



New Jersey WIC Services

FFY 2025

Statewide Nutrition and Breastfeeding Education Plan

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FFY 2024 OVERVIEW

In FFY 2024, New Jersey WIC was fully converted to eWIC and NJWOC converted from Internet Explorer to Edge. The State nutritionists continue to participate in weekly NJWOW operation meeting to address system issue and follow-up with training local agency staff as required. The nutrition unit continues reviewing documents, attending meetings, and providing feedback to the project management team. A state nutritionist is responsible for updates to the Universal Price Code (UPC) data base, which continues to inform the WIC Approved Product List (APL). In addition, the Nutrition and Breastfeeding Unit is preparing for the revised food package through attending USDA/FNS (United States Department of Agriculture/Food and Nutrition Services or National WIC Association (NWA) webinars and strategy meetings.

WIC local agencies and participants had to deal with the intermittent formula shortages following the impact of the Abbott formula recall. There was ongoing communication with local agencies via memos and Teams calls to keep everyone up to date.

There were ongoing enhancements in response to software releases to the NJWOW system. The increased Cash Value Benefit was welcomed by our participants but required the creation of all new WIC food packages in the NJWOW system. The Nutrition and Breastfeeding Unit are actively involved in reviewing and providing input on changes to the system, along with user acceptance testing releases to the WOW system. The State agency continues updating policies and procedures to accommodate changes required for the NJWOW system.

Remote services continued with the extension of USDA waivers, and the State agency continued to provide guidance to the local agencies. All the agencies returned to their offices but continued to provide remote or hybrid services. Local agencies continue to assess the optimal process of providing WIC services for their participants. Most participants return for anthropometrics and blood work, while others provide health care referrals. Nutrition education is often provided remotely. New Jersey WIC provided the local agencies training and access to Doxy.me, a telehealth platform to assist with both nutrition education and breastfeeding support. While this is a recent introduction, eight local agencies have used Doxy.me, and four agencies have successfully incorporated Doxy.me into their process of remote services.

The NJWIConline nutrition education website continued to be improved to be more user responsive. Increased usage is expected for secondary nutrition education with waivers in place. A project, referred to as “Phase 3 of website modifications” was launched in October 2023 and was completed in July 2024. Project highlights include easier access by allowing participants to sign in with their eWIC card number. In addition, there are four new lessons and two revised lessons. Other changes include added links to referrals, such as lead, immunizations and other NJ State agencies and programs. There is an improved processes to transfer data to WOW, NJ WIC’s centralized data management system and access NJWIConline reports. During the first three quarters of FFY 2024, 10,399 participants received credit for completing NJWIConline lessons.

The New Jersey Nutrition Unit updates the food list and the NJ WIC Food and Program Guide. It will continue to be available on the NJWIC website and the WICShopper App; it has been well received by both staff and participants. It is available digitally in 7 languages.

Collaborations have continued and grown at the State level, including Division of Community Health Services Oral Health Program, the Statewide Parent Advocacy Network (SPAN), and SNAP-Ed. Both State and Local agencies continue to expand collaborations with Connecting NJ, a joint program of the NJ Departments of Children and Families and Health. As a result of these collaborations, NJ has seen an increase in inquiries regarding WIC services from potential participants and professionals working with low-income families. NJ WIC continued collaborations with Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHC), the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Healthy Women, Healthy Families, Head Start, and NJ birthing hospitals.

The Teletask texting app is now used by 14 of our 16 local agencies; one agency utilizes another platform. Access to a texting app continues to be effective and efficient. Those who participated on the App received messages on breastfeeding support, clinic hours, and availability of Zoom groups, to name a few. In addition, the texting apps were used for appointment reminders.

