

WIC Local Agency Conference Call

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2026, 8:30-9:30 AM

Agenda and summary notes

Agenda items:

- General program updates - Kate
- New WIC Consultants – Rebecca
- Food Package changes – Tami
- Outreach and Retention items – Tina/Rosie/Blair
- 2025 LA outreach projects – Tina
- New report of in-person certifications – Tami

General program updates- Kate

21st Century WIC Act Introduced

Last week the 21st Century WIC Act was introduced in the Senate as bipartisan legislation that would help modernize the WIC Program and make permanent remote options for WIC certifications. This is the companion bill to the MODERN WIC Act that had been previously introduced in the House. Both bills would make virtual certification in WIC a permanent option as currently this option is available through a USDA waiver authorized in the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). The ARPA waiver is set to expire September 30, 2026. This flexibility helps reduce barriers for families in accessing WIC services while protecting program integrity and WIC's track record for improving health outcomes.

Partial Federal Government Shutdowns

The partial federal government shutdowns that occurred earlier this month do not impact the WIC Program. The Department of Agriculture is not impacted by the current partial shutdown.

WIC Program Integrity Efforts

State WIC program integrity staff from our team do reach out to WIC local agencies at times when they are responding to or investigating reports of potential program fraud or abuse.

If you are approached by others requesting information about potential WIC fraud or abuse allegations, please loop us in at the state office so that we can work with you on any responses. There are data privacy constraints related to both WIC participants and WIC vendors in federal regulations that we must attend to, and the state WIC office takes the lead with WIC fraud and abuse investigations.

State WIC staff will always identify themselves as working with MDH WIC. If you ever have questions about someone wanting information about WIC or these types of activities, feel free to reach out to your consultant, Kate Franken or Jessie Zins, Food Delivery Unit Supervisor.

Other program updates

New MDH staff – Rebecca

We are excited to share two new members of the state MDH WIC team. They will be joining the Nutrition & Clinic Services unit.

The new **East Central region consultant** is Cierra Thibert. Cierra is a Registered Dietitian with her Master's degree in Dietetics Administration. Cierra was previously a WIC CPA in Blue Earth County and then transitioned to the WIC coordinator role from July 2016 to May 2022. She has a variety of experiences working in public health including her most recent work as the Blue Earth County SHIP Coordinator. She was a Health Educator in Sibley County, and a Child Nutrition Coordinator and Backpack and Volunteer Coordinator with the Great Plains Food Bank. Prior to her work as a dietitian, she was a Dietetic Technician with Essentia Health.

The new **Southwest region consultant** is Kristy Rott. Kristy is a Registered Dietitian with her Master's degree in Public Health from North Dakota State University. She is currently the WIC coordinator at Polk-Norman-Mahnomen counties and participates in the WIC Advisory Group. Kristy has been in the coordinator role since 2022 and a WIC CPA since 2017. She has had a variety of other experiences including Dietetic Preceptor for North Dakota State University, and a Direct Support Professional with the Anne Carlson Center where she provided care to children with special needs in residential and educational settings.

We welcome both Cierra and Kristy! They will begin their work with MDH WIC on March 11. We will communicate their contact information when they start in their new roles.

Food Package changes – Tami

[WINNIE Update Document - Phase 3 Food Package Changes](#) provides details on changes. We are providing the information now for participants with early benefit issuance with a first date to use in June and after. You should not proactively create food packages for June. You should be creating the food prescriptions as the participants come to clinic so you are able to review the changes and have the select the new substitution options. These food items will be available on Monday February 23.

Brush Art – Tina/Rosie/Blair

In 2024, MDH WIC applied for infrastructure funds to further promote WIC program retention and recruitment. Infrastructure funds are one-time extra funds and are not part of our WIC Nutrition Services Administrative (NSA) grant. Once items run out, they will not be restocked.

Funds were used to purchase and provide the following breastfeeding and nutrition promotion and support items:

- Sippy Cups- intended for infants 6-9 months to promote cup use. Agencies can choose to track issuance in the materials given dropdown in WINNIE.

- Small water bottles – intended for children 1-4 to promote water intake. Agencies can choose to track issuance in the materials given dropdown in WINNIE.
- Large water bottles- provide to breastfeeding participants at the initial certification to promote WIC and hydration.
- Breastfeeding achievement stickers – Breastfeeding promotion. Staff can give stickers during the participant’s breastfeeding journey.
- Temporary kid tattoos – come in packs of 50. Staff can provide during appointments, lab, or outreach events. We appreciate any feedback.

Each WIC coordinator will receive a letter from their consultant with details specific to their agency with the amount they can order, please stick to the amount shown in the letter. Agencies can place orders at different times, and they don’t have to order all items at once. Please reach out with any questions.

2025 local agency outreach projects – Tina

MDH WIC uses Operational Adjustment (OA) funds, which comes from our NSA grant. A percentage of our grant is set aside for WIC projects that improve, retain, outreach and promote WIC services. In federal fiscal year (FFY) 2025, \$50,000 was set aside for OA grants that went to 21 local agencies for projects to help support WIC outreach, retention and promotion in their communities in comparison to \$25,000 used in FFY 2024.

Tina reviewed agencies that received project grants (maximum of \$3,000/agency). See the links below for a list of FFY 2025 grant awardees and for future funding announcements.

Here's the link to the full 2025 Outreach Grant Projects (PDF): [2025 Outreach Grant Projects](#)

This page reflects the past few years of projects: [Additional Funding for Local WIC Agencies - MN Dept. of Health](#)

Report of in-person certifications is now available – Tami

Go to the Local Agency portal and on the reports and data page >>> Participation and Demographics.

Questions & Answers

When will the Food Update document be available?

February 19 in the WINNIE the Scoop email.

Do WIC staff make food package changes June 1 or the actual date the June benefits start?

All food benefits with a first date to use in June will need the new food items.

Can participants only get salmon pouches? Or only tuna?

Participants can get tuna or salmon pouches.

Will the shopping guides be updated and printed or only the electronic copy be available?

Shopping guides will be updated with these changes and printed. They will be available for order tentatively in April.

Will there be visuals to share with participants on the new food package options?

Yes, there will be updated pictorials and resources for WIC staff. They will be listed on the Local Agency website, watch the WU for announcements.

Right now, should we just delete the future food package beyond June 2026, except formula?

Yes, when working with families, CPAs can delete food packages for after June 1.

Will there be a nutrition education card in the cup?

Yes, the card will be in the cup.

Will there be an electronic version of the education card?

No, it will not be available electronically.

When will the outreach grant project for 2026 info and application be available?

Currently, we don't know if there will be funds for these projects in FFY 2026.

References – Complete Listing of Hyperlinks

[WINNIE Update Document - Phase 3 Food Package Changes](https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/winnie/releasedocs/fpfeb2026.pdf)

(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/winnie/releasedocs/fpfeb2026.pdf>)

[2025 Outreach Grant Projects](https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/addfunding/grantsproj25.pdf)

(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/addfunding/grantsproj25.pdf>)

[Additional Funding for Local WIC Agencies](https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/addfunding.html)

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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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