

WIC Local Agency Conference Call

WEDNESDAY MAY 17, 2023, 8:30-9:30 AM

Agenda and Summary Notes

Agenda Items:

- National Updates
- WIC Mobile Management System – Tami Matti/Kati – Dakota County
- ARPA Waivers – Rebecca Gruenes
- CVB Benefit Issuance – Tami Matti
- Help Desk and Issue Resolution – Tami Matti
- Food Package and Formula Update – Jessie Zins

National Updates- Kate

Comment on Proposed Updates to WIC Vendor Regulations

In February, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) released a proposed rule entitled [Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children: Online Ordering and Transactions and Food Delivery Revisions to Meet the Needs of a Modern, Data-Driven Program](#). The proposed rule will adjust WIC vendor regulations, with the potential of empowering State WIC agencies to enable online shopping for WIC foods across the country. The rule is open for public comment through May 24, 2023.

The NWA has put together an online resource for those wishing to comment on the proposed rule with template comments and tools to help you draft comments:

- [Submit Comments on the WIC Online Ordering Rule](#)
- [National WIC Association Talking Points and Template Language](#)

You can adjust the template comments to best reflect your voice, experience, and vision for how WIC's benefit can be improved. Regulatory commenting is not a lobbying activity. USDA and other federal agencies seek public comment to inform their decision-making.

COVID-19 Public Health Emergency Expired May 11, 2023

The federal COVID-19 public health emergency declaration expired last Thursday, May 11. WIC's COVID-era waivers will remain in place through August 9 and we are preparing to support Local WIC Agencies in moving to the new ARPA WIC waivers for physical presence and remote benefit issuance. We'll share a little more about the ARPA waivers guidance later in the call, but I wanted to remind agencies that they will need to return

to offering in-person services by August 10. We encourage Local Agencies to be planning for and beginning that transition now.

Next Round of ARPA Grants for WIC State Agencies

The second round of WIC modernization and innovation grants through ARPA are open for State Agencies. SAs can apply for funds again to *Improve the WIC Shopping Experience* and for using *Technology for a Better WIC Experience*. In each of the two types of grants, states can apply for up to \$750,000. These grant funds could be used through September 30, 2025. Minnesota WIC did receive these 2 grants for 2022 and we are currently working on several projects. We plan to apply for the next round of grants with proposals due June 12, 2023. We're exploring project proposals in the following areas:

- Adding a participant portal to our WIC MIS
- Updating the platform for our WIC Mobile App
- Offering grant funds to WIC stores to move to integrated POS systems
- Expanding Online Shopping in Minnesota Beyond Hy-Vee project
- Offering grant funds to use CHW for WIC Grocery Tours
- Offering grant funds to support language interpretation services
- Working with U of M to Create Online Nutrition Courses for WIC CPAs

Other Program Updates

WIC Mobile Management System – Tami Matti/Katie Galloway – Dakota County

We are beginning steps to make mobile management available statewide. St. Paul/Ramsey began pilot in November 2022, Dakota County was added to the pilot in January 2023. There were some updates that needed fixes that needed to be made before we could rollout and those are being bundled with our next Mobile app release that will be available on June 17th. The updated guidance doc for using Mobile Management will be posted on Thursday June 22nd along with instructions on how to request access to Mobile management for your staff. After that time, requesting mobile management access will be included on the User Request form.

Dakota County's Katie Galloway gave an overview of how they are using.

THANK YOU to St. Paul/Ramsey County and Dakota County staff for piloting the Mobile Management system.

ARPA Waivers – Rebecca Gruenes

Tips and suggestions for reopening WIC clinics

On August 9, 2023, Minnesota WIC waivers, including in-person services, expire. With the expiration of the COVID-19 related waivers, height and weight measurements and bloodwork will be required per federal regulations. The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Waivers go into effect on August 10,

2023. ARPA Waivers add an option for waiving physical presence if measurements and bloodwork can be obtained from a health care provider. However, we anticipate most participants will need to be served in person to complete these measurements.

A “soft” reopening before August 10th is highly recommended

Local agencies in Minnesota and other states that are currently providing in-person services now recommend starting out with just a few appointments a day and to build slowly.

