

# Women and Children Receiving WIC

## DEFINITION

*Women and children receiving WIC* is the percentage of eligible women, infants and children served by the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC).

## SIGNIFICANCE

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children is a preventive program providing nutritious food, nutrition education, and improved access to health care.<sup>1</sup> This federally-funded program serves pregnant, postpartum and breastfeeding women, infants, and children under five years of age with household incomes below 185% of the poverty level. In addition, any individual who participates in the Food Stamp program, RIte Care, Medicaid, cash assistance through the Family Independence Program, or is a member of a family in which a pregnant woman or infant receives Medicaid benefits, is deemed automatically income eligible. Participants must have a specified nutritional risk, such as anemia, history of poor pregnancy outcomes or inadequate dietary patterns.<sup>2,3</sup>

WIC is not an entitlement program and is not funded at a level that is sufficient to serve all eligible women, infants, and children.<sup>4</sup> Rhode Island received \$13.9 million dollars in federal funding during fiscal year 2002 and served 23,969 people.<sup>5,6</sup>

WIC participants purchase a monthly food package – an individually prescribed combination of targeted foods to improve the nutritional quality of their diets – at local retailers with checks or coupons.<sup>7</sup> WIC participants also receive nutrition education and health care referrals through the program.<sup>8</sup> WIC promotes breastfeeding as the optimal method of infant feeding and program eligibility for breastfeeding mothers is extended for up to one year.<sup>9</sup> Between 1993 and 2002, the percentage of WIC infants who were breastfed more than doubled, increasing from 6.4% to 14.6%.<sup>10</sup>

WIC participation improves birth outcomes, increases the nutrient intake of preschoolers, increases breastfeeding rates and immunization coverage, improves cognitive development and increases the likelihood of having a regular medical care provider.<sup>11</sup>



## Overweight Children and Childhood Obesity

- ◆ WIC was first established in 1972 to combat malnutrition and hunger in low-income Americans. Since that time, overweight and obesity have become a serious health issue in the United States. An estimated 1 in 10 children in the WIC program is overweight, an increase of 20% since 1983.<sup>12</sup>
- ◆ The increase of overweight and obesity among WIC participants may be related to the overall increase in the general population and the prevalence of overweight among low-income groups that are served by the program. Because the goal of the WIC program is to improve nutrition and healthy eating, overweight is one of the nutritional risk criteria used to determine eligibility.<sup>13</sup>
- ◆ Participation in WIC provides a unique opportunity for overweight children and their families to improve their health. WIC foods are more nutritious than typical foods in poor children's diets, its educational counseling promotes healthy food choices and age-appropriate physical activity and its health referral component increases access to medical intervention for overweight.<sup>14</sup>

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Table 12. Women, Infants and Children Receiving WIC, Rhode Island, December 2002

CITY/TOWN	ESTIMATED* NUMBER ELIGIBLE	NUMBER PARTICIPATING	% OF ELIGIBLE PARTICIPATING
Barrington	211	29	14%
Bristol	403	180	45%
Burrillville	427	226	53%
Central Falls	1,642	1,517	92%
Charlestown	105	85	81%
Coventry	592	282	48%
Cranston	1,753	871	50%
Cumberland	554	216	39%
East Greenwich	241	53	22%
East Providence	1,205	708	59%
Exeter	13	36	100%*
Foster	10	47	100%*
Glocester	293	28	10%
Hopkinton	33	82	100%*
Jamestown	96	13	14%
Johnston	598	294	49%
Lincoln	360	144	40%
Little Compton	63	9	14%
Middletown	694	248	36%
Narragansett	71	90	100%*
New Shoreham	39	1	3%
Newport	1,332	606	45%
North Kingstown	370	174	47%
North Providence	262	331	100%*
North Smithfield	59	48	81%
Pawtucket	3,198	2,772	87%
Portsmouth	249	84	34%
Providence	11,280	8,982	80%
Richmond	24	55	100%*
Scituate	75	60	80%
Smithfield	174	67	39%
South Kingstown	402	193	48%
Tiverton	260	89	34%
Warren	156	119	76%
Warwick	1,613	872	54%
West Greenwich	38	17	45%
West Warwick	777	664	85%
Westerly	648	307	47%
Woonsocket	2,566	1,561	61%
Unknown Residence	NA	38	NA
Core Cities	20,795	16,102	77%
Remainder of State	12,091	6,058	50%
Rhode Island	32,886	22,198	67%

\*Estimated number eligible is based on the 1990 Census and does not reflect recent increases in eligible population.

## Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Health, Division of Family Health, WIC Program, Fiscal Year 2002.

Core cities are Central Falls, Newport, Pawtucket, Providence, West Warwick and Woonsocket.

The denominator is the number of pregnant and postpartum women, infants and children under age 5 who live in families with an income less than 185% of poverty according to the 1990 Census of Population as estimated by the United States Department of Agriculture. This is an estimate of the eligible population and does not take into account any increases or decreases in the number of women and children who became income eligible after 1990.

## References for Indicator

<sup>1</sup> American Academy of Pediatrics (November 2001). "WIC Program" in *Pediatrics*, Vol. 108, No. 5.

<sup>2,4</sup> *Federal Food Programs: Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children* (2002). Washington, DC: Food Research and Action Center.

<sup>3,7</sup> *Frequently Asked Questions* (Factsheet) (2002). Washington, DC: United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

<sup>5</sup> *Summary of FY2002 Food and NSA Grant Levels* (2002). Washington, DC: United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

<sup>6,10</sup> Rhode Island Department of Health, Division of Family Health, WIC Program, Fiscal Year 2002 and 1993.

<sup>8</sup> *About WIC* (2002). Washington, DC: United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

<sup>9</sup> *WIC at a Glance* (Fact Sheet) (2002). Washington, DC: United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

<sup>11</sup> *How WIC Helps* (August 2001). Washington, DC: United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

<sup>12,13,14</sup> Oliveira, V. et al (2002). *The WIC Program: Background, Trends and Issues*. Washington, DC: United States Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service.