



New Jersey WIC Services

FFY 2024

Statewide Nutrition and Breastfeeding Education Plan

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FFY 2023 OVERVIEW

In FFY 2023, New Jersey WIC continued to concentrate on supporting the conversion from paper vouchers to electronic benefits transfer (EBT/eWIC). State nutritionists continue to participate in operation meetings to address issues and follow-up with training local agency staff as required. The manager and supervisor continue reviewing documents, attending meetings, and providing feedback to the project management team. A State nutritionist reviews and updates the Universal Price Code (UPC) data base, which informed the WIC Approved Product List (APL). In addition, food categories, subcategories and food packages are being updated for eWIC. The Nutrition and Breastfeeding Unit was active in user acceptance testing (UAT) for the WOW conversion from Internet Explorer to Edge. The Nutrition and Breastfeeding Unit lead the Participant Communication Committee which saw the development of videos, participant education hand-outs and inserts to be utilized during the eWIC implementation.

In addition to the rollout of Edge, WIC local agencies and participants had to deal with the impact of the Abbott formula recall and formula shortages. There was ongoing communication with local agencies via memos and Teams calls in an effort to keep everyone up to date.

Along with the required adaptations for eWIC, there were ongoing enhancements in response to software releases to the NJWOW system. The increased Cash Value Benefit was welcomed by our participants but required the creation of all new WIC food packages in the NJWOW system. There were New Jersey WIC agencies who had not converted to eWIC, and therefore, were still using checks. The Nutrition and Breastfeeding Unit are actively involved in reviewing and providing input on changes to the system, along with user acceptance testing releases to the WOW system. The State agency continues updating policies and procedures to accommodate changes required for the NJWOW system.

FFY 2023 saw the continued impact of the COVID-19 pandemic public health emergency on New Jersey WIC services at both State and local agencies. Remote services continued with the extension of USDA waivers, and the State agency continued to provide guidance to the local agencies. Many agencies returned to their offices but continued to provide remote or hybrid services. Three agencies returned fully in-person WIC services.

The NJWIConline nutrition education website continued to be improved to be more user responsive. Increased usage is expected for secondary nutrition education with waivers in place. In FFY 2023, the number of lessons completed was 16,497 for the first three quarters; surpassing FFY 2022 with 14,780 participants receiving credit for completing NJWIConline lessons. The New Jersey Nutrition Unit updated the food list and the NJ WIC Food and Program Guide. The food list work group included State and Local WIC staff. The guide is smaller, more convenient to carry, remains colorful and provides key information for participants to use their WIC benefits. It will continue to be available on the NJWIC website and the WICShopper App; it has been well received by both staff and participants.

Collaborations have continued and grown at the State level, including Division of Community Health Services Oral Health Program, the Statewide Parent Advocacy Network (SPAN) and

Connecting NJ program from the Department of Children and Families. As a result of these collaborations, NJ has seen an increase in inquiries regarding WIC services from potential participants and professionals working with low-income families. NJ WIC continued collaborations with Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHC), the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Healthy Women, Healthy Families, Head Start, and NJ birthing hospitals.

The Teletask texting app is now used by 12 of our 16 local agencies; one agency utilizes another platform. Access to a texting app proved efficient during the ongoing public health emergency and remote services. It was easier to reach participants individually, but also helpful in notifying participants via group messaging. Those who participated on the App received messages on breastfeeding support, clinic hours, and availability of Zoom groups, to name a few. In addition, the texting apps were used for appointment reminders.

Efforts to improve nutrition education and service delivery in FFY 2023 included, but were not limited to:

- Ability of local agencies to print materials for participants directly from the internet, utilizing materials available on NJWIConline, the NJ WIC website and WIC works.
- Increased use of technology to provide group education virtually. Fourteen agencies provide education via Zoom, WhatsApp, and Facetime.
- Continued use of technology for communicating education messages (group and individual texting education messages and education materials sent via pdfs).
- Targeted trainings for local agencies on counseling, documentation, and formula issuance due to the shortage.
- Collaboration with local health departments, Healthy Women Healthy Families, Federally Qualified Health Centers, Family Success Centers, vendors, farmers markets, Head Start programs, hospitals, and community groups including non-profits serving similar populations.
- Increased communication with participants via Facebook, Facetime, Instagram, WhatsApp, and YouTube.
- All 16 agencies have incorporated the WICShopper app in the certification process to educate participants on the food list and assist with shopping in the store. Participants have been receptive, specifically with the scanning option and the ability to report vendor issues through the App.

