

# **Illinois WIC Program Policy Practice Standards (PPS)**

## ***Caseload Management Strategies***

### **February 2021, September 2021**

Policy Practice Standards (PPS) assist staff in translating policy into practice. This guidance is intended to be used with the Illinois WIC Policy and Procedure manual; to facilitate agency assessment, encourage creative thinking and explore various factors that contribute to caseload.

### **General Information**

Research has found WIC to be a cost-effective investment that improves the nutrition and health of low-income families- leading to healthier infants, more nutritious diets, better health care for children, and subsequently to higher academic achievement for students. The WIC Performance Standards include a 90% achievement goal for agency assigned caseload. Assigned/Base caseload is the number of people who can participate monthly in your local agency WIC program and is calculated by the State office (based on previous fiscal year's caseload achievement). The goal is to reach and maintain this level of participation.

### **Assessment**

To assist agencies in achieving this goal, this document will focus on an individualized self-assessment of various aspects of program delivery which impact participation including customer service, teamwork, outreach, retention of participants and innovative agency ideas. Completing an agency assessment is the first step to help decide where to focus time and effort for the best results. The format of this tool allows the reviewer to self-assess, by answering yes or no to the question(s) and use the space provided to reflect on your agency's strengths and identify opportunities for improvement. It is important to think about the answers from the reviewer's perspective and consider responses from the point of view of families participating in the WIC Program.

Other program materials to assist in self-assessment may include, but is not limited to:

- Current WIC Management Evaluation/Quality Assurance Tool
- Current Nutrition Education Plan and participant survey results

### **Plan**

With identified opportunities for improvement, the next step is to consider your priority areas. Brainstorm ideas with staff. Which topic will most likely increase caseload numbers? Identify one priority topic for each section and determine a "SMART" objective for each priority. Review progress annually to determine adjustments needed to your priority areas and/or objectives.

## Customer Service

Customer service is a crucial component of caseload management. When participants believe that participating in the program is worth their time and effort, beyond the food they are receiving, they will remain loyal to our program. Useful nutrition education, breastfeeding support, referrals to additional services and excellent customer service is the key to what keeps many coming back.

### 1. Self-Assessment – Answer the questions below and identify opportunity for improvement.

Self-Assessment Question	Yes	No	Strengths and Opportunities for Improvement
1. Do participants report that the clinic is easy to find? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the clinic have clear and visible signage?</li> <li>• Is there a transportation barrier to reaching your clinic?</li> <li>• Is public transportation easily accessible and do the routes reach the WIC office and grocery stores? Does your community have services that provide free transportation?</li> </ul>			
2. Can participants reach you easily by phone? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How are the phones answered (by a person or an automated system)?               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ If an automated system, how long does the participant have to listen to the message before hearing the extension for WIC?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Once the WIC department is reached, are participants routed to a voicemail message?</li> <li>• If a message must be left, does the clinic call back process respond to message within the next 15 min., hour, two hours, etc.?</li> </ul>			
3. Are participants scheduled and seen in a way that respects their time? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When staff are behind schedule, are participants kept informed and given options?               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Do you offer to reschedule their appointment?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>			

Self-Assessment Question	Yes	No	Strengths and Opportunities for Improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How often are participants scheduled for appointments- do you follow the WIC timeline for appointment frequency, i.e.) certification, secondary nutrition education, follow-up, secondary nutrition education, recertification?</li> <li>• How long is the typical appointment for each WIC category?</li> <li>• When possible, are families scheduled together?</li> <li>• Are other services provided to participants during their WIC appointment? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ How do staff make participants aware of these other services and inform them that other services are not required to obtain WIC benefits?</li> <li>✓ Are WIC services offered first, then other services if time allows? (NPS: Documenting in WIC MIS)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>			
<p>4. Appointment times are varied enough to accommodate working families, homeless, migrants, minorities and those residing in rural areas. (PPM CS 9.3)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you have times/days set aside for walk-ins? (Refer to the Flexible Schedules document for guidance)</li> <li>• Do you offer late clinics or Saturday appointments? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Are they late enough to accommodate the working population?</li> <li>✓ Does your agency offer appointment times outside of the standard 8:30-4:30 Monday – Friday schedule?</li> <li>✓ Do they include an opportunity for certifications as well as education/benefit issuance?</li> <li>✓ Participant informed about Proxy’s role as an option to assist with benefit issuance and secondary education visits?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>			

