

Declining Participation in Florida's WIC Program: Strategic Planning Needed to Reverse the Downward Spiral

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Executive Summary

Only 51 percent of eligible Floridians participate in WIC.

Factors including confusion over eligibility, processes that differ by county, and barriers to obtaining WIC-approved items at the grocery store have contributed to the downward trend in participation.

Florida Policy Institute recommends that state officials — in collaboration with advocates and families — take the following steps to streamline WIC:

- help combat misperceptions;
- create easier ways for people to get and stay enrolled; and
- make shopping effortless.

Introduction

All Floridians want their children to thrive. One program in the Sunshine State — the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) — is a cost-effective means to help achieve that end.

Evidence of the lifetime benefits of WIC on infants and children is impressive.¹ WIC is associated with better overall health outcomes² for infants and children who are nutritionally at risk, as well as a reduction in low birth weight rates and improved fetal and cognitive development.³ In addition to giving low-income children access to a more nutritious diet, WIC plays a role in bettering school performance.⁴

WIC is also a tool to address racial disparities in the health of infants. In Florida, the death rate for non-Hispanic Black infants is twice as high as the overall infant death rate.⁵ WIC improves adverse outcomes — premature birth, birth defects, and low birth weight.

Yet enrollment of eligible families in the WIC program is on a steady decline in Florida.

Only 51 percent of eligible Floridians participate in WIC. More than 400,000 people in the Sunshine State who qualify for WIC are not participating.⁶ This is the worst coverage rate in Florida since 2006, falling behind Alabama, Mississippi, North Carolina, and Texas.⁷

There is no one cause for the drop in Florida's WIC enrollment.

The Florida Department of Health (DOH) suggests that misinformation, administrative hurdles (including time required to participate), and overall improved economic conditions in the Sunshine State before the pandemic have contributed to decreased participation in WIC.⁸ Improved economic conditions for families with low income are cause for celebration, but the fact that more than 400,000 Floridians who **are** eligible for WIC do not participate in the program makes clear that there are other reasons for the decline. It is more likely that misconceptions and inconvenient or insurmountable administrative hurdles dissuade many Floridians from participating.

The decline in WIC calls for collaborative strategic planning by lawmakers, state agencies, and health professionals, working in concert with eligible families, to begin to talk in depth about impediments to participation and effective workable solutions.

Florida's WIC Program

WIC is a federally funded program⁹ that provides healthy food and one-on-one nutrition counseling not only to low-income pregnant, breastfeeding, and non-breastfeeding postpartum mothers, but also to infants and children under the age of 5 at nutritional risk.¹⁰ All states participate in WIC, although participation is voluntary. The year 2020 marks the 46th anniversary of the WIC program in Florida.¹¹

The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) oversees WIC at the federal level. The DOH administers WIC, with services provided primarily through county health departments.¹²

In Florida, applicants for WIC must reside¹³ in the state and have income at or below 185 percent of the poverty level to qualify.¹⁴ Floridians who receive Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), or Medicaid are automatically income-eligible for WIC.¹⁵

Florida's WIC program is composed primarily of children. Roughly 75 percent of enrollees are infants or children, while 25 percent are women.¹⁶ WIC enrollees in the Sunshine State are racially and ethnically diverse. Approximately 41 percent are Hispanic.¹⁷ Thirty percent of WIC enrollees are Black, 61 percent are white, 1 percent are Asian/Pacific Islander and 0.6 percent are American Indian/Alaskan Native.¹⁸

The WIC program is particularly helpful for Floridians who are members of the military.¹⁹ Under federal law, states have the choice of excluding a variety of military allowances²⁰ from consideration when calculating a family's income-eligibility.²¹ Using that option, Florida excludes Military Housing Allowance payments from income,²² which makes it easier for families in the armed forces to qualify for the nutritional help they need.

There is no cost to WIC participants for services.²³ More than 2,000 grocery stores,²⁴ as well as all military commissaries in the Sunshine State, accept WIC.²⁵

Florida's WIC Program Already Uses Some Innovative Strategies for Enrollment

Although WIC coverage of eligible families in the Sunshine State has fallen below the national average, Florida is doing many things right.

While states have the option to set WIC income limits at anywhere from 100 percent of the federal poverty level up to 185 percent,²⁶ Florida, like all other states, sets its cap at 185 percent,²⁷ which allows more families with nutritional needs to access WIC services.

In addition, instead of forcing families to use outdated paper vouchers at grocery stores to redeem food with WIC, the Sunshine State provides enrollees with an Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card, which operates like a debit card at check-out and makes for faster, easier, and more discrete redemption of benefits. Although all states are required to implement EBT for WIC by October 2020,²⁸ Florida rolled out WIC EBT as many as 6 years ahead of schedule in some counties.

Florida has also deployed a WIC Mobile App.²⁹ Among other things, the WIC Mobile App allows enrollees to check their benefit balance and scan the barcodes of food items on their phone at the grocery store to see if the item is WIC-approved. The App also allows participants to be notified of upcoming appointments and expiring benefits.