Efforts to improve nutrition education and service delivery in FFY 2024 included, but were not limited to:

- Ability of local agencies to print materials for participants directly from the internet, utilizing materials available on NJWIConline, the NJ WIC website and WIC works.
- Increased use of technology to provide group education virtually, with the addition of Doxy.me All sixteen agencies received recent training and four are currently utilizing Doxy.me.
- Continued expansion of technology for communicating education messages (group and individual texting education messages and education materials sent via pdfs).
- Including new digital nutrition education resources that can be sent electronically or printed as PDFs for participants who prefer hard copies.
- Collaboration with local health departments, Healthy Women Healthy Families, Federally Qualified Health Centers, Family Success Centers, vendors, farmers markets, Head Start programs, hospitals, and community groups including non-profits serving similar populations.
- All 16 agencies have incorporated the WICShopper app in the certification process to educate participants on the food list and assist with shopping in the store. Participants have been receptive, specifically with the scanning option and the ability to report vendor issues through the App.

All Local agencies provide services in English and Spanish with additional languages targeted to the needs of their participants.

During the first three quarters of FFY 2024, the most frequently selected individual education topic was Healthy Weight followed by Fruits and Vegetables and Age-Appropriate Feeding. We also noted an increase in discussion and selection of online of Fruits and Vegetables correlating with the continued increased CVV/CVB. The most frequently selected online lesson was the WIC Gameshow; other popular topics included Babies 0-6 months, Being Active, and Fruits and Vegetables.

Local Agency staff Social Media presence increased in 2024, with six agencies having current Facebook posts, and two additional agencies with WIC posts on their 'Sponsor's Facebook page. This is an increase from a total of four agencies and Sponsors who posted WIC information on Facebook in 2023. In addition, six posts in August were about breastfeeding and Breastfeeding month.

NJWIC provides food packages that can be tailored to the individual needs of homeless and migrant participants. All agencies offer referrals to assist with social, medical, dental, and other needs identified during certification. Staff most frequently made referrals to health care and dental providers.

Training

State WIC trainings have been virtual using either Teams or Zoom platforms. The State Nutrition and Breastfeeding Unit conducted monthly or bi-monthly meetings. The meetings include important updates, topics included substance abuse and immunization documentation and referral, food package tailoring, VENA on LMS, Breastfeeding, perinatal loss, post-partum mental health, proposed food package, food allergies and exempt formula review. Trainings and resources are being uploaded to our Learning Management System (LMS) system so all CPAs could have access. Local agency staff training topics were determined by onsite observations, input from local agency coordinators, post-training evaluations, and comments received from local agency staff during meetings and onsite reviews.

The State has encouraged Local Agency Coordinators, Chief Nutritionists, and Breastfeeding Coordinators to include CPAs and Breastfeeding staff in the training, but with minimal participation. In FFY 2024 the State office introduced trainings for CPAs and non-supervisor breastfeeding staff. These were virtual and supervisory staff were also welcome to attend. Overall, the evaluations were positive, local agency evaluation responses indicated they specifically found scenarios and case studies of the greatest value.

The State WIC contracted a content developer to convert the USDA WIC Breastfeeding Curriculum into user friendly self-study LMS modules. This will offer the local agencies an avenue to provide continuous, timely and targeted breastfeeding training to all staff based on job title. The state will continue to train peer counselors and other staff using Level I and II of the curricula.

New Jersey WIC hosted our third annual virtual celebration of Breastfeeding Month on August 27. The Zoom-based celebration was inspired by World Breastfeeding Week to enable breastfeeding by making a difference for working moms. WIC staff discussed tangible ways to support breastfeeding moms by preparing and supporting them upon returning to work. In addition, 10 of the 16 local agencies hosted very well-attended in-person community celebrations.

The Civil Rights Training PowerPoint is available to state and local agency staff on the New Jersey Learning Management System (LMS).

NEEDS ASSESSMENT FOR FFY 2025

The State WIC office evaluated the following data and statistics to determine the statewide goals for FFY 2025.

