



July 27, 2026, Advisory Group Meeting

Notes:

In attendance

Jenny Barta, Kirsten Lejonvarn, Terrie Jorgenson, Krista Early, Teresa Severson, Hillary Spray, Amy Wittnebel, Amanda Schueler, Jill Wilson, Kimberly Vickberg for Katie Galloway, Nicole Ruhoff for Somadee Cheam, Michelle Weberg, Maria Bernhardt, Amber Converse, Sheila Johnson for Amy Bowles, Kate Franken, Tami Matti, Tammie Edmundson, Jessie Zins, Rebecca Gruenes, Tina Breitenbach.

MOM policies discussion and overview

Jenny Skinner, policy coordinator, gave an overview of how WIC policies are managed at the state and federal level. Most changes are rooted in Food and Nutrition Administration (FNA) communications, publishing policy memos or guidance documents. Often it just clarifies or interprets existing rules but does not change the Code of Federal regulations (CFR). At the State, our policy leads guide the policy update or creation. They take new regulations, memos, or guidance and draft them into our existing policies. The leads write the first draft of the revised policy, which is reviewed by other State staff. Initial drafting is a time-consuming step. Often it competes with other role responsibilities and policy writing is not anyone's primary role. Many layers of review occur before a policy can be approved. Once in a final draft form, it is reviewed by the management team, and once cleared, it is sent to the Midwest regional partners from FNA. Once approved by FNA, the updated policy is communicated through two channels. The weekly update newsletter and the [WIC MOM Updates](#) page which shows a log of all the policy updates in the past 6 months. For major policy changes, updates are given at regional meetings and local agency calls.

The topic of doing routine review of all MOM policies was brought up for discussion stating that some MOM sections have last been reviewed or updated several years ago. For credibility with staff, participants, and medical providers, it would be helpful to ensure policies are current. A suggestion was made for routine MOM review to occur and dates updated to reflect "reviewed" or "updated" within the past 1 to 2 years. This can be challenging due to the high volume of policies; however, we do try to publish draft versions of policies that are awaiting additional edits or reviews such as the recent food package policies. A suggestion was given to reach out to your consultant to inquire about any policy or to our policy coordinator Jenny. The current policy approval date is always at the top of the policy. Currently there are about 20 policies being revised.

Caseload decline

WIC enrollment and participation seem to be on a downward trend. Joni Geppert, one of our state epidemiologists, joined us to share a PowerPoint with data on recent participation trends and births in Minnesota. We have noticed changes since February 2025 when WIC participation began increasing statewide. Bigger shifts occurred in November 2025 with decreases in participation that are likely due to many issues such as federal shutdown, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) surge in MN, changes in Medicaid and SNAP, and immigration shifts. Kate asked Joni to investigate this more for trends and what we might be able to see from the data. Joni shared slides that highlighted participation, race/ethnicity, drop off data, and national data. Overall, key take aways, the lowest drop is for older children, particularly 4-year-olds. Birth rate for 2024 was higher than 2023, we don't know yet for 2025. Hispanic births have been higher so we would expect more participation but that is not the case. Again, ICE and immigration shifts and fear within communities may have added to potential reasons not enrolling. We seem to be retaining current enrolled participants but not capturing new families. Drop off means terminated due to missed benefit pick up for 2 months in a row or failure to recertify for 30 days after cert end. We have seen in 2024 and 2025 drop offs increase in our Hispanic participants. Additional concern is that with a change in public charge, we could see a larger decrease in participation, this could start in September. Will provide talking points and more information in the future. Another round of outreach quarterly texts to SNAP and MA, WIC eligible/not enrolled will begin on August 1. PowerPoint slides will be sent directly to advisory group members.

Review policy 9.6, Release of Information (ROI) language changes, and seeking input on MOM policy.

In [WIC MOM Updates](#), see policy 9.6, it was updated to say

If the local agency is using a texting platform, the local agency MUST:

- Receive and document the participant's permission to receive text messages (see [Section 1.7: Data Privacy](#)). NOTE: documented permission is not required to use texting via the WIC Mobile Management system. To use the "Contact Us" feature in the MN WIC Mobile App the participant must Opt-In to text messaging.
- Ensure text messages are easy to understand and do not contain abbreviations.
- Delete text messages immediately after viewing.

