

Women, Infants, and Children Program (WIC)

OVERVIEW

What is it?

A nutrition program that provides nutrition education, breastfeeding support, infant formula, milk, cheese, eggs, cereal, juice, and other foods to eligible recipients.

Who is it for?

Pregnant and postpartum women, infants, and children under age five who are nutritionally at risk and have a family income not more than 185% of the federal poverty guidelines.

Where are applications taken?

At most local health departments and some community health centers. Decisions on applications should usually be made within 20 days, or ten days for pregnant women or infants under six months of age.

INTRODUCTION

The WIC program, formerly entitled the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children, provides breastfeeding support, food supplements and nutrition education for eligible individuals who are at nutritional risk. Because this is not considered an entitlement program, not all persons who meet the eligibility criteria will receive benefits.

BENEFITS/ SERVICES

Two benefits are available through WIC: food supplements and nutrition education.

Food supplements:

Eligible recipients receive free food vouchers that can be redeemed at authorized grocery stores for special foods. A professional at the health department or community health center makes up an individual “food prescription” for each participant that is tailored to his or her nutritional needs. The vouchers are for a monthly allotment of the specified foods. Participants must usually pick up the vouchers from the WIC provider. Usually, three months of vouchers can be picked up at a time. The vouchers must be redeemed within the time period stamped on them.

A typical food package for an *infant* will contain:

- Iron-fortified infant formula for 0-12 month olds (up to 403 fluid ounces concentrate);
- Iron-fortified dry infant cereal for 4-12 month olds (up to 24 ounces); and
- Fruit juice for 4-12 month olds (up to 92 ounces).

A typical food package for a *child* will contain:

- Milk (up to 24 quarts);
- Cheese (up to four pounds);
- Eggs (up to two and a half dozen);
- Iron-fortified dry cereal (up to 36 ounces);
- Fruit or vegetable juice (up to 276 ounces); and
- Dry beans (up to one pound) or peanut butter (up to 18 ounces).

A typical food package for a *pregnant or breastfeeding woman* will contain:

- Milk (up to 28 quarts);
- Cheese (up to four pounds);
- Eggs (up to two and a half dozen);
- Iron-fortified dry cereal (up to 36 ounces);
- Fruit or vegetable juice (up to 276 ounces);
- Dry beans (up to one pound) or peanut butter (up to 18 ounces); and
- For exclusively breastfeeding women: tuna (up to 26 ounces) and carrots (up to 32 ounces).

Nutrition Education

Each local program must make available free nutrition education as well as specific counseling tailored to the individual participant's need. WIC participants who decline the nutrition education benefits of the program may not be denied food supplements. Nutrition education should be simple and take into account the cultural and personal preferences of the participants. Pregnant women must be given information on breastfeeding, bottle feeding, and other aspects of infant feeding. Children should receive information geared to their level of understanding.

APPLICATIONS

Applications are taken at the local WIC program sites, which are usually county health departments. In eight counties, the WIC program is administered in other locations (see list below).

County	WIC Provider
Chatham	Piedmont Health Services
Duplin	Duplin, Onslow and Pender Community Action Agency
Durham	Lincoln Community Health Center
Halifax	Twin County Health Center
McDowell	Saluda Medical Center
Orange	Piedmont Health Services
Polk	Saluda Medical Center
Rutherford	Saluda Medical Center

Information about the WIC provider in a specific area can be obtained from the First Step hotline, 1-800-FOR-BABY (1-800-367-2299) from 9 am to 7 pm Monday through Friday.

An applicant must provide information on residence, income and other eligibility factors to complete an application. For example, an applicant may be required to submit a W-2 form and/or check stub from the last four weeks (to verify income), a recent utility bill or other document which verifies residence, and a birth certificate (to verify age of child), to verify eligibility.

The application also includes a nutritional assessment, carried out by a professional at the WIC site. This is used to determine whether the applicant is at “nutritional risk.” (See personal eligibility section below). The assessment will include at least a measurement of height and weight, and for adults and children over six months, a blood test to check the iron level. An applicant may wish to present other medical information in support of the application to show that he/she is at “nutritional risk.”

An applicant who is pregnant, applying on behalf of an infant up to age six months, homeless, or a member of migrant farm worker family that plans to leave the agency’s service area should receive an eligibility determination within ten days. Other applicants should have a determination within 20 days. Applications that are denied may be appealed.

