

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 referrals to health care and social services. WIC serves pregnant, postpartum, and breastfeeding women, infants, and children under five years of age living in low-income households. Any individual who participates in SNAP (formerly the Food Stamp Program), RItE Care, Medicaid, or Rhode Island Works is automatically income-eligible for WIC. Participants also must have a specified nutritional risk to qualify. This includes medically-based risks such as anemia or high-risk pregnancy, or dietary risks such as inadequate nutrition.^{1,2,3}

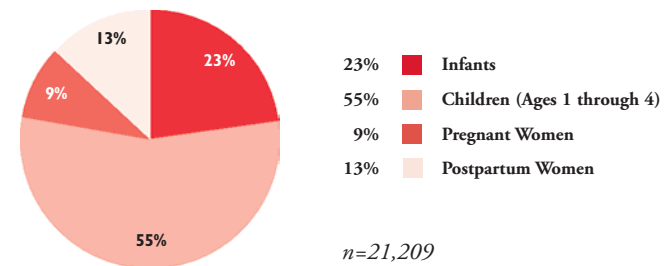
WIC improves the quality of participants' diets and promotes healthy eating habits. Studies have shown that WIC participants access more nutritious foods, including more produce, whole grains, and low-fat dairy. WIC

participation also may decrease household food insecurity (families that do not have regular access to food for an active healthy life).⁴ Food insecurity in early childhood can lead to impaired cognitive, behavioral, and psychosocial development, and can limit academic achievement.⁵ Pregnant women also have special nutritional needs that influence pregnancy outcomes and the health of their children.⁶

WIC participation has been shown to reduce infant mortality, improve birth outcomes (including reducing the likelihood of low birthweight and prematurity), improve cognitive development, reduce risk of child abuse and neglect, increase child immunization rates, boost cognitive development, and increase access to preventive medical care.^{7,8}

Revisions made in 2014 to the WIC food package increased access to a wider variety of nutritious foods and strengthened breastfeeding support.⁹ WIC consistently promotes breastfeeding as the optimal method of infant feeding.¹⁰ In Rhode Island in Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2018, 79% of mothers participating in WIC initiated breastfeeding. Sixteen percent of infants participating in WIC were breastfed at three months of age, and 13% were breastfed at six months of age.¹¹

Women, Infants, and Children Enrolled in WIC, Rhode Island, September 2018



Source: Rhode Island Department of Health, WIC Program, September 2018. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

- ◆ **Infants and children ages one through four comprised more than three-quarters (78%) of the population being served by WIC in September 2018 in Rhode Island. Women accounted for over one-fifth (9% pregnant and 13% postpartum) of the population being served.**¹²
- ◆ **In September 2018, 68% of WIC participants in Rhode Island were White, 17% were Black, 3% were Asian, and 12% identified as other races or more than one race. Fifty-two percent of WIC participants identified as Hispanic. Hispanics are included in the racial groups above.**¹³
- ◆ **All four core cities had participation rates exceeding the statewide enrollment rate of 46% in 2018 – Central Falls (54%), Pawtucket (47%), Providence (56%), and Woonsocket (53%).**¹⁴
- ◆ **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.**¹⁵ Rhode Island received \$21.7 million in federal WIC funding during FFY 2018, which was less than the \$22.9 million in funding for FFY 2017.¹⁶
- ◆ **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, 31 farmers' markets provided fresh produce to 12,235 WIC participants through the FMNP in FFY 2018.¹⁸

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Table 13.

Women, Infants, and Children Enrolled in WIC, September 2018

CITY/TOWN	ESTIMATED NUMBER ELIGIBLE	NUMBER ENROLLED	% OF ELIGIBLE ENROLLED
Barrington	154	34	22%
Bristol	429	153	36%
Burrillville	489	169	35%
Central Falls	2194	1182	54%
Charlestown	157	41	26%
Coventry	824	305	37%
Cranston	2953	1374	47%
Cumberland	719	208	29%
East Greenwich	178	47	26%
East Providence	1733	691	40%
Exeter	121	34	28%
Foster	105	24	23%
Glocester	180	38	21%
Hopkinton	224	122	54%
Jamestown	34	5	15%
Johnston	1043	421	40%
Lincoln	553	160	29%
Little Compton	54	11	20%
Middletown	440	206	47%
Narragansett	169	47	28%
New Shoreham	32	2	6%
Newport	905	450	50%
North Kingstown	588	183	31%
North Providence	1145	495	43%
North Smithfield	248	81	33%
Pawtucket	5243	2439	47%
Portsmouth	247	75	30%
Providence	15016	8423	56%
Richmond	131	25	19%
Scituate	216	67	31%
Smithfield	330	102	31%
South Kingstown	522	113	22%
Tiverton	360	105	29%
Warren	340	119	35%
Warwick	2334	774	33%
West Greenwich	101	28	28%
West Warwick	1469	528	36%
Westerly	753	207	27%
Woonsocket	3260	1721	53%
<i>Four Core Cities</i>	<i>25,713</i>	<i>13,765</i>	<i>54%</i>
<i>Remainder of State</i>	<i>20,280</i>	<i>7,444</i>	<i>37%</i>
<i>Rhode Island</i>	<i>45,993</i>	<i>21,209</i>	<i>46%</i>

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Health, WIC Program, September 2018.

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

- ¹ U.S. Department of Agriculture. (2018). *Women, Infants, and Children (WIC program)*. Retrieved January 8, 2019, from www.fns.usda.gov
- ² U.S. Department of Agriculture. (n.d.). *The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC program)*. Retrieved January 8, 2019, from www.fns.usda.gov
- ^{3,4,7,10} Carlson, Steven and Neuberger, Zoë. (2017). *WIC Works: Addressing the nutrition and health needs of low-income families for 40 years*. Washington, DC: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.
- ⁵ *Food insecurity*. (2016). Washington, DC: Child Trends.
- ⁶ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office on Women's Health. (2018). *Pregnancy: Staying healthy and safe*. Retrieved January 8, 2019, from www.womenshealth.gov
- ⁸ 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: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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