

SPECIAL SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION PROGRAM FOR WOMEN, INFANTS, AND CHILDREN (WIC) PARTICIPANT AND PROGRAM CHARACTERISTICS 2018 (SUMMARY)

Background

WIC Participant and Program Characteristics 2018 (PC 2018) summarizes demographic, income, and health-related characteristics and behaviors of participants in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). PC 2018 is the most recent in a series of biennial reports generated since 1992. The PC 2018 report is based on WIC administrative records collected from all WIC State agencies in April 2018.

Findings

There were 7.8 million women, infants, and children enrolled in WIC in 2018. This is a decline of 11.4 percent relative to the 8.8 million reported in PC 2016.¹

Demographics

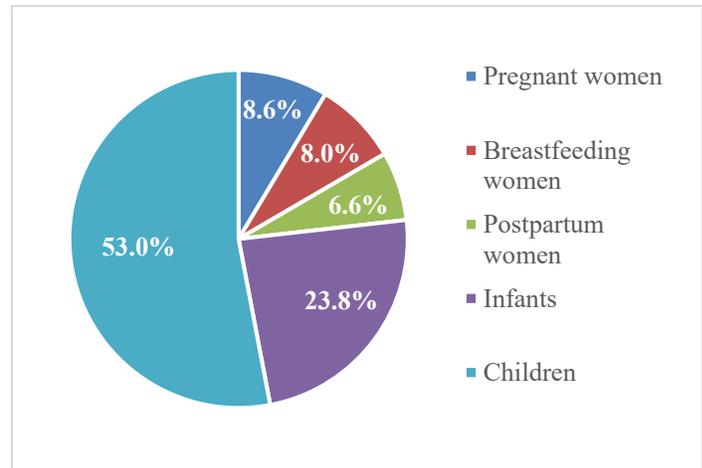
Similar to 2016, just over 76 percent of participants were infants and children under 5 years of age. The proportion of infants has decreased from 30.1 percent in 1992 to 23.8 percent in 2018, whereas the proportion of children has increased from 47.5 percent in 1992 to 53.0 percent in 2018. The percentage of infants and children in the total WIC population has remained steady since 2010. The majority of children (62.8 percent) who participated in WIC in 2018 were either 1 or 2 years old.

In 2018, the proportion of breastfeeding women exceeded that of non-breastfeeding postpartum women, continuing the trend first seen in 2012. Among all WIC participants, 8.6 percent were pregnant women, 8.0 percent were breastfeeding women, and 6.6 percent were non-breastfeeding postpartum women.

The racial and ethnic characteristics of the WIC population in 2018 were similar to that of 2016.² In 2018, 58.8 percent of WIC participants were White, 21.5 percent were African American, 8.9 percent were American Indian or Alaskan Native, 4.6 percent were Asian or Pacific Islander, and 6.1 percent of participants reported two or more races. Race was not reported by < 0.1 percent of participants. Ethnicity is reported separately

from race. In 2018, 41.3 percent of WIC participants were Hispanic or Latino.

Figure 1. WIC Participants by Category



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

Income

WIC benefits are provided for nutritionally at-risk women, infants, and children with family incomes at or below 185 percent of the Federal poverty guidelines. Participants may also become eligible for WIC through participation in other means-tested programs, such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), or Medicaid.

Nearly all (97.1 percent) of WIC participants had a household income at or below 185 percent of poverty.³

In 2018, the percentage of WIC participants with an income below 100 percent of poverty decreased from 72.4 percent in 2016 to 69.5 percent in 2018. In comparison, 12.3 percent of the U.S. population had an income below 100 percent of poverty in 2017, the latest year with available data.

¹ It should be noted that the 7.8 million individuals enrolled in WIC is higher than the 6.7 million individuals who received WIC food benefits in April 2018 (USDA Food and Nutrition Service. Monthly/Annual Data, U.S. Summary. National Data Bank. Version 8.2 Public Use. Accessed October 4, 2019) because not all persons enrolled picked up their WIC benefit in April of that year.

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

³ Income was reported for 93.6 percent of WIC participants.