Most local WIC offices permit enrollees to opt for text messages regarding appointments and benefits, instead of voicemail or letters through the United States Postal Service.³⁰

Many stores in Florida label WIC-allowable foods with aisle stickers, although labeling is inconsistent and often too inconspicuous to see.

WIC workers can interface with the Florida Department of Children and Families' (DCF) electronic FLORIDA system³¹ to confirm an applicant's eligibility for SNAP, TANF, or Medicaid. If a family receives Medicaid, WIC staff also have the ability to confirm eligibility through the Florida Medicaid Management Information System (FMMIS).

For families who are unable to provide a requested document to verify eligibility criteria because the document is unavailable, Florida allows the applicant to complete a "No Proof Form" as a last resort.³²

Still, the strategies that Florida has been using have not stopped enrollment in the WIC program from sliding.

New Strategies Needed to Reverse the Decline in WIC

Just as there is no one cause for Florida's downward spiral of eligible families participating in WIC, there is no one solution to reverse that trend. At a minimum, a roadmap towards reversing WIC decline should strive to do at least three things: correct misconceptions, create easier ways to enroll and stay enrolled, and make shopping more effortless.³³

Correct Misconceptions

Clearing up misperceptions about WIC eligibility would help address the long-term decline while also helping eligible families who have lost income as a result of the current pandemic understand that they qualify.

Some common misconceptions stem from confusion over whether caretakers who are not mothers can get WIC for their children, as well as WIC's interplay with other safety net programs, such as SNAP, TANF, and Medicaid. Another misconception is attributable to "public charge" rules recently adopted by the United States Department of Homeland Security (DHS) governing the impact of receipt of public assistance on immigrants.³⁴ Even though WIC is unaffected by recent changes to public charge determinations, and therefore is not considered in public charge evaluations, DHS's new rules have likely made families afraid to enroll in any public assistance program. Until the Sunshine State takes bolder steps to address confusion and fear, misconceptions will continue to keep eligible families from participating in the program.

Clarify Who Can Get WIC for Their Children

Although pregnant, post-partum, and breastfeeding women are the only adults who can get WIC for themselves, women are not the only ones who can enroll their babies or children in WIC. Any income-eligible parent or guardian³⁵ can get WIC for nutritionally at-risk infants and children under the age of 5 in their care, whether the caregiver is a single or married mother or father, grandparent, foster parent,³⁶ or a two-parent family.

Yet many men and other guardians are unaware that WIC is available for infants and children in their care. This misconception is reinforced not only by the fact that the WIC program, by its very name, singles out women, but also by WIC marketing, which rarely aims to engage non-traditional enrollees or pictures single men³⁷ or seniors as WIC caregivers.

Targeted outreach with a more inclusive message about eligibility may bolster enrollment among parents and guardians who would not normally think of WIC as a program that is relevant to their family.

Clarify the Interplay of WIC with Other Safety Net Programs

Confusion over the difference in eligibility criteria between WIC and other safety net programs may deter Floridians from participating.

For example, some families believe that they cannot qualify for WIC if they are employed or are ineligible for TANF, SNAP, or Medicaid. This misconception stems from the fact that families who are eligible for TANF, the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations, SNAP, or Medicaid are also automatically income-eligible for WIC. However, eligibility for other assistance programs is not a prerequisite to qualifying for WIC. While these programs work best in tandem³⁸ to reduce hunger and promote health, TANF, SNAP, Medicaid, and WIC are separate programs governed by different eligibility criteria.³⁹ People who are ineligible for TANF, SNAP, or Medicaid are not automatically ineligible for WIC; instead, they are assessed for WIC eligibility based on WIC's income limit.⁴⁰ Families who work are also eligible for WIC if their income falls under its limit or they receive TANF, SNAP, or Medicaid.⁴¹

Clarifying the interplay between WIC and other safety net programs is an important component in encouraging enrollment.

Alleviate the Fear of Being Labeled a Public Charge

Fear of being labeled a public charge if a family enrolls in WIC is rooted in a misconception that keeps eligible immigrants in Florida from participating in the program.⁴²

Under the immigration law of the United States, receipt of benefits from certain enumerated public assistance programs may affect an immigrant’s ability to adjust their status or stay in the United States because those immigrants may be considered likely to become primarily dependent on the government for support (known as a “public charge”). WIC has never been on that list of benefits. However, in 2018, DHS proposed a rule to include additional benefits on the list of programs that would be taken into account when making a public charge determination.⁴³ Although DHS’ proposed rule did not expressly include WIC as a benefit to be considered, DHS did not expressly exclude WIC, either.

