

# From Policy to Participants: WIC State and Local Agency Implementation Toolkit for the Cash Value Benefit

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# Table of Contents

**Introduction..... 1**

**WIC State Agency Guidance and Best Practices ..... 2**

**WIC Local Agency Guidance and Best Practices..... 5**

**Appendices..... 8**

    Appendix A. Example Outreach Resources..... 8

    Appendix B. Talking Points ..... 10

    Appendix C. Additional Resources..... 12

# Introduction

## Overview of the Cash Value Benefit Changes

As a public health safety net program, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) plays a crucial role in increasing access to nutrition services for those experiencing food insecurity. A key component of WIC is the food package, which includes the cash-value benefit (CVB) that participants can use to purchase fruits and vegetables. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the monthly CVB amounts were \$9 per child and \$11 for women. In March 2021, the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) allowed WIC State agencies to opt-in to a [temporary CVB increase](#) to \$35 per person per month. Though this was intended to be a temporary solution to mitigate the effects of the public health emergency, Congress approved a continuing resolution (CR) in [October 2021](#) that created mandatory monthly CVB amounts at \$24 per child, \$43 for pregnant and postpartum women, and \$47 for breastfeeding women. The CR was extended in [October 2022](#) to increase the amounts to \$25 per child, \$44 for pregnant and postpartum women, and \$49 for breastfeeding women, and was extended again in [October 2023](#) to set the current monthly amounts at \$26 per child, \$47 for pregnant and postpartum women, and \$52 for breastfeeding women. Figure 1 highlights the timeline of CVB changes for child participants as this was the focus of the WIC Fruit and Vegetable study.

## WIC Fruit and Vegetable Study

For each policy change, WIC State and local agency staff were responsible for implementation to ensure the appropriate amount was available to participants. To better understand *how* the policy changes were implemented and their impacts, the Gretchen Swanson Center for Nutrition (GSCN) conducted a mixed-methods study that included interviews with WIC State agency staff (n=23), local agency staff (n=61), and caregivers of child WIC participants (n=76), and WIC State administrative redemption datasets (n=27) across the United States.<sup>1</sup> From October 2022 to February 2023, a variety of WIC staff were interviewed across all seven Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) regions, including those from Indian Tribal Organizations (ITOs), U.S. territories, rural local agencies, and large urban local agencies. Staff were asked about their experiences with the CVB changes to gain insight on what it took to implement the new CVB amounts, including any challenges, helpful strategies, and assistance needed. The results of the study informed the development of this toolkit and served as the evidence base for the recommendations. For more information on the study, please visit [our website](#).

This toolkit is designed to provide actionable strategies and best practices for both State and local WIC staff to implement the CVB policy changes and offer insight on how to implement future food package policy changes. Though there are several [implementation strategies](#) that can be used, the strategies highlighted are those related to engaging with clients, adapting workflow and procedures to implement the new CVB, training staff, and developing relationships with partners. This information is based on the experiences of WIC staff that were directly involved in implementation of the CVB. The toolkit includes examples used by different types and sizes of agencies as applicable.

<sup>1</sup> The study was funded by Healthy Eating Research, a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation national program, as part of the 2021 Special Solicitation on COVID-19 and Socioeconomic Recovery Efforts.



Figure 1. Timeline of CVB Changes for Child WIC Participants

# WIC State Agency Guidance and Best Practices

WIC State agencies are responsible for relaying pertinent policy information to local agencies and providing guidance for implementation. Although this mainly entails big picture planning and direction, there are many opportunities for WIC State agencies to provide more concrete support. Below are recommendations based on key findings from State and local agencies to facilitate implementation of the CVB changes.

- **Update Management Information System (MIS) for automatic updates to food packages.** State and local agency staff discussed the advantages of having automatic issuance of policy-mandated CVB changes, instead of manual voiding and reissuance, to help streamline implementation and reduce the amount of time needed to make changes. WIC State agencies can work with MIS contractors, in-house experts, and other relevant stakeholders to develop scripts or update system capabilities to enable automatic CVB changes to food packages. Agencies who are a part of a State Agency Model (SAM) consortium can prioritize these group conversations to start planning the needed changes to the MIS. *Note: MIS upgrade projects take significant resources and staff from other WIC projects ([2023 WIC Technology Landscape Report](#)). Seeking modernization grant funding or partnering with other State agencies could help to initiate projects.*

“Those calls/webinars became monthly probably around fall of 2021. Our updates and discussion with our local agencies on those monthly calls has been a big vehicle for us to share information with them, allow them to ask questions, because we always leave time at the end for it to be interactive and take questions and comments. We also relied a lot on our weekly e-newsletter that we sent to local agencies. So, we would put guidance and information in there.”

