ASK THE COMMUNITY FIRST ACTION RESEARCH INITIATIVE

The findings and recommendations from the Ask The Community Action Research Initiative* fell into two main categories:

PROGRAMMATIC AND PSYCHOLOGICAL/SOCIOLOGICAL

Within these categories several themes emerged:

- INNOVATION AND ACCESS
- MARKETING, OUTREACH AND PERSONAL ENGAGEMENT
- CULTURAL COMPETENCY/CAPACITY
- INCLUSIVE/EXCLUSIVE BEHAVIORS AND ATTITUDES
- CULTURAL REFERENCE POINTS REFLECTING CULTURAL COMPETENCY

Produced by the California WIC Association, 2016
* Full report available at www.calwic.org
**PROGRAMMATIC CHALLENGES/BARRIERS/INFLUENCES:**

**INNOVATION, TECHNOLOGY AND ACCESS**

Need for better transportation and location of WIC sites (41% of respondents)

Need for more effective use of technology that improves accessibility

Millennials’ utilization of technology is normative; California WIC’s use of checks instead of debit cards, electronic payments or mobile apps is a problem (46% of respondents mentioned this)

Hours of operation makes it challenging to participate (22% of respondents)

Often African American participants find it difficult to calculate their income, difficult to understand qualifications

**MARKETING, OUTREACH AND PERSONAL ENGAGEMENT**

African American participants often do not observe either local or state staff who look like them, unconsciously reinforcing that they are neither welcome or accepted.

“When you don’t see people who look like you, you tend to ask yourself, ‘Do I belong?’”

Many marketing materials look outdated and do not show African Americans, thereby creating a lack of contemporary style. “It’s gotten better but we still don’t see us in marketing materials.”

It is important to build relationships and connections with the African American staff, peer counselors and advocates who are already in WIC. Several ATC members shared how quality relationships with staff and others substantially influences long-term participation by current and potential clients. When one client has a positive experience she is more likely to do outreach to family and friends to encourage further participation.

Need for materials, training, and activities that are focus group tested and relevant to the African American family.

**CULTURAL COMPETENCY/CAPACITY**

A majority of respondents (51-65%) do experience California WIC as being inclusive, responsive, respectful and accepting of the African American community. However this is not mutually exclusive of those who do experience a need for heightened cultural awareness and aspects of cultural competence. For example, those taking the survey noted the “lack of cultural appropriateness of food choices” (30% of respondents), “need for improved awareness and practice of culture competencies” (36%), and “lack of culturally appropriate activities I find interesting” (22%).
INCLUSIVE/EXCLUSIVE BEHAVIORS AND ATTITUDES

“Hurry up and wait” experience at WIC Clinics that make participants feel disrespected (30% of respondents); inability to adequately prepare participants for what to expect when checking in makes them feel that their time is not valued.

Bilingual staff should speak both English and Spanish. ATC members consistently spoke to the fact that when Spanish is spoken so prevalently, as it is in many WIC clinics, African Americans experience a sense of “othering.” Spanish is used in staff-to-staff communication that isolates those who do not speak Spanish, thereby creating discomfort (30% of respondents). One respondent noted that “Speaking in Spanish in front of non-Spanish speaking participants” was problematic for her.

CULTURAL REFERENCE POINTS (REFLECTION OF CULTURAL COMPETENCY)

Some African American cultural norms serve as psychological and sociological barriers to participation in the program. There can be a stigma attached to participating in government-sponsored programs.

As one ATC Task member opined, “For many families it’s a case of ‘We don’t do that’ or ‘I ain’t feelin’ that’ or ‘You didn’t get that and you fine’ that pervades our communities.” “We sometimes have to make the additional effort to help those in our community understand the benefits of WIC.”

Several survey responses also noted difficulty and embarrassment in finding the correct WIC foods at grocery stores and checking out using WIC checks.

Lack of childcare (35% of respondents) or child-friendly environments, including a level of disarray or poor quality of toys, also makes the WIC clinic space seem uninviting.
RECOMMENDATIONS

CONTINUE THE TASK FORCE
There was consensus among the members of the Task Force that continuing the operations of the Task Force would help create accountability between California WIC, stakeholders and the African American community. The experience and sense of collaboration, cooperation, thought leadership and being a catalyst for change were reasons for continuing conference calls (possibly quarterly), webinars, video conference calls, and two face-to-face meetings a year.

The ATC Task Force would also serve as a resource for implementation of recommendations. Members were also aware that additional resources would be required to continue this work and cognizant that resource development and fundraising would be necessary.

INCREASE COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIPS
Members of the ATC were prolific in their suggestions of other community-based, regional, and national partners that could strengthen California WIC programs and cooperate in increasing overall capacity as well as cultural competency.

SHARE BEST PRACTICES AND CREATE A LEARNING COMMUNITY
ATC Task Force members were extremely vocal in their observation that an expansion in organizational culture would serve California WIC. By continually emphasizing learning and sharing of best practices related to cultural competencies, collaboration, effective outreach and community engagement, various stakeholders would support stronger partnerships. A majority of Task Force members spoke to the power of continued organizational change and evolution, while recognizing that WIC is a federal and state bureaucracy that is slow to shift mindsets. Yet slow, steady, consistent emphasis on spotlighting best practices, as is often mentioned in the CWA blog, would be a strong vehicle for the type of change needed.

SUPPORT AND ADVOCATE FOR CULTURAL COMPETENCIES
Although Latinos make up a majority of California WIC participants, and consequently have created a dominant culture in many WIC Clinics, remembering to exhibit, embrace and enhance (Three E’s) inclusive behavior is critical to create a sense of belonging for everyone who uses WIC.

CONTINUE TO BUILD AND SUPPORT THE INFRASTRUCTURE OF BOTH CALIFORNIA WIC AND THE ATC TASK FORCE, AS NATIONAL MODELS BY:

- Creating a template for conference presentations that California WIC and Task Force members can use at various presentations and webinars and increase the number of presentations at health-related conferences
- Recognizing that ATC Task Force is a model for other states and should be disseminated and shared across the state and the country, possibly providing an ongoing column on the CWA blog or WIC Watch magazine
- Identifying and supply cultural competency resources for WIC centers
- Bringing together various WIC agencies, beyond those on the ATC Task Force, to discuss and plan for best practices for inclusive practices
- Providing quality cultural diversity/capacity training mandated for California WIC staff members
- Continuing to offer a cultural diversity/capacity track at CWA conferences
- Creating connections across local WIC agencies that were involved in the ATC Task Force