

## Extending WIC to Eradicate the Gap

### Background

The Special Supplemental Nutrition program for Women, Infants, and Children also known as WIC was piloted in 1972 and permanently established in 1974 by the Food and Nutrition Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (U.S. Department of Agriculture [USDA], 2021). WIC is a supplemental nutrition program that serves women, infants, and children with the goal to protect the health of eligible participants who are at nutritional risk by providing supplemental foods, nutrition education and counseling in addition to health referrals, screenings, and social services. Specifically, WIC services pregnant, breastfeeding, and non-breastfeeding postpartum women, infants, and children up to the age of five. It is believed that children will then receive supplemental nutrition through school meal programs after their fifth birthday but more than 50% of kindergarten students start school until they are 5.5 years and older, resulting in a gap of not receiving supplemental nutrition which is essential to support growth and development. WIC to 6 policy expands supplemental nutrition and other WIC services to the age of 6 eliminating a gap with no services until children are enrolled in school and then receive supplemental nutrition through school meal programs.

### Concerns with the current 5-year-old gap

- Families of children over 5 years old who are not yet enrolled in kindergarten and therefore not receiving supplemental nutrition may fall into food insecurity.
- Children experiencing food insecurity are likely to have lower educational outcomes and worse health than children in food secure households.
- Having a gap year without WIC services can cause a setback in the progress a child has made in growth and cognitive development while enrolled at WIC.
- Families of children over 5 years old not receiving supplemental nutrition are more likely to experience decline in health contributing to economic losses.

### Recommendations

Our proposal is to support the WIC to 6 policy which would expand WIC services to the age of 6 years. This law will continue to provide services to children and families that are eligible for WIC until the age of 6 years.

### Pros and Cons

The benefits of implementing a policy to extend WIC will be significant. With the extension, WIC will be able to support a child's growth during key developmental stages, which include physical, communication and language skill development. Additionally, with the expansion of WIC services, children benefited from WIC will continue receiving supplemental nutrition that promotes healthier eating habits. Practicing healthier eating habits can contribute to the prevention of severe childhood obesity. By extending the benefits of WIC, childhood obesity will continue to decrease, and children will be given the chance to grow into adults unburdened by preventable health complications related to severe obesity. Although the benefits are promising some challenges may be monetary; finding the required funding may be the largest obstacle.

## Summary

Expanding WIC services to eligible families until the age of 6 years will continue to promote and support a WIC participant's growth during key developmental stages, promote healthier eating habits, and reduce the risk for families of falling in food insecurity.

## References

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