All Local agencies provide services in English and Spanish with additional languages targeted to the needs of their participants.

Participants' nutrition education topics were determined by reviewing surveys, nutrition risk factors, post-training evaluations, and comments received from staff during meetings and onsite reviews. Specific details are listed in the needs assessment section.

During the first three quarters of FFY 2023, the most frequently selected individual education topic was Healthy Weight followed by Fruits and Vegetables and Age-Appropriate Feeding. We also

noted an increase in discussion and selection online of Fruits and Vegetables correlating with the continued increased CVV/CVB. The most frequently selected online lesson was WIC Gameshow; other popular topics included Babies 0-6 months, Being Active, and Fruits and Vegetables.

Local Agency staff Social Media presence increased in 2023, with six agencies having current Facebook posts, and two additional agencies with WIC posts on their 'Sponsor's Facebook page. This is an increase from a total of four agencies and Sponsors who posted WIC information on Facebook in 2023. In addition, six posts in August were about breastfeeding and Breastfeeding month.

NJWIC provides food packages that can be tailored to the individual needs of homeless and migrant participants. All agencies offer referrals to assist with social, medical, dental, and other needs identified during certification. Staff most frequently made referrals to health care and dental providers.

Training

State WIC trainings have been virtual using either Teams or Zoom platforms. The State Nutrition and Breastfeeding Unit conducted monthly or bi-monthly meetings. The meetings include important updates, such as formula recall and eWIC issues (especially formula and food package issuance). The eWIC formula and food package training provided was presented during these monthly meetings and included on our Learning Management System (LMS) system so all CPAs could have access.

The new USDA WIC Breastfeeding Curriculum was rolled out to all our local agency staff between October 2022 and April 2023. Every Mother Inc. was commissioned to provide the training using the curriculum's tiered approach. Local agency CPAs and PCs interested in advancing their lactation careers by becoming DBEs and/or IBCLCs were offered the opportunity to complete all four levels of training. Eighteen CPAs and eight PCs attended all four training levels.

New Jersey WIC hosted our second annual virtual celebration of Breastfeeding Month on August 16. The Zoom-based celebration was inspired by World Breastfeeding Week to enable breastfeeding by making a difference for working moms. WIC staff discussed tangible ways to support breastfeeding moms by preparing and supporting them upon returning to work. In addition, 10 of the 16 local agencies hosted very well-attended in-person community celebrations.

Local agency Chief Nutritionists, Breastfeeding Coordinators, and Coordinators were surveyed regarding their topic preference. Evaluations were sent to attendees after the meetings; these included suggestions for future meetings. The State has encouraged Local Agency Coordinators, Chief Nutritionists, and Breastfeeding Coordinators to include CPAs and Breastfeeding staff in the training, but with minimal participation. PowerPoint presentations and hand-outs are provided for local agencies to use in their staff training. In July 2023, the State Nutrition & Breastfeeding unit presented an in-person training for Local Agency Coordinators, Chief Nutritionists, and Breastfeeding Coordinators on documentation and counseling. Another training covering documentation was offered to CPAs and breastfeeding staff virtually. Overall, the evaluations were positive. Following this virtual presentation, local

agency evaluation responses indicated they specifically found scenarios and case studies of the greatest value. In addition to eWIC, other topics included promoting the increased Fruit and Vegetable benefits, Planning and Implementing Nutrition and Breastfeeding Education Plans, Providing Nutrition and Breastfeeding education and support virtually along with available platforms, and Planning and Transitioning to in-person services. This included time for local agency staff to ask questions and discuss solutions.

