WIC History in the Making!

This time next year national implementation of WIC Cards will be complete! California is going strong, now on the fourth of 10 waves of rollouts focused on moving from the paper voucher system to WIC Cards utilizing the new WIC WISE Business Platform, and the new WIC App. By April we will be looking back on all that was accomplished! There is more! Ten local agencies are completing pilots in a collaborative project with state staff to develop, test, and evaluate streamlining enrollment, interactive texting, co-location, outreach and messaging, case management, community partnerships, and more. There is exciting work taking place all over the state. Ask any agency and they can tell you about strategies they are testing. We all have a lot to learn and share about new ways to serve participants, work with partners, integrate technologies, and move through the growing pains together.

Growing pains and change are hard but our WIC program is up for the challenge! Not knowing everything and feeling less in control can be stressful, but what we do know is that WIC Works. We can own our pride in the program and service to our communities. From that powerful place, we can embrace change and new ways to do business. Inside this edition you will see examples of the exciting WIC changes, how we honor, recognize, and support moms and dads, breastfeeding, WIC leaders, the WIC workforce, and more.
The WIC Card is Here!

On June 3, Napa and Solano counties began the pilot of the California WIC Card and WIC Web Information System Exchange (WIC WISE). This accomplishment was a long time coming and took the hard work of many, many California Department of Public Health (CDPH) WIC staff, WIC local agency staff, and contractors who have been hired to support this project through fruition.

During Go Live week, CDPH/WIC staff and contractors were on site with the pilot agencies as they walked through the new process, including a short lesson on how to use the California WIC App. The first participants to get the WIC Card were thrilled. Many went straight to the grocery store with their WIC Cards to buy their WIC foods. In the first three months during pilot (6/3-8/18) a total of 5,415 cards were issued, 22,032 store transactions occurred, and 8,261 people downloaded the new CA WIC App. Those numbers will continue to steadily increase as new cards are issued and local agencies Go Live with the California WIC Card.

Preparing for Upcoming Waves

During waves 1-2B 42 local agencies (88 clinic sites) implemented the WIC Card and WIC WISE during the weeks of September 3 and September 23. Due to the large number of sites that went live during the month, CDPH/WIC staff and local agency support teams received intensive training to provide support. CDPH/WIC staff worked diligently to ensure the local agency implementation resources were available for the first waves and they will continue to improve preparation strategies and materials for local agency staff as the statewide roll-out continues. The WIC WISE system is also being updated regularly as feedback is received from the local agencies using the system.

The support teams were on-site to help local agency staff during the first few days of their Go Live week, which proved to be extremely effective in supporting both the local agencies and the families. Due to the success of this endeavor, CDPH/WIC is committed to assisting local agencies during future waves.

In addition, CDPH/WIC staff along with contractors, visited WIC authorized stores in Wave areas 1- 4 to conduct "Test Shopping." This effort will continue throughout the rest of the waves to ensure that store’s point of sale (POS) equipment is working and stores were able to successfully conduct a WIC Card transaction before their Go Live date.

To ensure successful shopping experiences for both WIC participants and authorized vendors, CDPH/WIC adds new food items to the WIC Approved Product List (APL) regularly. Before each Wave, a team of WIC staff visited the highest redeeming regional chains, independent grocers, and a sampling of ethnic and specialty stores to collect UPC/products to add to the APL. The APL will be updated before each Wave and on an ongoing basis. A current version of the APL is online: https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CFH/DWICSN/Pages/WICFoods/CAWICAPL.aspx.

CDPH/WIC is overwhelmed with excitement by the level of support from local agencies, CDPH/WIC staff, and contractors who have volunteered to assist with these endeavors to make future waves successful during their upcoming Go Live weeks.

Updated Roll-Out Schedule

Revisions were needed for the new WIC WISE system and the WIC App prior to Pilot Go Live in order to improve the experience for families, local agency staff and grocers. Therefore, CDPH/WIC made slight changes to the original roll-out schedule as shown in the updated map below.

CDPH/WIC looks forward to working with the rest of the state as the Go Live process continues.

California WIC Card and WIC WISE Implementation Rollout Waves
Solano County WIC loved being a pilot agency for the WIC WISE and WIC card roll out. Chris Husing, the director for Solano County WIC, shared, “The engagement with preparation and planning with CDPH, OSI, and 3-Sigma was thrilling. When June 3rd arrived, we had the tools to serve the public. 3-Sigma and CDPH staff were on site to support us which was greatly appreciated. As a matter of fact, our clinics had so much attention we felt like celebrities. The local agency staff rallied to identify “bugs” and “work arounds” and took their

new job duty extremely seriously. The big lesson we learned was WIC WISE seemed to not allow us to serve the participant like WIC MIS. Many, including myself, thought there must be something wrong with WIC WISE and it needs fixing. Eventually, we learned that WIC WISE was doing what it was designed to do, and our agency would refer to this as “WIC WISE-isms.”

We have start-ed new staff since Go Live, and they only know WIC WISE. The system works just great for them. For those of us knowing WIC MIS, it’s time to move on.”

