

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), RIte 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.¹²

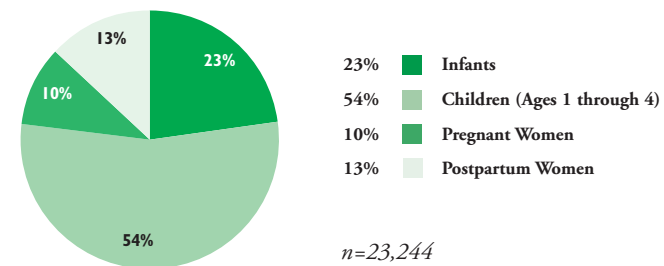
Compared to children who receive WIC benefits, young children who are eligible for WIC but not participating are more likely to be in poor health, at

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 revisions to the WIC food package have increased access to a wider variety of nutritious foods and strengthened breastfeeding support.⁸ WIC consistently promotes breastfeeding as the optimal method of infant feeding.⁹ Seventy-six percent of mothers participating in WIC in Rhode Island in Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2016 initiated breastfeeding. Eighteen percent of infants participating in WIC were breastfed at three months of age and 10% were breastfed at six months of age.¹⁰

Women, Infants, and Children Enrolled in WIC, Rhode Island, September 2016



Source: Rhode Island Department of Health, WIC Program, September 2016.

- ◆ **Infants and children ages one through four comprised more than three-quarters (77%) of the population being served by WIC in September 2016 in Rhode Island. Women accounted for over one-fifth (10% pregnant and 13% postpartum) of the population being served.**¹¹
- ◆ **In September 2016, 70% of WIC participants in Rhode Island were White, 16% were Black or African-American, 3% were Asian, and 10% identified as other races or more than one race. Forty-eight percent of WIC participants identified as Hispanic or Latino. Hispanics are included in the racial groups above.**¹²
- ◆ **The four core cities - Central Falls (65%), Pawtucket (56%), Providence (63%), and Woonsocket (57%) - had WIC participation rates exceeding the statewide enrollment rate of 54% in 2016, but there are thousands of eligible families who are not enrolled.**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 and children in Rhode Island.**^{14,15} Rhode Island received \$23.3 million in federal WIC funding during FFY 2016.¹⁶
- ◆ **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, 29 farmers' markets provided fresh produce to 12,690 WIC participants during the FMNP in FFY 2016.¹⁸

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Table 13. Women, Infants and Children Enrolled in WIC, Rhode Island, September 2016

CITY/TOWN	ESTIMATED NUMBER ELIGIBLE	NUMBER PARTICIPATING	% OF ELIGIBLE PARTICIPATING
Barrington	148	41	28%
Bristol	435	191	44%
Burrillville	416	186	45%
Central Falls	2,046	1,322	65%
Charlestown	133	59	44%
Coventry	775	372	48%
Cranston	2,667	1,508	57%
Cumberland	651	233	36%
East Greenwich	150	49	33%
East Providence	1,551	729	47%
Exeter	116	41	35%
Foster	116	27	23%
Glocester	142	43	30%
Hopkinton	222	67	30%
Jamestown	33	5	15%
Johnston	896	421	47%
Lincoln	507	249	49%
Little Compton	51	12	24%
Middletown	396	193	49%
Narragansett	170	70	41%
New Shoreham	44	5	11%
Newport	923	527	57%
North Kingstown	632	244	39%
North Providence	1,007	487	48%
North Smithfield	223	94	42%
Pawtucket	4,838	2,718	56%
Portsmouth	258	110	43%
Providence	14,135	8,897	63%
Richmond	96	90	94%
Scituate	193	49	25%
Smithfield	308	96	31%
South Kingstown	511	176	34%
Tiverton	341	143	42%
Warren	300	122	41%
Warwick	2,169	877	40%
West Greenwich	83	53	64%
West Warwick	1,403	598	43%
Westerly	710	339	48%
Woonsocket	3,156	1,801	57%
Four Core Cities	24,175	14,738	61%
Remainder of State	18,776	8,506	45%
Rhode Island	42,951	23,244	54%

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Health, WIC Program, September 30, 2016.

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 Food Research & Action Center. (n.d.). *Child nutrition fact sheet: Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)*. Retrieved January 31, 2017, from www.frac.org
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- ³ *Children's HealthWatch policy action brief: Federal programs that protect young children's health*. (2011). Boston, MA: Children's HealthWatch.
- ⁴ *Food insecurity*. (2016). Washington, DC: Child Trends.
- ⁵ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office on Women's Health. (2017). *Pregnancy: Staying healthy and safe*. Retrieved January 31, 2017, from www.womenshealth.gov
- ⁶⁹ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. (2013). *About WIC-How WIC helps*. Retrieved January 31, 2017, from www.fns.usda.gov
- ⁷ 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: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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