Local Agencies were required to provide motivational interviewing training to counseling staff; most utilized the Molly Kellogg "Step by Step" program. An emphasis was placed on practicing the techniques provided in the modules.

The Civil Rights Training PowerPoint is available to state and local agency staff on the New Jersey Learning Management System (LMS).

NEEDS ASSESSMENT FOR FFY 2024

The State WIC office evaluated the following data and statistics to determine the statewide goals for FFY 2024.

NJWOW Nutrition Risk Data

The most common risks assigned to participants in the third quarter of FFY 2023 were:

- Risk 114 – Overweight or at risk of overweight was the most common risk for children age two and was the second most common risk for children age one.
- Risk 401 – Failure to meet dietary guidelines, three and four years of age.
- Risk 142 – Preterm or Early Delivery was the most frequent risk for Children one year of age. – Dietary Risk Associated with Complementary Feeding Practice was the most common risk for exclusively breastfeeding infants.
- Risk 111 – Overweight was the most common risk for all women, including postpartum, pregnant, exclusively breastfeeding, and partially breastfeeding women.
- Risk 701 or 702 – Infant less than or equal to 6 months of age whose mother was on WIC or eligible during pregnancy and breastfeeding infants of women at nutritional risk.

Healthy People 2020/2030 Goals

Based on the most recent CDC Breastfeeding Report of infants born in 2019, overall breastfeeding rates in the US and New Jersey are lower than in recent years. In 2019, New Jersey's rate of ever breastfed was 82.5% (the national rate was 83.2%). The rate for exclusive breastfeeding through three months was 41.2% (the national rate was 45.3%). The rate for exclusive breastfeeding through six months was the same as the US: 24.9%.

The only Healthy People 2020 objective New Jersey met was for "any breastfeeding": the target was 81.9%. For Healthy People 2030, NJ WIC will continue efforts to meet the MICH-2030-15 objective of 42.4% of infants exclusively breastfeeding at six months of age, which is an ongoing goal.

Per USDA Food and Nutrition Services WIC Breastfeeding data local agency report (November 2022): in FY 2021, NJ's "any breastfeeding" rate of 44.7% is 10.4 percentage points higher than the US rate of 34.7%. NJ WIC's 2021 "partially breastfeeding" rate was 33.4%, 10.9 percentage points higher than the US 22.5% rate. All NJ local agencies recouped their pre-pandemic (2019) overall breastfeeding rates, with increases ranging from 0.1% to 8.2%. Six agencies showed gains in their "fully breastfeeding" rates from FY 2019, ranging from 1.3% to 15.5%. This is notable because the US saw a drop of 1.7% in this category. NJ's "partially breastfeeding" rate was 33.4%, 10.9 percentage points higher than the US 22.5% rate. At 55.4%, New Jersey's "fully formula feeding" rate is 55.3%, 10.4 percentage points lower than the US rate of 65.7%.

WIC Modernization

The New Jersey WIC community continues to follow current USDA/FNS Waiver guidance to test and explore various approaches to expand and retain participants. Many agencies will continue to offer remote services using a hybrid model.

Although New Jersey WIC has allowed telephone counseling in the past, it was rarely used by agencies; participants preferred in-person or group nutrition education sessions at the clinic sites. The State conducted a participant survey in 2021, and data suggested participants now prefer remote WIC services.

ARPA Waiver Guidelines - Benefit Issuance (BI)/ Nutrition Education (NE)

1. Continue remote service to current active participants (BI/NE/Mid-cert Assessments)
2. Offer choice to participants for benefit issuance and NE/Mid Certification Assessments in person.
3. Encourage participants to access NJWIConline.org for secondary nutrition education.