NJWOW Nutrition Risk Data

The most common risks assigned to participants in the third quarter of FFY 2024 were:

- Risk 201 - Low Hematocrit / Low Hemoglobin
- Risk 114 - Overweight or at Risk of Overweight
- Risk 111 - Overweight (Women)
- Risk 401 - Failure To Meet Dietary Guidelines for Americans
- Risk 425.3 – Improper Use of Bottle/Cups/Pacifiers

The risk low hematocrit/ low hemoglobin (risk #201) has replaced overweight or at risk of overweight (risk #114) as the most common risk likely related to increased in-person appointments and ability to accept documentation from health care providers.

Healthy People 2020/2030 Goals

Based on the most recent CDC Breastfeeding Report of infants born in 2021, overall breastfeeding rates in the US and New Jersey are lower than in recent years. In 2021, New Jersey's rate of ever breastfed was 81.6% (the national rate was 86%). The rate for exclusive breastfeeding through three months was 40.8% (the national rate was 46.5%). The rate for exclusive breastfeeding through six months was 24.6, lower than the US: 27.2%.

For Healthy People 2030, NJ WIC will continue efforts to meet the MICH-2030-15 objective of 42.4% of infants exclusively breastfeeding at six months of age, which is an ongoing goal.

Per USDA Food and Nutrition Services WIC Breastfeeding data local agency report (October 2023): in FY 2022, NJ's "any breastfeeding" rate of 46.8% is 11.7 percentage points higher than the US rate of 35.1%. NJ WIC's 2023 "partially breastfeeding" rate was 34.6%, 10. percentage points higher than the US 24.2% rate. Twelve of NJ local agencies increased their total breastfeeding rates, three maintained and only one decreased. Six agencies showed gains in their "fully breastfeeding" rates from FY 2021, ranging from 1.0 to 4.53. NJ's "partially breastfeeding" rate was 34.6%, 9.9 percentage points higher than the US 24.7% rate. New Jersey's "fully formula feeding" rate is 53.2 9.5percentage points lower than the US rate of 62.7%.

WIC Modernization

The New Jersey WIC community continues to follow current USDA/FNS Waiver guidance to test and explore various approaches to expand and retain participants. Many agencies will continue to offer remote services using a hybrid model.

ARPA Waiver Guidelines - Benefit Issuance (BI)/ Nutrition Education (NE)

1. Continue remote service to current active participants (BI/NE/Mid-cert Assessments)
2. Offer choice to participants for benefit issuance and NE/Mid Certification Assessments in person.
3. Encourage participants to access NJWIConline.org for secondary nutrition education.

Onsite Review Findings and Observations 2024

Eight local agencies have been reviewed in 2024. Onsite reviews included in-person observations of all eight local agencies, in addition virtual observations via Teams were conducted for local agencies providing remote services. Several areas of improvement have been identified. Six agencies received findings regarding participant-centered, VENA nutrition, and breastfeeding assessment and counseling. In addition, three agencies had a finding related to documentation and referrals for immunization Training in both these areas, has been included during the year and updated VENA guidance was made available in 2024 on LMS and completion is required of all counseling staff. Changes in the MIS system are planned to improve screening for immunizations; training and use of the NJIIS (Immunization Information System) was recommended. Breastfeeding staff at four agencies did not follow up with participants that were issued breast pumps. Areas of improvement identified during onsite were addressed during nutrition and breastfeeding meetings throughout 2023 and 2024. Training is scheduled in September 2024 on assessment, referrals, and nutrition risk.

NUTRITION AND BREASTFEEDING GOALS FFY 2025

Goal

Improve participant-centered nutrition and breastfeeding services (education and referrals) to pregnant, postpartum, breastfeeding women, infants, and children up to age five through Value Enhanced Nutrition Assessment (VENA) by providing targeted training to local agency counseling staff and improve collaboration with other health and social services programs.

