



NWA'S EFFORTS TO RECRUIT AND RETAIN WIC PARTICIPANTS

NWA'S MISSION

The National WIC Association (NWA) provides its members with tools and leadership to expand and sustain effective nutrition services for mothers and young children.

The WIC program is facing caseload declines across the country. WIC participation has fallen from a high of 9.2 million participants in 2010 to a current participation level of around 7 million participants.¹ We know that many factors contribute to caseload declines, including an improving economy and declining birthrates, which are outside WIC's control. However, we also know that some factors leading to declining caseloads are within WIC's control. These include, but are not limited to: lack of awareness or understanding of WIC; negative perceptions of WIC; lack of referrals to WIC; barriers to applying for WIC; transportation issues; and difficulties with the WIC shopping experience and clinic experience.² With this in mind, NWA is engaged in a number of national initiatives aimed at supporting our members in their efforts to tackle these issues.

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION CAMPAIGN

NWA's largest effort aimed at improving WIC caseloads is our National Recruitment and Retention Campaign. The national campaign, which first launched in 2016, is a multi-platform strategic marketing approach designed to raise awareness, drive enrollment, and improve perceptions of WIC. The messages and branding used in the campaign are based on extensive research including interviews, focus groups, and a survey of WIC staff and participants. The components of the campaign include digital advertisements, print advertisements in pregnancy and new mom-targeted magazines, point-of-care literature in OB/GYN offices, hospital maternity wards, and pediatricians' offices, email outreach to prenatal WIC-eligible women, a national WIC Facebook page, and a local activation toolkit.

State WIC agencies opt into participating in the campaign. In the first three years of the campaign, 44 states and Indian Tribal Organizations (ITOs) participated. The second three-year phase of the campaign, which kicked off at the start of 2019, is being implemented in 62 states and ITOs.

In the first three years of the campaign, NWA and our national campaign partners have developed a new WIC brand look, created a central www.signupwic.com website, developed and sent over five million print brochures

to healthcare provider offices, ran full-page advertisements in eight print publications reaching nearly 25 million subscribers, reached hundreds of thousands WIC-eligible families through digital advertising, and created hundreds of digital and print advertisements and content for use in participating state and local agencies. Early evaluations have indicated that digital and print advertisements have been effective in promoting engagement with WIC and improving attitudes about and understanding of the program. For more information about the campaign you can email campaign@nwica.org.

CATALYZING RETENTION EFFORTS IN WIC (CREW) PROJECT

In late 2018, NWA received a three-year grant from the [Robert Wood Johnson Foundation](#) to support a new project called Catalyzing Retention Efforts in WIC (CREW): Developing and Disseminating Evidence-Based Resources to Enhance the WIC Participant Experience. The overarching goal for this project is to explore and address declining WIC caseloads by developing promising practices for WIC participant retention, investing in local WIC agencies, and disseminating emerging practices through webinar trainings and online resources. Specifically, the CREW project includes an in-depth review of both the published literature and



writings that have not undergone formal peer review on a range of strategies that have been implemented to retain WIC participants. In addition, subject-matter expert interviews will help inform a list of promising practices for retaining WIC participants. In late 2019, NWA will provide small innovation grants to four local WIC agencies to implement and evaluate a participant-retention strategy. Emerging practices generated from this project will be shared on an online WIC Research, Policy & Practice Hub, in a WIC Participant Retention toolkit, and in a webinar training series.

An additional goal of CREW is to promote health equity in a number of ways, including: considering retention strategies through a health equity lens, increasing access to resources and guidance, and encouraging smaller local WIC agencies with fewer resources to apply for the sub-grants that will be available through this project.

SHARING RESEARCH, PROMISING PRACTICES, AND LESSONS LEARNED

In addition, NWA provides updates about the latest recruitment and retention research through our Research to Practice quarterly newsletter and through Monday Morning Report.

NWA collects data from our members throughout the year through surveys, interviews, and listening sessions about innovative WIC activities. We then disseminate the information we collect in the form of reports, toolkits, webinars, and conferences. For example, in 2017 NWA worked with our Reach Them, Teach Them, Keep Them Task Force to create an Outreach

and Retention Survey, which we sent to all of our members. 389 people representing 43 states completed the survey. The report summarizing the survey findings provides an overview of all of the outreach and retention activities that state and local WIC agencies are engaged in throughout the country so that other agencies can discover new activities to try.

Another project that NWA is leading that has involved data collection through listening sessions and interviews is our Participant-Facing Technology project. NWA collaborated with Social Interest Solutions (SIS) and the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP) to create a toolkit for WIC agencies on how to go about launching new participant-facing technologies. These technologies, which include text messaging, smart phone apps, telehealth, online appointment scheduling, and others, have been used by many agencies in their efforts to improve the WIC participant experience and thereby keep participants on the program longer. This toolkit was published in February 2019.

CONVENING DIVERSE STAKEHOLDERS

In addition to NWA, state and local WIC agencies, and USDA, there are many national and state-level organizations working to improve access to WIC. NWA has worked over the past two years with CBPP to convene these stakeholders in an effort to share knowledge and foster partnerships. The WIC Access Group, which comprises 17 organizations, has met in-person and via teleconference quarterly starting in March 2017. In addition, NWA is currently exploring opportunities for the WIC Access Group to collaborate on one or more joint projects.

ADVOCACY TO PROTECT AND STRENGTHEN ACCESS TO WIC

Anecdotal evidence from our members suggests that immigrants' fears about potential changes to federal public charge policy have led to declines in participation, especially in states with high immigrant populations. NWA has been leading an extensive national advocacy effort to protect WIC access for immigrants, in an effort to curb and ultimately reverse this trend. This has involved directly lobbying members of Congress, urging our partners at USDA to oppose the proposed changes, preparing public comments to submit, engaging with the media, providing guidance to our members, and collaborating with coalition partners.

WIC: EMPOWERING FAMILIES, STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES

Please direct all questions to Elisabet Eppes, Program Innovation Manager, at eeppes@nwica.org or 202-719-5515.

¹ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service (2018) WIC program Data Accessed online: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/pdf/wic-program>

² National WIC Association (2013) WIC Client Journey Map. Available Online: https://s3.amazonaws.com/aws.upl/nwica.org/wic_journey_map.pdf