

# Women and Children Participating in WIC

## DEFINITION

*Women and children participating in WIC* is the percentage of eligible women, infants, and children enrolled in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC).

## SIGNIFICANCE

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) is a federally funded preventive program that provides participants with nutritious food, nutrition education, and referrals to health care and social services. WIC serves pregnant, postpartum, and breastfeeding women, infants, and children under age five living in low-income households. Any individual who participates in SNAP (formerly the Food Stamp Program), RIte Care, Medicaid, or Rhode Island Works is automatically income-eligible for WIC. Participants also must have a specified nutritional risk to qualify. This includes medically based risks such as anemia or high-risk pregnancy, or dietary risks such as inadequate nutrition.<sup>1,2,3</sup>

WIC improves the quality of participants' diets and promotes healthy eating habits. Studies have shown that WIC participants access more nutritious foods, including more produce, whole grains, and low-fat dairy. WIC participation also may decrease

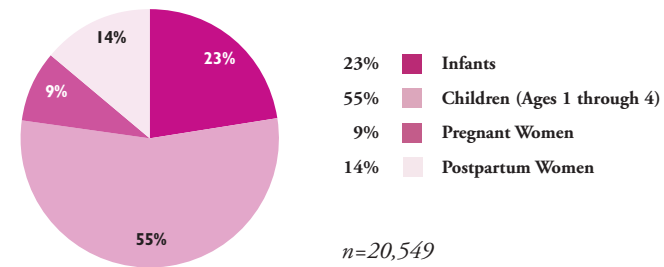
household food insecurity (families that do not have regular access to food for an active healthy life).<sup>4</sup> Food insecurity in early childhood can lead to impaired cognitive, behavioral, and psychosocial development, and can limit academic achievement.<sup>5</sup> Pregnant women also have special nutritional needs that influence pregnancy outcomes and the health of their children.<sup>6</sup>

WIC participation has been shown to reduce infant mortality, improve birth outcomes (including reducing the likelihood of low birthweight and prematurity), improve cognitive development, reduce risk of child abuse and neglect, increase child immunization rates, boost cognitive development, and increase access to preventive medical care.<sup>7,8</sup>

Revisions made in 2014 to the WIC food package increased access to a wider variety of nutritious foods and strengthened breastfeeding support.<sup>9</sup> WIC consistently promotes breastfeeding as the optimal method of infant feeding.<sup>10</sup> In Rhode Island in Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2019, 79% of mothers participating in WIC initiated breastfeeding. Sixteen percent of infants participating in WIC were breastfed at three months of age, and 14% were breastfed at six months of age.<sup>11</sup>

As of June 2020, WIC will provide an EBT (Electronic Benefit Transfer) card to all Rhode Island users.<sup>12</sup>

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**Women, Infants, and Children Enrolled in WIC,  
Rhode Island, September 2019**



Source: Rhode Island Department of Health, WIC Program, September 2019. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

- ◆ **Infants and children ages one through four comprised more than three-quarters (78%) of the population being served by WIC in September 2019 in Rhode Island. Women accounted for over one-fifth (9% pregnant and 14% postpartum) of the population being served.**<sup>13</sup>
- ◆ **In September 2019, 68% of WIC participants in Rhode Island were White, 17% were Black, 3% were Asian, and 9% identified as other races or more than one race. Fifty-five percent of WIC participants identified as Hispanic. Hispanics are included in the racial groups above.**<sup>14</sup>
- ◆ **Three of the four core cities had participation rates exceeding the statewide enrollment rate of 47% in 2019 – Central Falls (58%), Pawtucket (46%), Providence (57%), and Woonsocket (57%).**<sup>15</sup>
- ◆ **WIC is not an entitlement program. Congress determines funding annually, and WIC is not funded at a level that is sufficient to serve all eligible women and children.**<sup>16</sup> Rhode Island received \$16.8 million in federal WIC funding during FFY 2019, which was less than the \$21.7 million in funding for FFY 2018.<sup>17</sup>
- ◆ **The WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) improves participants' intake of fresh fruits and vegetables by enabling participants to purchase produce at authorized local farmers' markets using WIC benefits.**<sup>18</sup> In Rhode Island, 28 farmers' markets provided fresh produce to 12,747 WIC participants through the FMNP in FFY 2019.<sup>19</sup>

# Women and Children Participating in WIC

Table 13.

