Public Policy and Public Health Nutrition: Does my voice matter?

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"Though I am gone, I urge you to answer the highest calling of your heart and stand up for what you truly believe."

John Lewis, the civil rights leader and congressman who died on July 17, wrote these lines in an essay shortly before his death.
WIC: The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children
Serves over 6 million mothers and young children

90 State agencies and more than 1,800 local agencies nationwide, including 34 Indian Tribal Organizations (ITOs) that served as State agencies
(2016 PC Report)
WIC: The Program

50% of all babies born in the US participate in WIC

25% of all children 1-4 years of age in the US participate in WIC
Core WIC Services

• Nutrition and health education
• Breastfeeding education and support
• Referral services
• Monthly food benefits for buying nutritious foods
California

~940,000 WIC Participants
July 2020
350,000 WIC participants each month (40% of CA)
7 local agencies
~80 WIC offices
~1200 local staff
57% of infants born in LA County get WIC services
90% of potentially eligible served
Served 185,000 participants
WIC Works: Addressing the Nutrition and Health Needs of Low-Income Families for 40 Years

REVISED MARCH 29, 2017 | BY STEVEN CARLSON(1) AND ZOE NEUBERGER

**WIC Participation Improves Birth Weight**

Estimated impact on birth weight (grams)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Impact (grams)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sonchak (2016)</td>
<td>6*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hoynes et al. (2011)</td>
<td>29</td>
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<tr>
<td>Joyce et al. (2008)</td>
<td>40*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bitler and Currie (2005)</td>
<td>59</td>
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<tr>
<td>Joyce et al. (2005)</td>
<td>7*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lazariu-Bauer et al. (2004)</td>
<td>25</td>
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* Birth weight adjusted for gestational age (length of pregnancy).


**WIC Participation Reduces Risk of Adverse Birth Outcomes**

Percent reduction in risk at each week of pregnancy

![Graph showing the reduction in risk of adverse birth outcomes over weeks of pregnancy.]

*Fetal or infant death 20 through 46 weeks after last menstrual period. Source: Finger et al., *Reassessing the association between WIC and birth outcomes using a fetuses-at-risk approach,* Maternal and Child Health Journal, published online August 16, 2016.
Study shows declining obesity rate for preschoolers who receive government food aid

The obesity rate for preschoolers who receive government food aid has declined, according to a study released Tuesday in the Journal of the American Medical Association. Obesity rates dropped steadily to about 14% in 2016 – the latest data available – from 16% in 2010, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported.

The improvement affected youngsters ages 2 through 4 who receive food vouchers and other services in the federal Women, Infants and Children nutrition program. About 1 in 5 U.S. kids that age were enrolled in 2016.

"It gives us more hope that this is a real change," said Heidi Blanck, who heads obesity prevention at the CDC.
Economic evaluation of California prenatal participation in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) to prevent preterm birth.

Niangoo RA,1 Winyo Mt2, Basurto-Davila R, Nohari T2, Pfeffer M, Araha OA, Whaley SE.

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Abstract
There is growing evidence that prenatal participation in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) reduces the risk of adverse birth outcomes. With recent changes in health care, rising health care costs, and increasing rates of prematurity in the U.S., there is urgently to estimate the potential cost savings associated with prenatal WIC participation. A cost-benefit analysis from a societal perspective with a lifetime horizon over the newborn's life course for a hypothetical cohort of 50,000 California pregnant women was conducted in 2011. A universal coverage, a status quo (‘business as usual’) and a reference scenario (absence of WIC) were compared. Total societal costs, incremental cost savings, return on investment, number of preterm births prevented, and incremental net monetary benefits were reported. WIC resulted in cost savings of about $349 million and the prevention of 7,757 preterm births and would save more if it were universal. Spending $1 on prenatal WIC resulted in mean savings of $2.48 (range: $1.24 to $6.83).
How has Public Policy Advocacy played a role in WIC?

Here’s some recent history.....
104th Congress 1995-96

Sweeping Republican proposal that changed “welfare as we knew it” included a provision to “Block Grant” the WIC Program

Blistering editorials: The scheme by House Speaker Newt Gingrich to cut spending for WIC by folding it into a block grant to the states is nothing more than an effort to take food out of the mouths of babes. Trust the states, Gingrich tells us, to siphon money to the poor. Why?
• Two-thirds of the states, including California, make no matching contribution to the WIC program, and as a result millions of needy pregnant women and infants go without. (LAT, Feb 26, 1995)

• Would have given states the ability to modify the program/Diluted WIC’s effectiveness

• A REAL THREAT to WIC
The Paper Plate Campaign
Grass roots advocacy triumphed over politics

WIC survived as a national program administered by USDA
Breastfeeding Advocacy: as good as it gets
The story of AB 157
The story of AB 157...

