

# WIC: Building Collaboration to Improve Oral Health

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# Overview

- Dental disease and access to dental care are major public health problems for young low-income children living in the United States.
- Because of frequent interactions with low-income children and their families, several public health programs can help alleviate dental problems by improving access to dental care.
- An example of such a program is the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC).

# What is WIC?

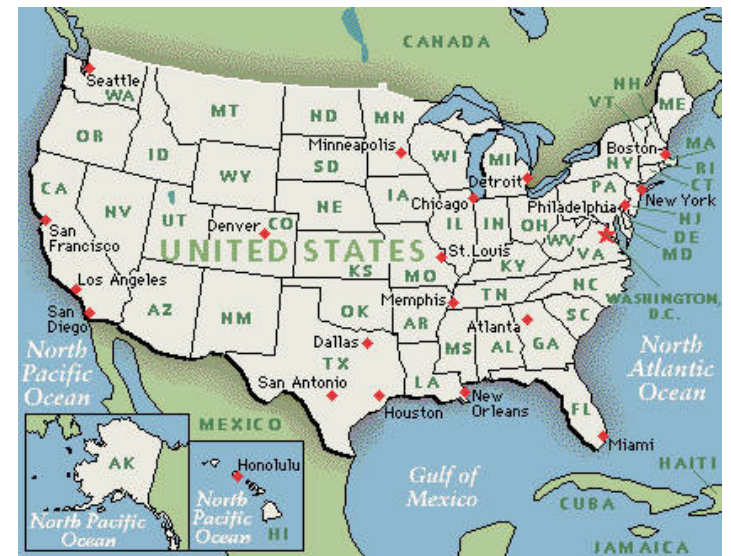
- WIC is a public health nutrition program administered at the Federal level by the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture
- FNS provides grants to 90 State agencies who administer the Program at more than 2,000 local agencies and more than 10,000 WIC clinics

# Who Does WIC Serve?

Low-income pregnant, breastfeeding, and postpartum women, and infants and children up to age five who are at nutritional risk.

# Where is WIC?

- 50 States
- District of Columbia
- Puerto Rico
- U.S. Virgin Islands
- Guam
- American Samoa
- Northern Mariana Islands
- 34 Indian Tribal Organizations



# WIC Participation

- During the final quarter of FY 2009, the number of women, infants and children receiving monthly WIC benefits reached **9.3 million.**
- One half of infants born in the United States are enrolled in the WIC program.

# Average Monthly Participation Fiscal Year 2009

- 2.0 million infants
- 4.0 million children (1-4 years of age)
- 2.0 million women



WIC is often the first contact with the health care system for many low-income women and children.



# WIC's Goal

Improve the health of women and children  
by providing:

- supplemental nutritious foods
- nutrition education and counseling
- breastfeeding promotion and support
- referrals to health and social services

# Nutritious Foods

- Monthly “food package” provides foods designed to meet the nutrition needs of each of WIC’s participant categories
- Recently revised to better align with U.S. Dietary Guidelines for Americans and AAP infant/toddler feeding guidelines
- Participants receive vouchers redeemable for specific items at local grocery stores

# Referrals and Networking

- To improve its goal to improve the health of women and children, WIC agencies work to improve the linkage between clients and health care providers, including dentists, through referrals and networking.
- Referral of children to health and social services is an important component of WIC programs.

# Examples of WIC Referrals

- prenatal/well-child care services
- immunization services
- public assistance programs:
  - TANF
  - Medicaid (including EPSDT)
  - Food Stamps
- State Children's Health Insurance Program
- alcohol, tobacco, and other drug abuse counseling
- **dental services**
- child support services
- family planning

# WIC and Oral Health

- The WIC Program's role in preventing oral health problems in women, infants, and children is through its education and referral programs.
- WIC local agencies provide nutrition education and counseling on healthy diets based on assessment of client needs.
  - Often includes nutrition counseling to parents and guardians of infants and children on proper care of the gums and teeth at home and feeding practices that reduce the risk of developing early childhood caries.

Many WIC local agencies have improved the links between participants and the local dental community through referral and networking.

# Opportunities for Collaboration

- Many opportunities exist for WIC and the dental community to come together to benefit communities.
- The potential benefits of working together can make a positive impact on good oral health and good general health for children.

# Variation in WIC Programs

- State agencies have broad discretion over program implementation within the regulations established by USDA.
- A great deal of variation exists among States in specific program characteristics.



# Key Points for Collaboration

- Share understanding of the goals, objectives, organization, policies, legislative mandates, funding, and practices of each program.
- Develop key messages on nutrition education and breastfeeding they relate to oral health that are evidence-based and consistent between programs.
- Seek practical solutions to issues such as staffing, space, time management, and priorities.
- Develop formal agreements.
- Understand value of each program.

# Successful Demonstration Projects

- WIC agencies around the country are keenly aware of the devastating effects that poor oral health can have on low-income children. One of the biggest problems facing local WIC agencies and clinics is finding dentists and oral health care programs to refer WIC participants.
- The demonstration projects you will hear about today, which were funded with grants from HRSA, offer some examples of how WIC and the dental community can work together to ensure that low income children and pregnant women receive necessary dental services.