

## 120.10 Outreach

### Overview

#### Introduction

Outreach includes goals and objectives to coordinate activities with other programs serving women, infants and children.

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## **Outreach Action Plan for FFY2021**

### **Objective:**

By July 1, 2021, a WIC outreach plan aimed increasing collaboration between programs that service similar populations as the WIC program. WIC understands that the families that participate in our programs face many barriers due to their socioeconomic status. By building state partnerships to promote collaboration between different programs that service the same populations we can decrease barriers that are present to individuals to allow them to get to services and programs we hope increase their overall health while increasing participation numbers.

### **Purpose Statement:**

WIC participant levels have been steadily decreasing over the last decade. WIC is a supplemental nutrition program for infants, children under the age of 5, pregnant women, breastfeeding women, and women who have had a baby in the last 6 months. Our current outreach for the current RFA is to close the Gap between our enrollment numbers (participants that are certified within the Focus system) and participation (participants that have benefits and are actively coming to appointments).

WIC's mission is to safeguard the health of low-income women, infants, and children who are at nutritional risk. Part of that mission is accomplished by providing referrals to other programs and health care. The participants of the WIC program are of a socioeconomic state that puts them at higher risk to be food insecure and experience lower health outcomes. Additionally it is proven that there are many health disparities to individuals of ethnic and racial minority groups that put them in higher risk categories. This is reflected in the participants WIC provides services to which in 2019 was 52.8% White, 14% Black or African American, 21.4% Hispanic and the remainder being of other or multiple racial and ethnic groups where Iowa's overall population is 90.7% White.

Due to the importance to promote health equity and food security to work towards positive health outcomes of Iowa families, Iowa WIC plans to work towards decreasing the barriers that are present to these families to get them the services and resources that are present not only in their communities but within the state to promote health equity across all racial and ethnic groups to protect and improve the health of all Iowans. To accomplish this we will reach out to and open communication channels with new and current programs and organizations to foster networks and coalitions across the state that service the same populace as WIC.

### **Action Steps:**

Due to the current COVID-19 national public health epidemic all current plans and actions are tentative to change. This is due to the uncertainty of agencies and organization being open and the ability to start outreach efforts are severely impacted by the state shutdown and social distancing.

The following activities are planned to meet the objective:

- By October 31, 2020, organizations that were identified from the FY20 state outreach survey will be reviewed and a selected organizations or programs will be contacted for possible outreach or collaboration efforts
- By November 30, 2020, meetings will be scheduled with the programs or agencies that responded with interests to work with the Iowa WIC program.
- By May 31, 2021, communication and resources will be shared with the programs/agencies that were identified in our second action step. Additionally any joint projects that were agreed upon will have plans drafted to expand the states partnerships in an effort to decrease barriers, promote health equity and create mutual positive relationships with a diverse group of community partners.

### **Evaluation Plan:**

- All action steps will be completed as planned, following the assigned time lines if able.
- Summary notes from conversations with potential partners will be created and shared with state WIC staff to decide upon feasibility of outreach and potential collaboration efforts.
- Partners will be asked for input at the conclusion of the project period to determine if they felt this outreach effort positively affected communication between all entities and if these actions helped to strengthen the relationship between WIC and their organization/program.

### **Resources Required:**

- Staff time to participate in face-to-face or telephonic meetings with personnel within the Outreach Action Group.
- Staff time to compile/analyze data.
- Staff time to compile meeting notes and analyze meeting discussion results to assess the best method of providing outreach.
- Staff time to create education/best practice materials or put together presentation highlighting benefits of Outreach Action Group formation.
- Financial resources for any printing, mailings, or other costs that result from this plan.

### **Lead Staff:**

Caryn Wittry, RD, LD, CLC, Charles Lorinser, RD, LD

## **Status Report on Outreach Plan for FFY2020 - Collaboration with Local WIC Agencies to Increase Participation past the 1<sup>st</sup> Birthday**

### **Objective**

By July 1, 2020, a WIC outreach plan aimed at decreasing the prevalence of participants failing to reapply after the child's first birthday will be implemented. WIC participant numbers for ages 1-5 are decreasing not only statewide but nationally. These participants are still eligible for benefits and there still exists a need to provide them with the nutritional benefits of the WIC program. Data reports will be run in conjunction with this outreach plan to have accurate data to enhance the materials and education presented at conclusion of program.

### **Purpose Statement**

WIC participant levels have been steadily decreasing over the last century. WIC is a supplemental nutrition program for babies, children under the age of 5, pregnant women, breastfeeding women, and women who have had a baby in the last 6 months. Our current outreach for the current Request for Application (RFA) is to close the gap between our enrollment numbers (participants that are certified within the Focus MIS system) and participation (participants that have benefits and are actively coming to appointments).

