

Authorization and Monitoring of WIC Vendors - State Role

11/2020

The Minnesota WIC Program uses a network of retail food stores and pharmacies (“vendors”) across the state to provide authorized foods to WIC participants. The Food Delivery Unit (also referred to as the Vendor Unit) of MN WIC is responsible for administering all activities involving vendors, as listed below.

Authorizing Vendors

- **New WIC vendors:** State WIC rules require that new vendor applications be processed within 135 days of receipt. Prior to being authorized, each store receives a site visit to verify it meets minimum food stock and pricing requirements, and be trained on WIC Program rules.
- **Existing WIC vendors:** The maximum vendor authorization period is three years. Rather than assign individual contract expiration dates, all Minnesota vendor contracts are written to expire on the same schedule (3/31/2020, 3/31/2023, etc.). Because of this, some vendor contracts will expire earlier than three years. Prior to the end of the contract, vendors must submit reauthorization applications for review and approval.

On-site Vendor Monitoring

Each vendor receives at least one site visit from a Food Delivery Unit staff member in the course of each three-year contract period. The state is divided into six monitoring regions, and staff visit stores in each region over a period of six months. At these visits, staff check to see that the vendor meets WIC Program requirements for minimum food stock and pricing, provide training and other resources, and answer any questions. If a store fails a monitoring visit, an additional visit(s) is made as needed to assure compliance.

Vendor Training

Food Delivery Unit staff provide initial and ongoing education and training to WIC vendors. Training methods include on-site training at the store, group training (in-person and/or web-based), online training modules, DVDs, etc.

- **New vendor training:** At least one employee representing the vendor must receive training in WIC Program policies and procedures for the store or pharmacy to be authorized as a WIC vendor.
- **Ongoing training:** Each WIC vendor receives additional training at least annually. Vendors found to have committed a program violation(s) may be required to complete additional training.

Vendor Resources and Communications

The Food Delivery Unit is the primary contact for questions from WIC vendors, participants, and local agency staff related to the vendor component of the WIC Program or the WIC allowed foods list. In addition, the Unit provides the following resources and communications to help assure program compliance and positive shopping experiences.

- Shelf labels for use in stores.
- A list of WIC allowed foods and their UPCs.
- Periodic [vendor newsletters](#) also provided electronically to local agencies.
- Information in the [WIC Vendors](#) section of the Minnesota WIC Program website.

Rules

Food Delivery Unit staff review and update, as needed, the [Minnesota rules](#) applicable to vendors.

Program Compliance

All vendors are required to follow WIC Program rules. Vendors who do not comply with program requirements are subject to various sanctions, depending on the nature of the violation. Common sanctions are disqualification or monetary penalties. In addition to assessing vendor compliance through monitoring visits, Food Delivery Unit staff also:

- Analyze food benefit redemptions of individual vendors to identify patterns indicative of possible rule violations. Such vendors may be referred to as “high-risk” vendors. High-risk vendors may also be identified through reports by third parties (including local agencies), participant violations cases, etc.
- Perform undercover investigations and/or conduct inventory audits of high-risk vendors to identify rule violations.

Food Price Limits

The Food Delivery Unit monitors and analyzes food costs and to limit the amount vendors can charge for specific food items. Unit staff request reimbursement from vendors as needed.

Shopping Experience Concerns

- When a participant has concerns about a shopping experience, and there is enough information to follow up on the issues reported, the local agency should contact the MN Help Desk. The MN Help Desk will provide support and if a resolution is not found, will determine if the issue should be passed along to the Food Delivery Unit to research food inconsistencies and address store reports. Staff should be as specific as possible in completing the form (i.e., time of day incident occurred, name of person at the store involved, describing what was said or done, etc.). Use the *WIC Transaction Troubleshooting Guide for Local Agency Staff* when exploring participant issues.
- When a vendor identifies participant behavior that indicates a need for additional education or corrective action to improve the shopping experience, the vendor can report this using the WIC [“Customer Incident Report”](#). Unit staff review these reports and, in most cases, will contact the local agency with guidance on addressing the concerns with the participant and documenting the action taken. In some cases, Food Delivery Unit staff will address the concerns directly with the participant and copy the local agency.
- Local agency staff who have questions regarding a particular WIC vendor, the vendor authorization process, or any other vendor related question, should contact the Food Delivery Unit at health.wicvendor@state.mn.us. A Food Delivery Unit contact list is available at on the [State Staff Directory](#) or you can call (651) 201-4417 to be directed to the appropriate person.

Reference – Complete Listing of Hyperlinks

Vendor newsletters

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

Grocery Stores and Pharmacies

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

Minnesota rules (<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/rules/4617/>)

WIC Customer Incident Report (<https://survey.vovici.com/se/56206EE37357C646>)

State Staff Directory

(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/program/ststfflst.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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