- Until August 10th, agencies can continue to use the COVID related waivers, providing more flexibility in how participants are served, e.g., if you are unable to schedule an in-person appointment or obtain referral height/weight/hgb data, you can use the COVID related waivers until August 10th. That flexibility takes the pressure off staff as they adjust to in-person services.
- Start with new pregnant, breastfeeding/postpartum, and infant applicants. Agencies that have reopened share it is easier to explain the WIC program, how to use the WIC card, and find WIC allowed foods in-person. Additionally, pregnant participants and new parents appreciate the in-person breastfeeding support!
- Allow extra time for appointments in the early days as staff readjust or learn how to provide services in person.
- Use the time before August 10th to develop a manageable clinic schedule.
 - Consider which appointments can be done remotely, such as Additional Education Contacts.
 - Determine how to manage staff time between in-person and remote services.

Take time to communicate as a WIC team

- Discuss concerns staff have re-opening WIC clinics to in-person services. Listen and brainstorm ideas to address the concerns.
- Create a timeline with steps to reopening.
- Plan fun re-opening activities! Bring food for a lunch potluck for employees. Decorate your office doors with welcome back signs for participants.
- Discuss the benefits of working in person. This is what we have heard from agencies that have reopened:
 - Staff report they enjoy seeing participants in person and feel they are making good connections.
 - Staff appreciate working together as a team and enjoy spending time together. One agency shared that they have been doing some fun, team building activities since being back in person.

Communicate with participants

- When scheduling an in-person appointment, frame the appointment in a positive manner. “We are excited that we are now doing appointments in person! We can’t wait to see how your child has grown. We will measure your child and talk about their growth and your family’s nutrition needs.”

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- Check out customizable social media messages to welcome families back to WIC clinic, [Communication Resources for Resuming In-Person Services](#). Share these messages with participants using your local agency communication channels (social media, email, text messages, website, etc.).
- Local agencies that have reopened clinics report that they have received little resistance from families. In fact, many families are anxious to connect with WIC staff and voice their appreciation for the in-person support. Families are accustomed to attending appointments at medical clinics and dental offices, where many COVID related restrictions are relaxing.
- If a family is reluctant to come in person, be flexible. Solicit their concerns and address them. Consider the options that best meet the family's needs, for example:
 - Offer the option to provide referral height/weight/hemoglobin so appointment can be completed remotely.
 - If they are concerned about being in a crowded place, offer an early morning appointment before the clinic gets crowded or have the family come into clinic just for measurements and then finish the appointment over the phone.
 - Share your agency procedures for mitigating the risks of infection or illness in the WIC clinic.
 - Explain how often in-person appointments will usually take place. "We get to see you in-person twice a year."
 - Offer appointment times that are convenient for the participant and meet the needs of working families, so they don't have to take time off to come to WIC. Make sure participants are seen on time.

Communicate with other programs and your partners

- Share your plans for reopening WIC clinics with other programs in your agency.
- Inform health care providers in your community of your plans. Invite conversation on how height and weight measurements and bloodwork results may be shared.

Prepare your clinic sites

- Inventory available certification equipment including scales, recumbent boards, stature boards and hematological equipment. Do you have adequate equipment for all your clinic sites?
- Test scales prior to opening.
- Inventory supplies for obtaining height, weight, and hematological measurements. Anticipate that most applicants/participants 9 months and older will require a hemoglobin at their appointments and plan accordingly.
- Inventory office supplies and educational materials.
- Do you have adequate computer equipment? Is internet access available at all clinic sites?

Train or retrain staff on Anthropometric and hematological procedures. Check out the resources on the MDH WIC website.

- [WIC New Staff Training](#) includes an easy to watch Anthropometric module (60 minutes).

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- [HemoCue OnCue Education](#) includes on-demand, eLearning courses for using the HemoCue Hb 201 or Hb 301.
- [MN WIC Calendar for Local Agencies](#) includes numerous HemoCue Hb 301 System Training Webinars.