“The eWIC rollout as pilot has definitely been a new experience for our agency—providing many unexpected challenges and some unforeseen benefits. The WIC WISE system seems to have a lot of potential that we hope can be developed and maximized before too long. Shopping has not always gone smoothly for our participants, as the stores are also learning, but generally they are excited about the ease of an EBT card over the old paper checks.

My team in Napa is amazing! It’s a testament to their commitment to each other and our clients that they’ve persevered the frustrations of learning on the fly and figuring it out as we go while keeping quality relationships as the guiding priority in navigating these changes together.”

– Jenna Haug Said, WIC Director at Napa County WIC

Ampla WIC

Ampla WIC (in Yuba and Colusa county) and Sutter County WIC went “live” in mid-September with WIC WISE. We were busy with appointments and learning to maneuver through the new system and serve our families. Several staff attended instructor-led training at the State WIC office in Sacramento two weeks earlier. While there, a few staff got reacquainted after working in WIC for over 25 years. From left to right: Rita Alvarez, Ampla WNA, Tina Lavy, IBCLC, now working at Sutter County WIC, Margaret Mickelson, WNA Ampla, Rosario Reyes, IBCLC Ampla, and Chia Moua, WNA, Ampla. All have worked at WIC prior to 1997, when what were called “3Fs” or the “Family File Folder” and carbon coupons were used. Around 1997, California WIC transitioned to a new computer system (known now as WIC-MIS) and this week, WIC-WISE went live in Sutter and Yuba/Colusa county.

The WIC staff pictured have worked in WIC for all THREE systems. They have also seen their children grow up over the years and several are now grandmothers.
Public Charge

Since early 2017, when the first document regarding changes to the “public charge” rule was leaked, local WIC agencies and other health and social services staff have seen the immigrant families in their communities concerned and sometimes withdrawing from services out of fear. In October 2018, the proposed rule change was announced and published in the Federal Register, and during the 60-day comment period, the proposed rule received over 267,000 comments, among which the WIC community was well-represented. Unfortunately the official public charge rule expansion was released in August of this year, and although it was not as broad as earlier leaked drafts threatened, it still stood to hurt many WIC families. The programs that were now considered under the public charge test included SNAP (CalFresh), Medicaid (Medi-Cal), and housing subsidies such as Section 8, in addition to cash aid, which was previously considered. Although the rule was scheduled to go into effect on October 15, at press time, the rule has been blocked by preliminary injunctions issued by judges in five states. No regulation changes will be implemented while litigation is pending.

Even though public charge is temporarily blocked, CWA will continue to oppose it, recognizing that families suffer short- and long-term consequences when they are denied, or afraid to access, the care they need. As part of our commitment to #protectimmigrantfamilies, it is important for CWA and local WIC agencies to continue to make clear that WIC is NOT included in the public charge rule, and furthermore the rule DOES NOT penalize immigrants for benefits received by their children under age 21. We must continue to urge families not to unenroll children from services like WIC, Medi-Cal or SNAP. Pregnant women will also not be penalized for using Medicaid for Pregnant Women Program, and must be encouraged to receive routine prenatal and postpartum care. For resources in multiple languages that can be used in WIC settings, including flyers, social media and text messaging, and a press release, check out www.calwic.org/what-we-do/engage-wic-families/protect-immigrant-families/, or contact Sarah: sdiaz@calwic.org.

State Policy

CWA had a busy legislative season, co-sponsoring a few California budget proposals, including a request to increase the Medi-Cal reimbursement rate for breast pumps, co-sponsored by CWA and California Breastfeeding Coalition as well as a proposal from the Children’s Health Coverage Coalition (also participants of the Horizontal Integration workgroup) to fund the state statute to implement “express lane enrollment” of children who participate in WIC into Medi-Cal. Unfortunately neither budget request made it into the Governor’s budget, but we will regroup and explore how to move forward next year! At press time, Governor Newsom has wrapped up the 2019 legislative session by signing or vetoing hundreds of bills sent to him. Several bills on CWA’s Bill Monitor were signed into law, including SB 464 (Mitchell), aimed at reducing racial disparities in maternal mortality, and SB 142 (Wiener), which expands and strengthens California’s lactation accommodation policy for employees. Other bills on CWA’s list were not signed, but were addressed administratively. For the complete CWA 2019 bill list, visit www.calwic.org/policy-center/state/.

Congress Advances FY 2020 Agriculture Appropriations, President Signs Continuing Resolution

At the end of September, the Senate Appropriations Committee unanimously approved an Agriculture Appropriations bill for fiscal year 2020, providing $151.7 billion in funding for USDA programs. Six billion, including a $800 million rescission for unspent food funds, is proposed for WIC funding, down $75 million from FY19, but sufficient to serve eligible participants, and the same levels as the House bill that passed in June. Different from the House’s $90 million proposal for WIC’s Breastfeeding Peer Counselor Program, the Senate proposes $80 million. At the end of September, President Trump signed a continuing resolution to continue funding the federal government through November 21. The measure received bipartisan support in both the Senate and the House. Congress now has until mid-November to negotiate agreements on the twelve outstanding appropriations bills for fiscal year 2020. If an agreement cannot be reached by November 21, another continuing resolution will be necessary to avert a government shutdown.
Put WIC on the Map

One of the most important things we can do to promote continued support and protection of WIC at the federal level is to ensure that our policymakers understand WIC and the benefits it brings to their constituents and communities. The tense political climate did not daunt 38 California WIC Ambassadors – including four WIC moms – as they visited all Congressional representatives in Washington DC last March to provide WIC program education. After attendees participated in the annual National WIC Association Washington Leadership Conference — hearing federal updates on the budget, immigration, and more — they stormed Capitol Hill to tell the WIC story. With plenty of convincing data, facts and family stories, these WIC Ambassadors easily described how WIC works and put a human face to families in need.