In its final public charge rule published in 2019, DHS clearly states that WIC *will not* be considered when making a public charge determination. Even though WIC did not end up on DHS’s final list, DHS acknowledges that its proposed rule might have caused immigrant families to forego WIC assistance.⁴⁴ The State of Florida agrees. In its long-range program plan for Fiscal Year 2019-20 through Fiscal Year 2023-24, DOH cites concerns about national immigration policies as adversely impacting the WIC participation of eligible Floridians.⁴⁵

In truth, WIC is one of many public assistance programs that are not considered by DHS when evaluating public charge risk. This means that immigrant families who need help boosting nutrition can participate in WIC without fear that enrollment in WIC will be used against them.

Getting the correct information to families whose concern over public charge keeps them from signing up for WIC should be a priority for the Sunshine State.

Create Easier Ways to Enroll and Stay Enrolled

Before Floridians can reap the benefits of WIC, they must be able to enroll. Yet in many counties, enrollment procedures create barriers to participation, such as limiting the days or times for appointments, or requiring that WIC beneficiaries be present in-person at the WIC office for each certification or to reload WIC EBT cards. In addition, Florida has not fully modernized its WIC program through creative use of technology in ways that would make it easier for families to participate. A more modernized and flexible enrollment process that takes into account the everyday needs of individual applicants is one key to increasing participation.

Make the Logistics Easier to Participate

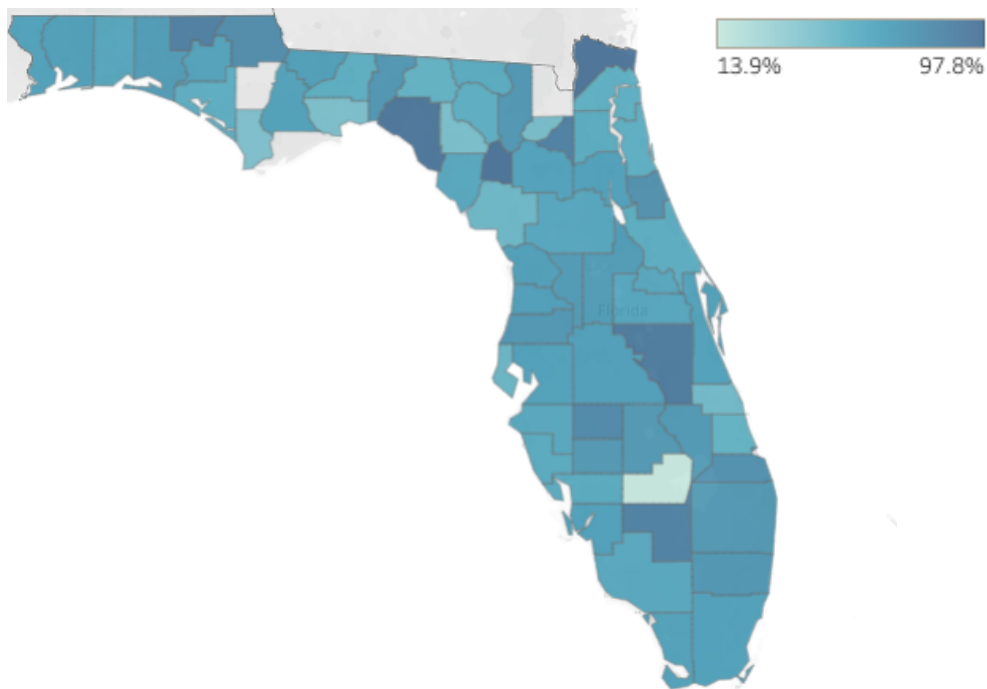
Levy, Glades, and Wakulla counties are among the counties in the Sunshine State that struggle the most in serving WIC-eligible families.⁴⁶ (See *Figure 1*.) At the same time, Levy, Glades, and Wakulla are also among the counties with the most to gain from increasing WIC enrollment. According to the University of South Florida’s annual Florida KIDS COUNT,⁴⁷ Glades County ranks last out of Florida’s 67 counties in the health well-being of children, while Wakulla ranks 62nd and Levy County ranks 53rd.⁴⁸ Wakulla County also has a higher infant mortality rate (14.79) as compared to the rest of the state (6.02).⁴⁹

However, those counties are not the only ones in Florida with WIC policies or procedures that warrant closer examination in order to increase WIC enrollment.

According to many county WIC websites, the only available times to apply for WIC are during normal business hours, which makes enrollment difficult for some families, such as working households or parents who are in school full-time.⁵⁰ Although DOH instructs WIC offices to accommodate working parents by offering them the ability to schedule an appointment and suggests that clinics provide lunch hour, early morning, evening and weekend appointments,⁵¹ few WIC offices mention these options on their web sites.

