, through Tanja, to connect with a local artisan in Cedarville, CA. Michelle Bartolo of Humble Homes Designs partnered with Mickie Royer who was able to custom build a 7 panel lactation room for WIC that fit with the décor that Tanja had selected for the Modoc College Center. The decor features local barn wood, local art, and even salvaged furniture from an old homestead. Serving participants in a rural area can be challenging. By establishing strong community partnerships NRHC WIC has been able to serve the participants of Alturas and the surrounding community of Modoc County while also supporting local business, integrating awareness of WIC, and streamlining the referral process.

Ian Lloyd, WIC Director, Northeastern Rural Health Clinics WIC, with Tanja Ramming, Advancing Modoc Director.
How Bringing your Breastfed Baby to Work Has Inspired So Many WIC Families

I have to share this story with all of you. Andrea Hernandez, IBCLC, was hired into the Lactation Consultant position in Santa Maria Betteravia WIC site starting in February of last year. She was also pregnant with her second child and just finishing her hours to sit for the International Board Certified Lactation Consultant (IBCLC) exam. Thanks to a supportive WIC Director, Susan Liles, Public Health Department Administration, and County’s "Breastfeeding Friendly & Workplace Accommodation" Policy, Andrea was able to bring her baby to work.

Since she had just started, Andrea was eligible for disability but not the additional bonding time leave that California provides. With very little sick leave, Andrea returned to work full-time on August 15th after just seven weeks of leave with baby Ariana and a very positive attitude. Her husband Salvador works on the same floor 50 yards away for Social Services. The three of them commute to work each day and often go to lunch together. Their first child Santiel, 2 years old, is watched by her mother while working.

Coming back to work after having a baby in general is very difficult, not to mention only having seven weeks off, and then bringing your baby to work too. Andrea is an inspiration to us all!

Andrea completes high-risk prenatal and breastfeeding assessments and follow-ups for families, issues manual and electric breast pumps when needed, bills for lactation services through the Comprehensive Perinatal Services Program (CPSP), and faxes the required doctor reports. She is paid out of a different fund than WIC, from Medi-Cal reimbursement. Andrea is a WIC team member completing all the same trainings and meetings.

Baby Ariana has become a live model and star to many breastfeeding women and partners seeking help with breastfeeding. Words cannot describe how remarkable and special this situation is. For example:

- Participant said she “had heard that the manual pumps don’t work.” So Andrea got one out and pumped. The mother ended up taking one home.
- Since we usually show the family how to put the breast pump together when they come in, Andrea and the breastfeeding mother sat there and pumped at the same time. The participant will never forget this.
- Andrea and baby Ariana were a live demo on how to latch for our WIC Nutrition Assistant (WNA) daylong breastfeeding training. Better than any video that I could have shown.
- Two mothers said how chubby Ariana was. They could not believe it’s all just from breast milk! Andrea went on to educate them about breast milk and the benefits. Unforgettable education.
- Used baby Ariana to show weight gain on our baby weigh scale.
- Participant was there for a breastfeeding consult. She had called the Pediatrician to say the baby had diarrhea. Pediatrician said to stop breastfeeding. Someone on TikTok said manual pumps don’t work and hurt! Baby Ariana had pooped and the participant watched while Andrea changed her. The participant said “that is what my baby’s poop looked like”. Andrea went on to explain that this was normal
breastfed poop. Mom was now determined to get her milk supply up with her goal of exclusively breastfeeding. We will call this pediatrician and offer him/her education through our Regional Breastfeeding Liaison (RBL) visits too.

- To show how good our Medela Symphony pumps are, after breastfeeding baby Ariana, Andrea pumped 5 oz. The participant stated, “the pumps are fast.”
- Andrea emailed me “just finished a prenatal appointment. I latched Ariana multiple times to show how to achieve a good deep latch and how to remove baby. I also used my manual pump to show her how to use it and how to hand express! The participant thanked me and said it was so much better seeing it in person than on YouTube.”
- Andrea used breast milk on Ariana for her cradle cap and it has been working. Not only are they helping individual families in our community, Andrea has donated 367 ounces of frozen breastmilk to the San Jose Milk Bank to help many other babies. The donated breastmilk gets used for medically vulnerable infants throughout California. The milk bank provides services to over 80% of California’s Neonatal Intensive Care Units (NICU’s).

Andrea has a sit/stand desk so she can chart and hold Ariana in a front carrier while completing doctor reports. Andrea is mindful that she has a good milk supply while others that see her may not. We are so fortunate to have Andrea join our team and feel so comfortable breastfeeding/pumping in front of participants. She has taken breastfeeding education to a new level. Our goal is to level the playing field for our participants and breastfeeding is one way to do this. With so many systemic issues out there why mothers’ stop breastfeeding, it is nice to support our families’ breast/chestfeed as much as we can. For more information, call 805-681-5276 or mbeard@sbcphd.org.

By Meg Beard, Breastfeeding Coordinator, Santa Barbara County Public Health Department Nutrition Services Breastfeeding Program / WIC
Gardner Health Services WIC’s Photo Journal

In newly redesigned spaces that blend information and helpful tips with an emphasis on cleanliness, comfort, and relaxation,

From the earliest days to late infancy from exclusive breastfeeding to combination feeding
From single parenting to support of a partner, grandmother, extended family members, older siblings to peers, to community, from tears to giggles, from the couch to the floor...

At Gardner WIC, we honor and celebrate every part of parenting from the first baby to the last, every family’s unique form, shape and size. We embrace the whole range of emotions of all of our incredibly strong and beautiful parents and their babies.
Regional Breastfeeding Liaison
Central Valley Collaboration

The California Department of Public Health’s Women, Infants and Children Program (CDPH/WIC) established the Regional Breastfeeding Liaison (RBL) Program in 2010 to narrow the breastfeeding support gaps in each region throughout the state.

“The state recognized that the USDA-funding Breastfeeding Peer Counselor Programs couldn’t reach their full potential without having corresponding breastfeeding awareness, knowledge and support from healthcare providers, community partners and employers where WIC mothers lived,” said Jeannette Newman-Velez, CDPH/WIC Breastfeeding Support Unit Chief. Newman-Velez oversees the RBL program for CDPH/WIC.

