



For Immediate Release
September 4, 2019

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The California WIC Association Assures California Families that New Federal “Public Charge” Rules Will Not Impact WIC Services

WIC recipients cannot be penalized for seeking services such as nutrition and breastfeeding support under the new rules

SACRAMENTO - The [California WIC Association](#) (CWA) today announced that new U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) rules expanding the definition of “public charge” do NOT impact WIC (Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children) recipients and urged immigrants to not be dissuaded from accessing WIC’s nutrition and breastfeeding support services. CWA also stressed that Medi-Cal coverage for prenatal and postpartum care and children under 21 years, school meals, and Head Start are not affected by the new rules and urged families to stay enrolled. Confusion about the new rules has resulted in fear among immigrants and they are not seeking the care they need.

“Despite misinformation and rumors, families cannot be penalized for seeking and accepting WIC services under the new public charge rules,” said Sarah Diaz, CWA Policy and Media Coordinator. “We strongly urge immigrants to continue to seek or stay enrolled in WIC which provides much needed nutrition and breastfeeding support and education to California families.”

Public charge is a term used by U.S. immigration officials to describe a person who is considered primarily dependent on the government, and this designation can prevent immigration approval. Until the release of the new rules on August 12, public charge applied to people who received taxpayer-funded cash assistance or long-term institutional care. The new rules, which go into effect on October 15, will now require immigration caseworkers to consider the use of government housing, food and medical assistance, as well as command of the English language, in their immigration application review. **WIC is authorized under the Child Nutrition Act of 1966, which is excluded under the limitations for qualified aliens from federal means-tested public benefits.**

While CWA, including 83 local WIC agencies, will not be impacted by the new rules, the association opposes the expansion of public charge, saying that families and communities will suffer short- and long-term consequences when immigrant families are denied, or afraid to access, the care they need.

“California immigrants and their families are integral to this state – they enrich our neighborhoods, our communities, our culture, and our economy,” said Karen Farley, CWA Executive Director. “It is in all of our best interests, ethically and economically, to make sure that mothers and children have what they need to lead healthy, happy, productive lives.”

Local WIC agency staff continue to inform participants that WIC is not included in public charge and provide resources where families can learn more of the details related to public charge.

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