– State agency director



- **Ensure local agency staff have adequate resources and support during CVB changes.** Both State and local agency staff emphasized the importance of providing various modes of support and resources to local agencies implementing CVB changes. Local agencies shared that a key challenge was not having an up-to-date list of active WIC participants when making manual updates, which created excess work for local agency staff. This was especially true for local agencies in offline Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) States, who needed to call participants to the clinic to load increased benefits into their cards. A key resource that State agencies can provide is an updated list of active WIC participants for each agency to help local agency staff identify what manual changes are needed and the extent of the changes. Similarly, some State agencies provided informational sheets and timelines to provide context and support CVB implementation plan development. State and local agency staff recommended connecting local agencies to support one another with making manual CVB changes. This was especially beneficial for local agencies with

higher caseloads or who were under resourced. These connections can help ensure changes to the CVB are implemented in a timely manner to ensure WIC participants have equitable access to the correct CVB amount.

**Figure 2. Communication Methods for WIC State and Local Agencies**

State and local agencies used a variety of communication methods throughout the CVB changes. Below are examples of the content of messaging and methods used by each agency to reach the intended audience.



- **Prepare local agency staff to clearly communicate CVB changes to participants.** Additionally, State agencies are encouraged to incorporate strategies that support local agencies interactions with WIC participants, including example communications for local agencies to use when communicating directly to WIC participants. For example, a few local agencies noted that they had difficulty with promotion due to limitations on what they could post on social media and delays in getting content approved by the WIC State agency. State agencies can create content for social media platforms and add messaging to State agency WIC apps to provide consistent information to staff and participants about the CVB changes and reduce burden to local staff.
- **Communicate frequently with vendors to help vendors prepare for the CVB changes.** Keeping lines of communication open with WIC-authorized vendors ensured transparency about the various changes to the CVB and minimized confusion among store staff and WIC participants. State agencies who frequently communicated with vendors about the CVB changes found that vendors were able to prepare their stores to facilitate more sales in fruits and vegetables. Common modes of communication included email blasts, newsletters, and calling vendors to inform them of a CVB change.
- **Leverage partnerships and networks to implement CVB changes.** Harnessing both internal and external partnerships during the CVB policy changes can provide critical support for implementation. Internally, State agencies collaborated with MIS partners to streamline processes such as testing and automatic issuance of CVB amounts. Agencies leveraged external networks through constructive interactions with neighboring states, consortiums, or ITOs operating within similar regions. This facilitated the exchange of valuable resources and information, promoting a smoother transition during the CVB policy changes. The National WIC Association (NWA) was acknowledged by State agency staff numerous times for providing invaluable support, particularly for their roles in communicating the CVB changes and guiding them through the evolving political landscape.

- **Use various communication channels to update local agencies on changes to the CVB.** Communicating frequently with local agency staff helped ensure the correct CVB amount was being issued to WIC participants. Utilizing various modes of communication, such as weekly emails, webinars, and newsletters, helped ensure local agencies were equipped with the most accurate information to update the CVB. To provide more one-to-one support, some State agencies made themselves available via phone and email to answer any questions or troubleshoot any challenges with issuing benefits.

[The National WIC Association] offered opportunities for us as States to kind of share approaches with each other, ask questions of each other. We have WIC [State] director calls every other Friday and we have since the pandemic started and that's been a huge help."

– State agency director

- **Promote equity in CVB redemptions.** Increased CVB amounts can improve the nutrition security of participants. Results from our study showed non-Hispanic Black families had lower redemption rates than other groups (e.g., non-Hispanic White, Hispanic, non-Hispanic Asian, and non-Hispanic other races) when CVB amounts increased to \$35/child/month. Monitoring redemption rates by race and ethnicity can help inform equity-promoting, culturally relevant communication and education strategies to increase redemption among vulnerable groups. Some ideas may include supporting local agencies serving groups with lower CVB redemption by providing additional resources and educational materials that have been culturally tailored and in the preferred languages of the participants.



# WIC Local Agency Guidance and Best Practices

WIC local agencies are the front-line of CVB implementation and communication with WIC participants and should approach the CVB implementation process with multiple lenses. Whether the CVB changes are made manually or automatically updated in MIS, the strategies below can facilitate timely and efficient implementation.