Assigning a lactation-focused professional in high need regions of the state made that strong network of support possible. To date, there are 31 RBL programs serving 32 counties in California. RBLs are breastfeeding experts who can:

- Assist birthing hospitals with implementation of the Hospital Infant Feeding Act (California HSC §123360-123367) to ensure successful breastfeeding initiation.
- Coordinate trainings for healthcare providers and staff on WIC’s nutrition education and breastfeeding services, and implementation of the 9 Steps to Breastfeeding Friendly Clinics: Guidelines for Community Health Centers and Outpatient Care Settings 2015 to ensure continued breastfeeding duration.
- Participate in coalition-building and community collaboration.
- Educate and assist employers and educators with implementation of lactation accommodation in their corresponding businesses and school settings.

Collaboration Makes a Difference

By the nature of the role they play in a region’s infant-feeding landscape, RBLs are naturals at fostering relationships throughout the communities they serve. But limitations of time and location don’t often allow for close collaboration with their peers. One region of the Central Valley, however, has overcome these barriers despite its expansive geographic area.

The Central Valley has among the lowest breastfeeding rates in the state. In this region, it is supported by four RBLs:
- Adourin Malco, Merced and Mariposa counties
- Carmen Escobar, Kings and Tulare counties
- Jazmin Mendez, Kern County
- Sally Tran, Fresno and Madera counties

One of the area’s newest RBLs, Escobar, said working with Malco, Mendez, and Tran helped her find creative ways to effectively tackle her professional objectives. “We are better together than working in silos,” she said.

Newman-Velez said these Central Valley RBLs are an example of how partnership and collaboration can amplify impact. “We believe when you work together, you avoid the duplication of effort while magnifying the results of your work,” she said. “We encourage RBLs to network in any way that makes sense for them and their regions.”

It’s hard to deny the impact these Valley RBLs have had on the area’s infant-feeding landscape. Escobar, Malco, Mendez and Tran were part of the planning committee for the 2022 Central Valley Lactation Conference, which convened healthcare providers, community advocates and agencies to provide lactation-supportive education and skill-building. They’ve also presented their work to CDPH’s Maternal, Child and Adolescent Health (MCAH) Regional Perinatal Programs of California (RPPC).

“California is a big state with big goals when it comes to breastfeeding rates,” Malco said. “It could be overwhelming to serve two counties all by myself. But knowing I have Carmen, Jazmin and Sally in my corner makes the possibilities feel limitless.”

As anyone in the First Food field knows, that kind of collegial support is worth its weight in gold. To see if there is a WIC RBL in your region, contact your local WIC agency.
Alameda Pregnancy Day Pilot

What better way to get clients and staff back in the groove of in-person classes than a celebration! We here at Alameda County WIC decided to pilot a string of enhanced prenatal education days that we have termed "Pregnancy Day". As we pondered the shift that was made pre-Covid and the negative impact it had on prenatal education, class attendance virtually and in-person, and thus postpartum breastfeeding outcomes, we had a vision. What if we opened our doors and invited our pregnant mamas to a party? A party where they were welcomed with some light décor, had a treat to eat and were showered with little gifts. A party where they can mingle with other mamas, share some of themselves and learn some valuable pregnancy and breastfeeding information. Hmmm.... what about a PREGNANCY DAY!

On September 21st, 2023, we hosted the first of two pregnancy days. The first one targeted our pregnant English speaking clients at our second largest site. We had a total of 39 attendees who participated in the following:

- A welcome and introduction hosted by our Breastfeeding Peer Counseling Team
- A 15 minute prenatal dental presentation
- A brief introduction to insurance and WIC pumps
- One of our trimester prenatal classes
- Snacks, raffles, gifts, and dental goodie bags

Overall, we were thrilled at the turnout, the excitement staff experienced and the enjoyment we saw on the faces of our clients. As one of our newer peer counselors put it, "...this day was amazing! You can tell that community misses us and that we miss community too!" Our second Pregnancy Day brought about a similar sentiment. This time we targeted our Spanish speaking population and had an even greater turn out. Our classes were engaging, breastfeeding interest was piqued, and gratitude was shown after clients received cute little gifts we assembled for them.

Our plan is to host our third and final pilot to fine tune some logistical details and then roll it out at our other four sites. We are thrilled to have clients back in the clinic to partake in in-person learning as well as spending time in community with one another.

Cheers to celebrating!
Advancing Black Maternal and Infant Health Equity at PHFE WIC’s CinnaMoms Crenshaw

Having been awarded the Kaiser Permanente Community Benefits grant, LA Care Generating African American Infant Nurturers’ Survival Initiative (GAAINS) and the Jewish Community Foundation of Los Angeles Grant in 2023, CinnaMoms was able to significantly expand and enhance our services to families. Our primary focus was to ensure that our CinnaFamilies had increased access to culturally congruent education, pregnancy support, and the experience of joyous births. We achieved our goal by documenting a substantial increase in CinnaMoms services, from 2022-2023, specifically reaching 150 new nurturers who may not have previously had access to our program.

The expansion of the CinnaMoms model also included returning to in-person support. Thanks to funding from Heluna Health, PHFE’s Obama WIC center was renovated, taking 1,400 square feet and turning it into our flagship location CinnaMoms Crenshaw. CinnaMoms Crenshaw features:

- Multi-purpose Wellness Studio for yoga and a lactation space for lactation consultant help and breastfeeding privacy
- Kid’s Corner with toys to practice motor skills and exploration, and books for reading literacy
- Rest and Nest Space Lounging area, inspired by book “Rest is Resistance: A Manifesto” by Tricia Hersey
- Kitchenette providing families with a refreshment station with WIC approved beverages and healthy snacks
- The CinnaSpot, which is a connecting, reading, meeting, and work space. Behind the CinnaSpot is the “Gallery Wall” featuring the CinnaTeam and a dedication to Ms. Sharen Anthony

