

## January 25, 2021, Advisory Group Meeting

### Notes

9:30-9:50

Welcome & Round Robin Introductions

#### Introductions

##### Welcome New Members:

**Northwest Region:** Stephanie Olson, Polk

**South Central Region:** Teresa Cooling, Watonwan

**New Chair** – will nominate/discuss today (2-year term) ***NEW CHAIR IS Nikki Bennett from St Louis County.***

Kathy Duffy is representing Ramsey/Hennepin as Hennepin waits to replace Karen Mayer

#### ADVISORY GROUP (AG) MEMBERS PARTICIPATING:

Jessica Allred (Winona Co.); Nikki Bennett (St. Louis Co.); Maggie Domski (Washington Co.); Kathy Duffy (St. Paul/Ramsey Co.) for Hennepin; Katlyn Hubbard (Becker Co.); Amber Koski (Pine Co.); Miriam Lindblad (Countryside); Marlee Morrison (Hubbard Co.); Wendy O'Leary (Olmsted Co.); Stephanie Olson (Polk Co.); Arlin Penner (Nicollet Co.); Teresa Cooling (Watonwan); Wendy Schoon (Otter Tail Co.); Amber Converse (Dodge Co.) and Lenora Yellow Bird (White Earth Reservation).

**AG MEMBERS ABSENT:** Amy Caron (Dodge/Steele CHB); Kris Klopp (Mille Lacs Co.)

#### MDH STAFF IN ATTENDANCE:

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Kate Franken, WIC Director; Tina Breitenbach, Breastfeeding, Training, & Communications Unit Supervisor; Rebecca Gruenes, Nutrition & Clinic Services Unit Supervisor; Tami Matti, MIS & Data Unit Supervisor; Jessie Zins, Food Delivery Unit Supervisor, and Tammie Edmundson, Financial Analyst

9:50-9:55

State Staff Updates

Food Delivery Unit positions – Jessie is working w/HR on final steps for the Program Internal Auditor Specialist position and then will be hiring for the WIC Vendor Training and Support Manager vacancy.

MIS & Data position – announcement in this week's WU. Emily Gomez will transition to MIS Business Analyst and Software Lead from the WIC Vendor Training and Support Manager position.

MOM/Civil Rights position – position was reclassified so it must go through an HR audit. It is being reviewed this week.

Melissa Nelson – new South Central State WIC Consultant started in November.

Rosie Pierce-Martin, our new Breastfeeding Coordinator will start a slow return to work in mid-February.

Communications Coordinator – we were ready to hire last February but then COVID hit resulting in a hiring freeze. We hope to repost this position in the near future.

Some MDH staff are still reassigned to COVID work. A portion of those reassigned are returning to their WIC roles since cases have been trending down. If that changes, those staff could be recalled into their reassignment if needed.

### **9:55-10:10**

Update on where at w/National State of Emergency, beyond next deadline

National Public Health Emergency extended until mid-April & WIC waivers extended until 30 days past emergency declaration so May 20<sup>th</sup>. Likely it will be extended again. A question was directed to Kate, “why do you feel it will be extended?” Kate shared since the pandemic is still active and vaccines are not widespread yet, NWA feels it could potentially be extended through the year.

With new Congress, the hope is that changes to WIC policy will be looked at again in the Child Nutrition Authorization. The window of time is critical in 2021 since January 2022 the Farm Bill will come up and if not resolved before that comes up, WIC policies will have to wait until after the Farm Bill. We understand that the Farm Bill may take priority with the committees once that discussion begins.

WIC Food Package revisions. In 2017 NASEM provided recommendations for the WIC food package. Revisions generally occur every 10 years. Currently waiting for USDA to make proposed changes.

Funding for FFY 21 was resolved just before Christmas.

### **10:10-10:25**

Regional Meeting Highlights

**Vendor Training** - Emily Gomez attended each regional meeting to discuss shopping transaction questions and troubleshooting resources.

Feedback from agencies was gathered at the meetings and documents were enhanced after discussions. A new Vendor Resources section was added to the [Local Agency section on the webpage](#) to keep materials in a central location.

**COVID – 19 & LA Sharing** - Agencies share staff are being pulled in multiple directions for WIC and in COVID response work. Kate previously shared a special thank you and encouragement in your work video to commend LA staff for all of their efforts during the pandemic. LAs are learning to use new resources and ways to do their work and connect remotely. Some agencies offer education components

at their meetings to stay connected and many indicate staff are allowed to utilize webinar learning individually.