Self-Assessment Question	Yes	No	Strengths and Opportunities for Improvement
<p>5. Does your clinic portray a welcoming environment? What is being done to establish a good rapport with participants?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When participants arrive at your office what do they see? Are all clinic areas (waiting room, intake, CPA area) comfortable, breastfeeding friendly (messages via posters, bulletin boards, etc.), encourage conversation and provide privacy?</li> <li>• How does the agency accommodate non-English speaking participants?</li> <li>• Is there family friendly signage to address clinic needs or is there a list of “rules” posted?</li> <li>• What toys or activities are available throughout the clinic to keep children engaged?</li> <li>• What do frontline staff say or how do they greet participants when they enter the clinic?</li> <li>• What steps are taken to make the eligibility process easy for participants? (e.g., check adjunct eligibility first, understand all allowable documentation, reminder of what to bring to the next appointment)</li> <li>• How do staff introduce themselves? Do they explain the purpose and expectation of the WIC visit? How do they engage them throughout the visit?</li> <li>• How many staff observations are completed each year to observe how staff explain program requirements, whether on the phone or during the WIC visit.</li> </ul>			

Self-Assessment Question	Yes	No	Strengths and Opportunities for Improvement
6. Do you routinely assess participant satisfaction with WIC services? See table below for ideas.			

<b>Visit Postcard</b>	Brief survey card (5-6 questions) examining waiting room time, treatment and attitudes of staff and overall satisfaction with the visit. Provide at the end of the visit and ask that completed cards be placed in a box found in the waiting room.
<b>Post Visit Text message(s)</b>	Text message asking the participant to rate their visit on a scale (e.g., from 1-10) with an opportunity for feedback/ additional survey questions.
<b>Suggestion Box</b>	Suggestion box in your waiting room. Post a sign asking for suggestions. Act on suggestions and if the participant signs their name, send a note thanking them for their input.
<b>Survey(s)</b>	An easy way of finding out what participants think, different than the participant survey completed for the Nutrition Education Plan.
<b>Focus group(s)</b>	Discussions with small, select groups of people. They may be general in nature or focus on specific issues.

## Working as a Team

The most successful WIC agencies are those whose staff have a positive attitude about the work they do, coming together for the benefit of each participant. Commitment to the team and its goals are seen through involvement, with problem solving becoming effective when the expertise of all employees is utilized.

Communication is an essential component of teamwork. Good communication is open, multi-directional, allows for the expression of new ideas, improves work methods, and encourages the discussion of problems and concerns. Communication is the foundation on which all other components of teamwork are built

Self-Assessment Question	Yes	No	Strengths and Opportunities for Improvement
7. Do you have regular staff meetings where staff have an opportunity to communicate issues and brainstorm possible solutions? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do you conduct brief, five-ten-minute morning “huddles” to discuss the plan for the day?</li> <li>Do you conduct brief, five-ten-minute end of day meetings to discuss issues that arose?</li> <li>Do you recognize employees for a job well done?</li> </ul>			

People increase commitment to a team when they can contribute to its success. Planning goals and objectives to maintain/achieve quality standards can be a way to involve staff. Once actively involved in goal setting and problem solving, a sense of ownership is developed. A feeling of importance is established when individuals feel a responsibility for results. Staff contribute to problem- solving because they have a personal stake in doing so.

Self-Assessment Question	Yes	No	Strengths and Opportunities for Improvement
8. When an employee presents a problem or issue, are they allowed to provide possible solutions? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When possible, are those solutions implemented?</li> </ul>			
9. Have you brainstormed caseload outreach and retention ideas with staff?			

For staff to be successful in their role with the WIC program, they need to learn the specific duties of the position for which they were hired. How well staff work independently and together as a team is dependent on their knowledge, skill, and confidence in the services they provide.

Self-Assessment Question	Yes	No	Strengths and Opportunities for Improvement
10. Are all WIC staff able to regularly attend State sponsored trainings, conferences, and workshops?			
11. Are staff trained initially and annually (WIC job specific, breastfeeding and peer counselor program, if applicable)? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you provide staff in-services on program changes?               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Do you include breastfeeding as a topic?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>			

## Outreach Activities

Outreach activities will vary depending on the needs of your agency and community.

