

National WIC Association

Journey Mapping the WIC Participant Experience

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National WIC Association

Advancing Health Equity to Achieve Diversity and Inclusion in WIC (AHEAD) 3.0: Enhancing Equity throughout the WIC Participant Journey

Journey Map Report



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What We'll Cover Today

1

Review of the Multi-Phase Mixed Method Design and Data Collection

2

Synthesize Findings Across all Six Journey Stages

3

Reflect on Strengths, Gaps, and Opportunities

4

Present Actionable Recommendations



Review of AHEAD 3.0

Advancing Health Equity to Achieve Diversity & Inclusion in WIC (AHEAD) 3.0: Enhancing Equity throughout the WIC Participant Journey

- NWA received a \$1.6M, 2-year grant (2024)
- Centers voices of Black, Brown, Indigenous & geographically diverse individuals
- Maps pain points across the full WIC journey
- Surfaces equity-focused, actionable solutions



Review of AHEAD 3.0



Data Sources

Literature Review

Synthesis of qualitative studies & gray literature

National Survey

38,600+ participants in 2023
Multi-State WIC Participant Satisfaction Survey

PAC

Participant Advisory Council, current or recent participants

Focus Groups

Five racial/ethnic communities, lived experience

Six Stages of the WIC Journey

Findings: The Six Stages of the WIC Journey

Families move through and between all six stages



The Journey Is Not Linear



**Families Move
Between Stages**



**Life Factors
Shape Experience**



**Flexibility Determines
Success**



Stage 1:

WIC Awareness:

How Families First Learn About WIC

- Prenatal and postpartum healthcare settings are primary gateways
- Family and community networks matter
 - Increases comfort for some families
- Visibility varies by community





Stage 1:

Participant Quote

"Well, for me, it was when I was going to my pregnancy checkups. They told me about it there, but I didn't really know what to do. After I left the hospital, they gave me the address I needed to go to ... For me, that was a blessing. They recommended that I apply for WIC, and ... there was an interpreter who helped us a lot there."

-Latina/x
WIC Participant





Stage 2:

Application and Enrollment: Smooth for Some, Stressful for Others

- Many describe enrollment as straightforward
- Barriers related to:
 - Transportation and distance
 - Scheduling and time off work
 - Language access
 - In-person requirements



Stage 2:

Participant Quote

"It was [a] very seamless experience. Because the WIC coordinator was on site, we were able to sit down and speak in person. I could ask clarifying questions right there and they walked me through every step of the application. So, I was able to do that there instead of over the phone or online."

**-Asian American/Pacific Islander
WIC Participant**





Stage 3:

Nutrition Education and Appointments:

Appointments that Build Confidence or Frustration



- Nutrition education and breastfeeding support is highly valued
- Cultural relevance varies
- Representation and communication tone matter

Stage 3:

Participant Quote



"So, [my baby] wouldn't latch, and that was really hard for me because I had no experience breastfeeding, [and] I didn't know what to do. That's why I'm so grateful to [breastfeeding counselor] for everything she did for me."

**-Latina/x
WIC Participant**





Stage 4:

Critical Communication: Communication Shapes Trust



- Texts, calls, apps, and reminders are valued
- Proactive communication helps hesitant participants
- Language access remains uneven



Stage 4:

Participant Quote



"I really enjoy the text messages that I receive from my WIC program. It could be like, 'Happy fruit and vegetable day, here's a fun recipe for your kids.' It's at least once a month, it's not too frequent, not overwhelming or anything like that, but I do enjoy those a lot."

**-Native American
WIC Participant**





Stage 5:

Shopping with WIC Benefits: Dignity on the Line

- WIC app and eWIC cards improved dignity
- Persistent challenges remain:
 - Unclear or missing shelf signage
 - Limited culturally relevant foods
 - Uncomfortable checkout interactions

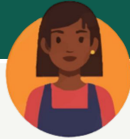




Stage 5: Participant Quote

"It's also super helpful [WIC app] because I learned I could order groceries online through [grocery store] with WIC! And if I scan an item that has a WIC sign, but the app says no, I can submit a picture, and they usually fix it pretty quick. They replied within 24 hours and made sure I was able to find what I needed, which I appreciated."

**-African/African American
WIC Participant**





Stage 6:

Recertification and Retention

Staying Enrolled or Falling Away

- Recertification is often described as easier than enrollment
- Digital tools are a major facilitator
- Drop-off linked to life instability, not lack of motivation





Stage 6:

Participant Quote

"[My recertification] was pretty easy. I get the phone call right here, send a text, and I just go online and upload the stuff [documents]. Then I go to the appointment, and they do it right at the front desk and reload my card, and I'm done [in] maybe five or 10 minutes. Pretty streamlined."