Objectives

- To continue expanding the nutrition and breastfeeding knowledge of local agency staff who provide education and counseling to WIC participants utilizing the WIC Breastfeeding Curriculum.
- To provide training and technical assistance on the updated VENA guidelines, including Motivational Interviewing and other participant-centered assessment tools, emphasizing remote services to foster the sustainability of the training.
- To include additional online resources for local agency staff to improve their participant-centered skills.
- Promote NJWIConline to WIC staff, WIC participants and WIC partners as a website for resources, information along with nutrition and breastfeeding education.
- To foster collaboration with Primary Care and Rural Health, which includes Oral Health and Federally Qualified Health Centers.

- Continue collaboration with Connecting NJ and the current Milestones Matter Grant collaboration.

Activities

- Continue Nutrition and Breastfeeding Meetings and trainings, targeted for supervisory staff or, CPAs, Peer Counselors, Lactation Consultants, and IBCLCs.
- Develop or obtain speakers to conduct webinars/training modules on subjects that will assist local agency staff in providing improved service to WIC participants. Post on LMS when applicable.
- Continue representing NJ WIC as part of the New Jersey Oral Health Coalition or other workgroups and committees.

Goal

Assist the individual who is at nutritional risk to achieve a positive behavior change resulting in improved nutritional status and prevention of nutrition-related problems through optimal use of supplemental and other nutritious foods.

Objectives

- Continue to offer a WIC food list that meets guidelines, provides variety, and meets the needs of the diverse population in New Jersey.
- Provide support to local agencies for continued food demonstrations using fruit and vegetable recipes at local agencies, especially during the farmers market season.

Activities

- State staff will review requested food items as needed or required and enter them into the UPC database.
- State staff will implement a rolling review of WIC food items.
- Local staff will include plans to work with Farmers' markets and focus on fruits and vegetables in their Nutrition/Breastfeeding education plan.
- Ongoing review of WIC food items submitted through the Approved Product List (APL) process.
- Monitor acceptance of the new food list and CVB redemptions.

Goal

Provide nutrition and breastfeeding education with consideration of the ethnic, cultural, and geographic preferences of the participants as well as their educational and environmental limitations.

Objectives

- To provide education materials in various languages to meet participant needs.
- To provide written materials that meet the literacy levels of the population WIC serves.
- To improve participant's awareness of NJWICOnline as an option for online nutrition education that is easy, convenient, and flexible to meet their individual needs.

Activities

- Evaluate current and revised educational materials to ensure the reading level is 6th grade or lower. Update based on plain language resources where needed.
- Continue translating educational materials into various languages based on assessments of the needs of the local agencies.
- Create a video to inform WIC participants of easy log-in to NJWICOnline using their eWIC card number. Create a template of NJ WIC Online Talking Points as a conversation starter for all local agency staff to use.

Goal

Continue to promote, support, and protect exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life and continued breastfeeding with the addition of complementary foods for two years or longer as long as mutually desired by mother and child.

Objectives

- Continue offering mother-to-mother support through the Breastfeeding Peer Counseling Program.
- Improve breastfeeding reports in WOW to generate data that can be used to identify barriers and opportunities to support breastfeeding in target populations within WIC.
- Ensure every local agency is staffed with at least one full-time DBE or IBCLC.
- Continue using texting applications to maintain frequent contact with breastfeeding mothers.
- Improve the availability of delivering new staff breastfeeding education by hosting the new Breastfeeding Curriculum on the state learning management system (LMS).
- Create guidance for the local agencies to develop scholarships for PCs in lactation support deserts to become IBCLCs.

Activities

- Continue to offer Peer Counseling Training with the new WIC Breastfeeding Curriculum for new staff.
- Establish a committee to work on improving breastfeeding reports. Update the “Formula Supplementation Report” to make it congruent with other state and national reports as recommended in the New Jersey Breastfeeding Strategic Plan.
- Conduct a full-day statewide in-person or virtual PC meeting to promote networking and update skills.
- Encourage all agencies to implement texting applications or video platforms that are confidential and involve two-way, ongoing communications.

Goal

Strengthen the infrastructure to continue normalizing breastfeeding in New Jersey by collaborating with traditional and non-traditional partners.