Since opening CinnaMoms Crenshaw in June 2023, our Lactation Consultants and Breastfeeding Peer Counselors have offered drop-in lactation services twice a week on Wednesdays and Thursdays for breastfeeding moms. We have also had 8 in-person events in 2023 that included a Baby Shower, Yoga, Cooking Demo, Dance Fitness, and Breastfeeding Support Groups. We ended the year with a bang, by organizing a Holiday Resource Fair, where 459 families came to CinnaMoms Crenshaw and the Obama WIC center to get connected to resources from community organizations. Fourteen partners tabled at this event where families signed up for services, received essential items such as groceries, laundry detergent, diapers, wipes, clothes, books, holiday gifts and the opportunity to take free Christmas photos with Santa! Here are some photos from the event:

Images of the space
Video of the soft launch

If you are ever in LA, email us at Cinnamoms@phfewic.org to schedule a visit to CinnaMoms Crenshaw. For more information about CinnaMoms, visit www.cinnamoms.org and follow us on social media (IG/FB/Twitter: cinnamoms_) and www.phfewic.org.
Christopher Husing, Serving In and Out of the WIC Office

Christopher Husing is the Nutrition Services Bureau Chief for Solano County Public Health overseeing the WIC program and the CalFresh Healthy Living program. He has worked for the WIC program for 25 years. Many do not know that Chris has served in the military reserves for 30 years in addition to his WIC job.

Chris was recently selected to be a Commander of the 328th Field Hospital in the US Army Reserve and will take Command in May as Lieutenant Colonel. With this challenge, Chris decided to put his retirement from the Army Reserves on hold to take on this awesome responsibility. The role of a Field Hospital is to provide high level medical care in a combat environment. Even though Chris is a RD, he will be in a leadership and administrative role ensuring the Field Hospital and its personnel are trained and prepared to deploy should it be called upon.

Chris’ military career started as a US Navy Hospital Corpsman in 1983 and he was honorably discharged in 1989. After completing college and a dietetic internship, Chris continued to have a sense of service that motivated him to receive a commission in the US Army Reserve as a 2nd Lieutenant in 2000 assigned as a dietitian. During that time, he was a year into a new career as a Public Health Nutritionist working for Solano County at the Fairfield WIC clinic.

As Chris was promoted, he had a variety of military assignments. Chris worked as a Chief Clinical Dietitian overseeing patient and staff feeding operations. He was a Force Protection Officer on a mission to Panama in 2009 helping to ensure medical personnel were safe as they traveled in the south section of the country. Chris was a Clinical Dietitian for a medical clinic in Baghdad, Iraq from 2010-2011. He served as a medical planner in Honduras from 2017-2018. This was an exciting job that involved working on a team that planned and coordinated medical missions for civilians throughout Central America.

During COVID, Chris was the Chief Dietitian for the COVID surge center in Philadelphia from April through May 2020. While on his most recent deployment, 2022-2023, Chris worked as the USCENTCOM Theater Dietetic Consultant providing oversight of all nutrition care in the theater. In this deployment, he traveled to Egypt, Kuwait, Qatar, and Jordan.

During his military career, Chris says he had extremely supportive employers while working for Sacramento County’s WIC program and Solano County. Without their support (AND HIS FAMILY’S SUPPORT!!) he could not have had such a busy and rewarding career in the WIC program and the military, Chris added.

He was able to maintain the dual careers by working for the Army before, or after, the work day. Often, when traveling for the Army, he carries his county computer and checks emails or takes calls before or after the duty day. Most of his Army colleagues are doing the same thing, juggling civilian and military commitments, so there is a mutual understanding.

One of Chris’s favorite experiences was early in his Navy career. While deployed on a ship to the South China Sea, his Task Force was assigned to pick up a group of Vietnamese refugees. Several years later, Chris was taking organic chemistry and was chatting with a fellow student. He had learned that they were rescued by the same Task Force. Chris was able to say ”I was there!” and both had an instant connection.

Chris talks about many great foods and meals during his military travels. During his recent time in the Middle East, he learned to love the fruit especially during Ramadan where so many different types of dates are available. Learning that dates are healthy and believed to cure ailments, Chris enjoyed promoting the fruit in military dining facilities and with his Army friends as well.
San Diego Spreads the Word on WIC

Those driving throughout San Diego County may have noticed billboards promoting how families grow healthy with WIC. Five agencies in the area – TrueCare, Scripps, SDSURF, San Ysidro and American Red Cross – worked together to promote awareness about WIC services. The billboard points people in the direction of regional website sdwic.com, which includes information about WIC services offered by all agencies across the county.

Local billboard company Outfront Media’s partnership with one of the parent organizations – the American Red Cross – helped jumpstart this project. Outfront provides free filler space to nonprofits that help the local community and was excited about the opportunity to add WIC to that list.

Outfront’s creative team helped put together this colorful design free of charge. Their expertise in what makes an effective billboard was invaluable in the process. Insights they shared included having only one tagline with no more than 7 words. Thankfully our tagline “Families Grow Healthy with WIC” is only five words. The other important piece of advice was to give people exactly one place to go for additional information. You want people to know where to go in case they want more information, without giving them too many options, because that can be confusing. That is why the billboard directs people to sdwic.com.

Outfront was able to provide the local WIC agencies with digital billboard space at a discounted price. They also offered discounts to have the static billboards printed. The space for these static billboards – that you can see in the pictures – was at no cost to WIC.
Like so many other WIC programs, PHFE WIC is fortunate to have staff with great longevity with the program. Besides the recognition done on our Intranet and special pins presented to staff observing BIG anniversaries, 10 years ago we started a special in person celebration, the Milestone Breakfast. Staff recognized had reached a 20, 25, 30, 35 or 40 year landmark in that year. Our parent organization Heluna Health helps defray the cost of the event.

With COVID we took this celebration onto Zoom and sent the staff gifts in the mail. This year we were just thrilled beyond bits to bring back our in person Milestone breakfast.

On December 5, 2023, 60 PHFE WIC staff were honored and feted for celebrating a grand anniversary with the program. The Heluna Health President and CEO, Dr. Blayne Cutler and the Chief HR Officer, Mr. Tim Seifert attended the event and expressed their appreciation to the staff celebrating their milestone anniversary.

As we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the WIC Program, it is a reminder that working at WIC is not necessarily just a job but it is a calling and these years of service reflect a true testament of the passion, compassion and dedication of our WIC staff.