**-White/Caucasian American
WIC Participant**



The background image shows two women sitting at a desk in what appears to be a community center or office. The woman on the left is holding a tablet and looking at the screen. The woman on the right is holding a smartphone. On the wall behind them are several posters, including one about breastfeeding support and another about changing diapers. There are also some decorative items on the wall, like a strawberry and a bunch of grapes.

Strengths, Gaps, & Opportunities

Key Strengths of WIC

Strong Education & Support

Nutrition education, breastfeeding peer counselor program, and foundational guidance empower caregivers

Trusted Staff Relationships

Empathetic, culturally responsive staff are the most-cited driver of a positive WIC experience

Digital Improvements

EBT cards, the WIC app, online scheduling, and text reminders have meaningfully improved access

Community Embeddedness

WIC's presence in hospitals, grocery stores, and farmers' markets makes it a trusted community resource

Key Challenges

Language Gaps

- Materials are not always in needed languages
- Inconsistent interpreter services
- Non-English speakers feel excluded

Administrative Burden

- Complex enrollment paperwork
- Mandatory in-person appointments
- Rigid recertification timelines

Access Barriers

- Rural distance & transportation
- Clinic hours conflict with work
- Digital equity gaps

Cultural Relevance

- Limited culturally appropriate foods
- Nutrition education is not culturally reflective
- Lack of culturally representative staff

What Participants Need

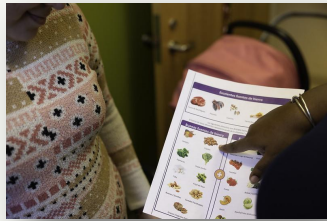
Cultural Relevance

Food packages, nutrition education, and staff interactions that reflect participants' identities, traditions, and languages



Clear Communication

Plain-language materials, proactive non-assumptive outreach, and timely benefit change notifications



Flexible Processes

Phone & virtual appointments, online document uploads, extended hours, and streamlined recertification



Better Shopping Experience

Clear in-store signage, trained cashiers, expanded food options, and checkout dignity for all families



A photograph of a family of three sitting on a light-colored couch in what appears to be a waiting room or clinic. A man in a maroon polo shirt is holding a white document and looking at it. A woman with glasses and a floral top is sitting next to him, smiling and looking at the document. A baby is sitting on her lap. The background shows a typical office or clinic setting with a desk, a printer, and some framed pictures on the wall.

Recommendations



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Recommendations



Strengthen Outreach

- Increase WIC visibility at cultural events and healthcare settings
- Hire former WIC participants and individuals reflective of participants' communities as staff

Culturally Responsive Services

- Increase bilingual staff & interpreter services
- Offer nutrition education that reflects traditional diets

Reduce Burden

- Expand virtual/phone recertification
- Allow online document uploads
- Simplify paperwork requirements

Improve Retail Partnerships

- Train cashiers on WIC procedures & dignity
- Improve in-store signage
- Ensure implementation of expanded food package options

Carry These Questions Into Your Work

Where can we
reduce burden?



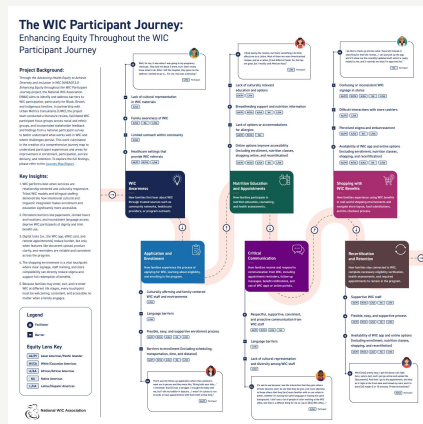
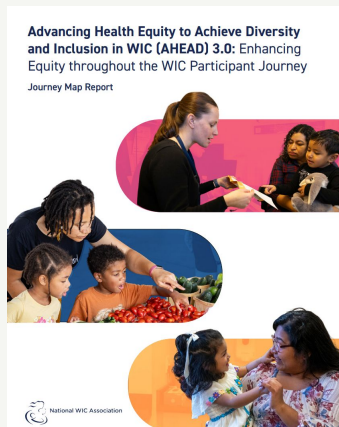
How can we strengthen
relationships?



What small changes can
improve dignity?



Explore the Journey Map & Report



The Journey
Map Report



The Journey
Map