Text Message Release of Information Local Agency staff may obtain initial verbal temporary consent to communicate via text messaging with documentation in a local use field in the Information System. A written release 2 SECTION 9.6: ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION SECURITY of information with signature consent for text messaging must then be obtained at the next participant contact and be scanned/uploaded into the Information System.

Release of information changes – Exhibit 1-C. Adding wording "with the WIC Program" at the end of the first sentence that states Initial the entities, programs, or persons you agree to release and exchange information (with the WIC Program). Added Text Messaging Services vs Text Message methods in the section on Initial the methods you agree to exchange information with the WIC program section.

Question asked if it is helpful to have a separate texting information release form in addition to Exhibit 1-C.

Overall, the consensus was yes. Also, a state use field will be used then to capture permission in WINNIE. The state use question would only be to document that a verbal or signed release has been obtained. This does not replace the signed consent. We are unable to use a signature pad to capture this release at this time. Question

asked if we would need to get all new consents or just make the change moving forward. Just make change going forward. However, once the State Use field is added to WINNIE it will be required for all participants. Keep in mind texting consent can be done at any time during appointment, nutrition education, etc. For the release of information, you must wait until the end of the certification so you can access referral needs. The WIC online application asks about preferred ways to contact the participant with texting as an option. Questions asked: Since Text is an option, could the release be "built in" during that process. This will be investigated more. Watch the weekly update for more information.

Discussion on strategies to streamline local agency work/ system level changes

Local agencies have become busier with many things including processing on-line applications and health care referrals: updating food packages and running & reviewing reports to make needed corrections; offering remote options to meet participant needs, which is great but can take extra time; helping to troubleshoot on-line shopping and other shopping issues, etc. Most cannot hire extra staff to do this and want to provide quality service. Looking for ways to streamline the work. Metro WIC coordinators recently met and came up with some ideas and would like to discuss them as a group to help with ideas for efficiencies across the state.

- Shopping issues- we are the middleman, can there be a direct way for families to report to state or Gainwell. Discussed the concern of shopping issues during weekends and weekdays on hours past when help desk or WIC clinics are open. We all do our best to help, and we have a lot of successful transactions. Per Gainwell, roughly 70 total issues/week only 5 of which are related to shopping, but likely many are not being reported. WIC shopping is complex. Consider adding information on what is needed to report an issue on the WIC flyer, WIC app handouts, or create an educational card. Mapping issues should go to vendor email and transaction issues to Gainwell. It was stated reporting issues as they occur would be helpful. Gainwell is paid to help, troubleshoot, and provide answers for the local agency side not directly to participants for shopping. Perhaps highlight staff tools for training new staff on shopping. Look under [WIC Shopping Help](#) for resources, in particular [Help with Common Checkout Issues](#). For local agency resources refer to the [WIC Local Agencies](#), staff resources - shopping support. Other items discussed: Good first question is to ask where you are shopping, might not be a WIC approved store. Consider adding information about using the "contact us" to MN app flyer for UPC submissions. There is an auto reply when someone submits a UPC but additional follow-up with them is done if needed. Consider adding "contact us" information to the shopping experience training from Erin and Mary Frances. Consider language used for UPC as some participants might not know what that is. Perhaps using language such as "report a product" would be better. Consider a flow sheet for managing transaction issues and whom to contact.
- Data sharing agreements/ language that says we can – request to move forward even if unable to have all programs listed at this time.
- MDH advocating for PMAPs to provide rides to WIC appointments- so we have fewer reschedules. Must have lab work to provide a ride. In a recent C&TC regional meeting, our Blue Plus rep mentioned that WIC participants who are enrolled in Blue Plus are eligible for medical rides to WIC appointments when height/weight/hemoglobin are required.

