A close-up photograph of a woman with long dark hair, wearing a blue tank top, smiling warmly as she looks down at a baby. The baby, wearing a pink shirt, is focused on eating a banana. A pink bow is visible in the baby's hair.

WIC Community Engagement Outreach Guide

Visit our website at TexasWIC.org
WIC helps you make amazing kids!



I am an
AMAZING
KID!

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WIC helps make amazing kids!

Every day, thousands of Texas women, infants, and children receive vital nutritional support from WIC clinics. Texas families count on receiving a full range of WIC benefits—from healthy foods, nutrition counseling, and breastfeeding support to parenting advice and social service referrals—to stay healthy.

The state WIC office at the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) is grateful for your agency's work in your community to help pregnant women, new mothers, babies, and young children eat well and live a healthy life. Thanks to you, WIC helps parents make amazing kids!

WIC is committed to reaching eligible women and children in Texas through public education and outreach initiatives. Goals for community engagement are to:

- Create community awareness.
- Address misconceptions and barriers.
- Encourage potential clients to apply.
- Increase the number of women and children enrolled in WIC programs.
- Keep participants enrolled in WIC up until their child's fifth birthday so they can benefit from the full continuum of WIC support.

We encourage you to read and adopt the suggestions and best practices in this guide and learn from the successful strategies of other Texas WIC agencies.

Thank you for your support! Together we can give families the nutrition and breastfeeding support and services they need to stay healthy—every step of the way.



How to Use the Community Engagement Guide

This guide provides resources, tips, and key messages to help you engage with potential and current WIC clients. It includes best practices for building rapport with clients in your local office and with the community through events and speaking opportunities.

Outreach Tools

These resources are available to WIC agencies and clinics:

- Community Engagement Guide with key messages and customizable templates, Stock no. 13-06-14636
- Texas WIC Program, A Guide for Partner Programs and Agencies, Stock no. 13-55
- Texas WIC Income Guidelines flyer, Stock no. 13-85
- Join our Healthy Family outreach brochure (English/Spanish), Stock no. 13-92/13-92A
- Real Nutrition. Real Advice. Really Worth It. retention brochure (Bilingual), Stock no. 13-06-14635
- Posters available in 18"x 24" and 11"x 17" sizes (English/Spanish)
- Customizable poster available in 8.5"x 11" (English/Spanish)
- Benefits flyer (English/Spanish)
- Local WIC clinic referral cards
- Media Toolkit with customizable templates
- Social media posts for Facebook from real WIC clients
- Texts or tweets for current WIC clients
- Outreach images, logos, and other branding elements
- Q & A for community presentations
- Television spots and video testimonials (English/Spanish)
- First Birthday Gift Bags as giveaway items for clients, as available (English/Spanish), including:
 - Photo frame magnet
 - Coloring sheet placemats (also available as a downloadable PDF)
 - Infant bib
 - Birthday card (also available as a downloadable PDF)
- Community event materials (available at the local agency):
 - Photo booth standees
 - Spinning Wheel Trivia game
 - WIC logo tablecloth

To access downloadable materials, contact your State WIC Outreach Coordinator.

Set up for success.

Engage your organization.

The first step to successful community outreach is starting with your own organization.

- Form a community outreach team. You may already have staff members whose job duties include outreach. Ask others across different groups to join in brainstorming sessions and seek volunteers to help with community events or new initiatives.
- Identify leaders for outreach efforts in your clinic and in the community. Building successful engagement strategies requires direction. Find staff members who can devote time to the project to head up specific community engagement efforts.
- Determine objectives. Help staff members across your organization understand the importance of engaging in community outreach to market your services.
- Position staff members for success. Provide support to help them engage with clients and potential clients in meaningful ways.
- Become familiar with WIC talking points. Key messages provided at the back of this guide can help you learn how to talk about WIC's benefits to potential clients, external stakeholders and partners, and media representatives.