Onsite Review Findings and Observations 2023

Eight local agencies have been reviewed in 2023. Onsite reviews include virtual observations via Teams and in-person observations of local agencies providing in-person certifications and recertifications. Several areas of improvement have been identified. Five agencies received findings regarding participant-centered, VENA nutrition, and breastfeeding assessment and counseling. In addition, five agencies had a finding on assigning nutrition risk appropriately. Training in both these areas, including the updated VENA guidance, is planned for 2023/2024. Five agencies were not screening for immunizations; training and use of the NJIIS (Immunization Information System) was recommended. Four agencies received findings for not fully satisfying the guidelines pertaining to race and ethnicity, primarily not explaining the purpose of collecting race and ethnicity information. The USDA provided an annual training in 2021, which is available on our LMS; the State office updated that training in 2023 with knowledge-based questions.

NUTRITION AND BREASTFEEDING GOALS FFY 2024

- Utilize the revised USDA VENA guidance to improve participant-centered nutrition and breastfeeding services (education and referrals) to pregnant, postpartum, breastfeeding women, infants, and children up to age five. Provide targeted training to local agency counseling staff. Utilize the Learning Management System (LMS) when feasible to provide consistent statewide training.

Objectives:

- To expand the nutrition and breastfeeding knowledge of local agency staff who provide education and counseling to WIC participants.
- To provide guidance and training targeted to incorporate revised VENA guidelines for nutrition education and breastfeeding support.
- To provide training and technical assistance on Motivational Interviewing and other participant-centered assessment tools.
- To provide training to focus on providing participant centered counseling virtually.

Activities:

- Survey local agency staff on topics on which they would like for training.
- Establish a work group of local and State agency staff to identify areas of need and the best educational materials and presentations.
- Offer virtual training for counseling staff. The focus will be participant-centered counseling for CPAs, DBEs/IBCLCs, and PCs.
- Develop at least one webinar on a subject that will assist local agency staff in providing improved service to WIC participants and post to LMS.
- Continue to update New Jersey WIC/DOH Nutrition and Breastfeeding webpages with current resources.
- Training will focus on the most common risk areas, including overweight and obesity risk and oral health.

Objectives:

- Provide at least one statewide training to nutrition and breastfeeding counseling staff on motivational interviewing to help the participant develop a plan that will lead to behavior change to reach their nutritional and breastfeeding goals.
- LA staff will recommend specific NJWIConline lessons during certification, recertification, mid-certification, and secondary education appointments that relate to the participant's nutrition risk and correspond with the nutrition education provided by the CPA. A webinar will be developed focusing on the resources available to staff and participants to assist with this.
- Continue to reinforce the availability tools available on both LMS and NJWIConline as a resource for all local agency staff on eWIC to optimize participant buying experience.
- Review WIC risks and the importance of assigning all applicable risks, including those related to medical documentation and the need for exempt infant formula or WIC-Eligible Nutritionals. Include training that addresses common risks, including overweight and improper use of bottles/cups and pacifiers.

Activities:

- Provide ongoing support/technical assistance on resources available through NJWIConline.
- Provide targeted local agency training on EBT in the WOW system if issues arise.
- Be available to local agencies for support regarding eWIC issues.
- Update the NJ WIC website with accessible WIC education resources.
- Continue to update UPC database.
- Encourage local agency staff to include plans to work with their local Farmers' Markets and focus on fruits and vegetables in their Nutrition/Breastfeeding education plan.
- Provide nutrition and breastfeeding education with consideration of the ethnic, cultural, and geographic preferences of the participants as well as their educational and environmental limitations.

Objectives:

- To provide education materials in various languages to meet participant needs.
- To provide written materials that meet the literacy levels of the population WIC serves.
- To evaluate the recently launched updated NJ WIConline.org usage with the new voice option and the need for additional languages.
- To provide retail store options via the WICShopper App.

Activities:

- Evaluate current or revised educational materials to ensure the reading level is 6th grade or lower.
- Continue translating educational materials into various languages based on local agency needs assessments.
- Update NJWIConline.org as needed to continue to meet the needs of WIC participants.
- Local staff will promote WIC Shopper App during all WIC appointments.
- New Jersey WIC website will be updated to include WIC materials and promote WIC Shopper App.
- Continue to promote, support, and protect exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life and continued breastfeeding with the addition of complementary foods for two years or longer, as long as mutually desired by mother and child.

