

# Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)

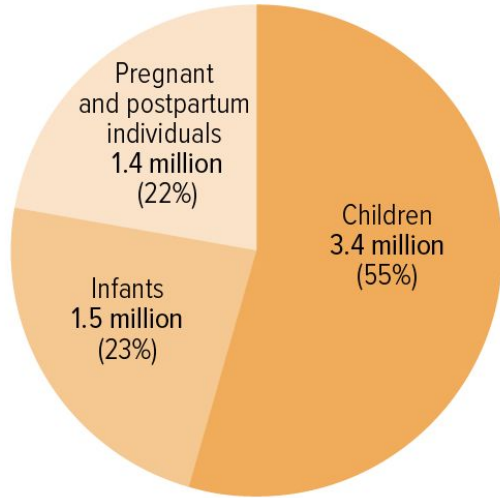
By: Esme Harshbarger

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# What is it?

- An American federal assistance program of the Food and Nutrition Service of the United States Department of Agriculture for healthcare and nutrition of low-income pregnant women, breastfeeding women, and children under the age of five
- WIC aims to ensure that pregnant individuals get the foods they need to deliver healthy babies and that those babies are well-nourished as they grow into young children
- contributes to healthier births, more nutritious diets, improved infant feeding practices, better health care for children, and higher academic achievement for students

## WIC Serves 6 Million Low-Income Pregnant or Postpartum Individuals, Infants, and Children



	Number of participants	Share of total participants
<b>Children</b>		
4 years old	0.5 million	8%
3 years old	0.8 million	12%
2 years old	0.9 million	14%
1 year old	1.3 million	21%
Infants	1.5 million	23%
<b>Individuals</b>		
Pregnant	0.5 million	8%
Breastfeeding	0.5 million	8%
Other postpartum	0.4 million	6%

Source: CBPP analysis of U.S. Department of Agriculture administrative data for fiscal year 2021. Number of children aged 1 to 4 estimated using WIC Participation and Program Characteristics 2020.

# History of WIC

Established as a pilot program in 1972 and made permanent in 1974, WIC is administered at the federal level by the Food and Nutrition Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Formerly known as the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children, WIC's name was changed under the Healthy Meals for Healthy Americans Act of 1994, in order to emphasize its role as a nutrition program

- Most state WIC programs provide vouchers that participants use at authorized food stores. A wide variety of state and local organizations cooperate in providing the food and health care benefits, and 46,000 merchants nationwide accept WIC vouchers.

# How is it funded?

- The program is under the jurisdiction of the United States Department of Agriculture
  - It is a domestic discretionary program funded annually through the U.S. Senate and House Appropriations Committee.
- The USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) drafts WIC's annual budget proposal for the Federal fiscal year
- Through the funding process Congress determines the level of funding that the Program will receive each year.
  - Once the appropriation passes Congress and is signed into law, grants are provided to each state, and administered at the local level by county and city health centers, or private nonprofits. See details on how WIC funding is broken down in individual states

# Who can participate?

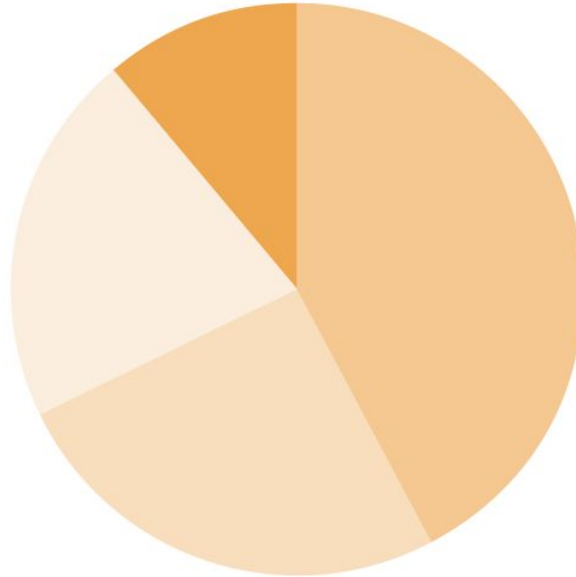
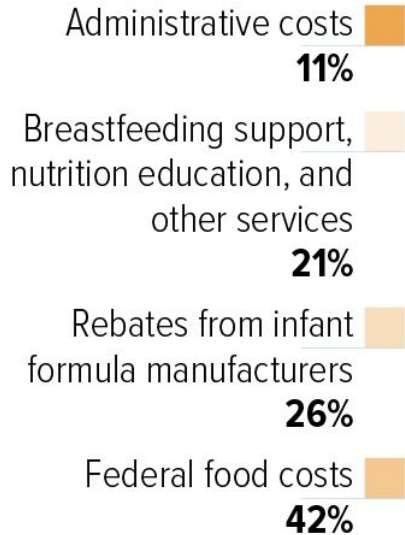


- **Low-income:** Applicants must have income at or below 185 percent of the U.S. Poverty Income Guidelines, or be enrolled in TANF, SNAP, or Medicaid
- **Nutrition risk:** Applicants are screened by health professionals for 1) Medically-based risks such as anemia, underweight, smoking, maternal age, history of pregnancy complications, or poor pregnancy outcomes and 2) diet-based risks such as not consuming the U.S. Dietary Guidelines recommended amount of protein or iron in their diet

# How efficient is WIC?

- While overall food prices rose by 11 percent between fiscal year 2009 and 2019, WIC food costs fell by 4 percent. Between 2014 and 2019, food prices rose by 2 percent while WIC food costs fell by 6 percent
- The remainder of WIC funds are devoted to the staff and overhead needed to provide nutrition education, breastfeeding support, and other services

## Only 11 Percent of Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Costs Go Toward Administration



Source: CBPP analysis of U.S. Department of Agriculture fiscal year 2021 administrative data



# Works Cited

“Policy Basics: Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children.” *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities*,

<https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/special-supplemental-nutrition-program-for-women-infants-and-children>.

“WIC Program Overview and History.” *National WIC Association*, <https://www.nwica.org/overview-and-history>.