**Women, Infants, and Children Enrolled in WIC, June 2019**

CITY/TOWN	ESTIMATED NUMBER ELIGIBLE	NUMBER ENROLLED	% OF ELIGIBLE ENROLLED
Barrington	151	31	21%
Bristol	370	132	36%
Burrillville	490	144	29%
Central Falls	2,090	1,213	58%
Charlestown	156	32	21%
Coventry	774	282	36%
Cranston	2,799	1,349	48%
Cumberland	721	231	32%
East Greenwich	191	39	20%
East Providence	1,585	626	39%
Exeter	114	41	36%
Foster	109	36	33%
Glocester	185	40	22%
Hopkinton	197	143	73%
Jamestown	25	2	8%
Johnston	982	393	40%
Lincoln	490	136	28%
Little Compton	48	6	13%
Middletown	436	208	48%
Narragansett	163	38	23%
New Shoreham	29	0	0%
Newport	815	407	50%
North Kingstown	555	185	33%
North Providence	1,126	460	41%
North Smithfield	206	74	36%
Pawtucket	4,971	2,278	46%
Portsmouth	237	86	36%
Providence	1,4369	8,252	57%
Richmond	139	48	35%
Scituate	195	56	29%
Smithfield	307	100	33%
South Kingstown	512	101	20%
Tiverton	315	90	29%
Warren	305	95	31%
Warwick	2,211	728	33%
West Greenwich	81	39	48%
West Warwick	1,447	501	35%
Westerly	672	185	28%
Woonsocket	3,002	1,700	57%
<i>Four Core Cities</i>	<i>24,432</i>	<i>13,443</i>	<i>55%</i>
<i>Remainder of State</i>	<i>19,138</i>	<i>7,064</i>	<i>37%</i>
<i>Rhode Island</i>	<i>43,570</i>	<i>20,507</i>	<i>47%</i>

**Source of Data for Table/Methodology**

Rhode Island Department of Health, WIC Program, June 2019.

Note: WIC participation rates in this Factbook are based on a single date in June. Previous Factbooks used a September 30 reference date, with the exception of the 2011 Factbook, which used a July reference date. Additionally, since 2007, the “estimated number eligible” is based on calculations done by the Rhode Island Department of Health to determine the number of pregnant and postpartum women, infants, and children under age five who live in families with an income less than 185% of the federal poverty level. In previous years, the “estimated number eligible” was based on 2000 Census data (2005 and 2006 Factbooks) and 1990 Census data (all Factbooks prior to 2005).

Core cities are Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket.

**References**

- <sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture. (2018). *Women, Infants, and Children (WIC program)*. Retrieved February 15, 2020, from www.fns.usda.gov
- <sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture. (n.d.). *The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC program)*. Retrieved February 15, 2020, from www.fns.usda.gov
- <sup>3,4,7,10</sup> Carlson, S. and Neuberger, Z. (2017). *WIC Works: Addressing the nutrition and health needs of low-income families for 40 years*. Washington, DC: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.
- <sup>5</sup> *Food insecurity*. (2016). Washington, DC: Child Trends.
- <sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office on Women's Health. (2018). *Pregnancy: Staying healthy and safe*. Retrieved January 8, 2019, from www.womenshealth.gov
- <sup>8</sup> Fortson, B. L., Klevens, J., Merrick, M. T., Gilbert, L. K., & Alexander, S. P. (2016). *Preventing child abuse and neglect: A technical package for policy, norm, and programmatic activities*. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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