



Reply to
Attn. of: SF-124

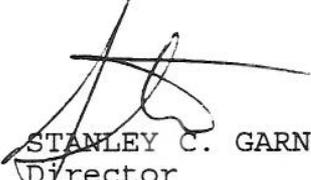
MAR 03 1995

Subject: WIC Final Policy Memorandum: #95-10
Sharing WIC Data and Information With State/local
Immunization Programs

To: Regional Directors
Supplemental Food Programs
All Regions

The purpose of this memorandum is to transmit the attached WIC Final Policy Memorandum #95-10. It is important to note that this policy memorandum is simply a clarification of general WIC Program confidentiality principals delineated in Section 246.26(d) of the Program Regulations and FCS Instruction 800-1 with special emphasis on provisions which affect immunization promotion activities. The same principals apply in similar situations with other programs (e.g., Maternal and Child Health Programs, Healthy Start, etc.). The policy memorandum assumes that States have copies of both the WIC Program regulations and FCS Instruction 800-1. If this is not the case, Regional offices should provide States with these resources.

The comments which Regional offices provided which were not included in this policy memorandum will be used to develop a future policy memorandum regarding the larger more comprehensive picture of data/information sharing and automated data processing systems in WIC. Thank you for providing very helpful comments on this policy memorandum. We hope this information is helpful in establishing strong and lasting relationships between State\local WIC and immunization program counterparts. If you have any questions, please contact J.P. Passino or Clara French of my staff on (703) 305-2730.


STANLEY C. GARNETT
Director
Supplemental Food Programs Division

Attachment



Reply to SF-124
Attn. of:

MAR 03 1995

Subject: WIC Final Policy Memorandum: #95-10
Sharing WIC Data and Information With State/local
Immunization Programs

To: Regional Directors
Supplemental Food Programs
All Regions

The purpose of this memorandum is threefold: (1) to explain why WIC data and information is relevant to State/local immunization programs; (2) to reiterate guidance on the various options available to States in sharing WIC data and information; and (3) to encourage the development of formal written agreements with State/local immunization programs when appropriate.

Extensive coordination with immunization programs is taking place in many WIC agencies. In some cases, agreements have been established at the State/local level to permit the sharing of WIC data and information, including immunization. In other situations, coordination has not yet reached this level. As coordination between WIC and immunization programs increases, the need for agreements between these two programs to permit the sharing of WIC data and information becomes crucial. Regardless of the current level of coordination, the following information may be helpful in pursuing such coordination efforts.

It is important to note that this policy memorandum is simply a clarification of the WIC Program confidentiality principals delineated in Section 246.26(d) of the Program Regulations and FCS Instruction 800-1 with special emphasis on provisions which affect immunization promotion activities. The same principals apply in similar situations with other programs (e.g., Maternal and Child Health programs, Healthy Start, etc.).

(1) IMPORTANCE OF SHARING WIC DATA AND INFORMATION

WIC participant data and information are available in hard copy or electronically, and are organized on an individual or aggregate basis. This information is of interest to State/local immunization programs for a number of reasons. The following are among the most common reasons:

- o to target immunization resources to WIC participant populations at greatest risk for under-immunization;

- o to measure the effects of particular immunization promotion interventions or activities on immunization rates in WIC participant populations;
- o to provide aggregate immunization data and information for general reporting purposes;
- o to assess the immunization status of WIC participant populations so that immunization outreach efforts can be accurately directed; and
- o to use the immunization status assessment to construct a registry of under-immunized populations for immunization program staff to track.

(2) OPTIONS FOR SHARING WIC APPLICANT/PARTICIPANT DATA

WIC State/local agencies have three options when sharing WIC data and information with State/local immunization programs (i.e., aggregate level data, written agreements, and information release forms). It is important to note that these options can be used separately or in combination. For example, a State/local agency may wish to share aggregate level data for reporting purposes with their immunization counterparts as well as provide individual level data for tracking purposes. Please note that Section 246.26(d) of the WIC Regulations and FCS Instruction 800-1 describe in more detail the options by which WIC data and information can be shared with other programs. FCS recommends that WIC agencies consult these references and legal counsel prior to developing any policy or agreements.