Now we challenge California WIC agencies to host all 55 Congressional representatives – as well as California Assemblymember, senators, and local policymakers – for a local WIC site visit! Let’s make sure your policymakers know how WIC works before our next annual conference. We know there are always fabulous things happening at WIC sites that are worthy of sharing, and we especially hope you will take this opportunity to share positive news about the new WIC Card and WIC WISE rollout! The first step is to contact and invite your representative; find tips on our website www.calwic.org/policy-center/wic-ambassadors/, and ask Sarah at CWA for assistance: sdiaz@calwic.org

COMING EVENTS

Save the Date!
The annual CWA Spring Conference will be April 5-8, 2020, at the Town and Country in San Diego.

Mark Your Calendar!
California Breastfeeding Coalition’s 10th Annual Summit
20/20 Vision: Creating a Clear Focus for Equitable Breastfeeding Care
January 21-23, 2020 in Sacramento

The National WIC Association (NWA) invites you to attend our 30th Annual Washington Leadership Conference scheduled from Sunday, March 15th through Tuesday, March 17th, 2020.

Connect with CWA
Visit CWA on Facebook!
Follow us on Twitter!
Find us on Instagram!
(Search for California WIC Association or calwic.)
In honor of Father’s day and the increasing number of men and dads participating in the WIC program, the El Monte Valley WIC center hosted a special event on June 14, to celebrate the important role men and dads have in the wellbeing of their families.

The El Monte Valley WIC center hosted the Congresswomen Grace Napolitano, Mayor Pro Tem for the city of El Monte, Jerry Velasco and Sarah Rizvi, staff member for Assemblywomen Blanca Rubio, who all spoke about the importance of men and dads and the WIC program’s nutrition education and support in our community.

The distinguished guests all presented certificates that acknowledged three fathers for their commitment to their families and participation with the WIC program:

• **Juan Luis Banuelos**
  Juan is a big part of his wife’s breastfeeding journey. He is supportive and has encouraged her to totally breastfeed their infant. He helps her around the house and attends her WIC appointments with her. When their baby was born, he would bring her to the breastfeeding clinic for the 1st month just to make sure the baby was gaining weight and breastfeeding well. The baby is now 13 months old mom is still totally breastfeeding and dad is still a big part of her journey.

• **Ahsan Chohan**
  Ahsan is very helpful during his WIC visits with his wife. He helps mom with the care of the baby, filling out forms and helping check the baby’s weight gain. He is also very supportive of mom and her efforts to breastfeed their baby.

• **Hoa Ngo, (Tom)**
  Tom has been a Nutritionist at the El Monte Valley WIC center since 5/2/2005. He has an eight-year-old son who is the highlight of his life. He likes to spend time with his son playing basketball, hiking, throwing a football around and taking a walk in the park or his neighborhood. According to Tom, the best part of being a dad, is teaching him something new and having him ask numerous questions.

The celebration included healthy snacks and drinks provided by WIC, face painting, arts and crafts, and book reading by a Norwood library, Librarian. Alta Med Dental, Norwood Library, El Monte Library, Spiritt Family Centers, Read Conmigo, and the Foothill Family, joined the celebration and provided their services.

One guest speaker gave testimonial about the WIC program and about the important role of men and fathers in children’s lives. Mr. Phu Ly, a WIC Nutrition Assistant at the Rosemead office for over 20 years, gave testimony about WIC and the important role of men and fathers in children’s lives.

PHFE WIC is committed to fostering an inclusive and friendly environment for men, fathers, and all other caretakers, parents, and guardians. Research shows children and families do better when fathers and father-like figures are involved. Children exhibit better school performance, increase in self-esteem and improves social relationships. The WIC program offers father-friendly materials such as nutrition education classes, nutrition counseling, parenting classes and referrals to additional resources to support the entire family.
Fathers are Superheroes!

Planned Parenthood WIC has made Father Appreciation a must for the month of June – families look forward to celebrating all the wonderful dads that belong to our WIC program. This year’s Father Appreciation Celebration theme was “Super Heroes.” There were many activities that took place: we had a food demo for Watermelon Pizza, there was a Super Hero bean bag toss, each dad received a certificate and we had fun prizes for our much-awaited raffle. One of the dads attended our celebration with his wife and baby really stood out – when this dad received his certificate of appreciation, his wife stood up to speak about how proud she was of her husband. She said he works hard every day to make sure his family has what they need. He works 2 jobs and still wakes up at night to feed the baby, so his wife can sleep. Now that’s a Super Dad!
American Red Cross WIC Celebrates Black Breastfeeding Mamas with Brunch!

