

IMPROVING THE WIC PROGRAM FOR BETTER MATERNAL & CHILD HEALTH

OVERVIEW OF 2021-2022 FINDINGS

Missouri WIC: Benefits and Barriers

Research shows the WIC Program (Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children) **improves birth outcomes, diet and nutrition, and decreases health care costs overall**. In Missouri, WIC typically serves over 100,000 infants, young children, and pregnant and postpartum individuals, yet **only 53% of eligible Missourians enroll** in WIC and program participation rates have declined significantly over the past decade.

Operation Food Search (OFS) is examining **ways to improve program enrollment and remove barriers to participation**. Barriers include communication about eligibility, transportation, accessibility of clinics, food package restrictions, difficulty shopping for approved items and stigma. Understanding both the benefits and barriers to utilization has the potential to impact the **health of tens of thousands of Missouri women and children**.



What is the WIC Innovation Project?

The WIC Innovation Project was developed by OFS to increase **WIC satisfaction among all stakeholders** and to extend the program's reach to more eligible Missouri families by using the WIC participants' experiences as a foundational guide. In Phase One, we surveyed and listened to participants; in Phase Two, we will test improvements to the program based on our findings.

Phase One

OFS identified key eligible and non-participating groups, children age 1 to 4 and parents during pregnancy, from Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services data.



One-on-One Interviews

OFS conducted and analyzed one-on-one interviews with 49 people eligible for Missouri WIC from across the state.



Survey Development

OFS partnered with the Social Policy Institute (SPI) at Washington University in St. Louis to develop and launch a survey based on interview feedback to gather more information on the WIC participant experience.



Survey Completed by 2,918 Missourians

During Spring 2022, nearly 3,000 Missourians completed the survey, providing valuable information about their own WIC perceptions and experiences. 97% identified as currently WIC eligible.



Final Report

The final report, *Strengthening Missouri WIC: Improving Maternal and Child Health through Research and the Voices of WIC Families*, uses survey findings to engage in program evaluation of Missouri WIC and advocate for policy interventions aimed at increasing WIC participation and satisfaction.

Learn more and read the full report at WIC.OperationFoodSearch.org.



KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE REPORT



Top Barriers

WIC-eligible respondents experienced difficulties with **stigma, enrollment, accessing clinics, scheduling appointments, and identifying and purchasing approved items.**



Accessing Produce & Better Nutrition

Key improvements include **increasing the amount in vouchers** participants can use at farmers' markets/stands, **making the increased cash value benefit (CVB) for fruits and vegetables permanent**, and **expanding the WIC food packages** to meet the diverse dietary and nutritional needs of WIC clients.



Increase Options

WIC can be expanded by **moving the EBT card system online** and **allowing online, virtual and phone options for appointments.**



Transportation & Technology Limitations

Households with a greater risk of adult and child food insecurity were **more likely to experience transportation and technology barriers** that limited accessibility and overall utilization of WIC.



Enhance Communications

WIC enrollment and participant experience can benefit from **improved communication regarding eligibility, appointments, the WICShopper App** and how to access available resources.

Read the report and follow our work in Phase Two at WIC.OperationFoodSearch.org.