Prepare your action plan.

- Assess current engagement activities. Many WIC clinics already engage in outreach activities. Review your organization's strengths and identify areas for expansion.
- Write goals and objectives. Developing a written plan that covers outreach and engagement strategies will help keep outreach initiatives top of mind and on track for completion.
- Identify community events for participation as well as other outreach opportunities. Review the event planning best practices detailed in this guide.
- Make a timeline and assignments. Plan ahead so you have ample time to prepare, and clearly communicate tasks for specific staff members.
- Identify one or more spokespersons for community presentations. These representatives can become well-versed in telling your WIC story.
- Define success. Would you like to increase your enrollment of pregnant moms, or increase retention rates for moms with infants turning age 1? Do your stated goals include increasing participation in community events and developing relationships with partner organizations? Set measurable parameters that work for your agency.

Be your client's partner.

Research shows that WIC clients trust WIC staff members to support their efforts to raise healthy children.

As you build strong relationships with your clients, they will be more likely to share the benefits of participating in WIC with their family members and friends. Here are helpful tips:

- Note the names of participants' children and family members, and make a point to ask about these loved ones during calls and in-person meetings.
- Compliment your clients on taking a proactive role in providing the best possible nutrition for their families, affirming that they are making wise choices for their children's future.
- Encourage moms to call you if they have any questions, and serve as a resource for sharing other services that will benefit their family.
- Offer to talk about how WIC can help their family and friends have healthy babies and healthy families.

Create opportunities within your clinic.

WIC clinics can be very busy with client appointments, certifications and recertifications, and coordination of nutrition counseling services. Yet carving out time and resources for engagement activities at your clinic will help clients feel more connected and encourage their continued participation. Below are several ideas for building staff-client engagement at your organization.

Start a support group for moms: Amigas de WIC.

Bring together the mothers and pregnant women participating in your programs in a friendly support group called Amigas de WIC.

Moms enjoy learning from each other and sharing personal experiences, and many WIC clinics already serve as a hub for interaction. You can provide a setting to bring mothers and pregnant women into a circle of friends by hosting regular Amigas de WIC activities at your clinic.

No formal application process should be required—simply ask clients if they'd like to be a part of a group that receives regular communications and is invited to activities.

Develop a regular schedule of activities and events for moms and pregnant women to come and share with one another. You can host meetings and events that are both useful and fun for your moms. For example, you could invite a local chef to come to your clinic and give a presentation on creating healthy finger food meals for toddlers. Other ideas include:

- Cooking demonstrations
- Recipe swaps
- Baby clothing swaps
- Couponing lessons
- Lactation support classes
- Walking groups

A customizable Amigas de WIC support group flyer template has been created for you to post on a bulletin board or central location at your clinic or to distribute directly to clients. Be sure to include any planned activities and specific benefits of participating in your clinic's support group.

To access a downloadable template, contact your State WIC Outreach Coordinator.



Join our upcoming Amigas de WIC support group.

What: Recipe Swap

Who: WIC parents – moms and dads welcome!

When: Friday, September 25 at 5:30 p.m.

Where: Local WIC office

Why: To exchange fun, healthy recipes with other families.

Visit our website at [TexasWIC.org](https://www.texaswic.org)

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Be social.

Gather email addresses or cell phone numbers for group emails or texts to notify moms of monthly activities, ways they can be involved, and fun tips on healthy living. Also, let moms know about activities during regularly scheduled appointment reminder calls or texts.

If your parent organization allows the use of social media, leverage your clinic’s Facebook page or create a new Facebook page. Several WIC clinics already have active Facebook pages. Use Facebook as a platform for engaging with clients to:

- Announce support group activities and encourage involvement.
- Promote community events where WIC will have a booth.
- Share content about subjects that moms care about. Examples of sites offering posts and graphics include:
 - Choosemyplate.gov
 - Eatingwell.com
 - Healthychildren.org
 - Breastmilkcounts.com



Sample Facebook Support Group Announcement

Facebook pages can also be used to post testimonials from your WIC clients. Here are just a few of the posts from real clients that are available for you to use on your own Facebook pages. To access all of the available Facebook posts, texts, or tweets for Twitter, contact your State WIC Outreach Coordinator.