Kiran Saluja, PHFE Director, acknowledges and thanks the WIC staff for their dedication and longevity.
Each new mom is on a journey, and Sheily Gonzalez is no exception. She did not enroll in WIC initially, but she did want to breastfeed. At the hospital, labor was complicated. Her baby boy was breech, and she required an emergency C-section. Luckily, she had taken breastfeeding classes.

She visited the Central Avenue WIC Office, one of 11 Lundquist WIC offices, when she needed diapers. Maribel Renteria, a child development specialist, gave Sheily a book for the baby, introduced her to our Little by Little books for children program, and gave her literature about child development. She also helped her identify additional resources.

When Sheily was scared and having difficulties with breastfeeding, her medical provider recommended WIC. She met with Lilia Torres, a breastfeeding peer counselor, who answered her questions about pumping, gave Sheily a hand breast pump and showed her how to position it. She now attends our breastfeeding support groups, which she enjoys greatly.

Sheily’s baby is now 15 months old, and continues to breastfeed.
Delta Health Care and Stockton Food Bank Collaborate

Delta Health Care collaborated with the Stockton Emergency Food Bank’s Mobile Farmer’s Market program to distribute fresh vegetables and fruits to the Stockton community at three Delta Health Care locations. Once a month, the Mobile Farmer’s Market program stops by each site to provide up to 10 lbs. of fresh produce to over 50 families. They also do a healthy cooking demonstration with recipes and nutrition information. For more than 20 years, Delta Health Care has been collaborating with the Food Bank and other local community organizations to provide health and food access to the underserved population in the county.

New Referral System in Stanislaus County

Stanislaus County Health Services Agency (HSA) is divided into two divisions – Public Health & Clinics and Ancillary. In an effort to improve accessibility of WIC services to the Medi-Cal eligible population and provide comprehensive services, WIC opened a sixth office co-located with Stanislaus County HSA medical clinic, McHenry Medical Office (MMO). MMO provides services ranging from family practice and pediatrics to women’s services, well child care, pregnancy care, gynecology, and family planning. On October 6th, 2022, the Stanislaus County WIC Program kicked off a partnership with and opened the doors to WIC participants in central Modesto – a convenient location for many of our participants and eligible non-participants.

Our long-term goal in co-locating with our medical clinics was to become integrated into their system – their clinic flow, their electronic medical records (EMR) and their Comprehensive Perinatal Services (CPS) program to ensure we were connecting all WIC eligible participants to WIC services, specifically newly pregnant moms. In our first few months of co-location, we worked on streamlining soft handoffs and built our schedules to allow for walk-in appointments. Six months after opening our doors, we began working on integrating a referral system into their EMR system through CPS screenings. We worked with the system manager and clinic manager to determine the most appropriate place for WIC referrals and the information needed for a WIC referral that would eliminate the need for duplicated efforts. We launched the WIC referral system in the EMR in April of 2023. In just 6 months, we have doubled our number of pregnant women enrolled in their first trimester. We attribute this success to both the integrated referrals and the great work of our Region Breastfeeding Liaison.

Pregnant women and families with young children can now conveniently access both healthcare and essential nutrition resources in a single visit. This integrated approach not only ensures that beneficiaries receive comprehensive care but also facilitates better coordination between healthcare providers and nutrition experts to address health needs.
LOCAL AGENCY NEWS

SLO WIC Team Supports Breastfeeding Success for Preemie

Jazmin Narez, Public Health Aide
County of San Luis Obispo WIC Program

Jazmin delivered her son, Armando, at 24 weeks weighing 1 pound 14 oz. He was born May 4, 2023 and her due date was August 23rd. He spent 79 days in the NICU and now weighs 18 lbs 8 oz. She exclusively pumped for 13 weeks until she was able to get him to latch.

“I had just started at WIC in March 2023. One reason I think I’ve been so successful with breastfeeding my little guy is the support I have from my co-workers and the advice that they have given me. Noelia and Noemi know my pumping time and make sure I don’t miss it. Funny story- I told my supervisor Shannon on my last day of work that I had a dream I was pumping already.” Jazmin’s breastfeeding story is featured in the waiting room at the Grover Beach WIC office.

National Diabetes Month

Esther Garcia, dietetic intern at Clinica Sierra Vista WIC program, accepted the proclamation for National Diabetes Month presented by Kern County Board of Supervisor, Philip Peters on November 7, 2023. As part of her rotation learning about local agencies and public policy, she identified a champion to address the community about National Diabetes Month. She had a few moments to share at the podium about the impact diabetes has on the Kern County community and ways to reduce the incidence and lower complications.

Contact Chelsea at CSV chelsea.manning@clini-casierravista.org.
Get the latest WIC news in your inbox.

Sign up to receive updates from the California Department of Public Health/Women, Infants and Children Division.

Scan the QR code below to sign up for our newsletter:
Gloria Pecina began her WIC Director position with United Health Centers (UHC) of San Joaquin Valley in 1988. She was a visionary, according to those who worked with her, and saw the need for workforce development focused on a culturally congruent workforce.

Gloria helped start the College Success program, which provided classes for WIC staff at night and on weekends in the WIC offices. Under Gloria’s leadership, the Central Valley WIC Dietetic Internship (DI) Program began in 2004. At that time, it was very difficult to hire dietitians in the Central Valley, especially dietitians who spoke Spanish, Hmong or Punjabi. The creation of the Central Valley WIC DI was the embodiment of her vision, according to Beth Arrindell, Central Valley WIC DI Director. There have been 92 intern graduates, and 76 have become registered dietitians (RDs).

Tina Canales, Career Development & Dietetic Internships Coordinator, CDPH/WIC, shared that on the first day of her dietetic internship, Gloria met with the students and told her story of being an older student and getting a dietetic internship at the University of Virginia. Her husband was a teacher, they had family to help them, and she left for nine months to complete her DI. She left her son, twin 5-year-old daughters, and missed the twin’s kindergarten year and all the holidays! "Gloria started the internship in the Central Valley for people like me who had a family and went to college later in life" stated Tina. "Because of her sacrifice, we did not have to leave to become RDs. I will forever be grateful to her."