The following is a brief summary of the three aforementioned options, all of which are applicable to either hard copy or electronic systems:

- A. **Aggregate Form Data:** WIC applicant/participant data and information can be provided to a State/local immunization program in aggregate form (e.g., immunization coverage levels among certain age groups). The information must be collected by WIC staff and must exclude any information which would enable the receiving program to identify program participants or applicants. For example, name, address, social security or patient identification number, phone number, etc.
- B. **Written Agreements:** A written agreement can be established with a State/local immunization program to permit the sharing of WIC data and information. This agreement must include, at a minimum:
 - the program(s) with which WIC data and information will be shared;

The contents of this guidance document do not have the force and effect of law and are not meant to bind the public in any way. This document is intended only to provide clarity to the public regarding existing requirements under the law or agency policies.

- the specific data elements and information that will be shared from a WIC participant/applicant's file. It will be necessary for WIC agencies to determine the WIC data elements essential for immunization programs to access in order to conduct outreach for immunization services. For example, date of birth, names, phone number, address, immunizations received could be essential whereas income data would be irrelevant;
- a statement that indicates the State/local immunization program will use the WIC information only for the purposes of conducting outreach for immunization services to improve coverage rates; and,
- a statement that assures the State/local immunization program will not in turn disclose the WIC information to a third party, revealing WIC applicants/participants by name, identification number, or other identifier.

It is important to note that this type of agreement would only provide WIC data and information prospectively - that is, from the time the agreement is in place forward. At the time of application or reapplication, WIC State/local agencies must inform applicants and participants of their authority and intent to share specific WIC data and information with the immunization program, in accordance with Section 246.7(i)(9) of WIC regulations. Written agreements can only provide for or authorize the sharing of WIC data and information from the time the agreement is in place forward. Any WIC data or information collected by WIC prior to the agreement can only be shared if applicants or participants sign information release forms which authorize the sharing of that specified WIC data.

Written agreements are required even if both programs are administered by the same State agency or located under the same department, division, or bureau. Additionally, at the time of application or reapplication WIC State/local agencies must inform applicants and participants of their authority and intent to share specific WIC data and information with the immunization program. This includes adding a statement to that effect to the rights and responsibilities statement on the WIC certification form in accordance with Section 246.7(i) of the WIC Regulations.

- C. Information Release Forms: The State/local agency may request that WIC applicants and participants sign information release forms to authorize the WIC Program to share specific data and information with certain programs, as described and identified on the release form.

The contents of this guidance document do not have the force and effect of law and are not meant to bind the public in any way. This document is intended only to provide clarity to the public regarding existing requirements under the law or agency policies.

In this option, WIC data and information could be prospective and/or retrospective. That is, applicants and current or past participants could sign an information release form which would specify and grant such data and information disclosure.

(3) WRITTEN AGREEMENTS

To accommodate ongoing or future requests by State/local immunization programs for data and information collected by WIC, FCS suggests that WIC State/local agencies enter into written agreements with State/local immunization programs as described in this memorandum and in FCS Instruction 800-1. As mentioned previously in this memorandum, a written agreement is required even if both WIC and immunization programs are administered by the same State agency or located under the same department, division, or bureau. If a written agreement is implemented, FCS strongly recommends that State/local legal counsel be solicited for guidance, and that the agreement include the specific WIC data and information to be shared and with whom it will be shared.



STANLEY C. GARNETT
Director
Supplemental Food Programs Division

The contents of this guidance document do not have the force and effect of law and are not meant to bind the public in any way. This document is intended only to provide clarity to the public regarding existing requirements under the law or agency policies.