<p>WIC nutrition services. TexasWIC.org Seeing all that WIC offered gave me confidence, like “I can do this.” Chelsea, WIC client</p>	<p>WIC means real support. TexasWIC.org WIC gives me healthy foods and teaches me why I should eat them. Asia, WIC client</p>	<p>WIC es apoyo real. TexasWIC.org Ser mamá es dar a sus hijos lo mejor para que crezcan fuertes. Patricia, cliente de WIC</p>
<p>WIC is mom’s partner. TexasWIC.org Being a single mom can be stressful, but WIC is there to help. Griselda, WIC client</p>	<p>Stick with WIC to age 5. TexasWIC.org It doesn’t just stop after your baby is one, so continue! It’s worth it. Kim, WIC client</p>	<p>WIC está con las mamás. TexasWIC.org A mi hijo y yo nos encantan las recetas de WIC. ¡Son asombrosas! Mayra, cliente de WIC</p>

Encourage moms to make their own Facebook posts, too!

Celebrate first birthdays.

A first birthday is a special time of celebration for families. It's also a key milestone in the continuum of WIC benefits, when monthly food packages decrease and busy parents frequently drop out of WIC.

To encourage parents to return to your clinic to recertify their child, WIC clinics can offer a First Birthday package of incentives as a special gift for one-year-olds. Giveaway items in the package include a WIC "I am an Amazing Kid!" infant bib, a photo frame magnet, a birthday card, and nutrition-focused coloring sheet placemats, all packaged in a colorful birthday bag.

Here are ideas for celebrating first birthdays in your clinic.

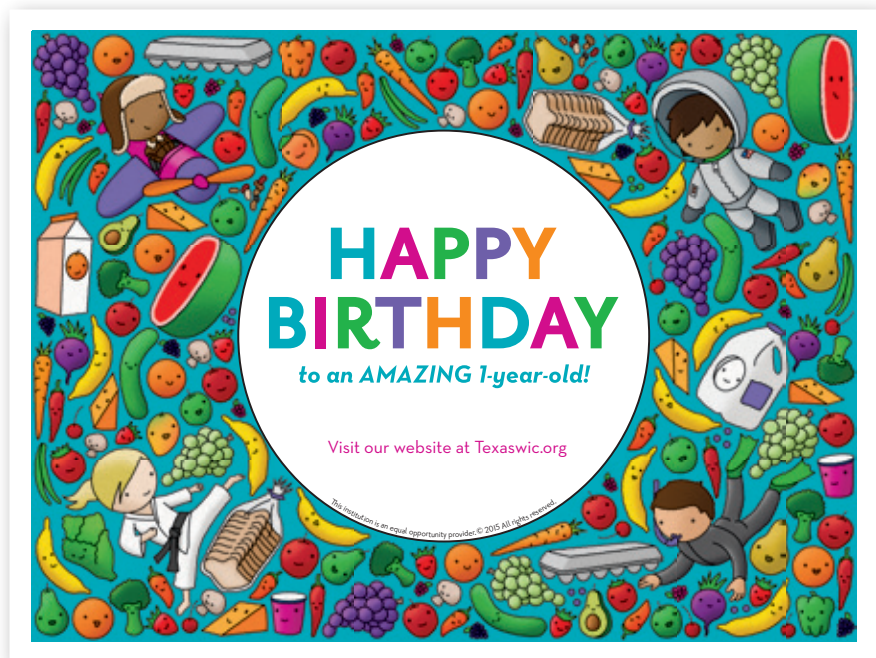
Host a first birthday party.