In addition to imposing time parameters for available appointments, several counties in the Sunshine State limit the days on which they operate WIC. For example, Jefferson County states that its WIC clinic is only operational on Mondays from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.⁵² Similarly, Madison County reports that its WIC clinic is open on Thursdays, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and Fridays, 8:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.⁵³ while Taylor County notes that its WIC clinic is open on Tuesday and Wednesday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.⁵⁴ In Glades County, applications for WIC in Moore Haven are only accepted on the 2nd and 4th Tuesdays.⁵⁵

Figure 1. RATE OF FLORIDIANS SERVED BY WIC IN EACH COUNTY, 2019



Source: Florida Department of Health, FLHealthCharts, “Ten Year Report: WIC Eligibles Served,” www.flhealthcharts.com

Under federal rules, WIC applicants must also physically report to the WIC office when they are first certified and at each subsequent certification unless they qualify for an exemption. Although physical presence at WIC is appropriate for some enrollees, not every family participating in WIC requires an in-person appointment, can get time off at work, or has a car or access to public transportation to get to their appointment.⁵⁶ To accommodate families, states have discretion to adopt certain exemptions, such as for some children of working parents.⁵⁷ Even before the pandemic, some states were even experimenting with telephone or video appointments. While Florida has adopted most of the permissible exemptions, the Sunshine State does not exempt children of working parents to the maximum extent allowed by law⁵⁸ or offer nontraditional modes of

interview. Yet families will lose WIC services if they are unable to appear at a WIC office but do not meet an allowable exemption.⁵⁹

In addition, the websites of most county WIC programs lack any obvious link to translated versions of their content in languages other than English.⁶⁰ Further, even though WIC is free, the WIC program website in Leon County tells potential WIC enrollees in a sidebar that they may be asked to pay for services, stating that that “most services are based on your ability to pay, on a sliding scale fee.”⁶¹

The Sunshine State should assure consistent and accurate information about WIC in a language that all enrollees understand. In addition, access to a WIC clinic at days and times that accommodate the complicated lives of families with low income — who may have full-time jobs, be in school, lack reliable transportation, or face unpredictable work schedules — is an important step to consider to improve WIC enrollment. To that end, Florida should maximize its discretion under federal law to limit physical presence requirements and, when appropriate, implement innovative interview strategies.

Employ Technology to Modernize Enrollment

Strategies to modernize WIC by using technology, such as smartphones and the internet, to fully interact with the program may also help to reduce barriers and simplify participation.⁶² DCF has done this with success in Florida’s TANF, SNAP, and Medicaid programs through ACCESS Florida,⁶³ which is an online system for, among other things, applying and reapplying, client accounts, viewing notices, and uploading requested documentation. Although there are still ways that DCF can make even better use of technology in its delivery of services in those programs, such as video chats, text messaging, and dedicated email addresses for families to return verification and communicate with workers,⁶⁴ ACCESS Florida stands as a natural starting point for discussion about modernizing the Sunshine State’s WIC program.⁶⁵

Florida’s WIC program accepts electronic versions of bank statements, paychecks, and unemployment benefits. However, the program does not accept photographs of papers⁶⁶ as acceptable documentation, which would alleviate the inconvenience of having to obtain the original or paper copy of documents required by the program.

Linking WIC applications with applications for DCF-administered safety net programs may also lead to greater enrollment. DCF has developed a robust multi-program application that makes it easier and faster for Floridians to apply for a variety of needed services. That application, which is available both electronically and in paper form, determines eligibility not only for SNAP but also for other DCF-administered cash and medical assistance programs.⁶⁷ However, DCF’s application does not screen for or determine WIC eligibility, which is handled by DOH. While syncing eligibility screening and determinations between WIC and other safety net programs requires an interoperative partnership between DCF and DOH, such an effort would likely improve WIC participation of eligible families. In December 2019 alone, more than 200,000 Floridians requested assistance using DCF’s multi-program application form.⁶⁸ Including WIC as part of that application process would reach many Floridians who may be eligible for the program, especially as many additional families become newly eligible for benefits as a result of the pandemic.

At a minimum, DCF should inquire whether applicants for other safety net program would like to apply for WIC and, with the household’s permission, share the contact information of interested applicants with the WIC program for follow up.

More innovative ways to cut through administrative red tape and promote participation include making it more convenient to electronically enroll, re-enroll, and submit documentation. Unless eligible families are able to successfully complete a WIC application, Florida's coverage rates are susceptible to continued decline.

Make Shopping More Effortless

Successfully completing the enrollment process for WIC is only the first hurdle that Floridians may experience. Shopping for allowable foods with WIC⁶⁹ can turn a grocery trip into an ordeal, particularly for new enrollees unfamiliar with WIC rules. Once they receive their EBT card, families are often intimidated by restrictions on the type of food that they may purchase with WIC, which makes selecting covered food at the grocery store difficult and time consuming.⁷⁰

Improve and Simplify the Shopping Experience

Using WIC requires patience and determination. Florida's WIC website contains no less than 12 different flyers explaining the food that can be purchased with WIC.⁷¹ This can create confusion at the checkout counter. For example, if a WIC participant overlooks a coupon that makes StarKist the least expensive tuna brand to buy that day, their purchase of another brand will be declined.⁷² If an enrollee picks up a 40 ounce jar of JIF peanut butter instead of a 15-to-18 ounce jar, WIC will not cover the cost. Families who grab a jug of White Grape Juicy Juice instead of Welch's, a 2-dozen carton of eggs instead of 1 dozen, or an 8-ounce bag of dried black beans instead of a 16-ounce bag, will be told that they have to pay for these items out of pocket.⁷³

Further, Florida's WIC Mobile App, which helps families identify WIC-allowable groceries at the store, is only available in English and Spanish.⁷⁴ This disadvantages Haitian and other families who may not be fluent in either of those languages.