- **Develop an implementation plan.** To reduce some challenges of starting a new procedure, most local agency staff noted that having a clear plan on how to implement the CVB helped ensure the process was smooth, despite the lack of clarity on timing of the policy changes. Revisions to the plan should be made as needed, especially as staff roles shift and new CVB information arises. A comprehensive plan could include:
  - **Guidance to edit the food packages.** In some instances, State agencies would provide step-by-step instructions on how to update the CVB amount in the MIS to local agencies. Alternatively, staff would hold trainings and create their own resources to outline the procedure. A protocol to review food packages for missed or incorrect CVB amounts should be included, as this was a frequently reported issue with implementation.
  - **Clear roles and responsibilities for staff.** Most local agencies created designated roles for staff in CVB implementation, with some staff focusing on updating the food packages, while others primarily communicated with participants about the CVB. Roles may look different depending on the size of the agency and staff capacity; however, it is critical that all staff are aware of their part in implementation.
  - **Scheduled training and frequent updates.** The uncertainty of the CVB policy changes required staff to meet regularly and communicate often to stay updated. Weekly staff meetings to provide training were common during the first CVB change, and as time went on, this became bi-weekly to monthly meetings with more frequent email updates.

- **Schedule adjustments to provide dedicated staff time.** Setting aside time to make manual updates to food packages was a key factor in successful implementation for many local agencies. Various approaches were taken for this, with some agencies opting to adjust the clinic schedule to space out appointments or pay staff overtime to work on a weekend. Although the time needed to make changes depended on how far in advance staff knew about the policy change, providing dedicated time was helpful for efficient implementation. When manual updates cannot be avoided, allocating dedicated time to make the updates will be key to complete the task.

“Yeah, the first bump was a little bit more of a training, how it would appear on their benefits, what’s the timing on the additional amount, what kind of communication are we going to provide to folks? But then after the first bump or the first extension, it became more of communication via email.”

– Local agency director

- **Promote the CVB and clearly communicate changes to participants.** Unawareness of or confusion with the higher CVB amount among participants was a common barrier to redemption. Marketing and promotion efforts differed by State agencies, with some State agencies sending notifications through the WICShopper app or by mass text messaging to participants, while other agencies posted the changes on their state WIC website. This contributed to differences in the information participants received, and local agencies often supported both promotion of the changes and updating food packages to ensure participants were aware of and could redeem the higher CVB. In addition to the recommendations below, local agencies are encouraged to collaborate with their State agency to provide consistent, equitable messaging throughout the changes.



- **Use a variety of communication methods that work best for participants.** Though promotion of the CVB was mostly done through appointments, local agencies used other methods to reach participants such as Facebook, emails, flyers and handouts, and mass text messaging. For local agencies that have access to mass text messaging, consider sending participants targeted reminder messages about their benefits throughout the month to increase the likelihood of full redemption. In areas where internet access is variable, phone calls and mailed resources were more common while agencies in urban areas used more digital communication methods. Some agencies even created specialized resources to encourage redemption (e.g., recipe cards based on the season, storing and preserving produce). Other unique communication methods included promotion in the local newspaper, radio broadcasts, and flyers posted in local grocery stores. Translating resources into multiple languages should be considered depending on the participant population. Regardless of the method(s) chosen, it should be easily usable by and meet the preferences of the WIC participants served.
- **Communicate with transparency.** The frequent policy changes of the CVB often led to confusion and feelings of uncertainty among WIC

participants that local agency staff had to manage. Sharing updates and brief information on the legislative process with participants is helpful to manage expectations and ease some of these feelings, especially since this was a new process for everyone involved. Emphasizing that decisions are made at a federal level and explaining how the clinic is navigating the uncertainty also helps to build trust between staff and participants.

- **Communicate with vendors regularly to keep them updated on CVB changes.** In addition to the WIC State agencies, local agencies can stay connected with vendors in their area to facilitate use of the CVB – helping ensure vendors are appropriately stocked and are in compliance with approved WIC foods to handle the increase in fruit and vegetable purchases. Participants would often tell local agency staff about any challenges they faced at the store such as low stock, WIC-eligible items not scanning correctly, or inadequate produce options. Engaging the Local Agency Retail Store Coordinator to troubleshoot these issues directly with vendors can help reduce these barriers and cultivate a working relationship.