Objectives:

- Continue the Breastfeeding Peer Counseling Program offering mother-to-mother support.
- Increase lactation counselor contact with breastfeeding mothers through a texting application.
- Improve the availability and speed of delivering new staff breastfeeding education by hosting the new Breastfeeding Curriculum on the State learning management system (LMS).
- Increase the number of DBEs in local agencies by 25% by developing a career path to becoming DBEs, CLCs, and IBCLCs for PCs and CPAs.
 - Create a webinar for local agency staff about the IBCLC Pathway 1 and how they can become IBCLCs.

- Create a NJ WIC scholarship for PCs in lactation support deserts to become IBCLCs.

Activities:

- Continue to offer Peer Counseling Training using the new WIC Breastfeeding Curriculum for new staff.
- Conduct a full-day statewide in-person or virtual Peer Counselor meeting to promote networking and update skills.
- Encourage all agencies to implement texting applications or video platforms that are confidential and involve two-way, ongoing communications.

Objectives:

- Implement and/or support efforts outlined in the Statewide Breastfeeding Strategic Plan (NJBSP).
- Maintain stakeholder committee that includes the New Jersey Breastfeeding Coalition, State Departments and programs, Maternal and Child Health Consortia, and other non-traditional partners.
- Work with the Healthy Women, Healthy Families (HWHF) initiative, whose goal is to provide education and training to non-traditional audiences as part of their municipality-focused activities.

Activities:

- Support ongoing efforts to implement the NJSBSP.
- Continue to communicate progress to stakeholders on a regular basis.

EVALUATION

- Survey local agency staff regarding areas of interest and need for training.
- Conduct, review, and summarize training evaluations to determine additional or future training topics. Evaluations shall contain questions related to attitude, knowledge, behavior change, effectiveness, and applicability of the training. Ask attendees how they used the information if they found it useful, and what they will take away from the training. Model and incorporate behavior change practices.
- Utilize NJ WOW and ad-hoc reports to evaluate patterns and needs of nutrition education, referrals, and nutrition risk.
- Use redemption data to see what participants are buying and whether it varies by demographic.

LOCAL AGENCY NUTRITION EDUCATION PLAN HIGHLIGHTS

Collaborations

Our local agencies continued and expanded on collaborations with SNAP-Ed, local hospitals, Head Start, Healthy Women, Healthy Families, their local Department of Health, Federally Qualified Health Centers, Family Success Centers, Maternal Child Health Consortium, Perinatal Cooperatives, and Chocolate Milk Café and Sistahs Who Breastfeed support groups.

Additional collaborations included: Housing Authority of Hudson County, Angela Cares, Alphabet Inc. Child Care Center, The Asbury Park Community Affairs and Resource Center (CARC), CCYC (County Council for Youth Coalition), First Baptist Church of Pitman, Rutgers Cancer Institute Faith in Prevention - Coordinated by Rutgers Cooperative Extension, Grandparents Raising Grandchildren of Gloucester County, MEND, Inc, a 22-pantry consortium in Essex County, City of East Orange Lead Programs, Body & Soul, AMAR Doula, Children's Future Doulas, Community Action Network, and the Henry J. Austin parenting group.

Nutrition Education

Remote secondary nutrition education continues to be offered, especially through our NJWIConline.org website, and provided at all local agencies, while most education is conducted individually. Five agencies provided group education, and seven agencies conducted food demos. Cooking classes were offered either in person or virtually, and recipes were shared with attendees, where participants were shown how to incorporate WIC foods.

NJWIConline or individual education are the more frequently chosen forms of secondary nutrition education.

Milestones Matter initiative screenings began this past March 2023. Ocean County rolled out this initiative, providing screenings to all in-person appointments with infants and children in the household falling between 2 months of age up through 5 years.