• Assemblyman Antonio Villaraigosa, D-Los Angeles, introduced the bill on behalf of mothers who had been harassed in restaurants and other public places. It failed in 1995
• He reintroduced the bill and ....
AB 157 1996-97

The people of the State of California do enact as follows:

SECTION 1. Section 43.3 is added to the Civil Code, to read: 43.3. *Not with standing any other provision of law, a mother may breastfeed her child in any location, public or private, except the private home or residence of another, where the mother and the child are otherwise authorized to be present.*
Gov. Wilson signed the bill into law on July 14, 1997, and further proclaimed August as “Breastfeeding Awareness Month” to call attention to the role of a mother's milk in giving children optimum growth and protecting them from infections and allergies.

AB 157 took effect Jan. 1, 1998, making California, the 13th state to make such an affirmation.
Want to learn more about breastfeeding bills in California?


The California WIC Association has championed these bills on behalf of the CA WIC community to help ALL mothers, babies and their families in CA!
Public Charge and the WIC program Advocacy/Public Policy today:

• January 2018
• The proposed rule: draconian
• While WIC was not specifically mentioned there was a huge risk that WIC participation could be included in the final Public Charge rule.
• Families took themselves OFF the WIC program out of sheer fear and due to bad advice from “notarios”
• Over the 60-day public comment period, more than **210,000 comments** were mailed

• Unprecedented level of response!
• However in Oct 2019 the PC rule took effect
• WIC was NOT part of the PC determination
On July 29, 2020, the Department of Homeland Security was stopped from enforcing, applying, implementing, or treating as effective the Inadmissibility on Public Charge Grounds for any period during which there is a declared national health emergency in response to the COVID-19 outbreak.

Aug 4th: A federal appeals court blocked the Trump administration's controversial "public charge" rule, in three states. Critics say this had a chilling effect on immigrants who may need to seek medical assistance.
Public Policy Advocacy in WIC
The need for WIC has GROWN

• Nationally numbers served ~6.2 million in June

• In CA the benefits issued increased by 100K since February 2020.
USDA Allowed Program Waivers

- Physical presence **WAIVED**
- Remote benefits issuance **ALLOWED**
- Separation of duties **WAIVED**
- Certification periods **EXTENDED**
- Medical documentation **WAIVED**
- Local Agency monitoring **SUSPENDED**
- Vendor preauthorization visits **MODIFIED**
The Bottom Line......

Because of these waivers.....

WIC can ramp up to meet the increased need, keep WIC families and staff SAFE while connecting these families to food, nutrition counseling and badly needed resources.

A WIN WIN!
The CARES act gave USDA the authority to grant waivers during COVID 19 to reduce WIC visits through Sep 2020.

BUT.....USDA was granting states waiver just extension one month at a time; laborious paper work filed each time; uncertainty and stress
Advocacy swung into action

• May 8: CWA staff had a virtual advocacy visit with a CA Congressman Josh Harder, member of the Education and Labor Committee

• Shared real stories of CA WIC families facing shortages of WIC foods; the success of remote WIC benefits issuance; ability to serve swelling numbers; explained that extending WIC waivers was a “no brainer”

• May 18: Dear Colleague letter to USDA to use authority granted by Congress in the Heroes act to extend waivers to Sept 2020.

• 60 members signed on to the letter, 19 from the CA delegation
• June 5: letter sent to USDA

With intense congressional pressure USDA finally relented and extended waivers to Sept 2020.
Quote from the National WIC Association: “The Harder letter was really key in getting the ball rolling earlier this month – many thanks to CWA for your advocacy!”
In late June USDA announced nationwide waivers will remain in effect through June 30, 2021 for the SBP, NSLP, and CACFP. *

• SBP: School Breakfast Program
• NSLP: National School Lunch Program
• CACFP: Child and Adult Care Food Program
Are you ready to ACT???

A present and immediate advocacy opportunity in the WIC Program
We urgently need to call on Congress to extend USDA waiver authority for WIC through September 2021 in the next COVID-response package.

WIC waivers are critically needed to continue safe WIC services to protect WIC families and staff from increased risk of exposure to COVID-19.
WIC = Where Incredible Change Happens

Every day, one family at a time!
How do you get involved?

• Who is your Congressperson?
• [https://www.commoncause.org/find-your-representative/](https://www.commoncause.org/find-your-representative/)

• The ask: As your constituent I am calling to urge you to support the extension of USDA waiver authority for the WIC program through September 2021 in the next COVID-response package.
What can you do?

• Make and appointment
• Write an email
• Get on social media
  • IG, Dubsmash, TikTok
• Call on the phone
• DO SOMETHING!
USDA and HHS invite the public to submit written comments to the Departments on the Scientific Report of the 2020 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee. The Departments will place primary emphasis on comments that address the scientific justification that informed the Committee’s advice.

Submit a Comment
“Get in good trouble, necessary trouble, and help redeem the soul of America.”
— Lewis speaking atop the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, on March 1, 2020

Lets get YOU into some GOOD TROUBLE!!