- Offer birthday parties monthly, such as every fourth Friday or quarterly, to attract parents and birthday children to the event.
- Promote the event with a birthday party invitation sent to parents the month before their children's enrollment anniversary.
- Offer the First Birthday Gift Bags to parents who attend the birthday party.
- Invite a local food bank to host birthday parties with healthy, kid-friendly snacks such as fresh fruit or yogurt cups. The food bank may offer a cooking demonstration or tasting using WIC foods.
- Seek practical donations such as diapers and award them as door prizes.
- Sing "Happy Birthday" with families during the celebration.
- Set recertification appointments to follow immediately after the party or at another date.

Invite parents to recertify their child.

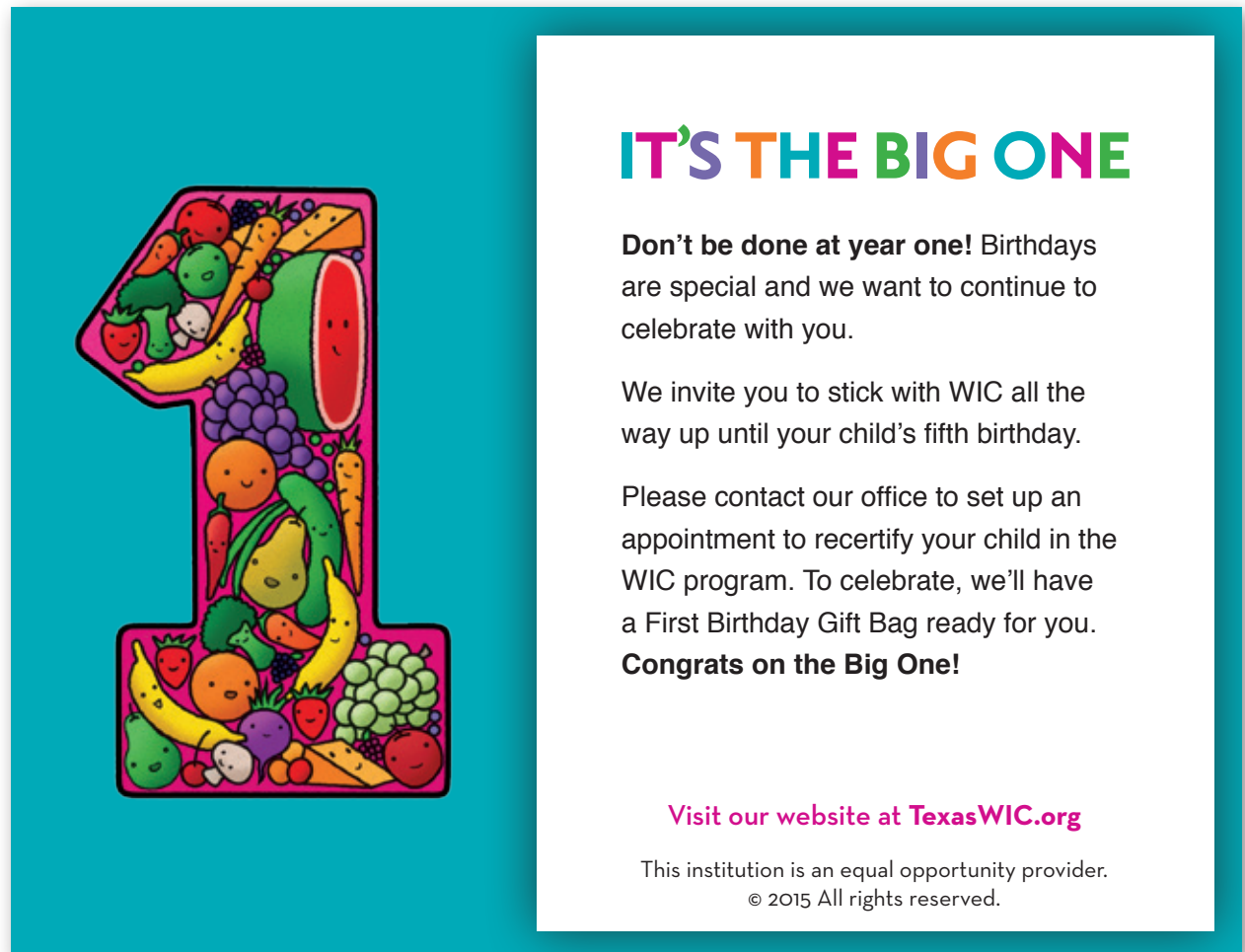
If your clinic is unable to host a birthday party, you can distribute the First Birthday Gift Bags to parents who bring in their one-year-olds for recertification. The bags may be awarded by staff when the client arrives or given by the nutritionist at the end of the appointment.