**Benefit Utilization Data** - Presented [statewide data](#) at meetings. Feedback was received that it would be helpful to have individual agency data and information comparing households (HH) newly participating in WIC to HH participating prior to March 2020. After the meetings, information on WIC LA level data is now available in Infoview and additional slides have been added comparing new HHs to those participating prior to March.

**WIChealth.org Quick Connect and Coffective** – reviewed information in recent WUs during meetings. Watch for follow up memos with additional information coming soon.

**10:25-10:40**

**AG Chair**

**AG Chair Selection:** AG chair is selected by AG members from among current members. The term begins in January and is for two years. April 2021 – December 2022.

**Role:**

- Works with the WIC Director to create meeting agenda, and then chairs/facilitates the meetings.
- When serving as Chair, individual does not represent any single constituent group.
- Represents MN local agencies on the Midwest Region Local Agency Section of NWA. As such, the Chair participates in quarterly NWA regional conference calls and may attend the annual NWA conference (with the state WIC program covering travel expenses).

A point was made that when we had in-person meetings it was easier during breaks to talk to one another and ask or suggest if there is interest in being the chair or being nominated. It is harder in a virtual setting. The chair is usually selected in October which gives the current chair an opportunity to talk about the role with candidates. Tina suggested AG members think about the opportunity and contact her if interested in this role. If we have multiple people interested, we will vote via email.

**UPDATE:** New Chair is Nikki Bennett from St. Louis County. She will serve as chair until Dec. 2022.

**10:40-10:55**

Lactation Station - update

There is uncertainty if there will be a state fair this year.

MDH WIC has been involved in the lactation station since 2014. At this time, we are wondering if we want to continue financial support for the event or look at other efforts for outreach and breastfeeding promotion. AG members were invited to share comments at the meeting and to reach out individually if they would rather comment that way. There is interest in gathering input from across the state.

**Notes/Comments:**

In general, there was positive input and discussion about our involvement in lactation station and WIC's affiliation with it.

AG member comments:

- I want to reiterate that I think it would be disappointing to step back from the lactation station. It feels like in the last year there has been acknowledgment by community clinics and some health care systems that WIC can be a real breastfeeding resource for their patients. The lactation station is a positive way to reinforce this message while reaching a lot of people. Many people who are not familiar with WIC.
- An outreach idea: is it possible to include it also as a pregnant woman tent to allow a space for a cool place to rest and promote future breastfeeding?
- Could you do a survey through the app to see where people hear about WIC? Currently this is collected in HuBERT for new contacts, but the first answer in the drop down tends to be the most used answer so not sure how accurate.

We did discuss that it is unclear how much the radio spots for this particular radio station (MyTalk) attract new or existing WIC participants. We would like to explore making connections to some of the diverse media vendors to help further outreach efforts. We've learned during the pandemic these are good connections to leverage.

Additional information/comments:

AG members mentioned family members "loved it" and felt it was a good experience. "It was a cool place to rest, nice resource and welcoming even to other children with the coloring area." Also, in other parts of the state there is coordination w/local hospitals for their local fairs. Discussion held that this is at the state fair, if MDH WIC wouldn't sponsor the event, there is concern over who might.

**11:05-11:20**

2021 Conference – update

Reminder – September 30<sup>th</sup> Virtual Conference

Theme – WIC - Better Together. Together we are Strong, Healthy, and Resilient.

We have a conference committee & subcommittees working on the plans/details already. The platform we are likely going to use will be Teams Live. Our hope/plan is to pre-record all the speakers and have the speaker available the day of the conference for Q&A. We will be communicating any updates on our planning in WU, AG meetings, Regional Meetings as we have additional details. Being that it is only one day, it will be limited and of course there are endless topics we would love to have, but we hope to maximize the day. A speaker/topic list was started early last year from both state and local agency staff since the original plan was to have the conference in the spring. If you have any last-minute thoughts on a speaker please share that with me by the end of the week as we are trying to move forward and secure speakers.

**Question:** Will there be time for a session that would fulfill the Ethics requirement for RDs? Our plan is to try to incorporate an ethics credit if possible.

**11:20-11:25**

## Shopping Guide – FYI

Goal is to have it available for agencies to order by the end of February. The guide will be translated into Somali and Spanish.

The front cover has new child images and blue in color to help distinguish the new version. The cover will have a start date but no end date visible to allow for some flexibility. As agencies suggested, WIC card and app information are now included in this version of the guide. The tips in the guide have been revised as a result of suggestions from LAs. Even with the additional information, the guide is the same number of pages. In order to create space to fit the new information, some photos were removed.