Objectives

- Implement and support efforts outlined in the NJ Breastfeeding Strategic Plan (NJBSP).
- Maintain a stakeholder committee that includes the New Jersey Breastfeeding Coalition, State Departments, and programs, Maternal and Child Health Consortia, and other non-traditional partners.
- Continue supporting the NJ Breastfeeding Strategic Plan as subject matter experts.
- Work with the Healthy Women, Healthy Families (HWHF) initiative, which aims to provide education and training to non-traditional audiences as part of their municipality-focused activities.

Activities

- Support ongoing efforts to implement the NJBSP.
- Continue to communicate progress to stakeholders regularly.
- Attend meetings and workgroups as needed.

EVALUATION

- Survey local agency staff regarding areas of interest and need for training.
- Conduct, review, and summarize training evaluations to determine additional or future training topics. Evaluations shall contain questions related to attitude, knowledge, behavior change, effectiveness, and applicability of the training. Ask attendees how they used the information if they found it useful, and what they will take away from the training. Model and incorporate behavior change practices.
- Utilize NJ WOW and ad-hoc reports to evaluate patterns and needs of nutrition education, referrals, and nutrition risk.
- Use redemption data to see what participants are buying and whether it varies by demographic.

LOCAL AGENCY NUTRITION EDUCATION PLAN HIGHLIGHTS

Collaborations

Our local agencies continued and expanded on collaborations with SNAP-Ed, Head Start, Healthy Women, Healthy Families, their local Department of Health, Federally Qualified Health Centers, Family Success Centers, Maternal Child Health Consortium, Perinatal Cooperatives, Children's Home Society (CUNA), Catholic Charities and Chocolate Milk Café and Sistahs Who Breastfeed support groups. Local hospital affiliations include nursing and medical students spending time in the WIC clinic as part of their training.

Additional collaborations included: Housing Authority of Hudson County, Angela Cares, Alphabet Inc. Child Care Center, The Asbury Park Community Affairs and Resource Center (CARC), CCYC (County Council for Youth Coalition), First Baptist Church of Pitman, Rutgers Cancer Institute Faith in Prevention - Coordinated by Rutgers Cooperative Extension, Grandparents Raising Grandchildren of Gloucester County, MEND, Inc, a 22-pantry consortium in Essex County, City of East Orange Lead Programs, Body & Soul, AMAR Doula, Children's Future Doulas, Community Action Network, and the Henry J. Austin parenting group.

Nutrition Education

Remote secondary nutrition education continues to be offered, especially through our NJWIConline.org website, at all local agencies, while most education is conducted individually. Five agencies provided group education, and five agencies conducted food demos. One agency provided cooking classes and recipes were shared with attendees, where participants were shown how to incorporate WIC foods.

NJWIConline or individual education are the more frequently chosen forms of secondary nutrition education.

Two agencies participated in Developmental Milestones CDC Grant through Association of Public Health Nutritionist (ASPHN) initiative screenings began in March 2023 at Ocean County WIC and continued in March 2024 at Rutgers NJMS WIC. This initiative, providing screenings to all in-person appointments with infants and children in the household falling between 2 months of age up through 5 years.

Breastfeeding Education and Support

All the local agencies have transitioned to providing both in-person and virtual breastfeeding education and support. During the pandemic the local agencies strengthened their partnerships with community programs that provide breastfeeding education. One local agency has a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Southern New Jersey Perinatal Cooperative for them to provide ZOOM breastfeeding classes and support groups to their participants. Three other agencies actively refer and cofacilitate breastfeeding support groups with their local Chocolate Milk Café chapter. In addition, two local agencies within the same geographic region have collaborated in providing support to their participants. These collaborations have been helpful in bridging gaps in breastfeeding

service provision as the state continues to grapple with staffing challenges. Most local agencies have implemented the automated breastfeeding text messaging app and continue to express appreciation for having yet another valuable tool in connecting with their participants. Currently three local agencies provide breastfeeding support at local hospitals to WIC enrolled participants. Lastly a local agency satellite site is piloting a new team approach to nutrition and breastfeeding education to provide more efficient and comprehensive assessment and counseling to newly delivered participants. A nutritionist and peer counselor have been completing the certification process together. They have found this improved the clinic flow, facilitated the nutritionists to learn more about breastfeeding and made the process of determining food packages more effective.

