

History of WIC

The Special Supplemental Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) is a federal assistance program funded by the United States Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Section (USDA FNS) and administered through the Illinois Department of Human Services, Bureau of Family Nutrition (BFN). It is a domestic discretionary program funded annually through the US Senate and House Appropriations Committee. Through the funding process Congress determines the level of funding that the Program will receive each year. Once appropriations passes and Congress signs it into law, grants are provided to each state and administered at the local level by county and city health centers or private non-profits.

At the State level, WIC is administered by 89 State agencies, including all 50 states, 33 Indian Tribal Organizations, American Samoa, The District of Columbia, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands

In 1972, as an amendment to the Child Nutrition Act of 1966, WIC began as the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants and Children, a two-year pilot program sponsored by Senator Hubert Humphrey of Minnesota to address a rise in poor birth outcomes in women who were experiencing extreme poverty. Just three years later, in 1975, WIC became permanent program and benefits were extended to non-breastfeeding women (up to six months post-partum) and children up to the age of 5 who were deemed at nutrition risk. Nutrition risk was defined in 1978 along with income eligibility standards.

In December 2000, The White House issued an executive memorandum which required the WIC program to screen clients for childhood immunization status. Since WIC had access to the greatest number of low-income children, there was the potential to influence immunization rates for this vulnerable population.

In 2004, the Breastfeeding Peer Counselor Initiative was launched. This initiative utilized women with breastfeeding experience to act as counselors for new mothers learning how to breastfeed. Five years later, the USDA introduced a new food package that included foods consistent with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and established dietary recommendations for young children.

Services provided by the WIC Program include supplemental food, infant formula, nutrition education, access to healthcare and other social services and breastfeeding support.