In addition to robust and streamlined measures to train families on WIC-eligible food as well as translated phone apps, some possible alternatives to make shopping easier include developing more prominent shelf labels or aisle stickers that tell families at a glance whether the item is covered by WIC.

Conclusion

WIC holds the promise of a healthier future for low-income infants and children in Florida. If participation of eligible families in the program continues to shrink, that promise will not be realized. Although the Sunshine State is doing many things right in the administration of its WIC program, enrollment among eligible families continues to fall. Florida should dig deeper into the reasons why eligible families are not enrolling and devise a strategic roadmap that considers the suggestions of experts and, more importantly, impacted families. At the very least, Florida should think carefully about louder and bolder messaging to dispel misconceptions about WIC, modernizing the enrollment process statewide to the maximum extent possible, and experimenting with creative ways to make shopping less burdensome.

¹ USDA’s WIC website contains a compendium of some of the studies on the benefits of WIC on women, infants and children. United States Department of Agriculture, Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, “About WIC- How WIC Helps,” <https://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/about-wic-how-wic-helps>. See also Food Research and Action Center, “Making WIC Work Better: Strategies to Reach More Women and Children and Strengthen Benefits Use,” May 2019, <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/Making-WIC-Work-Better-Full-Report.pdf>; Carlson, S. and Neuberger, Z., Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, “WIC Works: Addressing the Nutrition and Health Needs of Low-Income Families for 40 Years,” March 29, 2017, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/wic-works-addressing-the-nutrition-and-health-needs-of-low-income-families>.

² Carlson and Neuberger, “WIC Works.”

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Maternal Characteristics of Prenatal WIC Receipt in the United States, 2016,” Jan. 2018, <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/databriefs/db298.htm>.

⁴ Jackson, M., Social Science & Medicine, Volume 126, “Early Childhood WIC Participation, Cognitive Development and Academic Achievement,” February 2015, pp. 145-153, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0277953614008168?via%3Dihub>; Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, “WIC Improves Children’s Educational Prospects,” <https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/5-8-15fa-education.pdf>.

⁵ Florida Department of Health, “2017-2021 State Health Improvement Plan, Florida’s State Health Assessment: Key Findings 2016–2017,” p. 19, http://www.floridahealth.gov/about/state-and-community-health-assessment/ship-process/documents/SHA201617key_findings.3.pdf. In these Key Findings, DOH, which uses the term “Hispanics” in its analysis, notes that, “For every 1,000 live births in 2014, Non-Hispanic Black infants died at more than twice the rate of Non-Hispanic White infants: 10.6 versus 4.1. The rate for Hispanic infants was 4.9.” See also American Journal of Public Health, “The Impact of Prenatal WIC Participation on Infant Mortality and Racial Disparities,” April 1, 2010, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2837444/>.

⁶ United States Department of Agriculture, “National- and State-Level Estimates of WIC Eligibility and WIC Program Reach in 2017 Final Report: Volume II,” Dec. 2019, <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/WICEligibles2017-Volume2.pdf>. USDA does not count persons as WIC participants if they are enrolled in WIC but do not receive or pick up their benefits.

⁷ Id. The term “coverage rate” means the share of eligible Floridians who participate in WIC.

⁸ Florida Department of Health, Long Range Program Plan, Fiscal Year 2019-20 through Fiscal Year 2023-24, Florida Fiscal Portal, “LRPP Exhibit III: PERFORMANCE MEASURE ASSESSMENT,” p. 40, <http://floridafiscalportal.state.fl.us/Document.aspx?ID=18072&DocType=PDF>; <https://psmag.com/news/why-is-participation-in-food-assistance-programs-like-wic-declining>

⁹ WIC is 100 percent federally funded, although states could choose to supplement funding at their discretion. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, “Policy Basics: Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children,” April 26, 2017, <https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/2-9-15PolicyBasics-WIC.pdf>. See also National WIC Association, “FAQ: Frequently Asked Questions: How are WIC agencies funded and operated?,” <https://www.nwica.org/faq>.

¹⁰ Florida considers “nutritional risk” to include “underweight, overweight, low birth weight, low hemoglobin or hematocrit, prematurity or chronic disease that is determined by a nutritionist at the local WIC office.” Florida Department of Health, “WIC, Frequently Asked Questions, What is ‘nutritional risk’?,” <http://www.floridahealth.gov/programs-and-services/wic/wic-faq.html#3>.