Nutrition Services

- Review High Risk Care and Referral protocols. [Section 6.6 High Risk Individual Nutrition Care Plans](#) and [Exhibit 6-A High Risk and Medical Referral Criteria](#).
 - The CPA should determine the best method for High Risk Follow up for individual. Follow-up by phone may be appropriate if:
 - The participant doesn't have any anthropometric or hematological high-risk indicators, which require measurement or assessment of current height, weight, and/or hemoglobin before high-risk follow-up, or
 - Current height, weight, or hemoglobin from a health care provider is provided.
 - Agencies report a higher incidence of low hemoglobin in the early months of reopening clinics. This may be due to inconsistent healthcare and/or worsened eating habits during the pandemic. Remind staff of high-risk care and referral expectations for low hemoglobin.
- Agencies that have reopened are seeing a significant increase in postpartum depression. Remind staff of community resources available to assist. The [Postpartum Care – Topic of the Month](#) includes resources for Postpartum Depression.

CVB Benefit Issuance– Tami Matti

Changes to the descriptions related to canned will be made on May 20, 2023. See the May 18, 2023 [HuBERT Hints](#) more information.

Issuance of the increase in the CVB is approved through September 30, 2023. On or before September 30, 2023, Congress will either need to agree upon a budget for the next federal fiscal year (FFY) or have a continuing resolution (CR) in place to extend federal government funding to avoid a government shutdown. With either scenario, Congress will determine if the increased CVB will continue into the next FFY.

At this time, we know that Local Agencies will need to provide the standard CVB amount for benefits with a PFDTU on or after October 1, 2023. In July, we will provide a reminder that staff will need to begin issuing the standard CVB amount for these benefits. **We DO NOT recommend that staff proactively create new food prescriptions for October with the lower CVB amount.** We recommend that as staff are issuing benefits to participants, they create the new food prescription at that time. We plan to implement the same process we did last year working with our HuBERT Contractor Gainwell and the eWIC Processor CDP. When approved they will work together to perform the increases to the CVB on the back-end for all participants issued the lower amount of CVB.

As we move closer to these dates, we will continue to provide updates on the Local Agency call and in the HuBERT Hints.

Customer Service Line issue and Help Desk – Tami Matti

On May 15, 2023, we became aware of a few issues related to participants ability to set their PIN and view benefits in the app. Below are the issues and the cause of the issue, at this time **all issues have been resolved**.

eWIC Customer Service line – participants calling the eWIC Customer Service line were getting the message that it was “temporarily unavailable”. A certificate was introduced to the production servers prior to when it should have been in error at the eWIC contractor. They removed the certificate and reinstalled the old one. We will be receiving a full write up including the exact issue and the length of time it was unavailable.

Access to www.EBTEDGE.com via the wiccard.mn.gov URL listed on the back of the card - in assessing how participants could set their PIN instead of using the eWIC Customer Service line, we found that the wiccard.mn.gov URL listed on the back of the card was no longer directing participants to www.ebtedge.com site. It was instead directing to our MDH home page. This redirection is maintained by MNIT, we hadn't had any reports of this not working so we are unsure of how long it was “broken” MNIT has since resolved the issue.

Benefits Balance not displaying in the My MN WIC Mobile App - We had a few reports of participants unable to see their benefits balance in the app. This appeared to be resolved at the same time as the customer service line issue was resolved and from the errors that logged in our mobile app database it appears that it was having an issue accessing the information from the eWIC processor so related to the certificate issue.

Over the last few months, we have been receiving more emails directly to state staff rather than calling the MN WIC Help desk hosted at Gainwell. Remember that **the MN WIC Help Desk should always be your first call**, even if they can't directly resolve the issue, they gather all required information do an initial background investigation and then escalate to the State office. The State office is in frequent communication with Gainwell and issues reported to the Help Desk can be resolved faster than directly emailing state staff.

Food Package and Formula Update – Jessie Zins

- See Information in May 17 Weekly Update, [Formula Substitutions & Food Package Changes](#).

Questions & Answers

Are you able to send mass messages to a group through the app messages?

Yes, you will be able to send mass messages through the My MN WIC app. The state office is creating a form to be completed allowing Local Agencies to request a message to be sent. More information will be provided with the Mobile Management information in late June. NOTE: this message is sent to the messages section of the My MN Mobile App not via text.

