



# Participants New to WIC May Benefit from More Guidance on Shopping for WIC Foods

Research Brief | November 2023

## THE CURRENT STATE

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children—also known as WIC—provides low-income women and children with access to healthy foods. The WIC food package was temporarily changed in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These changes included waivers allowing for food package substitutions and an increase in the cash value benefit to purchase fruits and vegetables. It is timely to consider what WIC participants have to say about their experience with the changes and their recommendations for the future.

## OUR STUDY

The 2021 Multi-State WIC Participant Satisfaction Survey<sup>1</sup> evaluated participants' experiences and satisfaction with interactions and appointments with WIC, shopping for WIC foods, and using the WIC Card and App during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The survey—administered by 12 WIC state agencies—was completed by 26,642 WIC participants in English and Spanish. Of these, 7,831 responded to an open-ended question asking them to share any feedback about their WIC experience. Responses were coded into themes and descriptive statistics were computed.

Responses were largely positive (43%), with few participants reporting challenges with WIC. However, when comparing responses by themes, we found participants newly on WIC (<1 year) more often reported difficulty shopping for WIC foods compared to those on WIC for 1-2 or 3 or more years. Requests to substitute WIC foods also varied by time on WIC. Results suggests those new to WIC may benefit from receiving more guidance on shopping for WIC foods.



## KEY RESULTS

### Challenges Finding WIC Foods

Of 7,831 total respondents, only 7% reported difficulty finding WIC foods.

**Participants new to WIC (<1 year) more often reported challenges finding WIC foods while shopping.**

- *“I still can't find some products that WIC is providing, it is very complicated to find products.”* – WIC participant (<1 year)

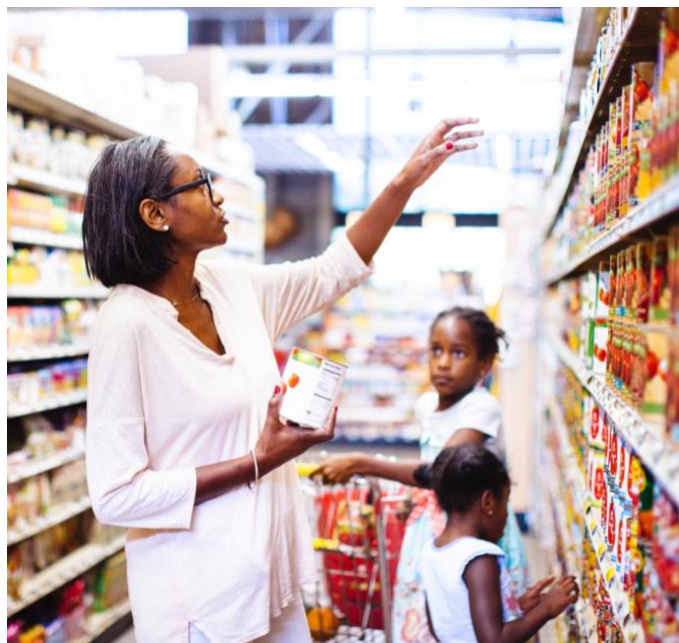
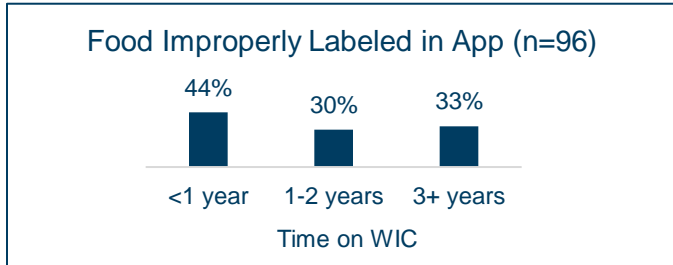
### Issues at Store Checkout

**Participants new to WIC (<1 year) more often reported issues at the store checkout.**

- *“[It's] confusing how to use the WIC card at different stores, seems you have to learn by trial and error which can be embarrassing.”* – WIC participant (<1 year)

**Participants new to WIC (<1 year) more often reported issues at store checkout due to food being improperly labeled in the WIC App.**

- “[It is] hard to figure out what items are included for beginners. [The WIC App] needs more specifics.” – WIC participant (<1 year)



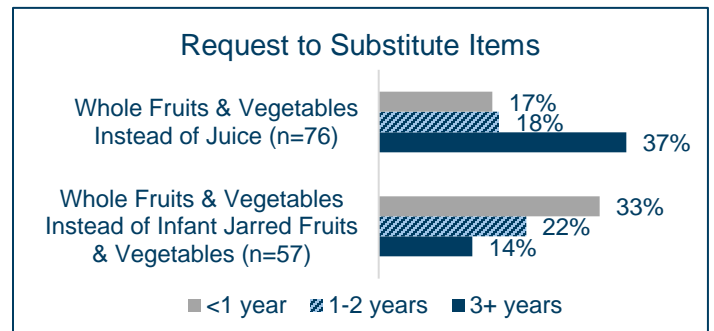
### **Requests to Substitute Food Items Varied by Time on WIC**

**Participants on WIC for a longer time more often reported wanting whole fruits and vegetables in place of 100% juice.**

- “I understand that WIC is a supplement and it’s not meant to be your main source of food. I would like more money for fruit and veggies and maybe take away the juice option. My pediatrician and AAP [the American Academy of Pediatrics] agrees.” – WIC participant (3+ years)

**Participants on WIC for a shorter time more often reported wanting whole fruits and vegetables in place of jarred infant fruits and vegetables.**

- “For mothers with children younger than one year that begin to eat, you should provide an option of fruits and vegetables because the baby food usually has a lot of sugar.”  
– Spanish-preferring WIC participant (1-2 years)



### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Provide more support to new WIC participants about how the WIC food packages work and on their specific benefits.
- Provide more support to new WIC participants on how to properly utilize the WIC App to identify WIC-approved foods.
- Allow caregivers with infants on WIC to purchase more whole fruits and vegetables instead of jarred infant food.
- Allow women and children over the age of 1 year on WIC to purchase more whole fruits and vegetables instead of 100% juice.

**References:** [1] Ritchie L, Lee DL, Sallack L, Chauvenet C, Machell G, Kim L, Song L, Whaley SE. Multi-state WIC Participants Satisfaction Survey: Learning from Program Adaptations During COVID. Funded by the National WIC Association, UC ANR Nutrition Policy Institute, Pepperdine University, and the David and Lucile Packard Foundation. December 2021.

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