



# WIC Improves Child Health Outcomes

## *Cuts to WIC = Cuts to Kids*

Children need good nutrition for their cognitive, physical, and emotional growth.

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants & Children – known as WIC – is a federally-funded, discretionary program that provides supplemental foods, health care referrals, and nutrition education for low-income pregnant, and breastfeeding, and non-breastfeeding postpartum women, as well as infants and children up to age five who are found to be at nutritional risk.<sup>1</sup> This program gives kids the start they need for healthy growth and a healthy life.

WIC serves 53% of all infants and 25% of all pregnant women in the United States.<sup>2</sup> This figure includes over 9 million mothers and young children each month. The average length of participation in WIC is thirteen months.

Congress and the President are considering ways to cut the federal budget. If a plan to balance the budget is not reached by the end of 2012, automatic across-the-board cuts, called sequestration, will occur.

All discretionary programs, whose funding can change with each budget, like WIC, are on the table for these cuts and would experience an 8.2% cut to funding. As a result, 735,000 participants would be cut from the WIC program in 2013.<sup>3</sup> This cut would have devastating health effects for the nation's most vulnerable infants and toddlers.

In 1974, WIC was created as the government's response to the realization that hunger and poverty were widespread, and that inadequate nutrition poses real dangers to pregnant women, new mothers, infants and children.<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, these same groups are still at risk – they are among the most vulnerable in our society. Today, 17.9 million households are food insecure and almost a quarter -- 24.5% -- of children under 6 are food insecure.<sup>5</sup>

### > WIC Improves the Health of Pregnant Women, Infants and Young Children

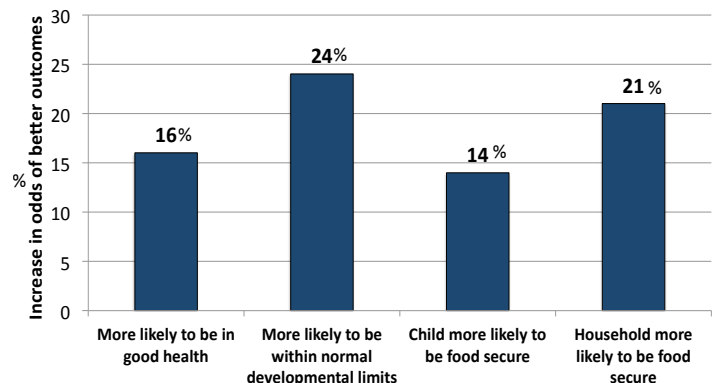
Mothers and babies who participate in WIC have better nutrition as compared to eligible families who do not participate. Participation results in healthier pregnancies, healthier births, and healthier young children. WIC participants have reduced rates of anemia, and increased rates of healthy weight and overall excellent health, as compared to those not receiving WIC.<sup>6</sup>



*"I love WIC because it supports me by helping me nurse my baby."*

*-- Monique, Philadelphia*

### WIC Improves Child Health and Development Outcomes



Source: Children's HealthWatch Data, 2008

<sup>1</sup> USDA, FNS, Women, Infants, and Children, <http://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/>

<sup>2</sup> National WIC Association, WIC: Solid Returns on Investment While Reducing the Deficit,

<sup>2</sup> National WIC Association, WIC: Solid Returns on Investment While Reducing the Deficit, <http://www.nwica.org/?q=advocacy/positionpapers>.

<sup>3</sup> National WIC Association, WIC Funding: What Does Sequestration Mean for WIC's Future?, [http://www.paramountcommunication.com/nwica/WIC\\_Funding\\_&\\_Sequestration2.pdf](http://www.paramountcommunication.com/nwica/WIC_Funding_&_Sequestration2.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> FRAC, WIC (Women, Infants, and Children), <http://frac.org/federal-foodnutrition-programs/wic/>

<sup>5</sup> USDA, Household Food Security in the United States in 2011, Table S-3 <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/ap-administrative-publication/ap-058.aspx>

<sup>6</sup> Black, M, et al., WIC Participation and Attenuation of Stress-Related Child Health Risks of Household Food Insecurity and Caregiver Depression.

Research from Children's HealthWatch<sup>7</sup> shows that<sup>8</sup>:

- Children under the age of three who receive WIC are more likely to be in good health than children who are eligible, but do not receive WIC due to difficulties accessing the program.
- WIC is most effective among children younger than 12 months. It is during this period, if the nutritional building blocks are provided, that a young child's brain more than doubles in size.
- WIC decreases the risk of developmental delays in young children. By reducing the risk of developmental delay, WIC helps children be ready to learn when they enter school.

### > WIC Saves Money and Supports Healthy Lifestyles for Mothers and Children

In addition to the health benefits of WIC, there are also economic benefits over the long and short term. Every \$1.00 spent on WIC results in savings of up to \$4.21 as WIC reduces the risk of preterm birth by 25% and low birth weight for babies by 44%.<sup>9</sup>

The average first year medical costs for a baby born without complications are \$4,551 compared to the average first year medical costs for a preterm or low birth weight baby of \$40,003.

Participation in WIC also lessens stressors for families that can lead to maternal depression and child health risks.<sup>10</sup> When families lack adequate resources to meet their basic needs, they are forced to make difficult decisions, like limiting their food or choosing unhealthy food, which can result in physical and emotional distress. These choices can lead parents to experience depressive symptoms that interfere with caregiving, which, in turn, affect a child's well-being.

In addition, by providing access to nutritious food and counseling through WIC, mothers can support healthy weight gain among young children. Children who participate in WIC begin life with a nutrient-rich diet and are on a path to a healthier lifestyle.

### Conclusion: WIC Needs to be Protected

Any cuts to the WIC Program will mean that children are not receiving the adequate nutrition they need at a critical time. A child's body and brain develop so quickly, and any deprivation will have lasting, life-long consequences on their physical, mental, and social development. As members of Congress consider making cuts to the WIC program, please join us in urging Congress that WIC is crucial to our children's and our economy's future.

*This policy brief was prepared by Kate Scully, JD, Policy Analyst for the Center for Hunger-Free Communities, Amanda Breen, PhD, Research Coordinator for Children's HealthWatch Philadelphia, Stephanie Ettinger de Cuba, MPH, Research and Policy Director for Children's HealthWatch and Mariana Chilton, PhD, MPH, Co-Principal Investigator for Children's HealthWatch.*



*"I ate really healthy when I was pregnant with her, with the help of WIC. I think there was a difference in her health because of the nutrition that I had gotten with her. Receiving WIC for the first year of her life helped her to be a healthy baby who has a good immune system and great developmental skills."*

*- Photo and Voice by Margaret M.,  
Baltimore*

<sup>7</sup> Children's HealthWatch monitors the impact of economic conditions and public policies on the health and well-being of very young children. For more than a decade, they have produced original, timely research and analysis linking nutrition, housing, energy and other policy issues to children's health and development.

<sup>8</sup> Children's HealthWatch, WIC Improves Child Health and School Readiness, [http://www.centerforhungerfreecommunities.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/wic\\_brief\\_jan10\\_0.pdf](http://www.centerforhungerfreecommunities.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/wic_brief_jan10_0.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> National WIC Association, WIC: Solid Returns on Investment While Reducing the Deficit, <http://www.nwica.org/?q=advocacy/positionpapers>.

<sup>10</sup> Black, M, et al., WIC Participation and Attenuation of Stress-Related Child Health Risks of Household Food Insecurity and Caregiver Depression.