Ilse Arrambide, WIC Director, Madera County, stated "Ms. Gloria Pecina had a profound impact on the lives of many dietetic interns, especially mine. She taught and encouraged me to seek for the best I can give, to never compromise my values or beliefs, to keep my integrity and to never sell myself short. I used to call her ‘La Presidenta’ for the three years she was in the CWA board as President Elect, President, and Past President of the WIC Association. I loved to make her laugh, but the best part was that she trusted me and the other interns.”

Ilse continued, “Gloria expected all of us to be WIC Directors one day, and a lot of us fulfilled her vision. She has left an imprint on our lives as well as in the dietetics profession. I had promised her that when she retired, I was going to bring Mariachis to her party, little did I know that the mariachis would be having wings in heaven as she arrived at her heavenly destination. She will be missed by many of us, but her legacy will continue in our memories, the Central Valley Dietetic Internship and as the result of such an exemplary professional/personal life.”

In 2004, Gloria received the WIC Distinguished Leader award. “Her influence during her tenure has deeply touched numerous lives, leaving a lasting impact on her colleagues, staff, and me”, stated Denise Lee-Martinez, WIC Assistant Director at UHC. “Throughout the years she has generously volunteered to train fellow directors and as always she consistently promoted personal growth, ongoing education, and training with all of her staff.”

WIC Nutrition Assistants work together in the College Success classes, located in the WIC clinic.

Gloria (R) works with Terry Echeveste (2nd from R) and Karla Magie, WIC Nutrition Consultant in planning the career pathway to becoming Registered Dietitians.
Karen Evon Remembered

Karen Evon was a child model, featured in everything from Butterick's sewing patterns, and later as a teenager in Seventeen magazine and Coca Cola ads. She received her bachelor's degree in Spanish and English from the University of West Virginia. Karen was a true pioneer in the field of lactation for northern California.

Karen’s breastfeeding advocacy journey began in 1966 when she joined La Leche League (LLL) in Indiana soon after the birth of her second son. She then joined LLL in Buffalo New York in 1969 with her third child. Two years later she became a LLL Leader. When she moved to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Karen started a LLL group to provide mother-to-mother support in her new community. After she moved to Sacramento, she continued her LLL involvement with the Northern CA/Hawaii Chapter, organizing numerous conferences. Then, Karen and a group of her fellow LLL leaders took on the challenge of advancing the lactation profession to the next level. She took the International Board Certified Lactation Consultant (IBCLC) Exam in San Diego in 1986, the first year that the exam was offered internationally.

Karen helped found an International Lactation Consultants Association (ILCA) chapter known as “ALTA” in the early 1990’s. Karen served both as Board President and later as Editor of the “Breast of Times” ALTA newsletter. She organized an annual “Breastfest” for World Breastfeeding Week that allowed breastfeeding advocates and mothers to connect and further the cause of breastfeeding by celebrating together.

In the late 1990’s, Karen opened Maternal Expressions in Folsom California. It was the first of its kind business model, serving as both a retail store to provide maternity apparel, as well as a resource hub to help mothers prepare for breastfeeding. Maternal Expressions provided individual lactation consultations, pump rentals and a place for mothers to connect with each other to support their breastfeeding efforts.

Starting in 1995, Karen served both local WIC agencies Community Resource Project (CRP) WIC (formerly YWCA WIC), and the Sacramento County WIC Program providing Lactation Consultant services to countless WIC mothers for over 23 years. Jeannette Newman Velez, CDPH/WIC Breastfeeding Support Unit Chief, remembers that her constant motto as mothers prepared to walk out the door was, “Remember to enjoy your baby.”

Karen also was a founding member of the Sacramento Breastfeeding Coalition (SBC). Karen actively participated in the various endeavors as well including conference planning, the annual Breast milk donation drive and IBCLC Day recognition events to welcome new IBCLC’s into the profession.

Karen served as mentor to a multitude of women who later went on to further their knowledge in lactation. Many of them become LLL Leaders, Doulas and IBCLC’s. Karen will be lovingly remembered for her infectious laugh, her authentic concern for others, and her humble yet persistent commitment to make this world a better place for others through her vocation to support mothers in their efforts to nurture and nourish their children with breast milk.

In honor of Karen’s tremendous contributions, SBC established the Karen Evon Scholarship in 2021. Funds raised help underwrite preparatory coursework and exam registration fees for aspiring IBCLC’s. For those who would like to make a donation towards this cause, in memory of Karen Evon, please find more information at: Sacramento Breastfeeding Coalition Karen Evon Memorial Scholarship.
Wilma Austin was born in Walla Walla, Washington in 1931 and went home to join her husband, Roland, and sons Paul and Brian in August 2023.

After graduating from Washington State University (WSU) in Dietetics, Wilma did an internship at Grasslands Hospital in White Plains, NY before becoming a Registered Dietitian. She returned to Walla Walla to wed Roland, who she met at WSU.

While Roland served in the Army in a variety of locations in the South, she worked as a dietitian. Then, while focused on her primary role as mom in Walnut Creek, CA, she served on the board of the California Academy of Dietetics & Nutrition, served as a Meals on Wheels volunteer, was a Bible Study Fellowship leader, and was actively involved in women’s and children’s ministries at the Evangelical Free Church of Walnut Creek.

Wilma and Roland moved to Fresno in 1979 when she began her 30-year tenure with the Fresno Economic Opportunities Commission (Fresno EOC) WIC Program. She retired at nearly 80 years old to care for Roland who was suffering from Alzheimer’s. Wilma became an active volunteer at Somerford Place Alzheimer’s Assisted Living after Roland passed away in 2011, supporting both residents and their families for over five years. Wilma, along with Roland, was an active member of the Evangelical Free Church in Fresno (now Bridge Church), finding the most joy in her involvement in the missions program. Wilma was a champion and advocate for women, helping them realize their potential.

Annette Thornton, who was hired by Wilma in 1994 to work at Fresno EOC WIC and is the current EOC WIC Director, stated that when Wilma retired she left very large shoes to fill. “She had all the qualities of an ideal leader: professional, smart, articulate, decisive, direct, dedicated, confident, compassionate, and caring. She was at the helm of a tightly run ship, which was structured, consistent, and steady. Her presence alone radiated command and authority.” Annette continued, “I remember when she proposed a 4-day workweek to our Chief Officer, the late Paul White. Her presentation was very thorough and convincing.” This speaks volumes on her leadership style. Even today, as I sit at her desk, I ask myself, “What would Wilma do?”

