



National WIC Association
WIC for a Healthier America



The Role of WIC in Reducing Infant Mortality

As the nation's premier public health nutrition program, WIC is a cost-effective, sound investment—insuring the health of our children.

NWA'S MISSION
NWA inspires and empowers the WIC community to advocate for and promote quality nutrition services for all eligible mothers and young children, and assure effective management of WIC.

The WIC Program

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), the nation's premier public health nutrition program, has improved the health of at-risk women, infants, and children for over 35 years. WIC serves over 9 million mothers and young children, over 1.5 million pregnant and breastfeeding mothers, more than half of America's infants, and one-quarter of its children 1 to 5 years of age. WIC has been shown to improve birth outcomes and reduce risk factors for infant mortality.

Infant Mortality

Infant mortality rate is considered a key indicator of a nation's health, measuring the number of infant deaths before age one. Although the U.S. has experienced a decline in infant mortality in recent decades, it remains a major public health issue. The U.S. currently ranks 30th in the world in infant mortality, with one of the highest rates among developed countries. Within the U.S., considerable racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic disparities exist in infant mortality rates. Women of lower socioeconomic status suffer substantially more infant mortality than higher socioeconomic women, and African American women experience 12.74 infant deaths per 1,000 live births, nearly twice the national average.¹

Adequate maternal health and nutrition during pregnancy, along with early prenatal care, can help reduce some of the leading risk factors for infant mortality, specifically premature birth and low birth-weight.² Breastfeeding has also been shown to reduce the risk of infant death.³

The WIC program contributes to healthy birth outcomes by providing nutrition education, supplemental foods, breastfeeding support, and referrals to health and social services for at-risk low and moderate income women and children.

WIC's Role in Preventing Infant Mortality

WIC HELPS REDUCE RISK FACTORS FOR INFANT MORTALITY

- ➔ Prenatal WIC participation is associated with lower infant mortality rates.⁴
- ➔ WIC prenatal care benefits reduce the rate of low birth-weight babies by 25% and very low birth-weight babies by 44%.⁵
- ➔ Prenatal WIC participation is associated with an increase of 6.6oz for low birth-weight babies.⁶
- ➔ Women participating in WIC have been found to have longer pregnancies resulting in fewer premature births.⁷
- ➔ WIC participants are more likely to receive adequate prenatal care.⁸
- ➔ Participation in WIC during both the prenatal and postpartum periods has resulted in women having higher hemoglobin levels, less likelihood of obesity, and higher birth weight babies at a subsequent pregnancy than women who only participated prenatally.⁹
- ➔ WIC infants are in better health than eligible infants not participating in WIC.¹⁰
- ➔ Women who participate in WIC's breastfeeding support activities have longer durations of breastfeeding and are less likely to stop breastfeeding.¹¹
- ➔ Participation in WIC prenatal counseling programs is associated with an increased rate of breastfeeding initiation.¹²

WIC'S ROLE IN PRENATAL AND POSTNATAL CARE

- ➔ Nutrition education and supplemental food packages help ensure pregnant women receive necessary nutrients for a healthy pregnancy such as iron, protein, calcium, and Vitamins A and C.
- ➔ WIC prenatal screenings examine participant weight, hemoglobin level, medical history and dietary intake to determine nutrition and health risks early on.
- ➔ WIC provides referrals to services that improve prenatal and maternal health, specifically smoking cessation, substance abuse counseling, dental care, and other critical health services.
- ➔ WIC promotes breastfeeding as the optimal infant feeding choice, which has been shown to help reduce the risk of SIDS.¹³
- ➔ Children who participate in WIC are more likely to receive regular preventive health care and have increased diagnosis and treatments of childhood illnesses, such as otitis media, gastroenteritis, upper and lower respiratory infections, and asthma.¹⁴

IMPROVING BIRTH OUTCOMES REDUCES HEALTHCARE COSTS

- ➔ Preterm births cost the U.S. over \$26 billion a year.¹⁵
- ➔ The average first year medical cost for a premature/low birth-weight baby is \$49,033 compared to \$4,551 for a baby without complications.¹⁶
- ➔ For very low birth-weight babies, a shift of one pound at birth saves approximately \$28,000 in first year medical costs.¹⁷
- ➔ Medicaid costs are reduced on average between \$12,000 and \$15,000 for every very low birth-weight incident prevented.¹⁸
- ➔ Every dollar spent on pregnant women in WIC produces \$1.92 to \$4.21 in Medicaid savings for newborns and their mothers.¹⁹

References

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