

## October 28, 2024, Advisory Group Meeting

### Notes:

**In attendance:** Jenny Barta, Arlin Penner, Kristy Rott, Marianne Nelson, Jessica Holst, Sue Olson, Kourtney Hoseth, Kathy Duffy, Wendy O’Leary, Polly Ahrens, Marlee Morrison, Kris Klopp, Tina Breitenbach, Kate, Franken, Tami Matti, Rebecca Gruenes, Tammie Edmundson, Jessie Zins.

**Absent:** Alli Orr, Katie Galloway.

### New advisory group members needed in 2025.

There will be 11 advisory group openings for 2025 including the chair. Open spots include regional representatives for Northeast, South Central, East Central, Southeast, Southwest, West Central, and the chair position. Also, caseload groups one, four, five and our Tribal Agency representative. Announcement and application will be in the weekly update Oct. 30 and in the coming months, also discussed in August and November regional meetings. No internal interest expressed for chair; position added to application. Deadline for applications Dec. 13.

### Funding discussion

Local agencies have seen an increase in administrative tasks since the pandemic. Appreciate the new ways for families to connect with WIC, it creates increased administrative burden. Many agencies are also dealing with increasing caseloads.

Question raised about providing local agencies with a higher reimbursement rate upfront versus planning more conservatively in case funding is tight? Are there barriers to the new funding process developed in 2019 given increases in caseload? Where can agencies cut back in their work, to allow more time for the new administrative tasks, which tasks should be eliminated first? Advisory group members wanted to start a discussion on whether agencies need or can receive increased funding and/or the new funding practices needs to be tweaked.

In 2019, the funding workgroup made up of local agency and state staff changed from quarterly funding to annual funding. Quarterly funding allows more flexibility when WIC is in a growth mode. For local agencies most of funding goes to staff, indirect costs, and communications. Kathy Duffy reports that only about 60% of the online applications get enrolled in WIC. Can LAs get more funding up front or are there ideas of where agencies can cut back, and/or reevaluate the new funding method. Big part of this issue is that we do not get our federal funding on time, at the beginning of October, therefore we don’t know what our funding will look like. For applicants and participants, new advancements are helpful for their enrollment however it puts more of a load on local and state staff. Essentially, we are shifting the burden of cost as we try to be flexible and convenient for families of WIC. Don’t see this changing as we move more into electronic health record referrals and MN Benefits. We will continue to see WIC applicants come to us through various methods. These new processes for online applications and referrals take staff time that LAs didn’t necessarily have previously. Ideas or thoughts around restructuring staffing a bit from a CPA only model. The state relies on local agencies as experts on how best to adjust. Right now, we have a continuing resolution in place through Dec. 20. There is also uncertainty given it is an election year and funding in general. We can’t give more

grant funds earlier because we don't know what federal grant will be. We could look at changing to quarterly funding, perhaps look at it with the funding workgroup again. The issues and responses look different for large and small agencies and challenges with both. Discussed clerical roles at agencies helping with various parts. In Ramsey that didn't help in savings, but other agencies this has helped. Concern over having a clerk/CPA model again in that participants now only must tell their story once. Not great service model of talk, sit, talk, sit, as experienced in past when staff roles completed various parts of an appointment (income, lab, appt., separation of duties). Perhaps consider a more clerical role focused on following up with new applications or referrals, more of the new admin tasks. Smaller agencies work across other programs so that can help offset the cost. Other agencies are trying various things some noted that they have clerical staff member that does those admin tasks, and some are restricting overall how many times they try to reach an online applicant. It was noted that a simple phone call can take only 5 minutes, but text and email tasks longer and the preferred method by applicants today is email/text. Hard to work within budget and have time for WINNIE training, new staff training. Mobile management seems to be more work than we can justify, one county uses county call phone instead to text. Minnesota WIC has a history of using all of the WIC federal grant and not sending funds back to USDA. Some other states don't do what we do and are unable to spend their money quickly enough. Funding is also a national discussion and concern. USDA doesn't make the funding formula decisions, Congress does. Some counties cannot hire until they can show they have the funds; some counties get no additional county money so cannot overspend. Every agency runs differently so that's challenging as well, no one size fits all. Next step, Kate will go back to management team and see what might be possible even if can't address in the near term we can perhaps address in the future. Will consider a relaunch the funding workgroup. At state we are also feeling the budget crunch as it takes more time and money to manage the changes in technology.

Additional discussion time about the online application – some agencies are calling once only due to the time it takes, many report issues with midcerts and having to reschedule. Some enter applicants in WINNIE, and some don't until they reach them. Reviewed what the message says after you submit your application. It says “Application complete: WIC staff will contact you to schedule a certification appointment. If your appointment is for your infant or child, they must be with you at the WIC certification appointment. WIC food benefits will be provided after your certification appointment is complete. For additional information on what to expect at your certification appointment visit the WIC Appointments page on our website”.

There is no confirmation email because emails are not required.

## Section 3.2 Processing standards policy changes and timeline

Following a Management Evaluation, an agency heard that there are changes coming to state policy around appointment scheduling. They requested this topic be an Advisory Group agenda item for discussion.

Federal WIC policy language states a scheduled appointment should be offered for WIC participants. They should have opportunities to be seen in WIC clinic and agencies should make efforts to avoid turning away any participant. Right now, policy is being drafted to be consistent with federal regulation and soon will go to FNS for approval. If your agency only offers same day scheduling, consider how your agency will comply with this regulation. All local agencies will need to offer scheduled options for families. This will accommodate families that need to

request off for work. If your agency will be impacted by this change, please reach out to your state WIC consultant for any support that is needed. The anticipated timeline is two to three months depending on FNS review and approval.

## Update on WIC data sharing agreements.

All programs that we are seeking data sharing agreements will move together for review to the General Counsel's office. Each program status was reviewed at the meeting.

The following programs are ready for review with the general counsel's office:

- Family home visiting data sharing agreement will be set at the local level. A template will be provided for local agencies.
- Head Start will also be set at the local level. A template will be provided for local agencies.
- Minnesota Immunization Information Connection (MIIC) is complete.

Each of these programs require additional preparation and review:

- Child and Teen Check-up (C&TC)
- Minnesota Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (PRAMS).
- SNAP and MFIP.
- There are discussions on the Longitudinal Follow-up for Newborn Screening Conditions regarding the utility of an internal data use agreement and whether the potential overlap provides useful data to justify the agreement.

The workgroup's next steps are to incorporate changes to MN Operation Manual (MOM) policies and WIC rights and responsibilities. A question was raised about why a data sharing agreement for MA is not being pursued with SNAP/MFIP. Currently, we do have a process to obtain MA data for outreach purposes; and agencies at the meeting reported the ability to access MA data for eligibility determination for WIC participation. Additional follow up on data sharing agreement progress will be shared at the next meeting.

## Timeline for new guidance around hemoglobin

At the previous advisory group meeting, there were various suggestions made for resources that could help WIC staff when discussing hemoglobin testing with participants. Some of the suggestions were to have talking points for WIC staff on ways to prepare WIC participants before coming to the appointment and how to discuss hemoglobin with participants in general. These ideas were brought forward to the Oct. 17, 2024, Nutrition Education Workgroup meeting for additional discussion. A summary of those meeting notes was shared with advisory group. The Nutrition Education workgroup discussed talking points for staff and suggested WIC website updates to the WIC appointments section and WIC phone appointments. More information will be shared in the Weekly Update when talking points are finalized and updates are made on the website. MOM policy 5.3 will also have updates following advisory group discussions around the exceptions to required hematological measurements that are consistent with federal regulations.

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