Can agencies request signatures through the mobile management system?

No, you cannot request a signature through the Mobile Management system.

Can the redcap form be sent through the mobile management system?

Participants can upload their documents via the Contact Us function in the My MN WIC Mobile app so there is not a need to send a link to the REDCap form for uploading documents. The REDCap form can

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be used for participants that are new to the program and have yet to register in the app and use the Contact Us function.

Does the mass message show up as a text?

No, the message will show up in the message section of the My MN WIC App. A participant will receive a notification that there is a message in the App. Clicking on the notification will bring them to the messages section of the app as well.

What is the expected time to respond to a message once received?

Guidance for responding to messages in the Mobile Management system will be daily when possible but no more than 3 days.

Do these messages from participants go to staff's email or are they using a phone then?

No, WIC staff correspond with the participant through the Mobile Management System.

Are the ARPA waivers required for agencies to utilize? Or can they choose whether they will use them?

MN WIC is opting into the waivers and agencies should consistently offer flexibilities across the state.

Can referral data (height/weight/hemoglobin) come from a home visiting nurse or do measurements have to be provided by the family's doctor?

Yes, referral data can come from a home visiting nurse.

Is a phone appointment still a possibility for low-risk Nutrition Education (NE)/Additional Education appointments?

Yes, providing Low Risk and High Risk NE over the phone is possible. The CPA should determine the best method for High Risk Follow up. Follow-up by phone may be appropriate if:

- The participant doesn't have any anthropometric or hematological high-risk indicators, which require measurement or assessment of current height, weight, and/or hemoglobin, or
- Current height, weight, or hemoglobin from a health care provider is provided.

Will the ARPA waivers guidance be sent in an email to all coordinator's when available?

Yes, we can send the guidance via email when available.

When did the substitution list for regular formula expire?

Enfamil non-contract brand substitutes ended April 30, 2023.

Reference – Complete Listing of Hyperlinks

[Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children: Online Ordering and Transactions and Food Delivery Revisions to Meet the Needs of a Modern, Data-Driven Program](https://www.regulations.gov/document/FNS-2022-0015-0001)
(<https://www.regulations.gov/document/FNS-2022-0015-0001>)

[Submit Comments on the WIC Online Ordering Rule](https://nwica.salsalabs.org/Onlineshoppingcomments2023/index.html?eType=EmailBlastContent&eld=f2d9739e-b479-486d-b223-82ea530ee4c9)
(<https://nwica.salsalabs.org/Onlineshoppingcomments2023/index.html?eType=EmailBlastContent&eld=f2d9739e-b479-486d-b223-82ea530ee4c9>)

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National WIC Association Talking Points and Template Language

(<https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fmedia.nwica.org%2Fmay2023onlineshopping%2520template%2520comments%2520resource.docx%3FType%3DEmailBlastContent%26eId%3Df2d9739e-b479-486d-b223-82ea530ee4c9&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK>)

Communication Resources for Resuming In-Person Services

(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/wedupdate/2022/topic/0511resources.pdf>)

WIC New Staff Training

(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/training/nst.html#NaN>)

HemoCue OnCue Education (<https://hemocueoncue.education/>)

MN WIC Calendar for Local Agencies

(<https://calendar.google.com/calendar/u/0/embed?src=500k4ns9eqb26v51529qg1fpuo@group.calendar.google.com&ctz=America/Chicago>)

Section 6.6 High Risk Individual Nutrition Care Plans

(https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/program/mom/chsctns/ch6/sctn6_6.pdf)

Exhibit 6-A High Risk and Medical Referral Criteria

(https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/program/mom/chsctns/ch6/sctn6_6.pdf)

Postpartum Care – Topic of the Month

(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/wedupdate/2022/topic/1005topic.pdf>)

HuBERT Hints

(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/infosystem/hubert/hints/current.html>)

Formula Substitutions & Food Package Changes

(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/wu/2023/0517fp.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, www.health.state.mn.us; to obtain this information in a different format, call: 1-800-657-3942.

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