

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 access to health care and social services. WIC serves pregnant, postpartum, and breastfeeding women, infants, and children under five years of age with household incomes at or below 185% of the federal poverty level. Any individual who participates in SNAP (formerly the Food Stamp Program), Rte Care, Medicaid, or Rhode Island Works, or is a member of a family in which a pregnant woman or an infant receives Medicaid benefits, is automatically income-eligible for WIC. Participants also must have a specified nutritional risk, such as anemia, high-risk pregnancy, or abnormal growth, or be in need of supplemental food to qualify.^{1,2}

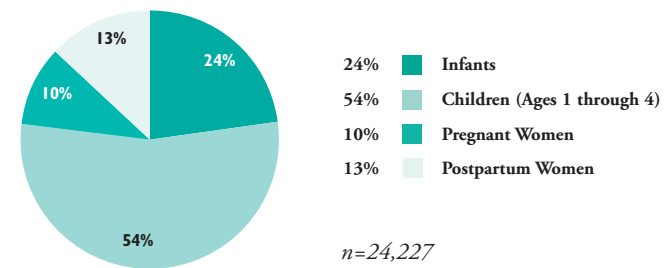
Compared to children who receive WIC benefits, young children who are eligible for WIC but not participating are more likely to be in poor health, at

risk for developmental delays, underweight, short for their age, and/or experience food insecurity (i.e., live in families that do not always have enough food for an active healthy life).³ Food insecurity in early childhood can lead to impaired cognitive, behavioral, and psychosocial development, and can limit academic achievement.⁴ Pregnant women also have special nutritional needs that influence pregnancy outcomes and the health of their children.⁵

WIC participation has been shown to reduce infant mortality, improve birth outcomes (including reducing the likelihood of low birthweight and prematurity), enhance maternal and child dietary intake, reduce child abuse and neglect risk, improve child growth rates, boost cognitive development, and increase the likelihood of having a regular source of medical care.^{6,7}

Recent enhancements to the WIC food package have increased access to a wider variety of nutritious foods and strengthened incentives for continued breastfeeding.⁸ WIC consistently promotes breastfeeding as the optimal method of infant feeding.⁹ Seventy-four percent of mothers participating in WIC in Rhode Island in Federal Fiscal Year 2015 initiated breastfeeding, 17% of infants were breastfed at three months of age, and 14% were breastfed at six months of age.¹⁰

Women, Infants, and Children Enrolled in WIC, Rhode Island, September 2015



Source: Rhode Island Department of Health, WIC Program, September 2015. Totals may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

- ◆ **Infants and children ages one through four comprised more than three-quarters (77%) of the population being served by WIC in September 2015 in Rhode Island. Women accounted for over one-fifth (10% pregnant and 13% postpartum) of the population being served.**¹¹
- ◆ **In September 2015, 70% of WIC participants in Rhode Island were White, 17% were Black or African-American, 3% were Asian, and 10% identified as other races or more than one race. Forty-five percent of WIC participants identified as Hispanic or Latino. Hispanics are included in the racial groups above.**¹²
- ◆ **The four core cities - Central Falls (71%), Pawtucket (60%), Providence (65%), and Woonsocket (67%) - had WIC participation rates exceeding the statewide enrollment rate of 59% in 2015.**¹³
- ◆ **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, infants and children.**^{14,15} Rhode Island received \$23.4 million in federal funding for WIC during FFY 2015.¹⁶
- ◆ **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.**¹⁷ In Rhode Island, 32 farmers' markets provided fresh produce to 13,879 WIC participants during the FMNP in FFY 2015.¹⁸

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Table 13.

Women, Infants and Children Enrolled in WIC, Rhode Island, September 2015

| CITY/TOWN | ESTIMATED NUMBER ELIGIBLE | NUMBER PARTICIPATING | % OF ELIGIBLE PARTICIPATING |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Barrington | 105 | 38 | 36% |
| Bristol | 406 | 232 | 57% |
| Burrillville | 404 | 236 | 58% |
| Central Falls | 1,986 | 1,408 | 71% |
| Charlestown | 132 | 57 | 43% |
| Coventry | 747 | 390 | 52% |
| Cranston | 2,535 | 1,448 | 57% |
| Cumberland | 585 | 276 | 47% |
| East Greenwich | 158 | 64 | 41% |
| East Providence | 1,482 | 788 | 53% |
| Exeter | 115 | 62 | 54% |
| Foster | 110 | 44 | 40% |
| Glocester | 158 | 54 | 34% |
| Hopkinton | 214 | 86 | 40% |
| Jamestown | 29 | 17 | 59% |
| Johnston | 827 | 468 | 57% |
| Lincoln | 477 | 242 | 51% |
| Little Compton | 52 | 12 | 23% |
| Middletown | 383 | 236 | 62% |
| Narragansett | 161 | 74 | 46% |
| New Shoreham | 37 | 2 | 5% |
| Newport | 882 | 619 | 70% |
| North Kingstown | 579 | 246 | 42% |
| North Providence | 1,029 | 542 | 53% |
| North Smithfield | 221 | 97 | 44% |
| Pawtucket | 4,563 | 2,736 | 60% |
| Portsmouth | 262 | 261 | 100% |
| Providence | 13,327 | 8,720 | 65% |
| Richmond | 85 | 76 | 89% |
| Scituate | 198 | 51 | 26% |
| Smithfield | 287 | 115 | 40% |
| South Kingstown | 539 | 218 | 40% |
| Tiverton | 304 | 144 | 47% |
| Warren | 294 | 143 | 49% |
| Warwick | 1,977 | 941 | 48% |
| West Greenwich | 81 | 35 | 43% |
| West Warwick | 1,365 | 674 | 49% |
| Westerly | 716 | 390 | 54% |
| Woonsocket | 2,955 | 1,985 | 67% |
| <i>Four Core Cities</i> | <i>22,831</i> | <i>14,849</i> | <i>65%</i> |
| <i>Remainder of State</i> | <i>17,936</i> | <i>9,378</i> | <i>52%</i> |
| <i>Rhode Island</i> | <i>40,767</i> | <i>24,227</i> | <i>59%</i> |

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Health, WIC Program, September 30, 2015.

Note: WIC participation rates in this Factbook can be compared to all Factbooks, with the exception of the 2011 Factbook, which used a July rather than September 30 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

- ¹¹⁴ *Child nutrition fact sheet: Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)*. (n.d.). Washington, DC: Food Research & Action Center.
- ²¹⁵ *WIC: The special supplemental nutrition program for women, infants and children (nutrition program facts)*. (2014). Retrieved February 15, 2016, from www.fns.usda.gov
- ³ *Children's HealthWatch policy action brief: Federal programs that protect young children's health*. (2011). Boston, MA: Children's HealthWatch.
- ⁴ *Food insecurity*. (2014). Washington, DC: Child Trends.
- ⁵ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office on Women's Health. (2010). *Pregnancy: Staying healthy and safe*. Retrieved February 15, 2016, from www.womenshealth.gov
- ⁶⁹ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. (2013). *How WIC helps*. Retrieved February 15, 2016, from www.fns.usda.gov
- ⁷ Martinez-Schiferl, M. (2012). *WIC participants and their growing need for coverage*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.

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