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SUBJECT: Considerations for the 2026 WIC State Plan of Program Operation and Administration in Pennsylvania

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Thank you for your continued leadership of the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) in Pennsylvania. As clinicians and health policy researchers focused on pediatrics, we appreciate the role that WIC plays for families.

We offer the following recommendations for consideration in the development of the 2026 State WIC Plan to help increase uptake rates in Pennsylvania's (PA) WIC program and to lower service barriers.

Recommendations

1. Leverage opportunities to improve WIC participation among Medicaid beneficiaries, including through [Pennsylvania's Bridges to Success: Keystones of Health for Pennsylvania](#) (Medicaid 1115 waiver)

State WIC Plan section: Outreach

With approval of the 1115 waiver, Medicaid-insured pregnant and postpartum women experiencing food insecurity will be able to receive food box and grocery delivery for all members of their household, including children. This waiver also calls for Medicaid beneficiaries enrolled in 1115 waiver nutrition supports to receive nutrition assistance navigation and application support, including support with applying for and accessing WIC and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

Research from [our team at PolicyLab](#) and [others](#) shows that [administrative burdens can be a barrier to applying for and accessing WIC](#). The data also demonstrate that adjunctive eligibility, that is, streamlining the application and enrollment process for families who are likely to be eligible based on their enrollment in other means-tested benefit programs like Medicaid, removes administrative barriers and boosts participation.

- There's opportunity for PA WIC to closely work with the PA Department of Human Services (PA DHS) to ensure families who benefit from short-term food and nutrition supports through the 1115 waiver are also connected to long-term supports through WIC, particularly given the focus on the pregnant and postpartum population.

2. Maximize flexibility in WIC program design to improve the user experience

State WIC plan sections: Management Information System, Certification, Eligibility & Coordination of Services

In a [recent qualitative study](#), we interviewed 40 current and former WIC and SNAP beneficiaries regarding their experiences with both programs and their suggestions for improvement. Families shared positive feedback about WIC, including that they appreciated receiving funds that they could use to purchase nutritious food for their children. They also appreciated the nutrition education provided through the WIC program, including breastfeeding support and education regarding how to improve their children's diets.

Many families also shared challenges in redeeming WIC benefits. They noted that WIC's stringent [product criteria](#), such as rigid size and brand limitations, can prevent families from fully using their WIC benefits. In addition, parents noted that redeeming WIC benefits can be an uncomfortable experience. They reported challenges in identifying WIC-eligible products at grocery stores and stigmatizing interactions in the checkout line.

- PA WIC should ensure that the approved WIC product list includes the maximum possible variety of product sizes. With vendors, PA WIC can also ensure that WIC products are clearly labeled and identifiable in-store.

In addition, caregivers in our study expressed enthusiasm for online enrollment and mobile app-based benefit management, finding these options less stigmatizing and more convenient and accessible than in-person options. For instance, they noted that the WICShopper app is helpful in identifying eligible items and updates.

We appreciate PA WIC's continued work to transition to online benefits reloading, which will tremendously reduce administrative burdens for beneficiaries if they are subsequently given the option of completing WIC certification remotely.

- We encourage PA WIC to continue to work towards providing remote certification and remote nutrition education, once the transition to online

benefits reloading is put into effect. We also encourage PA WIC to continue to inform families about the benefits of the WICShopper app.

- In the future, if permitted more broadly by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), allowing families to order WIC groceries online or have groceries delivered to their home could streamline and improve the WIC user experience. This update would make it easier for beneficiaries to identify eligible products and could remove barriers to WIC access for families with limited access to transportation or to stores carrying WIC products in their neighborhoods.

Please see this [recent memo](#) to Pennsylvania state policymakers for additional related policy recommendations.

3. Ensure dignified experiences for all WIC beneficiaries and center dignity throughout the WIC user experience

State WIC plan section: Organization and Management

In [a study](#) among participants in a free 4-week meal kit program, participants contrasted their experiences with this program with their experiences using WIC. A major theme was participants' dislike for the contingent nature of programs that treat food as a commodity through eligibility thresholds, challenging renewal requirements, or abrupt discontinuation.

In another [research study](#), caregivers described encountering stigma, especially during enrollment and in-office interactions. Many participants emphasized the need for respectful treatment and streamlined processes to reduce the feeling of being “othered” while seeking assistance. Multiple families shared experiences of perceived poor treatment by county assistance office workers, consistent with [other studies' findings](#). Specifically, those we interviewed shared:

“It’s not good to already be in a stressful life situation and then have to go into these atmospheres where the workers aren’t friendly, too. So maybe more training for the workers to learn how to deal with people in high stress situations in a more professional and courteous manner.”

- We encourage PA WIC to ensure all WIC staff have training focused on centering families and preserving dignity throughout the WIC certification and enrollment process.
- Innovations focused on modernizing WIC to reduce administrative burdens, such as remote benefits reloading, remote certification and nutrition education, and

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online grocery ordering and delivery, would also promote dignity and provide an improved WIC user experience.