When Wilma started at WIC in 1981, the program was still fairly new. Back then, there were no WIC offices. She and her staff of 7 served 860 clients by loading a van with materials, vouchers, and embossers, and setting up mobile clinics at community centers and playgrounds in West Fresno, and in the rural towns of Selma, Sanger, and Mendota. In 1989, after 8 years of mobile clinics, Wilma and her staff moved into the Executive Plaza in Downtown Fresno, in the same building the current WIC office operates today. While Wilma was the director, the WIC program grew from 7 to 70 staff and client caseload grew from 860 to 35,500.

Annette added “We really loved working for her; so much that we also loved to play fun jokes and hear her scream. And she was a good sport!” She continued, “Wilma was one-of-a-kind. We’re grateful for the lasting impression she left on us, and for the opportunity to work for her. She was not only our boss, leader, mentor, and role model, she was a trusted colleague and friend. Staff would walk into her office to talk about personal issues because she was such a good listener. Wilma was WIC—WIC is not only a place to serve the community, it’s a place where we build life-long friendships with our co-workers. Wilma will not be forgotten, she left a lasting legacy. We miss her and the delicious brownies she baked to reward us for a job well done. From the WIC family to Wilma, we say, ‘Job well done, Wilma.’”

“Job well done, Wilma.”
New CDPH/WIC Career Development & Dietetic Internships Coordinator

Tina M Canales, MBA, RD

Between my junior and senior year of high school, at the age of 17, I had my first daughter. I found out about the WIC program when she was 8 months old, enrolled, and took a “Feeding My Baby Class” which I loved and was my introduction to nutrition education. We got married and had our son when I was 19. We struggled financially. I worked at Round Table pizza and my husband cleaned offices at night. We qualified for food stamps, Medi-Cal, cash aid and financial aid because we were married.

My husband went to college full-time, and I went part-time, taking one to two classes a semester. I took nutrition classes which I loved, and the professor encouraged me to major in dietetics. I graduated from Fresno State at the age of 29 with a degree in dietetics. I did not do a Dietetic Internship (DI) out of college and found a job as the nutrition coordinator for Fresno Migrant Head Start. I made many connections, one of them Gloria Pecina, from United Health Centers (UHC) WIC. While attending a meeting, I was given information regarding the Central Valley WIC Dietetic Internship at the UHC WIC program.

At the age of 34, I was selected for the first Central Valley Dietetic Internship class in 2004. After completing the internship, I took the first job offered to me and was a full-time clinical registered dietitian (RD) at Madera Community Hospital for two years.

We were fortunate to have one more baby, my youngest is 17 and 19 years younger than our older children, and I could no longer work holidays and weekends at the hospital. In 2007, I started working for Fresno Economic Opportunities Commission (EOC) WIC as a supervising RD and loved it. I loved working with participants and mentoring staff.

In 2010, I accepted a position as assistant director of Clinica Sierra Vista (CSV) WIC and eventually became Director of the WIC program in 2013. We had over 100 staff with a dietetic internship for two interns per year. I obtained my master’s degree to retain our Dietetic Internship and in December 2019, a day before my 50th birthday, received my MBA from Fresno State.

After 13 years at CSV, in June of 2023 I accepted a position as the CDPH/WIC Workforce Development and Dietetic Internships Coordinator. This came around the same time I became a first-time grandmother (Grandma Teeny) to our grandson Leo.

I am passionate about sharing my story to encourage others that it is never too late to start school or a profession, and you don’t stay a teen mom forever. I love counseling and helping people to become their best self. I believe in the WIC program and hope to support and encourage more people to become RD’s. I feel I have come full circle at WIC, from participant to RD to Director and now working for CDPH/WIC.

I hope to help WIC staff achieve their goals by taking classes to become an International Board Certified Lactation Consultant (IBCLC) or RD. I feel my job is to help support the dietetic internships to be full of culturally competent interns that stay with the WIC program. I enjoy meeting with them for our RD2Be classes and encouraging them to pass the RD exam. I also want to encourage any staff that want to go back to school and get a college degree. There are so many programs available for working people.

I thank my parents for always supporting me, but especially my mom. One day I was complaining that I would be 29 years old when I graduated from college. Thinking my mom would give me a little sympathy, she asked me how old I would be if I didn’t go to college! It is never too late to finish or follow your dreams. Pecina with me at the CWA conference.
New WIC Directors

**Mukiio Kimanthi**  
*Napa County Health & Human Services Agency*

I am a first generation Kenyan-American. I was born in New Jersey and raised in Kenya and Rhode Island. I completed my Bachelors in Dietetics in 2011 and master’s in public health in 2014.

My professional journey has been in various areas. I served in the Peace Corps in 2017 in Kalomo, Zambia where I worked alongside the Department of Health to help with the reduction of maternal and infant mortality and promote exclusive breastfeeding. I also worked with a non-profit on a nutrition project that focused on reducing malnutrition rates in Kratie, Cambodia in 2019 which further ignited my passion for public health nutrition.

During the pandemic, I worked as a Covid-19 Epidemiologist but my longing for public health nutrition was not diminished. I have worked as clinical dietitian for seven years, but I knew I really wanted to be in the public health nutrition field.

Because of my desire and passion for community nutrition and helping women and children live healthy lives outside of the hospital, I realized that WIC was a great fit. In December 2022, I left Rhode Island and moved to Napa, California where I am currently working as the WIC director.

I am grateful that I get to work alongside and support a team that is passionate about helping our clients and making an impact in their lives. When I am not at work, I love to hike, exercise, travel the world and go back to Rhode Island to spend time with family, read and try out different restaurants and cuisines.

**Kaline Lecoq**  
*Plumas County WIC Director*

Kaline has worked for Plumas County WIC since early 2022 and accepted the Director position in July of 2023 after long-time director, Kathryn Dyrr, retired. She is honored to continue delivering quality services, support and education through WIC. She received her bachelor’s degree in biological sciences from California State University, Chico and returned to Quincy to raise her family. Although her time with WIC is relatively new, her work in social services is not. She worked for Plumas County Community Development Commission assisting local families in need and has been a program manager for various non-profit organizations prior to working with Plumas Rural Services.