During reminder calls or texts prior to the one-year appointment, be sure to tell clients that they will receive the free First Birthday Gift Bag for their one-year-old at the time of recertification.



First Birthday Gift Bag

We recommend sending out an invitation to recertify in the form of a fun reminder card, such as the one shown below. You can email it, send it through the mail, or hand it out in person. For a customizable template, please contact your State WIC Outreach Coordinator.



Recertification Invitation Template

Plan a family activity day.

Families love doing activities together. Set a specific date and time for games or group activities that the whole family can enjoy. Suggested ideas:

- Have a children's coloring contest and post artwork on the walls at the clinic.
- Host a field day of fun outdoor activities.

Engage in outreach opportunities.

WIC agencies can engage in short-term, long-term, and ongoing outreach to raise awareness and maximize visibility in the local community.

Short-term outreach can be implemented on a monthly, bimonthly, or annual basis and has the potential to become an ongoing activity. The goals for these activities are to provide opportunities for face-to-face interaction, let community members know about WIC's presence, and reach targeted segments of your community.

Participate in community events.

Staffing a booth at a community event is an effective way to get in front of and interact with community members in a nonthreatening, festive atmosphere.

Benefits of participating in community events include:

- Gaining access to new populations.
- Making connections with former WIC participants who may not know they are still eligible to participate in the program.
- Raising awareness among eligible participants and their friends and family. Many clients learn about WIC through word of mouth.
- Having a forum for answering questions about eligibility.



Community Engagement Spotlight:

The Cameron County Department of Health and Human Services WIC Program participates in many community events, including health fairs and festivals. Two popular events for outreach are the annual Sombrero Festival and the “Wild About Health Care” pediatric health fair hosted by Su Clinica Familiar. Incentive items such as DVDs and collapsible water bottles are packaged in shopping bags with WIC stickers and given to booth visitors.

Cameron County WIC collaborates with organizations including Texas Head Start and the Migrant Centers to provide education on WIC programs and other special topics. Some typical outreach events include health fairs, school district back-to-school events, local municipal events, hospital events, and local breastfeeding coalition events.

“We participate in a lot of Saturday events, and our staff is always willing to help. We look for events that target our particular population.”

Ted O’Dowd, RD

Cameron County Department of Health and Human Services WIC Program

Types of events for outreach:

- Family-oriented community festivals.
- Health fairs sponsored by area organizations such as schools, health centers, and hospitals.
- Back-to-school events.
- Fitness events such as fun runs and fitness festivals.
- Feast of Sharing Thanksgiving celebrations.

Best practices for choosing and staffing an event.

Know your demographics. Review the event’s audience and choose to participate in events that will appeal to your target population. Reaching the right population is more important than the size of the event. For example, a relaxed, family-oriented daytime festival will attract more families with young children than an evening music festival or concert.

Choose events with free admission. Pricey event tickets will turn away your audience.