¹¹ Florida Department of Health, “Florida’s WIC Program Provides Nutrition Services for Women, Infants and Children,” August 25, 2015, <http://www.floridahealth.gov/newsroom/2015/08/082515-wic-press-release.html>.

¹² Florida Department of Health, WIC, “WIC Contact Information,” <http://www.floridahealth.gov/programs-and-services/wic/contact-info.html>. DOH’s rules governing WIC are at Chapter 64F-16 of the Florida Administrative Code.

¹³ WIC applicants must give their street address or identify the location where they routinely live or spend the night. There is no requirement that the applicant have resided in Florida for any specific length of time. Nor is immigration status relevant to eligibility for WIC. DOH Procedure Manual No. 150-24, § 3-8.

¹⁴ Under DOH policy, to determine income-eligibility, a family is defined as a group of related or non-related persons who are not residents of a homeless facility or an institution but who are living together as one economic unit. Ordinarily, unborn children are counted as family members in the calculation. DOH Procedure Manual No. 150-24, § 3-7(e).

¹⁵ Fla. Admin. Code R. 64F-16.002(5). The WIC program calls families who are eligible because they receive SNAP, TANF or Medicaid “adjunctively eligible.” DOH Procedure Manual No. 150-24, § 3-7(a)(1).

¹⁶ National WIC Association, “Florida State WIC Profile,” <https://www.nwica.org/states/florida>.

¹⁷ Because USDA uses the term “Hispanic,” that term is also used here. United States Department of Agriculture, Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, “TABLE III -- COMPOSITION OF ETHNIC PARTICIPANT ENROLLMENT,” April 2019, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/resource-files/TABLE%20III%20--%20COMPOSITION%20OF%20ETHNIC%20PARTICIPANT%20ENROLLMENT%202016.pdf>.

¹⁸ United States Department of Agriculture, Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, “TABLE I -- COMPOSITION OF RACIAL PARTICIPANT ENROLLMENT,” April 2019, <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/TABLE%20I%20--%20COMPOSITION%20OF%20RACIAL%20PARTICIPANT%20ENROLLMENT%202016.xlsx.pdf>. See also Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, “Maternal Characteristics of Prenatal WIC Receipt in the United States, 2016,” January 2018, <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/databriefs/db298.htm>.

¹⁹ Church, C., Military Families Learning Network, “WIC and Members of the Military,” October 23, 2018, <https://militaryfamilieslearningnetwork.org/2018/10/23/wic-and-members-of-the-military/>.

²⁰ Military allowances are monies paid to military families for needs like housing. United States Department of Defense, Military Compensation, “Allowances,” <https://militarypay.defense.gov/Pay/Allowances/>.

²¹ United States Department of Agriculture, FNS Partnerships, “Military and Veteran Families,” <https://www.fns.usda.gov/partnerships/military-veteran-families>.

²² Fla. Admin. Code R. 64F-16.002. Excluded WIC allowances for the armed forces include Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH), Family Separation Housing (FSH), and Overseas Housing Allowance (OHA). DOH Procedure Manual No. 150-24, § 3-7(f)(5)(h).

²³ United States Department of Agriculture, “PART 246—Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children,” August 12, 2019, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/part-246%E2%80%94special-supplemental-nutrition-program-women-infants-and-children>.

²⁴ National WIC Association, “Florida State WIC Profile.”

²⁵ National WIC Association, “How WIC Helps the Sunshine State,” 2019, <https://s3.amazonaws.com/aws.upl/nwica.org/2019-fl-wic-fact-sheet.pdf>.

²⁶ United States Department of Agriculture, Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, “WIC Eligibility Requirements,” September 18, 2019, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/wic-eligibility-requirements>.

²⁷ Florida Department of Health, “Florida WIC Facts,” January 2016, <http://www.floridahealth.gov/programs-and-services/wic/health-providers/documents/wic-facts.pdf>.

²⁸ United States Department of Agriculture, Office of Inspector General, Nationwide Implementation of Women, Infants, and Children Electronic Benefits Transfer, “Audit Report 27601-0003-23, December 2019, <https://www.usda.gov/oig/webdocs/27601-0003-23.pdf>.

²⁹ Florida Department of Health, Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), Florida WIC Mobile App, “Introducing the New Mobile App,” <http://www.floridahealth.gov/programs-and-services/wic/wic-app/documents/flip-chart-eng.pdf>.

³⁰ DOH Procedure Manual No. 150-24, § 3-24 (l)(1).

³¹ The FLORIDA system stands for Florida Online Recipient Integrated Data Access System (FLORIDA), which is DCF’s automated system for eligibility determinations in the SNAP, TANF and Medicaid programs. Florida Department of Children and Families, ACCESS Florida Program Policy Manual, Chapter 4600, “Glossary,” <https://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/access/docs/esspolicymanual/4600.pdf>.

³² DOH Procedure Manual No. 150-24, A3-11-4.

