

NATIONAL- AND STATE-LEVEL ESTIMATES OF SPECIAL SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION PROGRAM FOR WOMEN, INFANTS, AND CHILDREN (WIC) ELIGIBLES AND PROGRAM REACH IN 2015

Background

The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) provides food, nutrition education, breastfeeding promotion and support, and referrals to health care and social services to nutritionally at-risk, low-income pregnant women, new mothers, infants, and children up to age 5.

This report offers national and State estimates of the number of people eligible for WIC benefits and the percent of the eligible population participating in 2015, including estimates by participant category. The report also provides estimates by region, U.S. territory, and race and ethnicity.

Methodology

The national estimates are based on a methodology developed in 2003 by the Committee on National Statistics of the National Research Council (CNSTAT). The report’s State-level estimates use a methodology originally developed by the Urban Institute that apportions the national figures using data from the American Community Survey and other sources.

The estimates of program eligibility consider poverty level, adjunctive income eligibility (e.g., due to participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program [SNAP], Medicaid, or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families [TANF]), national estimates of nutritional risk, and national- and State-level estimates of duration of breastfeeding. The estimates of program coverage are derived using USDA Food and Nutrition Service’s (FNS) administrative data on the average monthly number of program participants divided by the average monthly number of individuals estimated to be eligible for the program. Standard errors are included to estimate precision.

The methodology used to produce the estimates in this report is identical to the one used to produce the 2005-

2014 estimates that USDA published in September 2017.¹

In addition, for the first time in this series of reports, State-level estimates of coverage rates by race and ethnicity are presented.

Results: WIC-Eligible Population

FNS estimates that the average monthly WIC-eligible population totaled 15.06 million in 2015, a level not statistically significant from the estimate of 15.01 million in 2014.

WIC Eligibles and Coverage by WIC Subgroup, CY* 2015				
WIC Participant Category (PC)	# Eligible (Millions)	% of All Eligibles	# Participating (Millions)	Coverage Rate
Infants	2.51	16.6%	1.93	76.9%
Total Children	9.27	61.5%	4.11	44.4%
Children Age 1 ^a	2.27	15.1%	1.43	62.8%
Children Age 2 ^a	2.32	15.4%	1.09	47.0%
Children Age 3 ^a	2.34	15.5%	0.98	41.8%
Children Age 4 ^a	2.33	15.5%	0.61	26.3%
Pregnant Women	1.63	10.9%	0.76	46.4%
Postpartum Women	1.65	11.0%	1.14	69.2%
Breastfeeding	1.03	6.9%	0.59	57.4%
Nonbreastfeeding	0.62	4.1%	0.55	88.9%
All Participants	15.06	100.0%	7.94	52.7%

^a These figures are derived from the total number of children participating in CY 2015 using the ratio of child enrollees by single year of age to the total number of children enrolled as reported in the WIC Participant and Program Characteristics 2014 report.

