Women, Infant, and Children (WIC)

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Abstract

Women, Infant, Children, also known as WIC, is a government sponsored nutrition program. The purpose of this paper is to explain when the program was developed, the purpose of the program, and how the program is funded. The paper will identify the population target, according to government guidelines, and determine program availability in Cumberland County, North Carolina. The following topics will be discussed: whether the program meets the needs of its intended population, if the program meets the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, and if it adequately provides nutritional resources. Lastly, any changes that can be implemented to improve the program will be discussed.

Women, Infant, Children (WIC)

One of the most common government based supplemental food and nutrition programs in the United States is WIC. WIC stands for women, infant, and children. WIC is a short term intervention program that focuses on providing necessary nutrients to individuals in need, providing education about healthy diets, and referring individuals to proper health care providers. With the information provided by numerous reliable sources, individuals can receive the help needed to not only provide for themselves but also for their child or children.

This year WIC is celebrating its fortieth anniversary. “Established as a pilot program in 1972 and made permanent in 1974, WIC is administered at the Federal level by the Food and Nutrition Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture” (USDA, 2015). WIC was created after the realization that hunger and poverty was widespread in the United States and inadequate nutrition posed real danger to pregnant women, new mothers, infants, and children (FRAC, 2010). WIC’s primary goal is to, “safeguard the health of low-income women, infants, and children up to age 5 who are at nutrition risk by providing nutritious foods to supplement diets, information on healthy eating, and referrals to health care” (USDA, 2014). Women that apply for the WIC program are typically given vouchers that pay for a specified amount of WIC approved foods. WIC approved foods include milk, cheese, eggs, whole-grain cereal, whole-grain bread, brown rice, whole, wheat and soft-corn tortillas, vitamin C enriched juices, dried/canned beans, peas, lentils, peanut butter, fruits/vegetables (fresh, frozen, canned), chunk-light tuna or salmon, infant formulas and foods (Cumberland County, 2012). The vouchers cover enough, to ensure those using WIC are receiving the necessary nutrients that their bodies need. WIC also provides information about Breast-feeding and can refer women to specific doctors when necessary. WIC, “is a domestic discretionary program funded annually through the appropriations committee process by grants to each state. Food and Nutrition Service provides funding, policy guidance, and creates regulations” (NWICA, 2014). Each state has their own WIC office and are supplied with grants from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. According to the USDA, as of April 1, 2015, North Carolina’s WIC office has been supplied with $193,937,087 in grants (USDA, 2015). That money has helped provide nutritional food, that is essential for survival, to many families who live in poverty.

As previously stated, WIC’s intended target population is low-income pregnant women, new mothers, infants, and children. North Carolina WIC serves approximately 270,000 women. In Cumberland County, 14,000 women are assisted by WIC’s services (Cumberland County, 2012). WIC has offices located in Hope mills, Spring Lake, and Fayetteville within Cumberland County. According to Cumberland County, to be eligible for WIC the client must meet the following: “Be a pregnant women, one who has recently had a baby or one who is breastfeeding an infant less than 12 months of age, be an infant or a child who has not reached their fifth birthday, reside in Cumberland County or its health service delivery area, meet local agency income eligibility, the gross annual income cannot exceed 185% of the poverty level, and nutritional and/or medical eligibility must also be met. This is determined by an on staff health professional using current medical information” (Cumberland County, 2012). Cumberland County WIC services also strongly encourage breastfeeding; therefore, “breastfeeding education is given to all pregnant women so they can make informed decisions about infant feeding. Additional breastfeeding education and support are provided by the WIC Breastfeeding Peer Counselors before and after delivery” (Cumberland, 2012). However, the client is not forced to breast feed.

WIC meets the needs of the population it serves because pregnant women are provided food, which in turn, provides their fetus with nutrients necessary for growth. According to National WIC Association, WIC meets the needs of its population because it will “reduce premature births, reduce low and very low birth-weight babies, reduce fetal and infant deaths, reduce the incidence of low-iron anemia, increase access to prenatal care earlier in pregnancy, increase pregnant women’s consumption of key nutrients such as iron, protein, calcium, and Vitamins A and C, increase immunization rates, improve diet quality, and increase access to regular health care”(NWICA, 2014). If a mother decides not to breast feed and cannot afford formula, WIC provides the infant with cans of formula each month. Once the child is off of formula, WIC will still provide food for the child, if needed. Those enrolled in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which is also a government food program that gives individuals money to pay for groceries, automatically receive WIC (NWICA, 2014). WIC is beneficial because it enforces healthy eating and follows the American Dietary Guidelines; however, it is only supplemental. One cannot live off of WIC alone. Dietary guidelines for Americans, “emphasizes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products; Includes lean meats, poultry, fish, beans, eggs, and nuts; and is low in saturated fats, trans fats, cholesterol, salt (sodium), and added sugars” (USDA, 2012). WIC is good for providing the fruits, vegetables, milk, and grains; however, no meat is provided. WIC and Dietary Guidelines for Americans are partnered; therefore, the WIC approved foods all fall within the Dietary Guidelines.

Compared to some other government nutrition programs, WIC certainly provides nutritional resources for the population it serves. The structure of the program is very beneficial to one’s health. The vouchers that the consumers receive allow them to get certain foods at different times of the month. With programs such as SNAP, ice cream, chips, soda, and candy can be bought. Since this type of program gives actual money and not so many stipulations, it can be detrimental to one’s health, if these unhealthy foods are bought. However, it can be beneficial if the shopper values nutrition and opts for healthy foods. The WIC food packages were recently revised to align the authorized food with the latest nutrition science and guidance (FRAC, 2010). According to Food Research and Action Center, “there is a growing body of evidence that the revised WIC food packages have favorable impacts on dietary intake, breastfeeding outcomes, and obesity rates. In addition, emerging studies suggest an important role for WIC in improving neighborhood food environments,” proving that people find WIC beneficial (FRAC, 2010). WIC is very favorable; however, it is missing something very valuable. WIC needs to implement a change to add a voucher throughout the month for lean meats. According to the MyPlate theory, which is recommended by the USDA and Dietary Guidelines for Americans, each plate of food consumed should contain two cups of protein (USDA, 2012). Meat is one of the most expensive items in the grocery store, which leads one to assume that a person living in poverty consumes limited lean meats. Since WIC says that it is helping provide “low-income pregnant women, new mothers, infants and children with nutritious foods” lean meat such as poultry or fish should be added to the list of approved foods (FRAC, 2010).

This paper indicated that WIC “serves to safeguard the health of low-income pregnant, postpartum, and breastfeeding women, infants, and children up to age 5 who are at nutritional risk by providing nutritious foods to supplement diets, information on healthy eating including breastfeeding promotion and support, and referrals to health care” ( USDA, 2015). The Cumberland County WIC office helps 14,000 individuals in the community. It helps struggling mothers give birth to a healthy newborn and provide the infant with the formula needed to survive. WIC is a very beneficial program when used as a supplement to a healthy lifestyle and it is strongly recommended for women to take advantage of this vital resource.

References

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