Plan activities and incentives for children. When children are happily engaged at your booth, you’ll have an opportunity to talk with their parents and share information about the WIC program. Examples of children’s activities include hula-hooping, bean bag tosses, puppet shows, gift bag or sticker giveaways, or creating a minimart shopping experience for children using small carts, shelves, and plastic foods. Kids love to shop like mommy!

WIC agencies have a set of community event materials that can be checked out by local clinics, including:

- A Spinning Wheel Trivia game with fun questions and answers about fruits, vegetables, and healthy living.
- Photo booth standees where parents can snap photos of their children as amazing kids.
- WIC logo tablecloth.

Get photo releases for any adults or children you photograph at your booth in case you’d like to feature the photo in a newsletter, on your social media page, or in a brochure.

Engage your staff. While working a table at outreach events typically falls to several key employees, you can enlist the help of other staff members to serve as volunteers for weekend and off-site events.

Be prepared to set appointments with potential clients who express interest in learning more about WIC benefits.

Planning your booth setup.

- Request a booth location close to other children’s activities.
- Determine arrangements for tables, chairs, tents, and setup/tear down times.
- Obtain day-of contact information, parking passes, and load-in instructions.
- Assemble all of your booth materials in advance, such as program flyers, brochures, incentives, tablecloth and tent, if applicable, and activity pieces. Be sure to bring sandbags for any stand-up signage and paperweights for brochures.
- Know your talking points. Event staff should feel comfortable talking with event participants who visit the booth. For example:
 - WIC is more than just food. In addition to providing valuable healthy foods, WIC provides a variety of resources and benefits for eligible pregnant women, new moms, breastfeeding moms, and children up to age 5. Are you interested in learning more about how WIC can benefit your family?
 - Did you know that the first five years of a child’s life are critical for development? As kids grow, their nutritional needs change. WIC gives you advice on feeding your children nutritious foods—and how much—at specific ages, so you don’t have to guess.
- Work with like-minded organizations. Many groups and facilities conduct regular community events that will attract participants who might be potential WIC clients. Review the events held by your existing partners, and research events held by potential partners to determine if they are a good fit for your organization.



WIC Participation at a Community Event

Build long-term partnerships with other organizations.

Investing time and energy in building partnerships with local organizations can help establish ongoing community engagement relationships with long-term impact. While often these relationships require a long-term commitment and considerable staff time, ongoing outreach efforts:

- Increase staff awareness of other community services.
- Address barriers and myths over time.
- Help maintain participation rates.
- Increase caseloads.
- Make WIC's presence known in the community.
- Help connect with hard-to-reach populations.
- Bring in high priority participants.

Reach out to organizations in your community so that you can give presentations at meetings and provide resource materials for dissemination to their clients and customers.

Speaker opportunities allow you to engage with potential clients in a setting familiar to them. You can tailor your presentation to your audience. For example, a presentation to a group of health providers could include a PowerPoint with local data about breastfeeding rates and child health. A presentation to women at a battered women's shelter could be done in a conversational, friendly style in a small group setting.



Some examples of organizations and agencies that deal with potentially eligible persons include, but are not limited to:

- Health and medical organizations
- Hospitals, community health centers, physicians, and pharmacies
- Texas Department of Health and Human Services for SNAP and CHIP/Medicaid
- Private and public social service agencies
- Farm Worker organizations
- Military bases
- Public and private child care centers, including Texas Head Start
- Native American Tribal organizations
- Schools
- Grassroots organizations
- Battered women's shelters
- Breastfeeding women's organizations such as La Leche League
- Homeless shelters
- Food banks and food pantries
- Hospital outpatient clinics
- Churches and faith-based organizations

Participate in coalitions.

Regular participation on local coalitions and boards is an excellent way to make your organization known to other community service providers and advocates. Your WIC representative can position your agency as a trusted resource and demonstrate your agency's commitment to supporting pregnant women and mothers with young children in your community. Types of coalitions include:

- Breastfeeding
- Nutrition
- Health and wellness
- Child development



Raise awareness through media opportunities.