Self-Assessment Question	Yes	No	Strengths and Opportunities for Improvement
<p>12. Do you share WIC outreach and related materials with partners, organizations, and businesses that participants access? (Refer PPM AD 8.1 for details).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you include in outreach materials? Recommended to include: the USDA WIC pre-screening website (FNS website), the DHS WIC Income Guidelines outreach flyer, and suggested eligibility proofs/requirements (including adjunct eligibility options).</li> <li>• How do you encourage referrals?               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Send thank-you notes to businesses or have incentives for participant referrals?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Do you make use of volunteers, interns, students/or other clubs for concentrated outreach, encouraging relationships among community partners?</li> <li>• Does agency staff share information about the WIC program to all clients entering the agency?               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Do staff ask if they know someone to refer to WIC?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>			

### Conducting Outreach may include a variety of ideas, activities, and events shared with collaborative partners:

- Churches or Faith-Based Organizations
  - Many churches and synagogues have ministries focused on those in need within the community and are often informed when a local family is seeking assistance. Develop a relationship with the local clergy and other staff who can help refer to WIC.
- Daycare Facilities, Head Start Programs, Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) and Early Childhood Collaborative groups
  - Locating the daycare facilities in your area will help you find families with young children. Develop a relationship with daycare managers and let them help you get your message to parents about WIC services.
  - Attend Head Start meetings, conduct outreach at their annual registration and parent education events.

- Meet with CCR&R staff to discuss WIC and opportunities to collaborate on educating the local childcare community on early childhood nutrition, what WIC is and how to refer families.
- Does your community have an early childhood collaborative? Many of these groups are associated with local school districts and provide opportunities to network, provide services, and reach families from these targeted areas.
- Food Pantries
  - Visit your surrounding food pantries and discuss opportunities to provide on-site outreach and services to potential participants.
- Employers
  - Large employers in your area may have many employees who would qualify for WIC benefits. The Chamber of Commerce can often help you locate the names and addresses of such employers.
- Ethnic groups
  - Be mindful of all the ethnic groups in your community. Many groups have an organization or gathering place where you can reach people and inform them about WIC services.
- Healthcare Community
  - Develop a collaborative relationship with community medical providers to offer WIC and Breastfeeding Peer Counselor Program (BFPC) outreach materials; share WIC related materials (i.e. WIC formulary, Formula Prescription form, WIC breastfeeding resources etc.).
- Hospitals and Prenatal Clinics
  - Hospitals and prenatal clinics are great places for you to leave brochures and WIC/BFPC outreach materials (or request to put WIC outreach fliers in their hospital birth packets). You may already have a relationship with the hospitals; build on this to help increase referrals.
  - Share WIC information with childbirth educators and midwives.
- Housing and Apartment Complexes
  - These are great places to hand out flyers about WIC benefits, clinic hours and locations. Post your flyers in the laundry room or other common area.
- Local Community Partners (e.g., FCRC), Coalitions, and Task Forces
  - These groups bring multiple agencies together for a like cause. Participate regularly in meetings to ensure local groups are aware of the services WIC provides.



- Media
  - Utilize the media outlet your target audience has identified as their resource for information. How does your target audience get their information?
    - Radio
    - Local papers
    - Social media (Facebook, Pinterest, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, etc.)
    - Internet
  - Social media is changing the way business is done, providing new opportunities to engage existing and potential participants. Utilizing social media in a non-profit environment can present many unique challenges, become familiar with pertinent policies, take advantage of lessons learned and resources available.
  - Share healthy recipes using WIC foods.
  - Use WIC images or social media video clips to create a WIC promotional slide show that is displayed in your agency's waiting room or on your social media sites. Many can be found free through USDA and the National WIC Association (NWA).
- Service Organizations
  - Many service organizations reach out to the homeless, battered women, families with young children, hospitals, etc. Be aware of these organization's presence in your area and that they know how to refer people to WIC.

## Retention of Participants

Essential to achieving caseload is *reaching* potential participants that may be eligible for the program as well as *retaining* the participants that you have worked so hard to certify on the program.

Identification of additional strategies to assist with the retention of participants is an important aspect of caseload management. Participants who are familiar with the agency, staff and program benefits should be a consistent focus of outreach efforts.

