



Why Don't Eligible Families Stay Enrolled in WIC?

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WIC, which is shorthand for The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, provides nutrition support and education for low-income pregnant persons, newly delivered (for 6 months) and breastfeeding (for 1 year) women, and children until the age of 5 years. All persons in the above categories are eligible if they meet income eligibility requirements (generally 185% of the federal poverty level or less).

Surprisingly, according to statistics published by WIC, more than half of those who are eligible do not receive [WIC benefits](#). In particular, while nearly 80% of eligible infants receive WIC, this rate quickly drops with age, and most postpartum parents do not receive WIC.

Why don't eligible families stay enrolled in WIC?

This week, *Pediatrics* is early releasing an article by Christina Gago and colleagues at Harvard, Massachusetts Department of Public Health, and Boston College, entitled "Caregiver Perspectives on Underutilization of WIC: A Qualitative Study," that explores the reasons why families drop out of or do not enroll in WIC ([10.1542/peds.2021-053889](#)).

The authors conducted interviews with 20 parents whose children are currently enrolled in WIC and 17 parents who chose to stop receiving WIC despite still being eligible.

Please read the entire article to understand all of the reasons that were expressed by parents. Some of the major themes included:

- The cash value (\$11/month) allowed for fruits and vegetables was not considered adequate. Parents wanted to buy more fruits and vegetables and less dairy and cereal.
- The variety of foods that you can purchase with your WIC benefits is limited. Even foods that are healthy, particularly unprocessed foods that are culturally appropriate for many immigrant families, are not WIC-eligible.
- It is sometimes difficult to determine which foods are WIC-eligible and which are not. This can become embarrassing when you try to check out if you mistakenly thought that some foods were WIC-eligible.

Perhaps one of the most important themes was that parents only want to use WIC if they need the financial help. If they do not need the financial help, they will not accept it. They would rather others who have more need receive the help.

There were also many positive feelings that parents expressed about WIC, which I'll let you discover on your own when you read the article.

The authors mention that the American Rescue Plan of 2021 temporarily increases the fruit and vegetable allowance to \$35/month, and it will be important to see if this is enough to keep families enrolled in WIC.