Kaline is passionate about lactation education, food security in at-risk populations, and sustainable food systems. She is involved in the Dental Health Coalition, Mountain Interagency Lactation Coalition (MILC), and works in various local community health and children’s fairs promoting WIC. She enjoys collaborating with Plumas County Public Health Agency at their outreach clinics and Head Start to foster optimal health, well-being and happiness of the children in her community. In her free time, Kaline enjoys leather crafting, playing guitar, or spending time in nature kayaking, hiking or biking with her family, 7-year old son Elias, her partner, and their two dogs.
New WIC Directors

Bre Whitley
Sierra County Public Health WIC Director

I grew up in Quincy, California and have had a long list of jobs and experiences that have shaped my life. I began my career with Sierra County Health & Human Services in 2006 as an Eligibility worker processing Medi-Cal, CalWORKs, and CalFresh determinations. In 2014, when our longtime WIC coordinator retired, I jumped at the chance to fill the position. WIC was a huge part of my life as a new mom in 2002 when my daughter was born and again in 2005 with my son. I feel that I would not have been successful with my breastfeeding journey if it were not for the wonderful staff at WIC. The WIC staff that helped me in 2002 just happens to be the same RD that I work with every day now, Katy Dyrr. She has been a wonderful mentor personally and professionally. As of 10/1/2023, I have been given the opportunity to become WIC Director. I am excited to continue serving Sierra County WIC and pray that we are impacting people and their journeys.

When I am not working, I love to spend time with my husband of 23 years, our 4 children and their spouses and 2 granddaughters. I love to do all things crafting, it is my therapy and self-care time. Our youngest recently graduated from high school, so we are beginning a new season of life. We live in one of the most beautiful areas in the state and get to enjoy the outdoors often.

I look forward to learning and collaborating with you as WIC Director for Sierra County.

Sandra Salazar
Inyo County WIC Director

Becoming a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist was a challenging journey that started in my junior year of high school. At 16, I recall a career-choice exam hinted at Environmental Studies. My path eventually led me to nutrition after a realization that involved three years of studying soil. Taking a break from school, I focused on my plant-based journey, collaborating with a gardening organization to share nutritional insights gained from my own experiences.

This led to the revelation that my true passion lay in positively impacting lives through nutrition. Enrolling in a local junior college, I explored nutrition, finding genuine enthusiasm for my studies. Subsequently, I attended Cal Poly Pomona, actively participating in various clubs and joining a unique program specializing in Hispanic health and nutrition—a first of its kind in the nation. My confidence grew tremendously thanks to Dr. Aleida Gordon and the Estudiante de Dietetica program. Graduating from there, I secured a spot in Cal Poly’s Dietetic program under the guidance of Rachel S Flores. During this time, I honed my expertise in clinical nutrition.

In 2023, having moved to Bishop, CA, I passed the Dietetics exam and became the Registered Dietitian for Inyo County WIC. Shortly after, I assumed the role of Inyo County WIC Program Director, building positive relationships in the community and making a significant impact on families. Committed to continuous improvement, I am enrolled in a Certified Lactation Educator course and plan to pursue an IBCLC course to better understand and support those we serve. My experience with WIC has been transformative, and I am excited to continue making a difference in the community for the long term.
New WIC Director

Pooja Vyas

My name is Pooja Vyas, MS RDN – versatile seasoned dietitian with a flair for juggling hats. From healthcare to hospitality, I have blended nutrition expertise with management and leadership finesse. Currently, navigating the public health sector – WIC world and exploring program metrics to serve the community with outstanding customer service.

First generation South Asian – Indian Immigrant. Southern California native, where I lived and schooled; now a Bay Area resident, drawn by a promising work opportunity. Thriving in San Joaquin county with a loving husband and extended family.

Second career in the wine industry as a Wine Educator. I have worked for a boutique winery in Lodi, CA for almost 5 years now. I conduct and educate folks on the art of food and wine pairing alongside sharing knowledge on history and esthetics of wine tasting.

Looking Back Over 32 Years

Petra Rodriguez
Monterey County WIC Program

An amazing “WIC Chic”, Petra Rodriguez, is retiring after 32 years. Over her years, she has seen the program go from carbon to paper files, to ISIS “a new way of doing things” digitally, to WIC WISE. “Petra has always amazed me,” says Michelle Fox, Breastfeeding Peer Counseling Coordinator. Before WIC, she worked picking strawberries in the fields of Santa Cruz and Monterey County. She breastfed her children and returned to work never knowing anything about options of pumping at work. During her work at WIC, she was asked to translate for an IBCLC – and her passion and love to help and support struggling moms grew. She then had her fourth child Joshua, in 1997, and became an exclusive breastfeeding mom using a Latina pump when she returned to work.

Recognizing her deep interest and talent in helping, supporting and encouraging breastfeeding families, she went from a WIC Nutrition Assistant (WNA), to a Certified Lactation Consultant (CLC), to becoming an International Board Certified Lactation Consultant (IBCLC) in 2011. Petra visited the hospital in our “Mother to Mother” program – where she met with WIC moms who had delivered and assisted them with latch and building their confidence. This program led to her being our first Peer Counselor. When WIC moms would return to work in the fields, she knew what it was like and helped several moms continue to pump. All of Monterey County is blessed to have worked with Petra since her passion is contagious and her knowledge has identified countless babies that needed referrals because of suck issues. We are happy for the new adventures and travels that await her in retirement. She made a difference to so many, both staff and parents.
Dietetic Internship Grads

Clinica Sierra Vista RDN
Deanna Benavidez

This is our newest RD! She passed the exam last month. She had twin baby girls in May and still found the bandwidth to study and pass the exam! With a 2-year old!

School attended for undergrad: California State University, Fresno
Year of graduation: 2019

Fun fact about me: I have 3 babies under the age of 3, and they were my biggest motivation in passing my RD test. I became a dietitian to help others, and I feel extremely blessed to work for WIC and help my participants!

Clinica Sierra Vista DI Graduates

Berenice Vasquez

I completed my undergraduate degree at California State University, Fresno in May of 2021. A fun fact about me is that I was a participant in the WIC program as a teen mom. WIC had such a positive impact in my life and my son’s life that I decided to follow this career path.