On Saturday, August 24, the American Red Cross (ARC) WIC Breastfeeding Peer Counselor and San Diego County Black Infant Health (BIH) programs co-hosted a brunch for their participants in recognition of Black Breastfeeding Week 2019. This year’s theme was The World is Yours: Imagine. Innovate. Liberate!

Families enjoyed each other’s company while they listened to live jazz and helped themselves to a tasty brunch and mocktails. Some moms took part in a “relay race” where they put together a hand pump or tried wrapping a baby doll in a babywearing wrap. There was an exciting opportunity drawing and plenty of fun pictures taken at the photo booth.

In addition, attendees were informed about other community resources that support African American families throughout prenatal and postpartum stages. Representatives from PCI Healthy Start spoke about their collaboration with For the Village and Birth Roots to provide doula and additional midwife services specifically in this community. Dr. Kelly Oberia Elmore, Ob-Gyn, also spoke about the importance of maternal health for African American mothers and babies.

“What stood out to me was a mom who heard of the event by word-of-mouth and attended with her infant and toddler. She came up to me and said, ‘I will be here next year and so will my friends.’ We started 5 years ago with the intentions of creating this community, and at this year’s event I felt that what we set out to do had finally come to pass,’’ said Latrice Reid, event emcee and Breastfeeding Peer Counselor for the ARC WIC.

The day wrapped up with a group photo and a baby lift up. The ARC WIC Breastfeeding Peer Counselor program and BIH look forward to partnering to host this event again next year.
Compton WIC site celebrates Black Breastfeeding Week

Soul Food for Your Baby partnered with LA BioMed WIC for our Black Breastfeeding Week Celebration for The Village Moms at our Compton WIC Site. Fifteen mothers enjoyed camaraderie, food, presentations, gifts and raffle prizes. Elizabeth Woods, founder of Soul Food for Your Baby and Marquita Jones, Community Outreach Liaison from the Black Infant Health Program were there to share words of wisdom and resources.

Chocolate Milk Documentary

During the month of August, Elizabeth Bayne, director and producer of the Chocolate Milk Documentary, allowed over 200 organizations across the U.S. to host free screenings of a 90-minute preview. This was a nationwide effort to share the challenges and joys of breastfeeding in the black community LA BioMed WIC co-hosted two of the screenings with iDream of Racial Health Equity and BreastfeedLA; and these were attended by breastfeeding mothers, community members and health professionals. Afterward, the audience formed discussion groups to explore how communities can better support breastfeeding.
World Breastfeeding Week Celebration at San Joaquin County WIC

Over 260 people attended the Annual World Breastfeeding Week Celebration held at the main Stockton office of the San Joaquin County Public Health Services WIC Program on August 1. Attendees, including both breastfeeding and non-breastfeeding moms, as well as friends and family members, strolled through the historic building that houses WIC. Our high-ceiling corridors, accented by colorful streamers, were filled with booths staffed by representatives from more than 20 community-based organizations. These included Public Health Services programs such as Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention and Black Infant Health, as well as the Emergency Food Bank, Women’s Center- Family and Youth Services, Child Abuse Prevention Council, and Fathers and Families of San Joaquin County. In addition, dental specialists were available to provide free screenings for children, and WIC staff facilitated fun games and activities (bean bag toss, coloring, etc.) for kids to enjoy.

Upon arriving, each attendee was given one raffle ticket as well as a form listing all of the exhibitors. By getting the form stamped at every booth, another raffle ticket could be earned. We were very fortunate to be able to offer lots of raffle prizes that generated excitement about the event ahead of time as they were festively-wrapped and prominently displayed for most of the previous month.

The WIC staff proudly wore aprons in a rainbow of colors featuring “World Breastfeeding Week” logos on the front, which added a cheerful note to the festivities. With extended hours over past years – this year, lasting from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. – we were pretty exhausted when it was all over, but everyone had a great time, heard very positive comments from attendees, and agreed the event was a huge success.

United Health Centers WIC

To celebrate National Breastfeeding Month, United Health Centers WIC staff created breastfeeding art posters to display in the community. Posters went to the annual Breastfeeding Walk, the annual Milk Drive and the screening of the “Chocolate Milk” documentary. The posters are continuing their journey beyond the month of August and are being displayed in local libraries. They will eventually end up on display at the WIC site where they were created.
August is a busy month at Community Medical Centers, WIC! We celebrate World Breastfeeding Week and National Health Care Centers week. Our breastfeeding celebration “Be a Rainbow” was filled with information about community partners in San Joaquin County that our participants may benefit from; education on the invaluable benefits of breastfeeding to mom, baby, community, the environment; breastfeeding while working and returning to work or school; breastfeeding support resources available in our county at our 3 main sites, Stockton, Tracy, & Lodi.