### Examples of Tailoring Communication Methods to WIC Participants

Tribal WIC agencies often leaned into their community to promote the CVB and incorporated this messaging into local events. For example, during a community gardening event, **WIC staff set up a booth and passed out flyers** to ensure participants knew about the new, higher CVB. Similarly, another tribal agency connected with their tribal leader to **broadcast a message about the CVB on their local radio station.**

In more rural areas, printed materials were often sent to participants instead of promotion on social media. One local agency used their **local newspaper** to increase awareness of the CVB, while another agency **posted flyers at their local grocery store.**





- **Leverage partnerships and networks to implement CVB changes.** Several local agencies cited relationships and utilizing their network as a support for CVB implementation. Examples included advocacy from NWA to ensure participants received the higher CVB amount, collaborating with other local agencies to make manual food package changes and share implementation strategies, and partnering with local organizations to gain access to beneficial resources. For example, some rural and tribal local agencies connected with community partners for promotion of the CVB, like using the local radio station and outreach events at local stores.



# Appendices

## Appendix A. Example Outreach Resources

The examples created by GSCN below can be tailored for use by both State and local agencies to promote the CVB to WIC participants. Although these resources are primarily for digital methods of communication, the language can be useful when creating printed materials as well. WIC agencies interested in using these materials are encouraged to review State policies around messaging to WIC participants prior to sharing any resources.



### Social Media and Graphics

#### Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn

With the most recent policy change, the WIC cash value benefit, or fruit and veggie money, is now **[insert dollar amounts]**. Head to the grocery store to put more produce on your plate! Pick up some **[fresh, frozen, canned, and/or dried]** fruits and vegetables on your next shopping trip.

Questions? Visit your WIC agency's website for more details!

#### Twitter (X)

The #WIC cash value benefit, or fruit and veggie money, is now **[insert dollar amounts]**. Use this to buy **[fresh, frozen, canned, and/or dried]** fruits and veggies at the grocery store!

Questions? Visit your WIC agency's website for more details!

#### Graphics

Click each image below to download an editable version of the graphic!

##### Best for digital platforms and materials



##### Best for printed materials

#### WIC Participants



Stock up with the fruit and veggie money!



### Email, Newsletter, and Listserv

**Subject:** Update to your WIC Benefits

Due to the most recent policy change, the WIC fruit and veggie money is now **[insert dollar amounts]**. Use this benefit to add more color to your snacks and meals! Explore new types of fruits and veggies to get your family excited about healthy eating. Need some inspiration? Click the links for [recipes](#), [meal ideas](#), and [produce storage tips](#).

For more information, go to **[insert State agency website]**. If you have questions about your benefits, reach out to your local WIC agency.



### Text or Voice Messages

**1** – Take advantage of your family’s WIC fruit and veggie money! You now have **[insert dollar amounts]** to use at the store each month.

**2** – Apples and oranges and grapes, oh my! Use your WIC fruit and veggie money to add some color to your plate.



### Newspaper Ad

**Title:** Update to the WIC Fruit and Veggie Money!

Have you heard about the new fruit and veggie money for WIC?! You now have **[insert dollar amounts]** to spend on **[fresh, frozen, canned, and/or dried]** fruits and vegetables. This is the perfect time to try new types of fruits and veggies with your children and experiment with snacks and meals. Everyone will love some extra color on their plate. Head to your local grocery store to take advantage of the new amounts!

Questions? Looking for more recipe inspiration? Contact your local WIC agency at **[insert contact information]**.

## Appendix B. Talking Points

The prompts below can be used as guidance for starting the conversation with the WIC community about the CVB changes.



### Communicating with Local Agencies

- During appointments, it is important to take time to remind WIC participants they have more money to spend on fruits and vegetables when they grocery shop. Always be sure to emphasize the increase could be temporary though to encourage spending the CVB each month.
- As a result of the increase to the CVB, research found WIC participants have been spending more dollars on fruits and vegetables. Please keep up the great work of informing and encouraging your WIC participants to use their CVB money!
- Since WIC participants have more money to spend on fruits and vegetables, it is important to highlight various ways WIC participants can purchase and store fruits and vegetables for later. For example, if a participant is concerned that they will lose their remaining CVB dollars at the end of the month, encourage them to explore frozen and canned options (if applicable in your State) or [freeze fresh produce for later use](#).



