

WIC TO 6: EXPANDING NUTRITIONAL SUPPORT TO REDUCE FOOD INSECURITY

The Food & Communities Study, a large mixed-methods study examining the relationship between WIC, food security, and healthy growth among low-income children in Philadelphia, used focus groups to explore caregivers' thoughts about and strategies for using their WIC benefits.

What is WIC?

WIC is the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children. WIC provides eligible, low-income families, including pregnant or breastfeeding women and children under age five, access to specified, healthy foods. WIC also offers nutritional education and support.

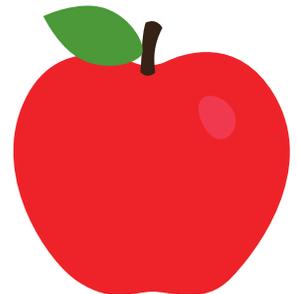
Most children in the U.S. don't start Kindergarten until after the age of...

5½

Why does WIC end at 5?

Currently, only children under the age of 5 are eligible for WIC. This cutoff is based on the assumption that children will begin kindergarten at age 5, and become eligible for free or reduced-price school meals. **In reality, school start ages vary by state and the development of an individual child.**

This leaves a majority of children on WIC without nutritional support from ages 5 to 5.5.



Children who age out of WIC and are not yet enrolled in school experience increased food insecurity.

Lack of stable access to food means:

- A large group of children are less likely to have their nutritional needs met during a critical developmental period.
- Low-income children who aren't ready to start kindergarten may be pushed into starting anyway to maintain their access to food.

WHAT ARE CAREGIVERS SAYING?

When caregivers in the Food & Communities study discussed what they would change about WIC, several of them mentioned that they wish it didn't end at age 5. Caregivers expressed that their children started eating more around 5 years old, making it harder to feed them without support from WIC.

"For WIC, why does it stop [at] just five? I think that needs to improve. Women need help with their kids and when they're six, seven, eight, and as their life goes on so they reach adulthood. So that's something that should be improved."

"But access to food and quality food should not be an issue... in the country that claims to be the greatest. Yeah. So particularly in Philadelphia, for us, if you're giving us a benefit, make it a benefit."

"So after five, my children, the hunger really picks up. So WIC should be extended until after five."

If WIC eligibility was extended to 6 years old, in Philadelphia:

10,000



five-year-olds would maintain WIC eligibility each year. Including over...

2,000



children not yet enrolled in school, and therefore not receiving subsidized school meals.

Want to learn more or get involved?

Check out these groups working to change WIC policy:

- **National WIC Association:** NWA provides education, guidance, and support to WIC staff; and drives innovation and advocacy to strengthen WIC and work toward a nation of healthier families.
- **Thriving PA:** Thriving PA is a non-partisan, statewide advocacy campaign that seeks to improve the quality of and increase equitable access to a coordinated system of health supports, including WIC.



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