We also celebrated our 6th annual “Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace Awards” during our celebration in August. Staff throughout our parent agency, with locations throughout San Joaquin, Solano, & Yolo counties, nominated the team members or clinics who supported them during their breastfeeding journey when they returned to work. They submitted their “Breastfeeding and Returning to Work” story where they described how their coworker or team provided support during their pumping journey. This year we had a total of 15 nominations which included, staff members, supervisors, doctors, and the clinics. During the awards our pumping mommies had the opportunity to share their story with everyone present at the celebration. It was very emotional! Everyone who was nominated received special recognition. We are very proud of our efforts to provide the support, and to recognize the people who are there to provide it, making this journey easier for moms when they return to the workforce.

On August 3 the 3rd annual AV Baby Expo was held. We had over 1,000 participants take part in: Breast Milk Drive, Fashion Show, Infant Massage, Prenatal Yoga, Breastfeeding Q & A, Car Seat Safety checks, Zumba, shopping and prizes. Assemblyman Lackey and State Senator Wilk helped kick off the event.

This event is hosted by the Antelope Valley Breastfeeding Coalition and includes AV WIC as a platinum sponsor.

It has been very successful to have one large event in our area for the month of August.
The Sutter County WIC Program, along with the Sutter County jail correctional officers, jail medical services and the public health branch, was recognized for its Model Practice "Supporting Incarcerated Breastfeeding Mothers – No Barriers To Breastfeeding" at the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) annual conference held in July in Orlando, Florida. The model practice was one of 53 outstanding practices chosen from across the nation. Winning projects, as determined through a competitive, peer-reviewed process, will be added to NACCHO’s Model Practice searchable online database. NACCHO represents the nation’s nearly 3,000 local governmental health departments. These city, county, metropolitan, district, and tribal departments work every day to protect and promote health and well-being for all people in their communities. "We are proud to recognize local health departments who have excelled and developed innovative public health projects that are making local communities healthier and more secure," said NACCHO’s Chief Executive Officer Lori Tremmel Freeman. "The 2019 Model Practice Awards are a showcase of the best and brightest in local public health. Winners display a diverse range of topics including issues such as supporting incarcerated moms’ breastfeeding efforts...and many more issues.”

The model practice "Supporting Incarcerated Breastfeeding Mothers” was a collaborative undertaking that included several partners: the Sutter County WIC director, lactation consultant, jail medical staff, and a supportive county public health officer.

A few years ago, at the Sutter County jail, an inmate had given birth and wanted to continue breastfeeding after delivery and returning to the facility. At the time, there was no policy or formal procedures to accommodate the situation. The jail medical staff contacted the county medical officer, who worked with the local WIC program to obtain a handpump and storage bags. The WIC director and nutritionist, together with the health officer, quickly drafted and approved a policy that would allow the mother to pump and save her milk (in an ice chest), as well as a procedure for the family to pick up the breastmilk each day. The WIC IBCLC visited the mom in jail, provided pumping guidance (and after a request – an electric pump) and clarification of best practices to the jail medical and correctional staff. The mom successfully pumped and provided breastmilk to her newborn for over three months.

Due to the circumstances, mom and baby were not able to be reunited during her jail time. The policy and procedures are still in effect to this day. The Sutter County jail nurse manager commented "supporting this mom and infant under these extenuating circumstances was a team effort and has been a highlight of my work here." WIC IBCLC Tina Lavy expressed her thoughts “the situation was not like any I had experienced before – even visiting the jail was an unknown for me...but as a health care professional, in this situation, I think we were all mindful of human dignity and civil rights – not just for mom, but for the baby as well. Such was the circumstances - to provide the means of support so that these rights could be upheld. As lactation consultants, our professional code of ethics asks that we protect and advocate for breastfeeding, which accordingly, allows a child - this child - the highest attainable standard of health, for at least her first three months and into the future.”

In 2017, a bill was introduced to the California legislation, AB2507 "County jails: infant and toddler breast milk feeding policy” that would require, on or before January 1, 2020, county jails to develop and implement an infant and toddler breastmilk feeding policy for lactating inmates detained in or sentenced to a county jail that is based on currently accepted best practices. The bill passed and was signed into law by then Governor Jerry Brown in September 2018. At the time, this was one of the first jail lactation accommodation bills in the nation. Other county and city jurisdictions have requested copies of the Sutter County policy and procedures as well AB2507. If your agency, county or jurisdictions are interested in more information about AB2507 (California Penal Code 4002.5) and other issues related to breastfeeding and incarceration, contact the California Breastfeeding Coalition at robbiegd.cbc@gmail.com.

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Supporting this mom and infant under these extenuating circumstances was a team effort and has been a highlight of my work here.

—Tina Lavy, WIC IBCLC
The City of Long Beach WIC program strives to make our participants feel special and welcomed. One of the biggest acknowledgements at WIC is when a child turns 5 years old and graduates from the program. We knew this significant accomplishment deserved more attention, and we wanted to make that moment special and memorable for both the child and the family. One of our team members had this innovative idea of putting together a WIC Graduation to celebrate their achievement.

We began this new journey on June 28, 2019, and started posting their graduations on social media. The response has been overwhelming with many parents expressing their excitement for their children to have a WIC graduation. The graduation ceremony starts off with the WIC Nutrition counselor congratulating the family on all their healthy accomplishments and asking if their child would like to walk down the “red carpet” and take pictures. Once the child and parent agree, they become excited to have their first graduation take place at the WIC office.