How can you bring greater awareness of your programs? Enlist the help of your local media! Your WIC agency can be proactive in sharing marketing materials and making your community aware of WIC events and services.

A marketing and outreach resources toolkit has been created to assist WIC agencies and clinics in their ongoing communications efforts to share messaging about WIC and its programs. The materials and strategies in the WIC Media Toolkit can help you:

- Highlight your specific WIC community or public event.
- Raise public awareness about WIC as a resource for families.
- Increase support for your programs and services.
- Secure media coverage and share WIC's story locally.
- Handle tough questions and stay on message.

To access the downloadable WIC Media Toolkit and templates, contact your State WIC Outreach Coordinator.



Community Engagement Spotlight:

Events are a key engagement strategy for the City of Dallas WIC Program. Outreach staff and volunteers regularly participate in annual events such as the Mayor's Back-to-School Fair, the Feast of Sharing Thanksgiving Celebration, and the MLK Day parade featuring staffers dressed in vegetable costumes.

Community partners' events include the Get Kids Fit Event, at which their Zobey puppet makes an appearance, the Summer Feeding Block Party, and "Chief on the Beat" neighborhood events with the Dallas Police Department. The Community Council of Greater Dallas supports the City of Dallas WIC Program by providing a staff member to help with CHIP and Children's Medicaid enrollment and distributes WIC outreach information to clients at non-WIC enrollment sites. Other robust partnership activities take place with the North Texas Food Bank and the Breastfeeding-Friendly Hospital Initiative.

In a community the size of Dallas, it's vital to serve on coalitions to foster collaboration and awareness. The City of Dallas WIC Program participates in numerous coalitions, including child obesity, health advisory councils, and the Dallas Area Breastfeeding Alliance.

"Participating in coalitions makes WIC more credible. If you want to be taken seriously by a breastfeeding expert and a child feeding expert, you better come to the table."

Cynthia Wachtler, RDN, LD
*Field Support Coordinator,
City of Dallas WIC Program*



Key Messages

- WIC helps you make amazing kids!
- WIC grows with you.
- WIC means real support.
- WIC supports you and your child from pregnancy and delivery up to your child's fifth birthday. Join and stay with WIC to receive the maximum benefit.
- Raising amazing kids is hard. Getting amazing help is easy.
- WIC is mom's partner, helping raise amazing kids.
- WIC is an important and beneficial program that is worth it for young families.
- WIC has been around for 40 years. We are here to support and help every step of the way.
- WIC is the best nutrition program for families.
- Keeping your child enrolled in WIC up to age 5:
 - Gives your child the best start in life so he will do well in school.
 - Helps your child grow healthy and secures your child's future.
 - Starts healthy habits before beginning school.



WIC Program Benefits

- WIC card. A benefits card for free, healthy food each month tailored to a child's developmental stage. WIC has shopping guides available, but the approved foods can also be found online.
- Continued breastfeeding education and support from experts to help moms reach their breastfeeding goals.
- Regular nutrition assessments (checking iron levels, height, and weight to make sure each child is growing properly).
- Personalized counseling from experts on a variety of topics such as nutrition during pregnancy, feeding children, tips for picky eaters, healthy cooking, and physical activity for the whole family.
- Group classes and other fun ways to learn, such as cooking demonstrations and nutrition fairs.
- Online classes to conduct, when convenient, on a variety of topics.
- Peer support. WIC gives families the chance to get together and share tips.
- Recipes using WIC foods so families can make simple, delicious meals.
- Referrals to other health and social service agencies. WIC can connect clients to other health services like Medicaid, Texas Health Steps, Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), SNAP, immunizations, and dental care. WIC is often able to help with additional referral needs such as child care, housing, and transportation.



TexasWIC.org
provides helpful brochures,
recipes, newsletters,
and so much more.

*Visit our website at Texaswic.org
WIC helps you make amazing kids!*



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