

SPECIAL SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION PROGRAM FOR WOMEN, INFANTS, AND CHILDREN (WIC) PARTICIPANT AND PROGRAM CHARACTERISTICS 2016 (SUMMARY)

Background

WIC Participant and Program Characteristics 2016 (PC 2016) summarizes demographic, income, and health-related characteristics and behaviors of participants in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). PC 2016 is the most recent in a series of biennial reports generated from WIC State management information systems since 1992.

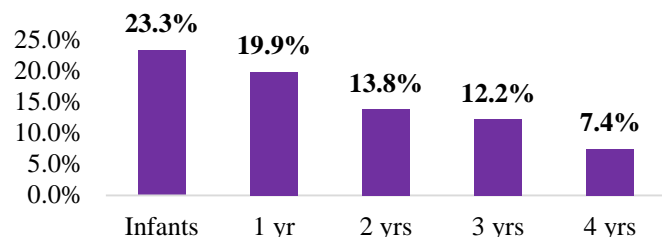
Findings

There were 8.8 million women, infants, and children enrolled in WIC in April 2016. This is a decline of 5.4 percent relative to the 9.3 million reported in PC 2014 (April 2014). According to FNS administrative data, 7.6 million individuals received WIC food benefits in April 2016.¹ The count of WIC participants based on FNS administrative reporting is lower than PC 2016 because administrative reporting is based on benefit delivery, and not all persons enrolled in WIC in April 2016 picked up their WIC benefits in April.

Demographics

Similar to 2014, just over 76 percent of participants were infants and children under 5 years of age. A majority of children who participated in WIC were under the age of 2.

Figure 1. Infant and Child Participation by Age

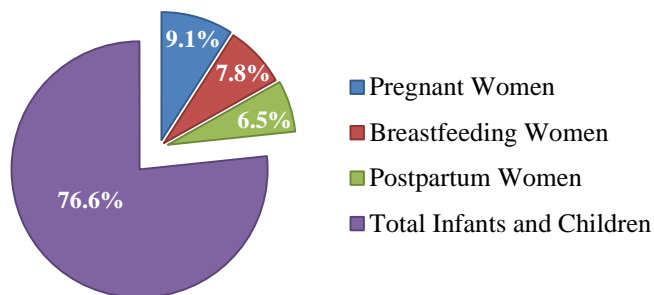


¹ USDA Food and Nutrition Service. Monthly/Annual Data, U.S. Summary. National Data Bank. Version 8.2 Public Use. Accessed January 2, 2018.

Of the children participating in 2016, the proportion of 4-year-olds (7.4 percent) is the lowest it has been since 1994 (6.4 percent).

The proportion of breastfeeding women exceeded that of nonbreastfeeding postpartum women, continuing the trend first seen in 2012. Among all WIC participants, 9.1 percent were pregnant, 7.8 percent were breastfeeding, and 6.5 percent were non-breastfeeding postpartum women.

Figure 2. Percent of WIC Participants by Category



WIC = Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children

The racial and ethnic characteristics of the WIC population in 2016 were similar to 2014. In 2016, 58.6 percent of WIC participants were White, 20.8 percent Black or African American, 10.3 percent American Indian or Alaskan Native,² and 4.4 percent Asian or Pacific Islander. About 5 percent of participants reported two or more races. Race was not reported by 0.2 percent of participants. Ethnicity is reported separately from race. In 2016, 41.8 percent of WIC participants were Hispanic or Latino.

Income

WIC benefits are provided for nutritionally at risk women, infants, and children with family incomes at

² Clients are asked to self-identify race and ethnic origin. If information is not reported, WIC clinic staff record race and ethnicity.

or below 185 percent of the Federal poverty guidelines. Some participants become income eligible for WIC through participation in other means-tested programs. Income was reported for 91.7 percent of WIC participants in PC 2016.

Nearly all (98 percent) of WIC participants reporting income had an income at or below 185 percent of poverty. Nearly three-quarters (72.4 percent) had incomes below poverty, a slight decrease from 74.2 percent in 2014. In the United States, 28.9 percent of the population is living at an income below 185 percent of poverty and 13.5 percent is living below poverty.

Table 1. Participant Income as a Percent of Federal Poverty Guidelines, WIC Versus U.S. Population

<i>Income as a Percent of Federal Poverty Guidelines</i>	<i>2016 WIC Participants</i>	<i>2015 U.S. Population*</i>
<i>Below 100%</i>	72.4%	13.5%
<i>100 to < 130%</i>	13.2%	5.4%
<i>130 to < 150%</i>	5.7%	3.6%
<i>150 to < 185%</i>	6.7%	6.4%
<i>185 to < 200%</i>	0.6%	2.8%
<i>200% or more</i>	1.4%	68.3%

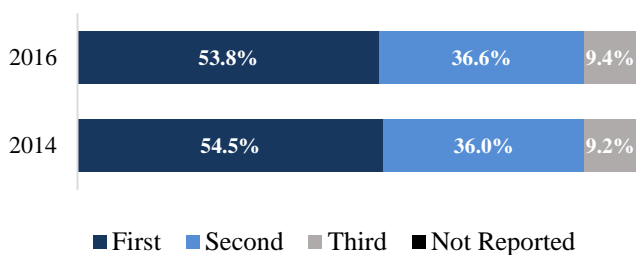
*Current Population Survey poverty thresholds reflect respondents' 2015 income (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics).

WIC = Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children

Enrollment

In 2016, over 53 percent of pregnant WIC participants enrolled in WIC during their first trimester, a slightly lower percentage than in 2014. Despite the downward trend beginning in 2014, the rate is higher than first trimester enrollment in 2010 (51.6 percent). In 2016, 36.6 percent of pregnant women enrolled during their second trimester; 9.4 percent enrolled in their third trimester.

Figure 3. Trimester of WIC Enrollment



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Nutritional Risks

Dietary (57.0 percent) and anthropometric (51.8 percent) risks were the most common broad categories of nutritional risk assigned at program enrollment. Children were most commonly assigned dietary risks (74.2 percent), followed by women (40.0 percent) and infants (34.5 percent). More than one-third (37.2 percent) of postpartum women had a hematocrit or hemoglobin level that indicated anemia based on FNS-issued criteria. More than two-fifths (45.3 percent) of all infants were assigned the broad anthropometric risk category, most commonly for low birth weight or high weight-for-length.

Breastfeeding

Breastfeeding initiation and duration continue to increase. Among the 83 WIC State agencies that reported breastfeeding data for 2016, 71.0 percent of all 6- to 13-month-old infants and children participating in WIC were breastfed or still breastfeeding compared with 69.8 percent in 2014. Sixty-eight WIC State agencies were able to provide breastfeeding duration data on at least 75 percent of infants and children. The median duration of breastfeeding was 13.0 weeks, with the proportion of infants and children breastfed for 6 months or more ranging from 24.4 percent to 31.2 percent, continuing the upward trend in breastfeeding among the WIC population.

For More Information

Thorn, B., Kline, N., Tadler, C., Budge, E., Wilcox-Cook, E., Michaels, J., Mendelson, M., Patlan, K. L., & Tran, V. (2018). WIC Participant and Program Characteristics 2016. Prepared by Insight and Abt Associates Under Contract No. AG-3198-B-15-0004. Alexandria, VA: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. Project Officer: Dr. Anthony Panzera. Available online at: www.fns.usda.gov/research-and-analysis

The PC 2016 report also includes State-level tabulations for breastfeeding, further health conditions and behaviors, and other variables. Prior WIC PC reports (beginning with 1996) can be downloaded at <https://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/women-infants-and-children-wic/reports-all>.