Esther Garcia

Graduated from UC Davis in 2021 and worked for WIC for about 5 short months before moving up to a supervisor position!

Congratulations!
Leadership Academy

2023 Leadership List

Alaina Coffey ............ PHFE WIC
Alejandra Rodriguez ...... PHFE WIC
Ana Rivera ................ Solano County
Anna Cardenas .......... PHFE WIC
Annie Dunn ............... County of Humboldt WIC
Camisha Nettles ........ Alameda County
Cristian Mercado ........ PHFE WIC
Cynthia S. Tovar ........ Fresno EOC WIC Program
Elizabeth Polivka ......... Butte Cty Public Health – WIC Program
Elizabeth Oregel ........ PHFE WIC
Jacqueline Razo .......... PHFE WIC
Jade Knight ............. City and County of Long Beach
Jennifer Chiprich ..... Lundquist Institute WIC
Jenny Carr ............... County of Riverside – RUHS Nutrition and Health Promotion
Johanna Escalante ...... Northeast Valley Health Corporation
Joseneoe Vargas ........ Lundquist WIC
Juliet Barwis ............ El Dorado County HHSA - WIC
Kaline Lecoq ........... Plumas Rural Services WIC
Kim Schott ............... E Center WIC
KongPeng Moua .......... Community Medical Centers WIC
Latrice M. Reid .......... American Red Cross WIC
Lauren Cameron .......... PHFE WIC – Industry Hills office
Leni G. Espiritu .......... Orange County HCA WIC Program
Letisia Rosales .......... Butte County WIC
Lorena Gutierrez ........ Lundquist WIC
Maria Isabel Rodriguez . Northeast Valley Health Corporation-WIC Program
Miranda Valenzuela ...... American Red Cross WIC
Monica Mendoza .......... South LA Health Projects WIC
Mylen Nguyen .......... OCHCA-WIC
Niccole Maldonado ...... Fresno EOC WIC
Nicole Westbrook ........ PHFE WIC
Pauline Perez ............ PHFE WIC
Rosa Vasquez .......... Planned Parenthood WIC
Sandra Salazar ........... Inyo County WIC
Sandy Lemus ............. Lundquist WIC
Siham Hami ............. American Red Cross WIC
Stephanie Kuo .......... City of Long Beach
Trudy N. Adams .......... United Indian Health Services Women, Infant & Children Program
Veronica Villalba ...... Lundquist Institute WIC
Supplemental Nutrition Program
Wendy Cervantes ........ Butte County WIC
Yesenia Garcia .......... Lundquist Institute/ SLAHP WIC
Yvette Muniz Silva ...... Stanislaus County Health Services Agency WIC Program

Leadership Reflections

Elizabeth Polivka, Butte County WIC
This program has been wonderful, and so helpful for me in my role as a supervisor. I have learned how to be more mindful of my impact and influence on my staff, as well as how I present myself as a supervisor. I am new to being a leader, and giving constructive feedback has been by biggest issue so far. However, being a part of this group has given me not only the tools to do this well, but emphasized the importance of timely and constructive feedback. I think this is an important class for anyone considering or currently in a leadership role. It has helped me figure out the kind of leader I would like to be and shown me how to put that decision into action. Thank you all so much!

Stephanie Kuo, Long Beach WIC
The WIC Leadership Academy has been a really encouraging experience. It has motivated me and taught me skills on how to be a leader that is both bold and kind. The learning environment is so safe and welcoming; it really feels like everyone is welcome to come as they are and grow at their own pace. I'm grateful that I was given the opportunity to attend this training and recommend it to all!

Cynthia Tovar, Fresno EOC WIC
I attended the CWA Leadership Academy, which was an excellent experience as I got to interact with like-minded individuals who share my interests and goals. The program is designed to teach people who may not initially see themselves as leaders how to develop essential leadership skills. As a result, I became more aware of my attitude and behavior during work interactions. I firmly believe that everyone within the WIC umbrella should have access to the leadership academy because it provides essential leadership building blocks in a way that's tailored to our organization.
Pineville, Kentucky, Home to the First WIC Clinic, Celebrates 50 years!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7tEBhv1JCPU

Pineville, Kentucky, Home to the First WIC Clinic, Celebrates 50 years!

Dr. David Paige, MD, MPH, was foundational to the formation of the WIC Program. Here he recognizes Betty Hopkins, RN, one of the first employees in the Pineville WIC Clinic.

Ventura County WIC - 50 Years Strong

First 3 Ventura County WIC Directors in 2011:
Left-right: Katie Rowe, Lynda Young, Edith (Edie) Wald.

Edie applied for and received one of the first California WIC contracts in 1974. Edie was WIC Director from 1974 to 1995. Lynda was the Ventura WIC Coordinator from 1974-1995 and was WIC Director until 2007. Katie started at WIC in 1997, then was WIC Director from 2007 to 2020.

Dr. David Paige, MD, MPH, was foundational to the formation of the WIC Program. Here he recognizes Betty Hopkins, RN, one of the first employees in the Pineville WIC Clinic.

Three WIC Directors at Katie Rowe’s retirement in 2020. Left-right: Laura Flores, Katie Rowe, Lynda Young.

Laura Flores began her WIC career in 1997 in Monterey County, then was hired with Ventura WIC in 2003. She was Nutrition Education Coordinator until 2020, and is now the Ventura WIC Director.

Samar McGregor, PHFE WIC, NWA Board Secretary, visited the Pineville WIC clinic and celebrated with staff.

The Pineville Kentucky WIC staff and NWA board members celebrated WIC’s 50th birthday.

Celebrate 50 Years With WIC!
CWA Directors
2023-2024

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Native American Health Center
Veronica Plaugher, President Elect,
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“I had no idea how big a resource this would be for me! The women here are so caring, loving and knowledgeable. This is a gem for our community. Don’t be afraid to ask them for help, they are a wealth of knowledge.”

–Anna, Humboldt County WIC Mom

Save the Date

WIC Celebrates 50 Yrs
CWA Education Day
CDPH/WIC Fall Meetings
SEPTEMBER 24-26
Sacramento