The child wears a cap and gown donated by staff, holds an official graduation certificate, receives a book, a backpack, and with a little WIC magic we “Make This Happen!” All of the WIC team members come together to create this special moment for the graduates; we roll out the famous red carpet, start the graduation music, and then it begins! Emotions fill the room with everyone clapping and cheering from the child’s family and our team members. Even our participants who are being counseled during that time clap for our little graduates.

Reactions have been so extraordinarily touching. Parents tell us they get emotional with tears in their eyes, and they are very thankful that we made their child feel so special. When other families have little ones, they whisper to their child, “You’ll get to do that too someday.” A mom during her pregnancy counseling session said, “I’m tearing up and he’s not even my child!” This is the kind of positive reaction that spreads throughout our office.

Statistically, participation in our WIC program drops once the children turn one year of age. We strive to keep our families engaged and retained, and constantly work on recruiting more families to participate in the wonderful WIC Program. Our graduation has become something special that children and parents look forward to. Many have seen graduation ceremonies take place in person or via social media, and this helps retain families in our program because they have something to await and anticipate.

We ask ourselves, “How will kids remember Long Beach WIC?” We now know that they will always remember their first graduation with cheers, applause, and love from their Long Beach WIC family.
Community Medical Centers WIC

There are many strategies that local WIC agencies use to make WIC easier to access – online education, walk-in appointments, offering bloodwork screening – but agencies around California are still struggling with participation, and continue to see families dropping out. Community Medical Centers WIC is trying a new approach with two new projects, supported by CDPH mini grants, aimed at making it easier for families to meet WIC requirements: texting and telehealth!

One project provides nutrition education via two-way text messaging that would allow for a conversational way to provide participants with their required nutrition education contacts for WIC. Families receive a series of text messages every two weeks linking to websites, WIC handouts, and interactive questions to assess for understanding. CMC’s WIC families are loving this option for completing their class credit, with over a quarter of our families opting for “Classes via Text” over in-person, 1:1, & online options. “I appreciate small tips instead of a whole bunch of info in one sitting. I retain info better this way,” wrote one participant.

The second project provides tele-health-based WIC appointments utilizing technology available to participants via home computer, tablet, or smartphone using HEALTHIE, a HIPAA-compliant telehealth platform. After receiving permission to test appointments with a pilot group, CMC WIC initially offered video visits for mid-certifications, trimester checks and high risk appointments. Recently we expanded video visits to include recertification appointments and one-on-one classes. Thanks to special interest from the Center for Healthy Women & Children and Altarum, CMC WIC plans to continue for an additional six months past the CDPH mini-grant period.

Stay tuned for more data and outcomes analysis!
North County Health Services

The WIC Worksite Wellness Program is alive and going strong at North County Health Services (NCHS) in North San Diego County! Wellness Coordinator, Jo Ann Shaw, RD, IBCLC, along with a Wellness Team comprised of several WIC staff representatives, have implemented various programs and challenges to motivate and promote a culture of wellness at their local agency. Among the components of their employee wellness program are: The Healthy Snack Basket where employees can purchase healthy snacks at their respective sites; Weekly Wellness Tips and a Monthly Wellness Calendar emailed to all WIC staff; Wiggle Breaks and food demos/tastings during staff meetings; and wellness challenges like “5-2-1-0 Challenge,” and “The Real Food Challenge” which encourages making small changes toward better health in a fun way.

Because of their involvement with UCSD Center for Community Health’s Live Well @ Work Program, NCHS was asked to participate in a panel discussion of worksite wellness best practices at CWA this past April. Along with SDSU and ARC WIC, the panel shared their successes and challenges in implementing and sustaining a WIC Worksite Wellness Program. Attendees at the session asked several questions and received much encouragement from these well-established employee wellness programs.

In addition, NCHS was asked to participate in an interview with consulting agency, Civilian, hired by Live Well @ Work (LW@W) to gather program feedback and insights from community leaders in order to expand the LW@W initiative. As a result of the interview, motivators and barriers to participating in such a program were identified. NCHS is contributing to the process of developing a new Live Well @ Work Recognition Program, as a key benefit of being a Live Well San Diego Recognized Partner who fosters a healthy, safe work environment for their employees.

Who knew being a certified Well WIC Worksite (WWW) would lead to all this? If you’re not a certified WWW, ask Jodi with CWA for help - jmulliganpfile@calwic.org. It’s worth the effort to create a culture of wellness for the benefit of your staff.

It’s worth the effort to create a culture of wellness for the benefit of your staff.
Long Beach WIC’s Wellness Journey

The Long Beach (LB) WIC Program is proud to be a Certified Well WIC Worksite since 2014. As it is common with many wellness initiatives, keeping the momentum going and maintaining motivation can be a major hurdle. In April 2019, the LB Platinum WIC Wellness Committee came up with a creative way to keep exercise and wellness at the forefront of our minds. We have been challenging each of our five sites to work together to complete weekly fitness challenges, such as doing 2,500 calf raises or 1,000 tricep dips in 1 week. To impart some friendly competition, we share a summary of each site’s performance after each week. In one four-month period, we did 11,610 squats, 13,298 calf raises, 12,747 shoulder raises, 10,984 arm circles, 10,776 seconds of wall sits, 13,180 high knees, 13,090 bicep curls, 16,760 booty kicks, and more.