In 2010 the U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service (ERS) Summary Report showed that on average 22.9% of participants within the WIC program in the U.S. exit the program after their child's first birthday. The Iowa Department of Public Health's mission is to protect and improve the health of Iowans. By these participants not receiving much needed services for 4 out of their 5 first years of life, we are missing an opportunity to enhance the lives of the children of low income families in Iowa and starting the next generation of Iowa on the path to health and a greater tomorrow.

Due to the decrease in both participant levels and funding on a national level the need to keep participants enrolled has never been greater. This is both to increase health outcomes across Iowa, but also to ensure the agencies that provide services across the state have the resources and funding to provide the much needed support in their communities. This action plan is aimed at both providing education to local agencies and to enhance the communication between the state and the individuals providing services in all the counties of Iowa.

## Action Steps

The following activities are planned to meet the objective:

- By October 31, 2019, all local agencies will be contacted for the formation of an outreach action group.
- By November 30, 2019, a meeting schedule will be agreed upon and the first meeting will have taken place
- By May 31, 2020, a course of action for outreach strategies at both the local and state level will be established. Based on the feedback, data compiled, and successes and failures of past outreach programs, an educational webinar or handout will be presented/distributed.

## Evaluation

- All action steps will be completed as planned, following the assigned time lines.
- Summary notes from conversations with the local state contracted agencies and participation data will be compiled.
- Partners will be asked for input at the conclusion of the project period to determine if they felt this outreach effort positively affected communication between all entities and if these actions helped to strengthen the relationship between WIC and the local agencies providing services.

## Resources Required

- Staff time to participate in face-to-face or telephonic meetings with personnel within the Outreach Action Group.
- Staff time to compile participation data.
- Staff time to compile meeting notes and analyze meeting discussion results to assess the best method of providing outreach.
- Staff time to create education/best practice materials or put together presentation highlighting benefits of Outreach Action Group formation.
- Financial resources for any printing, mailings, or other costs that result from this plan.

## Lead Staff

Caryn Wittry, RD, LD, CLC and Charles Lorinser, RD, LD

## Status Report

During FFY 2020, the Iowa WIC Program worked to increase the prevalence of participants reapplying after a child's first birthday by expanding upon state and local partnerships. By gathering information from local agencies and collaborating with Head Start/Early Head Start, steps were taken to evaluate potential partnerships and simplify the reapplication process through the creation of a new adjunctive eligibility option.

Surveys were sent to local agency coordinators in February and March, asking about their involvement within their communities and existing partnerships. Data was collected from 16 (80%) of our local agencies; 4 agencies failed to provide responses by the deadline. Information

collected ranged from current efforts, planned efforts at the local level, proposed outreach efforts, and potential partners for the state office to pursue. This data was collected and analyzed by the State Office.

The second phase of the FFY 2020 outreach was to hold in person meetings with local staff regarding outreach ideas and trends in participation reports, and to provide appropriate educational materials. This plan has been postponed due to COVID-19, the public health pandemic that has swept through the nation. Statewide closures disrupted WIC's relationship with existing and potential partners and USDA waivers, which excused physical presence and authorized remote benefit issuance, challenged agencies to quickly change their daily operations. Although these waivers were necessary to ensure the health and wellbeing of our vulnerable population, the ongoing situation caused a delay in completing the planned outreach activities.

Furthermore, pausing FFY 2020 outreach efforts allowed staff to concentrate on ensuring that Iowans who were impacted by COVID-19, particularly those facing food insecurity, were able to receive WIC services and benefits. The data that was previously collected will help direct next year's outreach strategies. This information is currently under review to determine how it can still be effective this fiscal year in light of the current health environment.

Despite set-backs, one project aimed at continued WIC engagement after the first birthday was successful. A partnership opportunity between Iowa Head Start/Early Head Start (HS/EHS) and WIC resulted in the development of an adjunctive eligibility form so that families using HS/EHS will automatically qualify for WIC. Efforts for this outreach, which decreases barriers for family members, included:

1. Met with HS/EHS state partners to review current strategies and actions geared towards increasing collaboration between programs.
2. Identified and analyzed barriers faced by participants utilizing both programs.
3. Created a HS/EHS adjunctive eligibility and referral form.
4. By the end of FFY 2020, the form will be implemented statewide and education on its use will be completed electronically to ensure proper usage and increase awareness.

Due to the uncertainty of the ability to have in person meetings and the fast evolution of public health in the current health climate for the current fiscal year, many efforts cannot be specifically planned or scheduled. Outreach efforts will continue to bring awareness to the WIC program and provide services to those in need within our state and populations that are at risk for food insecurity.