Applicants are usually certified for periods of six months at a time. Pregnant women are certified for the duration of their pregnancy and six weeks postpartum. At the end of the certification period, the participant must be recertified to continue receiving the benefits. The recertification process is essentially like the application process. The WIC program administrator must give at least 15 days advance notice prior to the end of the certification period.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

Eligibility Requirements

To receive WIC benefits, a participant must be:

- A resident of North Carolina and/or in the service area of the local WIC provider;
- At nutritional risk; and
- Pregnant, breastfeeding (up to one year after the birth), postpartum (up to six months after the birth), or under age five.

Nutritional Risk (Need)

The determination of whether an individual is at “nutritional risk” is a medical judgment. A variety of conditions may qualify an individual. If the person is diagnosed with conditions such as the following, he/she will be considered at “nutritional risk:”

- Abnormal or detrimental nutritional conditions that can be detected by laboratory tests or observation, such as anemia or abnormal weight;
- Other documented nutritionally-related medical conditions;
- Dietary deficiencies that impair or endanger health; or
- Conditions that predispose persons to inadequate nutritional patterns, such as chronic infections, or alcohol, tobacco or drug abuse.

PRIORITIZATION SYSTEM

The state estimates that it is meeting the needs of approximately 77% of the eligibles. Because WIC is not an “entitlement” program, applicants who meet the above criteria may still be denied benefits if there are insufficient resources to serve everyone. When funds become limited, eligibility is determined based on a priority system:

- Priority I: Pregnant women, breastfeeding women and infants at highest nutritional risk;
- Priority II: Infants (up to six months) of mothers who participated in WIC during pregnancy, or of mothers who did not participate but would have been eligible;
- Priority III: Children (over age one) whose medical condition reveals them to be at high nutritional risk;
- Priority IV: Pregnant and breastfeeding women at lower nutritional risk;
- Priority V: Children (over age one) at lower nutritional risk; and
- Priority VI: Postpartum women at nutritional risk.

APPEAL RIGHTS

WIC applicants and participants have the right to a fair hearing to contest any local program decision regarding initial eligibility or subsequent termination of benefits. Local programs must give participants at least 15 days notice if they plan to terminate benefits.

A request for a hearing must be made within 60 days after notice of the decision was mailed. The request may be made orally or in writing, and directed to either the local WIC provider or to the state WIC office. (The details of how to request a hearing are contained in every notice of decision). The benefits can continue pending a hearing on termination of benefits, provided the appeal is requested within 15 days of the notice.

The hearing must be conducted by an impartial hearing officer, scheduled within three weeks of receipt of the request, and held at a location accessible to the person requesting the appeal. A decision must be made within 45 days of the receipt of the request. If a person is dissatisfied with the results of the hearing, he/she may request a further hearing with the Office of Administrative Hearings. The procedures for these hearings are controlled by the Administrative Procedures Act, NCGS 150B. Persons wishing to proceed through this step may want to seek the services of an attorney. Some WIC participants and applicants may be eligible for free legal services (See Chapter 32).

FINANCING

The WIC program is financed primarily through federal (99.25%) and state funds (0.75%). In SFY 1998, the program spent the following amounts:

Federal: \$66,772,441 (food)
 \$25,846,891 (nutrition services and administration)
 \$39,835,961 (formula rebates)
State: \$950,000

ADMINISTRATION

WIC is administered at the federal level by the Food and Nutrition Services within the US Department of Agriculture. The program is administered at the state level by the

Women's and Children's Health Section, NC Department of Health and Human Services, and at the local level by public health departments or community health centers that have contracted to be WIC providers.

SOURCES OF LAW	Federal statute:	42 USC 1786 et. seq.
	Federal regulations:	7 CFR Part 246
	State statute:	Sec. 15.27 of 1997 Session Law 443 (Appropriations Bill)
	State regulations:	15A NCAC Chapter 21D

**FOR MORE
INFORMATION**

Nutrition Services
Women's and Children's Health Section
NC Department of Health and Human Services
PO Box 10008
Raleigh, NC 27605
919-733-2973

First Step hotline, 1-800-FOR-BABY (1-800-367-2299) from 9 am to 7 pm Monday through Friday.