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>2018 WIC Participants</i>	<i>2017 U.S. Population*</i>
<i>Below 100%</i>	69.5%	12.3%
<i>100 to < 130%</i>	14.3%	5.2%
<i>130 to < 150%</i>	6.1%	3.4%
<i>150 to < 185%</i>	7.2%	6.0%
<i>185 to < 200%</i>	0.8%	2.8%
<i>200% or more</i>	2.1%	70.3%

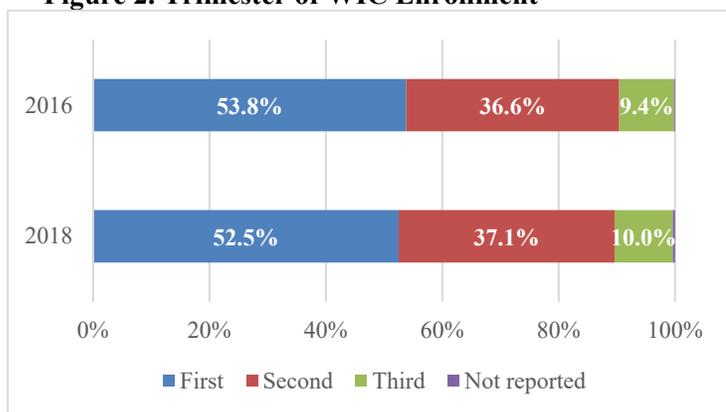
*Current Population Survey poverty thresholds reflect respondents' 2017 income (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics).

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Enrollment

In 2018, 52.5 percent of pregnant WIC participants enrolled in WIC during their first trimester, nearly the same as in 2016. In 2018, 37.1 percent of pregnant women enrolled during their second trimester; 10.0 percent enrolled in their third trimester.

Figure 2. Trimester of WIC Enrollment



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Most infants (90.3 percent) were initially certified for WIC benefits during their first 3 months of life. At the time of most recent certification, 36.9 percent of children were 1 year old, whereas 14.1 percent were 4 years old.

Nutritional Risks

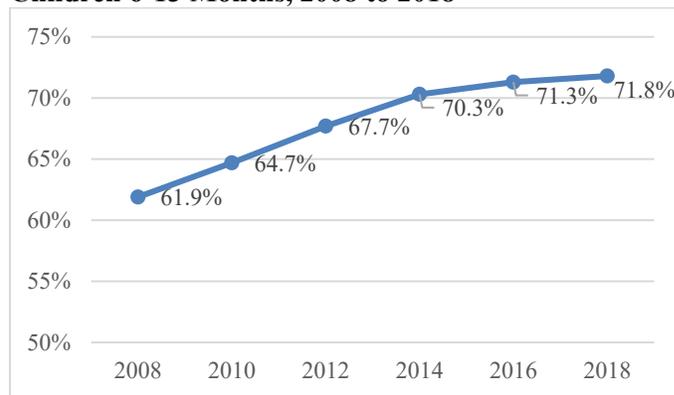
Dietary (56.4 percent) and anthropometric (52.1 percent) risks were the most common broad categories of nutritional risk assigned at program enrollment. Among women, anthropometric risks and clinical/health/medical risks were most commonly assigned (74.2 and 55.8 percent, respectively). Dietary risks were most commonly reported for children (73.7 percent). More than one-third (36.1 percent) of postpartum women had a hematocrit or hemoglobin level

that indicated anemia based on FNS-issued criteria. More than two-fifths (47.6 percent) of all infants were assigned the broad anthropometric risk category, most commonly for low birth weight or prematurity, high and low weight-for-length, and low length-for-age (short stature).

Breastfeeding

Breastfeeding initiation and duration continue to increase. Among the 83 WIC State agencies that reported breastfeeding data for 2018, nearly 72 percent of all 6- to 13-month-old infants and children participating in WIC were ever breastfed or still breastfeeding, an increase of about 10 percentage points since 2008.

Figure 3. Breastfeeding Initiation for Infants and Children 6-13 Months, 2008 to 2018



This year's report includes new information on breastfeeding duration. Retrospective data collected for infants between 9- and 13 months old indicated that about one-third (33.1 percent) had been breastfed when they were 3 months old. That percentage decreased to 23.2 percent by the time they were 6 months old. Data collected for 12-13 month olds indicated that 13.8 percent were breastfed at 12 months of age.

For More Information

Kline, N., Thorn, B., Bellows, D., Wroblewska, K., & Wilcox-Cook, E. (2019). WIC Participant and Program Characteristics 2018. Alexandria, VA: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. Project Officers: Anna Potter Clifford and Carolyn Luk. Available online at: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/research-analysis>

The PC 2018 report and appendixes include supplemental tables on WIC participation and additional measures, including distributions by region and state agency, select risk criteria, and other health conditions. Beginning with 1996, prior WIC PC reports can be downloaded at <https://www.fns.usda.gov/data-research>.