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- ³³ See Dockray, H. and Silas, J., Social Interest Solutions, Eppes, E. and Machell, G., National WIC Association, and Neuberger, Z., Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, Launching New Digital Tools for WIC Participants, February 25, 2019, <https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/2-25-19fa.pdf>; Food Research and Action Center, “Making WIC Work Better;” and, Neuberger, Z., Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, “Modernizing and Streamlining WIC Eligibility Determination and Enrollment Processes,” January 6, 2017, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/modernizing-and-streamlining-wic-eligibility-determination-and-enrollment-processes>.
- ³⁴ Swerlick A., “Only Wealthy Immigrants Need Apply: A Proposed Federal Rule Change Would Hurt Florida Families and the Economy,” Florida Policy Institute, October 30, 2018, <https://www.floridapolicy.org/posts/only-wealthy-immigrants-need-apply-a-proposed-federal-rule-change-would-hurt-florida-families-and-the-economy>
- ³⁵ DOH Procedure Manual No. 150-24, § 3-7(e)(1)(b). See also Florida Department of Health, “Mom We’re Here For You,” <http://signupwic.com/> (noting that all caregivers, including moms, pregnant women, dads, grandparents, foster parents, step-parents and guardians can get support from WIC).
- ³⁶ Foster parents must present documentation of the foster child’s current status to have the child certified for WIC. DOH Procedure Manual No. 150-24, § 3-7(e)(1)(b)(1).
- ³⁷ DOH Procedure Manual No. 150-24, § 3-7 (e)(1)(e).
- ³⁸ Science Daily, Science News, “New economic study shows combination of SNAP and WIC improves food security,” June 13, 2019, <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2019/06/190613103120.htm>.
- ³⁹ Federal regulations governing SNAP are at 7 C.F.R Parts 271 through 283; TANF regulations are at 45 C.F.R. Parts 260-265; Medicaid regulations are at 42 C.F.R. Parts 430 through 456; and, WIC regulations are at 7 C.F.R Part 246.
- ⁴⁰ For example, in the SNAP program, a household’s net income, after considering the household’s income and certain expenses, must be under 100 percent of the federal poverty level. WIC’s income limit is 185 percent of the federal poverty level, which is higher than SNAP. See United States Department of Agriculture, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), “SNAP Eligibility,” August 14, 2019, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/recipient/eligibility>.
- ⁴¹ Florida Department of Health, “Florida’s WIC Program Provides Nutrition Services for Women, Infants and Children.”
- ⁴² Bottemiller Evich, H., *Politico*, “Immigrants, fearing Trump crackdown, drop out of nutrition programs,” September 3, 2018, <https://www.politico.com/story/2018/09/03/immigrants-nutrition-food-trump-crackdown-806292>.
- ⁴³ U.S. Department of Homeland Security, “Inadmissibility on Public Charge Grounds,” Federal Register 83 (196) (2018) 51114–51296, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2018/10/10/2018-21106/inadmissibility-on-public-charge-grounds>
- ⁴⁴ The Department of Homeland Security states that it “recognizes a plausible connection between...[its] NPRM [Notice of Proposed Rulemaking] and reduction in alien enrollment in WIC...” Department of Homeland Security, Final Rule, “Inadmissibility on Public Charge Grounds,” 84 Fed. Reg. 41292, 41313, August 14, 2019, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2019/08/14/2019-17142/inadmissibility-on-public-charge-grounds>.
- ⁴⁵ Florida Department of Health, “LRPP Exhibit III: PERFORMANCE MEASURE ASSESSMENT,” p. 40.
- ⁴⁶ Florida Department of Health, FLHealthCharts, “Ten Year Report: WIC Eligibles Served,” <http://www.flhealthcharts.com/charts/OtherIndicators/NonVitalIndNoGrpTenYrRpt.aspx?q=18K%2bPwYPWEHLpIRoHysV4iZB%2bwf50u8EKNTGdpOFUfl%3d>. DOH counts persons served in the WIC program if they were issued WIC benefits.
- ⁴⁷ Florida KIDS COUNT is part of the University of South Florida’s Department of Child & Family Studies at the College of Behavioral and Community Sciences.
- ⁴⁸ University of South Florida, College of Behavioral and Community Sciences, Department of Child & Family Studies, Florida KIDS COUNT, “2018 Florida Child Well-Being Index,” <http://floridakidscount.org/docs/2018Index/2018FLCWIallcounties.pdf>.
- ⁴⁹ Hernandez, L., Florida Department of Health, Maternal and Child Health Section, “Florida’s Infant Mortality and Low Birth Weight Actual Rate Compared to Expected Rate by County Coalitions,” 2018 Update, <http://www.floridahealth.gov/diseases-and-conditions/infant-mortality-and-adverse-birth-outcomes/data/ documents/expected-rates-by-county-and-healthy-start-coalition-2018.pdf>.
- ⁵⁰ WIC offices in some counties may be more flexible in scheduling appointments than is stated on their website. In such cases, it may be helpful for those counties to include that information on-line so that potential enrollees are not dissuaded from enrolling due to availability constraints.