Social Media/Websites

Eleven agencies are utilizing social media, including Facebook and Instagram, to share program information, promote breastfeeding, and share recipes. The agencies have increased the number and frequency of their posts.

LOCAL AGENCY IMPLEMENTATION OF STATE PLAN (SNEP)

Review

Local agency coordinators, chief nutritionists, CPAs, and lactation consultants must review the Statewide Nutrition Education Plan (SNEP). Agencies may adopt the plan in its entirety or use it as the base for developing a modified local agency plan.

Planned Activities or Events

Local agencies must include planned activities for National Nutrition Month, National Breastfeeding Month, and other significant events.

Evaluate

Local agencies submit the fillable evaluation form detailing optional activities, collaborative efforts, and innovative projects.

RESOURCES FOR STAFF

- NJ Department of Health Learning Management System (LMS) all WIC staff have access to trainings: <https://stateofnewjersey.sabacloud.com/>
- The WIC Works Resource System resources for staff training, nutrition and breastfeeding education, and publications. WIC Works is a valuable source for State and local agency staff: <https://wicworks.fns.usda.gov/>
- Value Enhanced Nutrition Assessment (VENA) Training Resources | WIC Works Resource System (usda.gov)
- New Jersey Department of Health WIC, oral health resource: Department of Health | Children's Oral Health | About Us (nj.gov)
- New Jersey Department of Health WIC participant education materials: New Jersey WIC (wicresources.org)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention COVID-19 Resources: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Learn the Signs. Act Early: <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/index.html>
- Telehealth.HHS.gov, remote counseling: how to get or provide remote health care: <https://www.telehealth.hhs.gov/>
- National WIC Association Webinars: <https://www.nwica.org/snippet-webinars-intro>
- New Jersey Department of Labor & Workforce Development, NJ Paid Family Leave and Medical Leave: <http://myleavebenefits.nj.gov>
- Breastfeeding Resources:
 - USDA WIC Breastfeeding Training Curriculum (also available on our SharePoint drive that local agencies can access): <https://wicworks.fns.usda.gov/resources/wic-breastfeeding-curriculum>
 - USDA WIC Breastfeeding Support, Learn Together, Grow Together: <https://wicbreastfeeding.fns.usda.gov/wic-staff>
 - New Jersey Department of Health WIC: <https://www.nj.gov/health/fhs/wic/nutrition-breastfeeding/bf/>
 - Department of Labor and Workforce Development: Division of Temporary Disability and Family Leave Insurance | Maternity Coverage (nj.gov)
 - US Office of the Assistant Secretary of Health, Office on Women's Health: <https://www.womenshealth.gov/breastfeeding>
 - Stanford Medicine Newborn Nursery, videos: <https://med.stanford.edu/newborns/professional-education/breastfeeding.html>
 - CDC Breastfeeding: <https://www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding/breast-milk-preparation-and-storage/handling-breastmilk.html?>
 - New Jersey Breastfeeding Coalition: <http://breastfeedingnj.org/>
 - Lactation and medicine compatibility database in English and Spanish: <https://e-lactancia.org>

- Lactation Education Resources, hand-outs in many languages:
<https://www.lactationtraining.com/resources/handouts-parents/>
- Global Health Media, videos in many languages:
<https://globalhealthmedia.org/topic/breastfeeding/>
- ZipMilk.org, a statewide database for local breastfeeding support:
<http://zipmilk.org>
- National Library of Medicine Drugs and Lactation Database:
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK501922/>