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RETHINKING POLICY ON GENDER, SEXUALITY, AND WOMEN'S ISSUES

HELPING LOCAL STORES WITH WIC CERTIFICATION WILL YIELD BETTER FOOD OPTIONS FOR ALL

JACKIE HUNT



HELPING LOCAL STORES WITH WIC CERTIFICATION WILL YIELD BETTER FOOD OPTIONS FOR ALL

Providing vendors with help in maintaining or attaining WIC certification would improve food offerings for customers and help local economies in a time of economic recession.



CHANGES made to the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) in October of 2009 reflect updated U.S. dietary guidelines. The new food packages now include fresh fruits and vegetables. Because purchases must still be

made from a certified WIC vendor, these stores must stock a minimum amount of all the types of foods covered by the program. At least a quarter of WIC-certified stores in California are small local operations. Some stores may not have the resources to purchase, stock, and store fresh produce and may lose their WIC certification.

The nation's third largest nutrition assistance program in terms of expenditures following Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), WIC was established in 1975 to provide nutritional intervention during pregnancy and early childhood and to thereby prevent developmental issues and medical problems.¹ The state-run, federally funded program provides vouchers that may be redeemed at certified stores for specific food items. Because they were based

on nutrition science of the 1970s, WIC-approved foods emphasized specific vitamins and protein. The only WIC-eligible vegetable, for example, was fresh carrots—a source of vitamin A—and only lactating women qualified for them. Other approved foods included enriched cereals, fruit juice with vitamin C, peanut butter, full-fat cheese and milk, and infant formula. In recent years, as nutrition standards have changed, many have criticized WIC-approved foods for being too high in fat and for not offering fresh foods. For the first time in thirty years, changes made to the program were made in October of 2009 to reflect updated U.S. dietary guidelines. The new food packages include whole-grain bread and rice, fresh and canned fruits and vegetables, and low-fat dairy.²

RECOMMENDATION

Providing vendors with help in maintaining or attaining WIC certification would improve food offerings for customers and help local economies in a time of economic recession. Stores could have some assurance of income even when their customers have little cash for groceries. A higher volume of sales might also allow store owners to buy in larger quantities, which would give them more options for suppliers and better prices from distributors. WIC certification might improve the quality of produce stocked by

increasing produce purchases, which would lead to more frequent restocking. Organizations like Public Health Law and Policy have resources for community groups wanting to help local store owners to gain WIC certification.³ Created with help from the California WIC Association, a toolkit suggests ways that advocates can leverage the changes in the WIC program to help improve the food offerings in disadvantaged neighborhoods.⁴

Jackie Hunt recently earned a M.P.P. in the Department of Public Policy in the UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs and was a graduate student researcher at the Center for the Study of Women at UCLA. Photo credit: kevinruss/iStockphoto.com

NOTES

1. *The WIC Program: Background, Trends, and Economic Issues, 2009 Edition*, V. Oliveira & E. Frazão, USDA Economic Research Service <<http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/ERR73/>> URL accessed July, 2011.
2. *Changes in Access to Healthy Foods after Implementation of the WIC Food Package Revisions*, Andreyeva, Tatiana et al., Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity, 2011. <<http://ddr.nal.usda.gov/bitstream/10113/48404/1/CAT31079664.pdf>> URL accessed July, 2011; *WIC Food Authorization Process*. California WIC Food Policy,

2010. <<http://www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/wicworks/WIC%20Foods/WIC-FP-1-0-WICFoodAuthorization-Process.pdf>> URL accessed July, 2011.

3. *The Public Health & Law Policy (PHLP), 2010*. <<http://www.phlpnet.org/>> URL accessed June, 2011.
4. *Toolkits*, California WIC Association. <<http://www.calwic.org/policy-center/toolkits>> URL accessed July, 2011; *Changes in the WIC Food Packages: A Toolkit for Partnering with Neighborhood Stores*, California WIC Association and Public Health Law & Policy, 2009. <http://www.phlpnet.org/system/files/WIC_Toolkit.pdf> URL accessed July, 2011; *Increasing Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Availability in a Low-Income Neighborhood Convenience Store: A Pilot Study*, K. Jetter, & D. Cassady, *Health Promotion Practice*, volume 11 issue 5, pages 694-702, 2010.

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