### **11:25-11:35**

#### App Changes

There will be an app update in the next couple weeks this will include some bug fixes. We will provide the actual install date and the bugs that will be fixed in an upcoming HuBERT Hints.

We just signed 2 change requests for our next round of app enhancements. DXC will start development them in the next few months. These include adding a “Contact-Us” screen where the ability to suggest a UPC will be available. Participants will be able to request to cancel an appointment, request an appointment or securely submit documents for their upcoming appointments to the agency. There will be a Local agency portal (website) that agencies will log into to receive these “Contact-Us” communications and agencies will be able to respond and it will return to the participant via text message. To enable this communication the participant will have had to indicate in the settings section of the app that they are Opting-In to text messaging. This portal will also have the ability for Local agencies to send messages to registered users in their agency.

### **11:35-11:45**

#### WINNIE update

As mentioned on the 1/20/21 Local Agency Update call, development for WINNIE is on track and we will begin UAT this summer. Pilot is tentatively set to begin on 11/1 and we hope to have a draft rollout schedule available by mid-March 2021.

### **11:45 – 11:55**

#### WIC Participant Survey – update/recruitment

NWA is coordinating a multi-state participant satisfaction survey mostly focusing on WIC services during the pandemic and remote services. The hope is that it will launch in March and will be open for 30 days. Primarily we are looking at sending it out through the MN WIC app. A participant can click a link and it will take them to an on-line survey. Also, could link to the survey on our website and agencies that already use text messaging could also help promote the survey. NWA will do the data analysis but will also give us the data too. Because many states are going to share the survey with their participants, it can help advocate to keep some of the flexibilities we have in place during the pandemic. Final edits to the survey were sent in at the end of last week. LAs will not be required to do anything since the survey will be distributed through the app but may have opportunities to share the link to the survey via text messaging if utilized in LAs.

Not collecting any identifiable info and zip codes will be used to connect some of the responses to LA's.

**11:55-12:10 pm**

Leverage on using SNAP/Medicaid Data for WIC Outreach

Background Info:

Center for Budget and Policy Priorities in partnership with Benefits Data Trust, worked with four states (CO, MA, MT, and VA) over the course of 2018 and 2019 to match WIC data with SNAP or Medicaid data and conduct text-based outreach to eligible families not enrolled in WIC. To help other states build off lessons learning during those pilots, they offered a series of five workshops to interested states to help support and provide tools for exploring texting & partnering w/SNAP/Medicaid for WIC Outreach.

MN WIC is one of 5 states participating in these on-line workshops. We hope to form a partnership w/both SNAP and Medicaid to identify people that are participating in SNAP and/or MA, but not on WIC.

We have had a data request w/Medicaid for a while now where we obtain newly enrolled contact information for anyone determined to be categorically eligible and send a letter in the mail to those families. It is costly and time consuming. We plan to request cell phone data and DOB from MA as it would result in better matching. Looking at possibly using text messages to reach this group and exploring legal concerns around using this data to send text messages. Also parallel to this, we are working on a WIC on-line application. Information completed by a potential WIC participant will go directly to the LA in the area in which they live so WIC staff might contact them and schedule an appointment.

MDH WIC is half-way through the workshops. We have some state staff and some representatives from Medicaid and SNAP to learn how we can collaborate better together.

**Comments/feedback from AG:**

Appreciate exploring the legal aspects of sharing text messages to protect private data of WIC participants. In order for WIC to share any data with MA there needs to be a data sharing agreement in place. Currently MA shares limited information with WIC. We would like to explore obtaining more data to help coordinate w/other programs like C&TC.

Like the idea of using texting since that is where our clients are at, they use their phones now. We do notice an uptick in calls after the MA outreach letters go out and we would like to keep our count up now too. Pleased we are continuing to explore this option.

Like the innovative idea and hope we can figure it out

**12:10-12:15**

Agenda Items for April 26, 2021 Meeting

Update on National Public Health Emergency  
Everyday Hero

*Minnesota Department of Health - WIC Program 85 E 7<sup>th</sup> Place, PO BOX 64882, ST PAUL MN 55164-0882;  
1-800-657-3942, [health.wic@state.mn.us](mailto:health.wic@state.mn.us), [www.health.state.mn.us](http://www.health.state.mn.us); To obtain this information in a different  
format, call: 1-800-657-3942*

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