- Allowing others to have access to some parts of Infoview (this may help with pulling reports, etc.) would be nice to have regional models for regional support, process applications regionally and have 1-2 staff manage those. MOM Exhibit 4K: [Staffing Roles Grid for Nutrition Services](#) describes staff roles and could be a good resource.
- Figuring out a way to align height/weight/hemoglobin checks at well child checkups, maybe work with Prepaid Medical Assistance Programs (PMAPs). WIC community is aware of this issue, schedule for WIC measurements is not the same for well child checks, and do not align. We have had some discussions with C&TC and providers have some flexibility as to when measurements are collected. We will keep pushing for this at the state. Local agencies can discuss with medical providers in their community about WIC requirements and that WIC participants can use those measurements for WIC. Some agencies have had success with these discussions.
- Troubleshooting problems with Hy-Vee online – Jessie and vendor team have developed relationships with stores. Vendor team goes into stores to check their mapping, get Monday morning ticket issues from Gainwell. They do their best to resolve issues quickly once reported.
- WINNIE training manuals are a lot. User guide for WINNIE that would be a quick reference to help trouble shooting and training new staff. State office must provide training for all aspects of use for the system. All modules have a table of contents to filter to the section you are wanting to view if searching for a specific topic. Could recreate quick reference guides if there are needs on specific topics that can be requested online, could put topic scripts in a PDF so you could then search for specific words/topics if that is helpful.
- Progress on coursework for paraprofessionals. It is being worked on by the University of MN. through a 5-year grant. MN WIC had previously been working on paraprofessional training with them, however after they received the grant, there are efforts to loop this course work into the grant they received. This is a nationwide effort and will have much input creating a well-rounded WIC paraprofessional training, however it will delay the development of courses.

Strategic plan priorities review and status check

Kate gave an annual status check and review of the 2023 advisory group strategic plan.

The 2023 WIC program vision elements are

- WIC professionals work as a team
- WIC Programs and benefits are easily accessible
- WIC has a food package that is flexible, sustainable, desirable, and supports access to culturally appropriate foods
- There is a strong, capable, and diverse workforce supporting the WIC Program
- More partnerships with hospitals and health care clinics, participants have good shopping options
- WIC benefits are available for everyone eligible
- Data sharing between programs
- WIC is fully funded

- WIC Peer Program is fully funded
- Continue to utilize technology for program improvements

In 2023, the highest priority strategies were split into two tier strategies. The top tier strategies were State-level work toward electronic health record access, mapping issue for fruits and vegetables at cashier, expanding flexibility in food package, promoting WIC as nutrition program, secure state funding for WIC, and data sharing agreements.

In 2026, internal and external factors are impacting our work:

- Participation increased through October 2025 and now falling
- Food package changes fully implemented and additional choices offered to participants
- WIC staffing challenges in some local agencies
- WIC online shopping expansion planned for Walmart in fall 2026; discussions have begun with Instacart for expansion options; USDA Final Rule not yet published
- Uncertainty continues with Federal Policy and Funding Changes, cuts occurring to Medicaid and SNAP from Federal Legislation in 2025; eligibility changes mean fewer families adjunctively eligible for WIC
- Consumer costs increasing for common goods such as fuel, food, etc., putting pressure on families, public health funding continues to be at risk
- Number of US births decreased 1% from 2024 to 2025 (CDC, NCHS)
- ARPA waivers extended to September 2027 and efforts underway in Congress to address more permanently
- USDA WIC Workforce Projects continue
- New USDA and FNA terms and conditions published – state litigation underway
- USDA reorganization threatens support from FNA at regional and national level
- Newly published changes to public charge rule may cause chilling effect on WIC immigrant families and further decrease participation
- Prolonged federal government shutdown at start of FFY 2026
- House Agriculture bill includes WIC funding cuts and reduction in fruit and vegetable benefit
- Heightened focus on preventing fraud, waste, and abuse – State Office of Inspector General (OIG) created
- Surge in immigration enforcement in Minnesota over winter 2026 leading to decreased participation

Small break out groups discussed how we feel about progress we're making, are priorities still aligned with collective vision, any change needed in top priorities, and any barriers or roadblocks. Overall, positive outcomes regarding food package changes, WIC cards, use of technology (app and texting), online shopping. Other ideas how can the use technology (AI) help with efficiencies of notes, and data sharing moving ahead at some level.

References

[WIC MOM Updates](https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/momupdates.html) (<https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/momupdates.html>)

[Section 1.7 Data Privacy](#)

(https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/program/mom/chsctns/ch1/sctn1_7.pdf)

[WIC Shopping Help](https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/shopforwic/index.html) (<https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/shopforwic/index.html>)

[Help with Common Checkout Issues](#)

(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/vendor/checkout.html>)

[WIC Local Agencies](https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/index.html) (<https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/index.html>)

[Staffing Role Grid for Nutrition Services](#)

(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/program/mom/exhbts/ex4/4k.pdf>)

Minnesota Department of Health - WIC Program, 625 Robert St N, PO BOX 64975, ST PAUL MN 55164-0975; 1-800-657-3942, health.wic@state.mn.us, www.health.state.mn.us; to obtain this information in a different format, call: 1-800-657-3942.

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