State nutrition program launches more convenient shopping with WIC Cards

OLYMPIA – Starting in July, Washington’s Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) nutrition program is replacing paper checks with WIC Cards, a more flexible, convenient way to shop for almost 275,000 participants who use the program.

“WIC is a critical part of our state’s work to make our next generation the healthiest ever,” said Governor Jay Inslee. “WIC helps children start nutritious eating habits before starting kindergarten, and supports parents so they can experience a healthy pregnancy and raise healthy children.”

As the program transitions to cards over the summer and fall, WIC participants will no longer need to keep track of multiple paper checks or purchase all foods on their benefit at one time. A family’s benefits will all be available on one card. Any foods they don’t purchase will be available on their next trip until the end of the benefit period, and their receipt will list the food benefits they have left.

With nothing to sign and an automated process for checking whether each food item is WIC-approved, the new system will speed up grocery store transactions and make shopping easier for WIC families.

Feedback from the first WIC participants to receive cards during a pilot phase in Kitsap County in March has been overwhelmingly positive. Participants said the cards “make getting groceries a snap” and “feel like a debit card: inconspicuous and easy to use.”

“The ease of shopping went up by 100 percent,” said one WIC mom in Port Orchard.
Improvements to the program’s technological capabilities will also give clinics new tools to make participants’ lives easier, like text message reminders for appointments and the WICShopper app.

Using the app, participants can scan food barcodes to see if they’re WIC approved, locate WIC clinics and approved stores, find recipes using WIC foods and browse health tips. Participants without regular access to the internet will still be able to use a printed shopping list.

WIC provides many services beyond access to nutritious foods, including health assessments, nutrition education, breastfeeding support and important referrals to other health and social services.

Learn more about the WIC Cards rollout on the department’s website.

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