### Communicating with WIC Participants

- The fruit and veggie money has increased for this month. You have **[dollar amount]** to spend on your favorite fruits and vegetables or explore new ones.
- Here are some [recipes](#) you can use to incorporate more fruits and/or vegetables into your diet.
- Encourage children to pick out a new fruit or vegetable to try. Sometimes it takes offering the new food several times before the child will eat it.
- If you are worried about not being able to use all the fruit and veggie money on fresh produce, you can freeze fruits and vegetables, or pre-frozen fruit or vegetables are a great source of nutrients. If you have an infant, [making your own baby food](#) is another great way to use your fruit and veggie money.
- Fruit and vegetables that are considered [in season](#) tend to be less expensive, meaning your dollar can go a lot further when you shop for foods.



## Communicating with Vendors

- As a result of the WIC CVB changes, WIC participants now have more dollars in their hands to spend on fruits and vegetables, and research has shown they are using this money. To ensure participants are able to shop at your store, it is important to keep a variety of **[fresh, frozen, canned, and/or dried]** fruits and vegetables in stock and regularly update the UPC codes so they align with the WIC Approved Product List.
- WIC participants may have questions in store on what items they can purchase with their increased CVB. Reviewing the WIC Approved Product List is a great refresher on what WIC participants can purchase.
- Highlighting fruits and vegetables that are in season or on sale is one way to help WIC participants make the dollar amount go further to purchase even more fruits and vegetables.
- As a reminder, if you encounter any questions on WIC-eligible items, processing the CVB, or anything else, please reach out to your local WIC agency.



## Communicating with External Partners

- The WIC CVB has increased, meaning participants can spend more money on fruits and vegetables. Please share our outreach materials to help inform participants about this change.

## Appendix C. Additional Resources

### CVB Policy Information

- USDA FNS 2024 WIC Policy Memorandum: [Fiscal Year 2024 Cash-Value Voucher/Benefit Amounts](#)

### Articles on the Impact of CVB Implementation

#### Research and Policy Briefs

- Baughman T, Washington D, Patteson B, Hernandez J. Strengthening our nation one bite at a time: Benefits of a permanent Cash Value Benefit (CVB) increase for women, infants and children; 2022. <https://mchnutritiontrainees.files.wordpress.com/2022/06/2022-permanent-increase.pdf>
- Halverson MM, Karpyn A. WIC participants' perceptions of the Cash-Value Benefit increase during the COVID-19 pandemic. WIC Hub. <https://media.nwica.org/wiccvbresearchbrief.pdf>
- Duffy EW, Vest DA, Davis CR, Hall MG, De Marco M, Ng SW, Taillie LS. The Cash Value Benefit increase: A key step toward healthier WIC Families. Global Food Research Program, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Gillings School of Global Public Health; June 2022. <https://media.nwica.org/cvb-brief-for-nwa-hub.pdf>

#### Reports and Journal Articles

- Ritchie L, Lee D, Felix C, Sallack L, Chauvenet C, Machel G, Whaley SE. Multi-State WIC Participant Survey: Cash Value Benefit increase during COVID. The National WIC Association and Nutrition Policy Institute, University of California Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources; 2022. <https://media.nwica.org/nwa-multi-state-cvb-report-march-2022.pdf>
- Martinez CE, Ritchie LD, Lee DL, Tsai MM, Anderson CE, Whaley SE. California WIC participants report favorable impacts of the COVID-related increase to the WIC Cash Value Benefit. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. 2022;19(17):10604. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph191710604>
- Tsai M, Au L, Ritchie L, Anderson C, Martinez C, Whaley S. Larger WIC Cash Value Benefit for vegetables and fruit is associated with lower food insecurity and improved participant satisfaction in WIC families with children. *Current Developments in Nutrition*. 2022;6:231. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cdn/nzac048.045>
- Anderson CE, Au LE, Yopez CE, Ritchie LD, Tsai MM, Whaley SE. Increased WIC Cash Value Benefit is associated with greater amount and diversity of redeemed fruits and vegetables among participating households. *Current Developments in Nutrition*. 2023;7(9):101986. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cdnut.2023.101986>

### Other Useful Resources

- CVB Increase Testimonial Toolkit. National WIC Association. WIC Research, Policy and Practice Hub. June 23, 2021. Accessed September 18, 2023. <https://thewichub.org/cvb-increase-testimonial-toolkit/>
- National WIC Association. Building Support for WIC in Your Community: Engaging Partners and Forging Coalitions. <https://media.nwica.org/2018-wic-building-support-for-wic-in-your-community.pdf>. Published 2018. Accessed September 18, 2023.
- What Do I Do With the CVB (Fruits and Vegetables)? WIC Works Resource System. Accessed September 18, 2023. <https://wicworks.fns.usda.gov/resources/what-do-i-do-cvb-fruits-and-vegetables>