

NATIONAL- AND STATE-LEVEL ESTIMATES OF SPECIAL SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION PROGRAM FOR WOMEN, INFANTS, AND CHILDREN (WIC) ELIGIBLES AND PROGRAM REACH IN 2016 (SUMMARY)

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 2016, 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. 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 the 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 2015 estimates that the USDA published in February 2018.¹

In addition, for the first time in this series of reports, a replicate-weight method is used to calculate standard errors, and information on the military status of household members of infants and children eligible for WIC is presented.

Results: WIC-Eligible Population

FNS estimates that the average monthly WIC-eligible population totaled 13.93 million in 2016, a statistically significant drop from the estimate of 15.06 million in 2015.

WIC[^] Eligibles and Coverage by WIC Subgroup, CY* 2016				
WIC Participant Category (PC)	# Eligible (Millions)	% of All Eligibles	# Participating (Millions)	Coverage Rate
Infants	2.16	15.5%	1.85	85.9%
Total Children	8.91	63.9%	3.93	44.1%
Children Age 1 ^a	2.32	16.6%	1.37	59.2%
Children Age 2 ^a	2.22	16.0%	1.05	47.4%
Children Age 3 ^a	2.22	15.9%	0.93	42.1%
Children Age 4 ^a	2.15	15.4%	0.57	26.5%
Pregnant Women	1.41	10.1%	0.71	50.3%
Postpartum Women	1.46	10.5%	1.11	75.8%
Breastfeeding	0.95	6.8%	0.59	62.2%
Non-breastfeeding	0.51	3.7%	0.52	100% ^b
All Participants	13.93	100.0%	7.59	54.5%

^a These figures are derived from the total number of children participating in CY 2016 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 2016 report.

^b The estimated coverage rate exceeds 100 percent, likely a result of sampling variability in the CPS-ASEC survey data.

[^]Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children

*Calendar Year

Results: WIC Coverage Rates

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

- In the average month of 2016, WIC served an estimated 54.5 percent of those eligible for WIC, a statistically significant increase from the estimate for 2015 (52.7 percent).
- The estimated WIC coverage rate increased from 2015 to 2016 because the estimated number of individuals eligible for WIC fell (a 7-

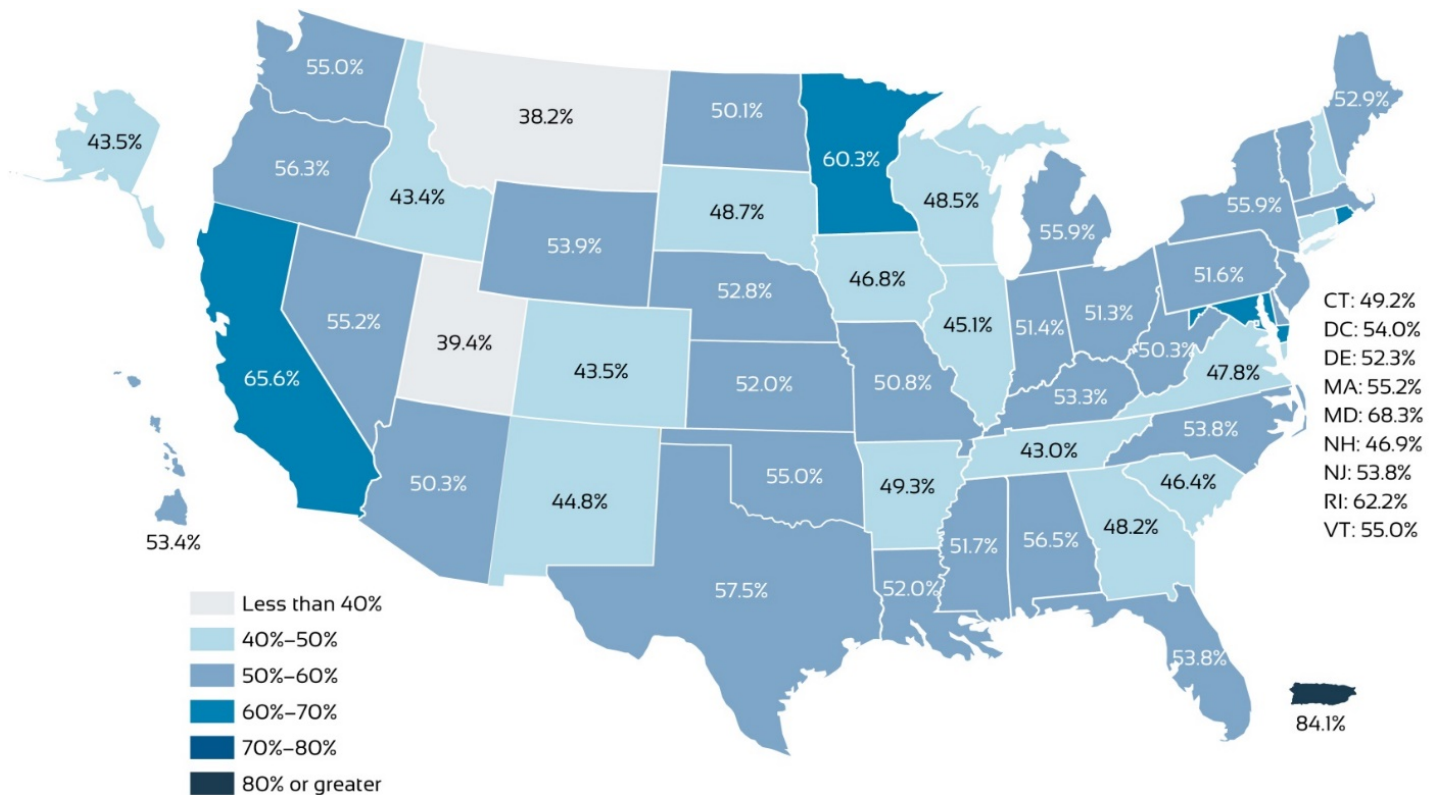
¹ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Policy Support. *National- and State-Level Estimates of Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Eligibles and Program Reach in 2015*, by Carole Trippe, Chrystine Tadler, Paul Johnson, Linda Giannarelli, and David Betson. Project Officer: Grant Lovellette. Alexandria, VA: February 2018.

percent decrease) by more than the number of individuals who participated in WIC (a 4-percent decrease).

- The decrease in the estimate of individuals eligible for WIC was mainly a result of a large decrease (14 percent) in the estimated number of infants eligible for WIC from 2015 to 2016 that occurred concurrently with a smaller decrease (4 percent) in the number of infants participating in WIC. However, this may be a single-year anomaly in the estimate of eligible infants due to small sample sizes in the underlying Census data. While the total estimate of infants in the Census data dropped by less than 1 percent, the estimate of infants eligible for WIC dropped by 14 percent. Another year of estimates is needed to confirm a declining trend in WIC eligibility among infants.

- Since the number of eligible women is estimated from the number of eligible infants, the drop in infant eligibility led to a drop in estimated eligibility among women. This drop led to an estimated coverage rate of over 100 percent for postpartum non-breastfeeding women, though the lower bound range of the 95-percent confidence interval surrounding the estimated coverage rate of postpartum non-breastfeeding women is below 100 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 2016



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 2016*, by Carole Trippe, Chrystine Tadler, Paul Johnson, Linda Giannarelli, and David Betson. Project Officer: Grant Lovellette. Alexandria, VA: February 2019.

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