Breastfeeding Education and Support

Breastfeeding group education has transitioned to virtual for eight local agencies and continues to be well received. One agency consistently provides breastfeeding support groups; other agencies refer to their partners. One agency utilizes an electronic "tickler file" to reach out to breastfeeding participants to come in for breast pump flange sizing. Another agency contacts WPP participants who are two weeks or fewer postpartum to ensure that it is not due to challenges WIC can assist with if they are not breastfeeding. One agency IBCLC spoke to a local high school's Mother's Group. One agency learned that prenatal education focusing on factors impacting milk production was particularly helpful for their participants after delivery. Several agencies servicing participants in a hybrid fashion bring all new pregnant moms to the office for initial certification.

Social Media/Websites

Two agencies reported a focus on utilizing social media, including Facebook and Instagram, to share program information, promote breastfeeding, and share recipes. All agencies are keeping their websites updated to include the NJWIC Portal, links to the WIC DOH website, contact information, and hours of operation.

LOCAL AGENCY IMPLEMENTATION OF STATE PLAN (SNEP)**Review**

Local agency coordinators, chief nutritionists, CPAs, and lactation consultants must review the Statewide Nutrition Education Plan (SNEP). Agencies may adopt the plan in its entirety or use it as the base for developing a modified local agency plan.

Planned Activities or Events

Local agencies must include planned activities for National Nutrition Month, National Breastfeeding Month, and other significant events.

Evaluate

Local agencies submit the fillable evaluation form detailing optional activities, collaborative efforts, and innovative projects.

RESOURCES FOR STAFF

- To improve motivational interviewing skills, Molly 'Kellogg's Step-by-Step: Client-Centered Skills for WIC Counselors, is available to all staff. Password: WIC cares
<https://mollykellogg.com/products/step-by-step-wic-log-on/> -
- The WIC Works Resource System resources for staff training, nutrition and breastfeeding education, and publications. WIC Works is a valuable source for State and local agency staff: <https://wicworks.fns.usda.gov/>
- New Jersey Department of Health WIC, oral health resource:
<https://www.nj.gov/health/fhs/oral/about-us/>
- National WIC Association COVID-19 Resources: <https://www.nwica.org/covid-19-resources>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention COVID-19 Resources:
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Learn the Signs. Act Early:
<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/index.html>
- Telehealth.HHS.gov, remote counseling: how to get or provide remote health care:
<https://www.telehealth.hhs.gov/>
- National WIC Association Webinars: <https://www.nwica.org/snippet-webinars-intro>
- New Jersey Department of Labor & Workforce Development, NJ Paid Family Leave and Medical Leave: <http://myleavebenefits.nj.gov>
- Breastfeeding Resources:
 - USDA WIC Breastfeeding Training Curriculum (also available on our SharePoint drive that local agencies can access): <https://wicworks.fns.usda.gov/resources/wic-breastfeeding-curriculum>
 - USDA WIC Breastfeeding Support, Learn Together, Grow Together:
<https://wicbreastfeeding.fns.usda.gov/wic-staff>
 - New Jersey Department of Health WIC:
<https://www.nj.gov/health/fhs/wic/nutrition-breastfeeding/bf/>
 - US Office of the Assistant Secretary of Health, Office on Women's Health:
<https://www.womenshealth.gov/breastfeeding>
 - Stanford Medicine Newborn Nursery, videos:
<https://med.stanford.edu/newborns/professional-education/breastfeeding.html>
 - CDC Breastfeeding:
https://www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding/recommendations/handling_breastmilk.htm
 - New Jersey Breastfeeding Coalition: <http://breastfeedingnj.org/>
 - Lactation Education Resources, hand-outs in many languages:
<https://www.lactationtraining.com/resources/handouts-parents/>
 - Global Health Media, videos in many languages:
<https://globalhealthmedia.org/topic/breastfeeding/>

- ZipMilk.org, a statewide database for local breastfeeding support: <http://zipmilk.org>
- National Library of Medicine Drugs and Lactation Database: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK501922/>
- Association for Promotion of and Cultural and Scientific Research into Breastfeeding: <https://e-lactancia.org>