⁵¹ DOH Procedure Manual No. 150-24, § 3-2(d).

⁵² Jefferson County Department of Health, Women, Infants, & Children (WIC), October 30, 2019, <http://jefferson.floridahealth.gov/programs-and-services/clinical-and-nutrition-services/WIC/index.html>.

⁵³ Madison County Department of Health, Women, Infants, & Children (WIC), October 30, 2019, <http://madison.floridahealth.gov/programs-and-services/clinical-and-nutrition-services/wic/index.html>.

⁵⁴ Taylor County Department of Health, Women, Infants, & Children (WIC), December 3, 2019, <http://taylor.floridahealth.gov/programs-and-services/wellness-programs/wic/index.html>.

⁵⁵ Glades County Department of Health, Women, Infants, & Children (WIC), December 11, 2019, <http://glades.floridahealth.gov/programs-and-services/clinical-and-nutrition-services/wic/index.html>

⁵⁶ Certification periods depend on the individual enrollee's circumstances. Although the length of certification periods varies, most certifications are for one year. Once enrolled, participants are provided a Florida Verification of Certification/Identification (VOC/ID) card, which states, among other things, the participant's current certification period. DOH Procedure Manual No. 150-24, § 3-17.

⁵⁷ 7 CFR § 246.7 (o).

⁵⁸ DOH Procedure Manual No. 150-24, § 3-11.

⁵⁹ DOH Procedure Manual No. 150-24, § 3-11. See also Neuberger, Z., Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, "Modernizing and Streamlining WIC Eligibility Determination and Enrollment Processes," January 6, 2017, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/modernizing-and-streamlining-wic-eligibility-determination-and-enrollment-processes>.

⁶⁰ Although DOH's main WIC page contains links to translations in both Spanish and Creole, links to individual county WIC programs from that page are not uniformly translated. Florida Department of Health, "Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)," August 20, 2018, <http://www.floridahealth.gov/programs-and-services/wic/index.html>. The WIC websites of each county are accessed through a link on a drop-down box entitled "Counties" at the top of the page.

⁶¹ Leon County Department of Health, Women, Infants, & Children (WIC), March 28, 2019, <http://leon.floridahealth.gov/programs-and-services/clinical-and-nutrition-services/wic/index.html>

⁶² Modernizing WIC through innovative use of technology should not result in across-the-board de-personalization of enrollment. Some families may have barriers to use of technology, such as a disability, not owning a computer, or lack of internet access.

⁶³ "ACCESS Florida" stands for Department of Children and Families Automated Community Connection to Economic Self Sufficiency. It allows Floridians round-the-clock, on-demand access to their online SNAP, TANF and Medicaid applications and individual MyACCESS accounts. Florida Department of Children and Families, ACCESS Florida, <https://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/access/>.

⁶⁴ Id.

⁶⁵ Florida's WIC program may need to ensure that families are able to maintain more personal interaction with program staff than many households experience with DCF's ACCESS Florida.

⁶⁶ Florida Department of Health, WIC, "What to bring to the WIC certification visit," June 4, 2018, <http://www.floridahealth.gov/programs-and-services/wic/certification-visit.html>.

⁶⁷ Florida Department of Children and Families, Automated Community Connection to Economic Self Sufficiency (ACCESS), <https://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/access/>. DCF already contracts for WIC EBT services for Florida.

⁶⁸ Florida Department of Children and Families, "ACCESS Florida, Standard Data Reports, Caseload," <https://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/access/StandardDataReports.asp>.

⁶⁹ Florida Department of Health, "Healthy Food. Healthy Kid. Healthy Mom. Florida WIC Foods," July 2019, <http://www.floridahealth.gov/programs-and-services/wic/documents/fl-wic-foods-eng.pdf>.

⁷⁰ Id. Allowable foods covered by WIC are distinguished by, among other things, brands, the weight of the package, and the make-up of the ingredients.

⁷¹ The twelve flyers range from a Juice Concentrate Flyer, a Baby Foods Supplemental Sheet, and a WIC Foods for Fully Breastfeeding Women Flyer, to a WIC Foods for Women who are Breastfeeding and Giving Some Formula Flyer. Florida Department of Health, WIC Program Information, "WIC Foods," December 12, 2019, <http://www.floridahealth.gov/programs-and-services/wic/wic-program-info.html>.

⁷²Florida Department of Health, WIC Program Information, WIC, Frequently Asked Questions, “18. Do store brands need to be purchased when it says ‘least expensive’?,” January 2, 2020, <http://www.floridahealth.gov/programs-and-services/wic/wic-faq.html#18>.

⁷³ DOH, *Healthy Food. Healthy Kid. Healthy Mom. Florida WIC Foods*.

⁷⁴ DOH, “Introducing the New Mobile App.”