Self-Assessment Question	Yes	No	Strengths and Opportunities for Improvement
13. Does your agency currently review reports weekly to determine who may need benefit issuance and a WIC appointment?			
14. How does your agency handle the rescheduling of missed appointments and walk-ins? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has your agency discussed using techniques such as text messaging for appointment reminders? If you conduct walk-in clinics, could you use text messaging to keep participants who are within a few days of their benefits expiring informed of busy/slow periods and wait times?</li> <li>• Do staff document calls to participants who have missed WIC appointments/services in WIC MIS?</li> </ul>			
15. Do staff briefly review the “Take 5 for WIC to 5” brochure with parents or caregivers of infants six months of age or at their mid-certification visit to ensure the family understands benefits of staying on WIC until five years of age?			
16. Does your agency send birthday cards to infants turning one year old to encourage program continuation and remind them of eligibility and program benefits?			

WIC’s goal is to improve health and achieve positive health outcomes by providing nutrition and breastfeeding support. This is achieved through (1) foods containing important nutrients during critical times of growth and development and (2) nutrition education, which sets WIC apart from other supplemental food programs.

Self-Assessment Question	Yes	No	Strengths and Opportunities for Improvement
<p>17. Does your staff discuss “why” WIC foods are an important part of a healthy diet and provide ideas to help participants enjoy them?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do they promote and support the value and use of them?</li> <li>• Do they assess participants’ food preferences, such as allergies or cultural and religious restrictions?</li> <li>• What education does staff provide? Are they utilizing how-to ideas and focusing on foods the participants are <u>not</u> purchasing on a regular basis? Some ideas to try: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Provide recipes to your participants on how to use WIC foods, promote WICHealth eKitchen</li> <li>✓ Try a “WIC Food of the Month” with recipes</li> <li>✓ Display WIC foods in waiting areas</li> <li>✓ Host staff potluck using WIC foods</li> <li>✓ Provide food demos/taste testing during staff meetings</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Do staff provide participant education on how to shop for WIC foods?</li> <li>• Are food packages tailored to meet participant’s food needs and preferences?</li> </ul>			

WIC is the go-to-place for breastfeeding information and support. Pregnant women should receive basic, culturally appropriate breastfeeding information at certification and each prenatal follow up visit. The breastfeeding assessment and an understanding of a mother’s plans for breastfeeding are two critical components in determining a mother’s barriers and support systems.

Self-Assessment Question	Yes	No	Strengths and Opportunities for Improvement
<p>18. Does your staff provide Breastfeeding Dyad Education desktop reference (NPS: Breastfeeding) to ensure all education is offered?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educational and outreach materials exhibit positive, up-to-date, and culturally appropriate breastfeeding messages and portray breastfeeding as the normal and expected infant feeding.</li> <li>• No display of formula/formula product logos or bottle-feeding images visible to WIC participants</li> <li>• Encourages mothers to breastfeed anywhere in WIC clinic area and offers a private space for those who prefer privacy and/or need to express breastmilk; Observe space available for women to breastfeed/pump. Is there signage to notify participants that there is an option for a private space?</li> </ul>			
<p>19. Do they promote and support breastfeeding as the preferred method of infant feeding?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do staff provide pregnant women a follow up call in the last month of their pregnancy to determine any changes in intent or support to breastfeed, as well as identify other needs as her due date approaches?</li> <li>• Do staff provide referrals to support services available in your community?</li> </ul>			

Self-Assessment Question	Yes	No	Strengths and Opportunities for Improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do staff provide support to families during the early days postpartum (the most critical weaning period)?</li> <li>• Does your agency provide incentives to breastfeeding moms (drawings or prizes)? FYI: this is not an allowable WIC or BFPC program expense.</li> <li>• Do you have a breastfeeding expert on staff (e.g., CLC/CLS/IBCLC trained)?</li> <li>• Has your agency considered collaborating with your local Milk Bank to become a Milk Depot? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Collecting breastmilk in the community brings awareness to others that WIC is a breastfeeding program!</li> </ul> </li> </ul>			

2. **Plan** – What one idea will be considered in each of the 4 priority areas? Develop a “SMART” objective for each priority area. Review progress regularly to determine adjustments needed to meet priority areas and/or objectives.

Priority Areas – choose one idea for each (to improve caseload numbers)	Objective to accomplish the priority
Customer Service: Click here to enter text.	Click here to enter text.
Working as a Team: Click here to enter text.	Click here to enter text.
Outreach Activities: Click here to enter text.	Click here to enter text.
Retention of Participants: Click here to enter text.	Click here to enter text.

Annual Progress Reviewed (date): \_\_\_\_\_

Objective for each Priority: Met/Not met? If not met, how much additional time is needed to complete?