LB WIC team members are putting their values into action by implementing healthy lifestyle practices throughout the work day. Because of this challenge, WIC staff are growing both in strength and in teamwork.

"Amazing and truly challenging!” said Zoila O., a site supervisor. "It makes me look forward to the new one! Team members express that it promotes interaction, motivates them to move, makes them feel good, and builds a habit that is important for health in general. I love how we come together as a team and that it is fun! I feel that we are modeling the behavior that we want to see! It connects and involves everyone.”

Another team member, Jennifer C., said, “I enjoy the weekly challenges; it motivates me to move at work, especially on the days I can’t make it to my spin class. I love how we get together as a team at [our site] and we motivate each other. Even on the challenges that hurt, when we say, ‘Ten more!’ it keeps us going!”

In addition, the Wellness Committee began a five-month weight and wellness competition called Healthy U 2019. At the end of the competition, the weight loss winner Susana, lost 27 pounds in 22 weeks, which was 18.3% of her original weight! The wellness winner Georgina, drank 1,216 cups of water, exercised at least one hour every day, ate at least three servings of vegetables most days, slept at least seven hours most days, and gave thanks every day.

Our weight loss winner, said, “I’m very happy to win! I’m most happy that I lost a lot of weight.”

Our wellness winner, said, “I really worked hard. I feel so healthy. It takes dedication and a lot of discipline to change your eating habits and keep active in the gym. I am grateful to the WIC Program and the wellness team who motivated me to adopt a healthy lifestyle.”

We are so proud of our LB WIC family for being great sports about the fitness challenges and pushing themselves and each other to stay active inside and outside of work. It is our sincere hope that the Wellness Committee continues to spark change and improve our agency culture and health.
Are you ready to become a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist (RDN)?

If you have a bachelor’s degree from an Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics (ACEND) accredited Didactic Program in Dietetics (DPD), you may be ready to take the next step, completing a WIC Dietetic Internship and becoming a RDN.

**Here’s important dates you need to know:**

- **January 1, 2024,** NEW Requirement for entry-level RDNs will require a master’s degree to take the RD exam.
- **December 31, 2023,** complete a dietetic internship and be eligible to take the RDN exam before a master’s degree is required.
- **2021-2022,** WIC dietetic internships will be selecting interns for the last classes that will graduate prior to the master’s degree requirement.

**Here’s how WIC can help you become a RDN:**

- WIC employees receive priority in the selection of interns for WIC dietetic internships.
- Nancy, the statewide Career Development Coordinator will review your eligibility, provide advice to strengthen your qualifications and apply for a WIC dietetic internship.
- WIC dietetic internship graduates have access to the very successful e-RD-2b Study Program to prepare them to pass the Registration Examination for Dietitians (RD exam).
- The California Nutrition Corps scholarship through CWA helps support employees of California local WIC programs who are advancing their professional careers.
- For more information go to WICcareercorner.com.

**Q.** Will individuals who establish eligibility with a baccalaureate degree prior to January 1, 2024, but do not pass the registration examination, have to meet this new requirement? No. Provided registration eligibility is established prior to January 1, 2024 a graduate degree will not be required.

**Q.** What does the statement, “all other entry level dietitian registration eligibility requirements remain the same,” mean? The current DPD and supervised practice requirements (CP, DI or ISPP), remain in effect. The only change is the degree level moving from minimum baccalaureate degree to minimum graduate degree. The foreign degree equivalency requirement also remains in effect.

**Q.** Does the statement, “graduate level degree can be in any major,” mean that the graduate degree could be in anything (even totally unrelated to nutrition and dietetics)? The graduate degree may be in any area, provided it is granted by a U.S regionally accredited college/university, or foreign equivalent. Although, CDR does not require any particular area of study it is anticipated that a graduate level degree in nutrition and dietetics would be the most efficient means for students to obtain the necessary competency for dietetics.

**Q.** Will applicants for registration eligibility with a graduate degree have to have supervised practice and have a verification statement to take the RD exam? Yes. Just as baccalaureate graduates now have to have verification statements to document completion of DPD and supervised practice program completion, graduate degree applicants will have to do the same.

**Q.** Does the graduate degree have to be completed after the supervised practice program? No. The graduate degree may be completed at any time prior to applying for registration eligibility. However, some dietetic internships and Individualized Supervised Practice Pathways (ISPPs) may require that interns have a graduate degree or are enrolled in a program so that they are better prepared to take the exam with recent didactic and supervised practice experience.

*Find out what your next steps are to become a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist, contact Nancy, the statewide WIC Career Development Coordinator at nnesa@sdswic.com.*
**Making Health Equity a Part of WIC**

WIC agencies have many opportunities to better serve participants, including ensuring health equity. What does this mean for a local agency when this framework has not been part of tradition guidelines for providing WIC services?