* Calendar Year

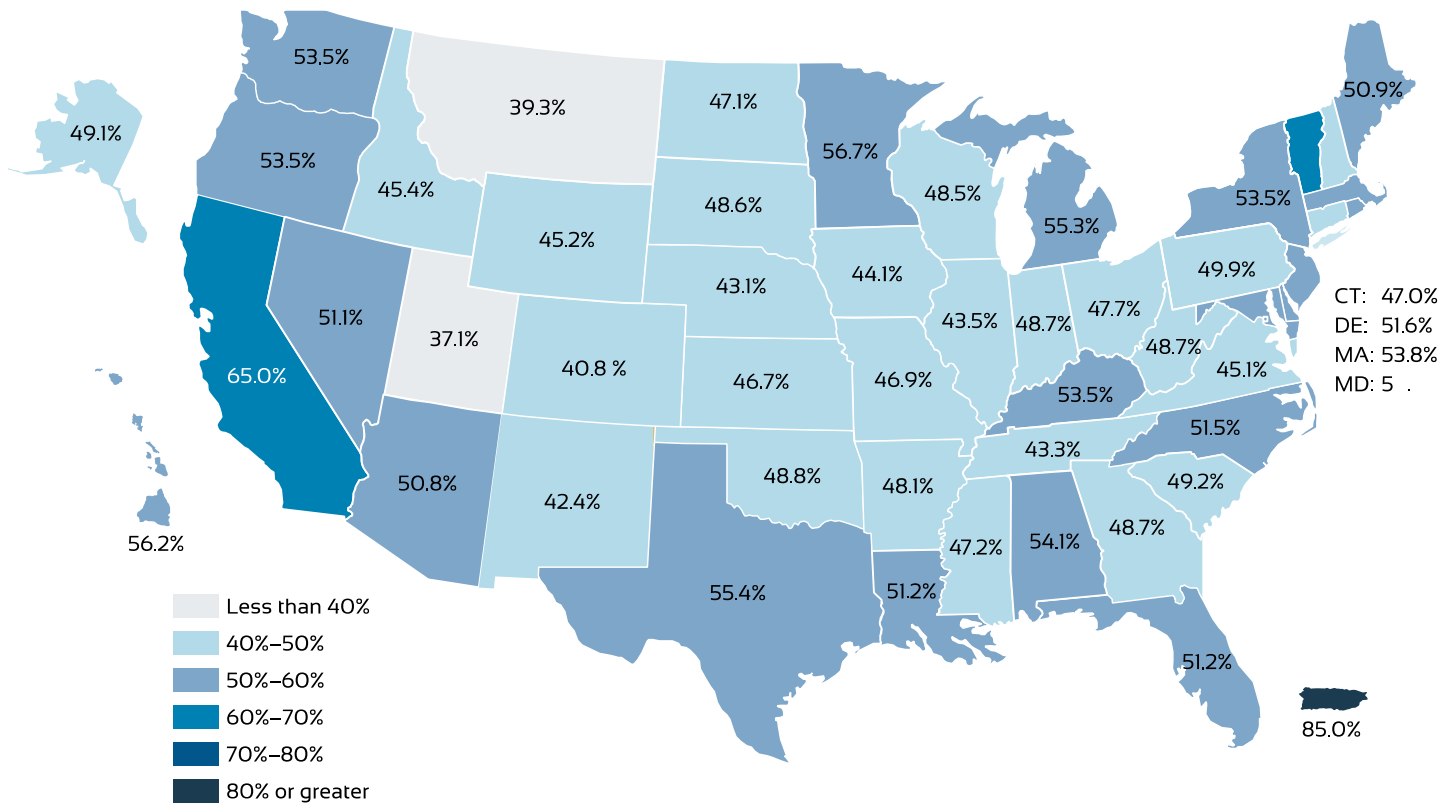
Results: WIC Coverage Rates

The percentage of the eligible population that receives WIC benefits is the program’s “coverage rate.”

¹ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Policy Support. *National- and State-Level Estimates of Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Eligibles and Program Reach in 2014, and Updated Estimates for 2005–2013*, by Paul Johnson, David Betson, Lorraine Blatt, and Linda Giannarelli. Project Officer: Grant Lovellette. Alexandria, VA: September 2017.

- In the average month of 2015, WIC served an estimated 52.7 percent of those eligible for WIC, which was not a statistically different change from the estimate for 2014 (54.8 percent).
- Although the change in coverage rate was not statistically significant, the decrease in our point estimate of the coverage rate was caused primarily by a 3.5-percent decrease in the number of WIC participants from 2014 to 2015, while our point estimate of the number of WIC eligibles remained mostly unchanged.
- Similar to recent years, the coverage rates for WIC-eligible infants (77 percent) and non-breastfeeding postpartum women (89 percent) were highest among WIC participant subgroups in 2015, while the coverage rate for WIC-eligible children (44 percent) continued to lag behind other groups.
- Overall, coverage rates were highest for Hispanic (62.7 percent) and lowest for White-only non-Hispanic (42.2 percent) WIC eligibles, while the coverage rate for Black-only non-Hispanic WIC eligibles was 57.0 percent.
- In 2015, the Mountain Plains region had the lowest coverage rate for all WIC-eligible individuals (43.5 percent), while the Western region had the highest coverage rate (60.1 percent).
- Coverage rates vary substantially by State, as demonstrated by the map below. (Note: confidence intervals around estimates for States with small populations are larger than for other States, so differences between States and from previous year reports may be less pronounced than they appear.)

**Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)
Coverage Rates for All Participants by State, Calendar Year 2015**



U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Policy Support. *National- and State-Level Estimates of Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Eligibles and Program Reach in 2015*, by Carole Trippe, Chrystine Tadler, Paul Johnson, Linda Giannarelli, and David Betson. Project Officer: Grant Lovellette. Alexandria, VA: February 2018.