

# WIC 2009: A time of change

WIC is the “Federal Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children”



WIC’s new food choices offer even better options for healthy eating



DOH 960-027 January 2010

## WIC is 37 years old – and a nutrition program that works!

Many studies have shown WIC is efficient and cost effective. In 2009 WIC made important revisions to better support healthy diets for lower income women, infants and children. WIC supplemental foods now match current dietary guidelines, encourage breastfeeding, and are lower in fat and cholesterol. These changes, plus nutrition education, help reduce the risk of obesity for WIC families – an epidemic damaging our nation’s health.

## WIC’s new foods help improve the lifelong health of Washington’s youngest residents

WIC Nutrition Program checks have always bought milk, eggs, juice, cheese, beans, peanut butter, and – for babies not fully breastfed – infant formula. These healthy foods:

- Are high in nutrients often missing in diets of lower income families.
- Are selected to address each individual client’s health needs.
- Promote healthy eating habits that can help prevent chronic diseases like diabetes, cancer, asthma, and obesity.

Now families participating in WIC can use WIC checks to buy fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grain breads and tortillas, tofu, and soy beverages – more healthy options! Plus, in most Washington communities, WIC families also get Farmers Market Nutrition Program checks to buy fresh fruits and vegetables from local farmers.

## WIC helps support local economies

WIC is funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Most dollars are spent locally on food for mothers and children. The second biggest cost is funding local agency WIC services.

**\$134 million in groceries** – Almost 78 percent of WIC funds are spent on healthy foods for young families in over 754 large and small grocery stores statewide.

**\$796,000 in local fresh fruits and vegetables** – With WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program, WIC families buy locally grown fruits and vegetables from 688 Washington growers.

**\$25.5 million for local jobs** – By funding 63 community and public health agencies to provide WIC nutrition services at over 214 clinic sites around the state, WIC helps support almost 1,000 local jobs.

With health screening, breastfeeding support, nutrition education, and referrals, families get much more from the WIC Nutrition Program than checks for foods. Your community benefits as well, because good nutrition helps prevent chronic diseases and the need for costly medical care, and healthier children are more likely to enter school ready to learn.

# WIC is a proven, cost effective public health program

**Healthy Communities**  
Washington  
Healthy people in healthy places



**The benefits of WIC nutrition services begin even before the child is born**



**Pregnant women participating in WIC** are more likely to get early prenatal care and to breastfeed, and they are less likely to be heavy smokers than similar moms not in WIC.<sup>1</sup> Children not exposed to second-hand smoke are less likely to suffer from asthma symptoms and related hospitalizations.<sup>2</sup> Mothers served by WIC have better birth outcomes: they are half as likely to have very low birth weight babies, which come with health concerns and high medical cost.<sup>1</sup>

## Supporting breastfeeding is WIC's top priority

Breastfeeding is best for babies and all pregnant women and new mothers in WIC are encouraged to breastfeed. Almost 85 percent of WIC moms do – more every year. Trained staff and peer counselors support them through the beginning stages, and offer breast pumps to help mothers who return to school or work continue breastfeeding.

- Breastfeeding lowers baby's risk of infections, diarrhea, SIDS, obesity, diabetes, asthma, and childhood leukemia.<sup>3</sup>
- Each breastfed baby saves \$450 to \$1,450 per year in medical costs.<sup>3</sup>
- For every 1,000 newborns who are not breastfed, there are 2,033 more doctor visits, and 212 more hospital days compared to babies breastfed for three months.<sup>4</sup>
- Helping mothers to breastfeed is an important obesity prevention effort. Breastfed children are less likely to suffer from childhood obesity.<sup>5</sup>
- Breastfeeding also strengthens the bond between mother and baby.

## Nutrition education and referrals are the keys

Trained WIC staff coach families enrolled in WIC on good nutrition and physical activity, normal growth and development, and the importance of preventive health care. Staff also help connect WIC clients to services they need to get and stay healthy.

## WIC Nutrition Program "by the numbers" in 2009

- **Over 67 percent** of infants born in rural counties were served by the Washington WIC Nutrition Program; statewide 51 percent of all infants born were served.
- **More than 313,000** women, infants and children participated in WIC.
- **Working families made up 69 percent** of WIC participants, yet 63 percent of families were living on poverty-level incomes.
- **Over 14,000 WIC clients are in the military** or are from military families.

For more information about the Washington WIC Nutrition program or to get footnoted references visit [www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/WIC](http://www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/WIC) or call 1-800-841-1410.

For persons with disabilities, this document is available on request in other formats. To submit a request, please call 1-800-841-1410 (TDD/TTY 1-800-833-6388).