In early 2019, PHFE WIC committed to addressing health equity, a vision of Kiran Saluja, WIC Director. The agency committed to staffing this approach, and Toncé Jackson, MPH, RDN, CLE became Health Equity Manager. Part of this work would involve addressing social determinants of health (SDOH), also a new way to understand WIC services and managing a local agency. Using available county data they identified health, maternal and infant mortality, and childhood obesity as key determinants to address.

Staff trainings followed, led by Dr. Sayida Peprah, an expert consultant in addressing multicultural competence. Trainings focused on implicit bias and cultural humility, and root causes and forms of racism. As a follow-up, all staff engaged in an activity, "Highway to Health", in which staff identified the life expectancy of residents surrounding their WIC Centers, revealing the disparities and likelihood of living a long and healthy life. Data revealed the starkest injustices among people of color living in under resourced communities.

Staff identified and committed to actions they could take in their WIC center to address the alarming inequalities in maternal and infant mortality, exceptionally high for African Americans. Interestingly, many staff were unaware of the numbers of African American families they serve. One strategy was to refer families to the CinnaMoms Maternal Health Summit, a conference for WIC families, sponsored by PHFE WIC and First5 LA. CinnaMoms has been working to close the breastfeeding gap and improve and maternal and infant health outcomes among African American/Black WIC families.

Despite WIC’s impact on the decline of childhood obesity, data reveal that Hispanic three and four year olds are at greatest risk. During ongoing staff meetings, staff apply an equity lens to understand the issues for families experiencing childhood obesity. In addition to food intake and physical activity, access to healthy food, safe and affordable places to play, exposure to chronic stress, sleep quality, and local resources are also included in the strategizing. This work aligns with the new WIC WISE information system and added feature of electronic growth charts.

Based on post-surveys and questionnaires, PHFE WIC has found their work on Health Equity has provided a platform for staff to express their biases, be open with their feelings and move beyond. Once the vast majority of staff realized the rate of disparities they also realized their unique positions as public health professionals to be more empathic, listen without judgment, avoid stereotyping and use the opportunity to problem solve together.

For any agency, large or small, interested in learning more, contact Toncé at toncej@phfewic.org.

*Staff identified and committed to actions they could take in their WIC center to address the alarming inequalities in maternal and infant mortality, exceptionally high for African Americans.*
Perveen Ali

Perveen Ali, Public Health Program Director for the Riverside County WIC Program will be retiring in October, after working for Riverside WIC for over 33 years.

Perveen started as a WIC site Nutritionist, advanced to Senior Nutritionist, then Supervising Nutritionist, and to her current position as Public Health Program Director.

Perveen wrote and implemented the WIC Expansion grant awarded by First Five Riverside to meet the increased caseload demand in 1999 when additional funding was not available from State WIC. She oversaw the WIC caseload growth from 50,000 to 90,000 and helped staff and participants through the “growing pains” of such rapid growth.

Perveen has served on the NWA Policy and the Legislative committee as well as the State Training committee and was part of the team that developed the WNA certification process. She was also instrumental in leading the pilot for online nutrition education, the first in the state, for Riverside County WIC.

Perveen shared: “I realize that after 33 years, the time has now come to conclude a very important chapter of my life. Very few of us are fortunate enough to be in a job that we truly enjoy doing. One that keeps us coming back hungry for more despite the daily challenges, and also places us in a position where we are not only able to influence, but be influenced.

The WIC program has afforded me the opportunity to gain and share experiences with so many talented people and also build meaningful relationships with colleagues, peers and the WIC community while serving the most vulnerable population during a critical period of life.

I am privileged to have had a career that has been so encompassing and gratifying. While I look forward to enjoying my retirement by spending time with my family and traveling, I will miss the WIC world and will continue to support the program’s goals and what it stands for.”

Grace Yee

Grace Yee recently retired from San Francisco WIC where she served as a lactation consultant. Many of you know her not only for her work in WIC, but also as a board member of the California Breastfeeding Coalition. Grace first worked as a health worker for WIC, joining the staff in 1979. With the WIC program being established in 1974, she has seen the evolution of the program. After nine months, Grace left WIC to attend college and worked at the UC Cooperative Extension and the Chinatown Public Health Center, at San Francisco General Hospital, returning to WIC in 2009. She has loved providing direct services, especially the opportunity to ensure lactation support for WIC parents, babies and families. She is most proud of the WIC Breastfeeding Peer Counseling Program and the Regional Breastfeeding Liaison Program. Grace is a model of the meaningful relationships we make with WIC colleagues, when she shares that she treasures the time with her colleagues from San Mateo and Santa Clara WIC Programs, in addition to her San Francisco colleagues.
Tell Your Story & Inspire Your Colleagues!

Send us your agency’s article ideas, photos, and best practices any time, and by February 21st for the Spring Conference Edition.

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To update your e-mail or mailing address, request more copies, or submit article ideas or drafts, contact Sarah Diaz at:

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Read this and past issues of the WIC Watch online at http://calwic.org/news-a-publications/wic-watch. Share the link with colleagues, family & friends!

This WIC baby sure was excited about the WIC Card rollout at her WIC office in Concord!