

## Section 6.9: Nutrition Education Materials

03/2024

**References:** 246.11(c)(3)

**Policy:** Local agencies should use appropriate nutrition education materials that deliver accurate and consistent messages to participants and address the nutritional needs of participants.

**Purpose:** To assure the use of appropriate, accurate, high-quality nutrition education materials.

### Procedures

- Nutrition education materials provided by the state office are designed to support and enhance nutrition-focused counseling efforts in local agencies. Materials are developed and evaluated for content accuracy and appropriateness for WIC participants.
- Materials are routinely reviewed for scientific accuracy and health literacy principles such as plain language, reading level, format, and graphic design. Language and cultural appropriateness are also considered. This review is conducted by State Consultants, working with the Nutrition Education workgroup. Local agencies are encouraged to order and utilize materials available from the state office.
- Local agencies may purchase or develop nutrition education materials. These materials must be reviewed for scientific accuracy and health literacy principles. See guidance for developing and reviewing nutrition education materials.

### Guidance

- When a local WIC agency uses nutrition education materials not provided or suggested by the state office, the nutrition coordinator for the agency should evaluate the materials.

**Consider the following criteria as you develop and/or evaluate nutrition education materials.** These criteria apply to most educational materials, including printed and electronic. For a more detailed evaluation of nutrition education materials, use one of the resources listed in the Resources section below.

- **The content should:**
  - Be current, accurate, and consistent with evidence-based recommendations. Use credible resources, e.g., American Academy of Pediatrics, United States Department of Agriculture, and Centers for Disease Control.
  - Address relevant health issues for the target audience. Is the information appropriate for pregnant, breastfeeding, postpartum, infant and child participants?
  - Have a clear purpose. Is the intent of the material apparent?
- **Materials should be behavior focused and:**
  - Contain just one or two main themes, e.g., “Five strategies for increasing activity” is one theme.
  - Clearly state the actions you want your audience to take. Focus on behavior rather than medical facts or statistics.
  - Include specific examples of desired behaviors in a positive manner, e.g., play tag with your children.
  - Be encouraging by offering small, practical steps.
- **Consider culture:**
  - Use terms that your target audience uses and/or is comfortable with.
  - Use culturally appropriate images for the target audience.
- **Choose your words carefully and:**
  - Keep it short. Use simple, common words. Avoid abbreviations, acronyms, and technical jargon. If you need to use an unfamiliar term, explain it in the text.
  - Avoid long, complex sentences containing multiple phrases and clauses. Keep most sentences to between eight to ten words.
  - Use active voice. Active voice is where the subject does the action, e.g., “Use WIC foods for snacks between meals” rather than “WIC foods can be used as snacks between meals”.
  - Be conversational. Communicate like you are talking to a friend.
- **Promote Readability by:**
  - Displaying information in a logical order, with the most important messages first.
  - Keeping sentences simple, short, and specific.
  - Limiting paragraphs to one topic.
  - Adding white space around headings and text.
  - Using bullets, numbers, and tables to make information easier to scan and read.
  - Choosing an easy-to-read font. Font should be at least 12 point.

- Using images that are relevant to the text and communicate a message. Images should show instruction or desired behaviors.
- Assuring material is written at 5th-grade reading level or lower. Suggested ways to test readability include:
  - Pre-test the material readability with a sample group from your intended audience.
  - Use a readability formula such as the SMOG Readability Formula. Making Health Communication Programs Work in the Resource section below includes a guide to using the SMOG Readability Formula.
- **Accurately translate materials:**
  - Use a skilled professional translator with the necessary writing skills and cultural knowledge, or, at a minimum, have a skilled translator review a local translation.
  - Translate for meaning, rather than word for word.
  - Be cautious of online translation tools. These tools can have errors and may not correctly convey the meaning and nuances of the text. If an online translation tool is used, have a skilled translator review the translation before it is used.

## Resources and Reference – Complete Listing of Hyperlinks

CDC Clear Communications Index (<https://www.cdc.gov/ccindex/pdf/clear-communication-user-guide.pdf>)

Federal Plain Language Guidelines (<https://www.plainlanguage.gov/guidelines/>)

Developing and Assessing Nutrition Education Handouts: Testing the Validity and Reliability of the New Tool

(<https://www.jandonline.org/action/showFullTableHTML?isHtml=true&tableId=tbl1&pii=S2212-2672%2815%2900116-1>)

Developing and Assessing Nutrition Education Handouts (DANEH) Checklist

<https://higherlogicdownload.s3.amazonaws.com/THEACADEMY/332b30df-e065-46ce-94da-9c8a13541862/UploadedImages/Foundation/files/DANEHChecklist.pdf>

Making Health Communication Programs Work (<https://www.cancer.gov/publications/health-communication/pink-book.pdf>)

*Minnesota Department of Health - WIC Program 625 Robert St N, PO BOX 64975, ST PAUL MN 55164-0975; 1-800-657-3942, [health.wic@state.mn.us](mailto:health.wic@state.mn.us), [www.health.state.mn.us](http://www.health.state.mn.us). To obtain this information in a different format, call: 1-800-657-3942*

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