

Section 1

INTRODUCTION

What is WIC?

The Federal Government established the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) as a two-year pilot program in 1972. In 1974, the WIC program achieved permanent program status through Public Law Number 94-105 as an Amendment to the Child Nutrition Act of 1966. This cost-effective nutrition intervention program is designed to improve the nutritional status of income eligible pregnant, breastfeeding, and postpartum women, infants, and children up to the age of five years who are determined nutritionally at risk. WIC is funded by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and was first offered in Arizona in 1974. WIC program services are provided throughout the state by county, tribal health departments, and non-profit health agencies.

Within the geographic boundaries of Arizona there are three (3) **separate** USDA funded WIC programs (Inter Tribal Council of Arizona, Inc. (ITCA); Navajo Nation; and Arizona WIC Programs). **This Manual relates solely to the Arizona WIC Program.**

Studies have shown that inadequate nutrition and health care represent a threat to the physical and mental well-being of certain individuals. Proper nutrition at the beginning of life can help prevent serious health problems. Infants and preschoolers experience a period of rapid growth in their physical, intellectual and social development. Their nutrition status and the health care they receive may have a major impact on their ability to function as happy, healthy children.

WIC has three major components: nutrition and breastfeeding education, referrals to health and social services, and supplemental foods. The foods supplied through the WIC program are not intended to serve as a complete diet, but to supplement the foods already being consumed by the participant. Participants are examined by health care professionals to determine the need for supplemental foods and are provided with nutrition guidance. In 1992, the USDA determined that every dollar spent on the prenatal component of WIC saved up to \$4.21 in medical costs for newborns and their mothers and up to \$4.75 for newborns alone.

Participants/authorized representatives receive food instruments for specific types and amounts of nutritious foods and cash value vouchers to purchase fruits and vegetables. Participants/authorized representatives redeem their food instruments at authorized grocery stores and pharmacies which meet certain criteria and who have signed a Vendor Contract to follow all WIC program rules and regulations. **NOTE:** WIC cash value vouchers may also be redeemed at authorized farmer/grower locations.

SPECIAL NOTE: Upon the implementation of WIC Electronic Benefits Transfer (eWIC), Arizona WIC Program participants/authorized representatives will be able to access their food benefits electronically using an eWIC card.

What Role Does the Vendor Play?

WIC Vendors (“Vendors”) play an important role in the health community. The WIC food instruments contain a food prescription designed to supplement the WIC participant’s nutritional needs. With eWIC, an eWIC card provides participants access to food benefits. The Vendor fills the prescription, ensuring that the participant receives exactly what is prescribed. Vendors act as the final step in the WIC process. The Vendor’s role is vital to the success of the WIC program because the nutritious WIC foods are designed to promote the healthiest possible birth outcomes, as well as the growth and development of children.

The Vendor may also find that the WIC program makes a substantial contribution to overall food sales. The Arizona WIC Program allows participants/authorized representatives to choose their Vendors from an authorized Vendor list. Most participants/authorized representatives select a Vendor that can also meet the remainder of their shopping needs. Current studies show WIC participants/authorized representatives spend an additional three to four dollars in cash or SNAP benefits for every WIC dollar spent. During Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2015, the Arizona WIC Program served approximately 148,206 participants per month who redeemed 5,237,121 food instruments worth \$120,641,604.55.

IMPORTANT NOTICE



The Arizona WIC Program sends out important information that can assist you (as a Vendor) in maintaining compliance with your Arizona WIC Program Vendor Contract. Therefore, it is essential that you accept/pick up all certified mail sent to you from the Department. Examples of items that may be sent to you via certified mail are replacement food instruments, contract related items, correspondence such as sanctions, lost/stolen food instruments, and Annual Training Alerts.

WIC Vendor Criteria

The selection criteria for WIC Vendors that are referenced below are described in detail in Appendix 3 of this Manual. An Applicant must meet **all** of the selection criteria. Failure to meet any of the criteria is cause to deny an application.

- Stock requirements
- Infant formula purchases
- Competitive price evaluation
- Business operations
- Accessibility to WIC participants
- Type of store
- Above-50-Percent Vendor
- Sanitation
- Service mark compliance
- History of compliance
- Training
- Conflict of interest
- Volume of WIC business
- SNAP* status
- Business integrity
- Incentive item prohibition

***SNAP is the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program formerly known as the Food Stamp Program.**

Vendor Contract and Authorization

The Department ensures that all participating Vendors enter into a written contract (Vendor Contract). The Vendor Contract must be signed by a representative who has the legal authority to obligate the Vendor. The Vendor Contract and this Manual explain the rights and responsibilities of the Vendor and the Arizona WIC Program. Neither the Vendor Contract nor this Manual constitutes a license or a property interest.

The term of the Vendor Contract is three (3) federal fiscal years or a portion thereof, to be determined at the discretion of the Department, beginning October 1 and ending on September 30. Neither the Department nor the Vendor has an obligation to renew the Vendor Contract.

The purpose of the Vendor Contract and this Manual is to establish retail outlets where WIC participants can redeem food instruments or use their eWIC cards to access their food benefits. It will also provide the Vendor and the Department with guidelines for transactions arising out of the Vendor Contract. It will be the responsibility of the Vendor to designate a person from each outlet who will be responsible for ensuring Vendor compliance with the terms of the Vendor Contract and this Manual. You or your designated representative will also be responsible for accepting in-store training, providing training to all cashiers and other employees who handle WIC transactions, and providing special or additional training to employees at the request of either the Department or local agency. The Vendor will be held accountable for the actions or inactions of its employees.

The WIC Decal

The purpose of the WIC decal is to allow WIC participants/authorized representatives to identify your store as an authorized Arizona WIC Program Vendor. The decal is available in English and Spanish and must be posted in a location that is visible to participants/authorized representatives. The Department will provide at least one (1) English and one (1) Spanish decal at the time of initial authorization. An additional supply may be requested by completing and submitting the Arizona WIC Program Vendor Order Form found in Appendix 2.

Please note that Vendors must use the signage provided by the Department; Vendors are NOT allowed to create or use any other WIC signage.

An example of the English version of the WIC decal is shown below.



Note: Also available in Spanish

WIC ID Stamp

The Department will provide Applicants with two (2) Vendor ID stamps when authorized as an Arizona WIC Program Vendor for the first time. The Vendor is responsible for maintaining the Vendor ID stamps and must store them in a secure location. If the stamps are worn, lost, or stolen, immediately contact the Department at 1-866-737-3935.

The Vendor ID stamp is the property of the Arizona WIC Program and must be returned to the Department within ten (10) calendar days if:

1. Ownership is changed;
2. Bankruptcy is filed;
3. The business is sold;
4. The Vendor Contract is not renewed or is terminated.

When the Vendor ID stamp becomes worn, broken, or lost, the Vendor may order additional duplicate ID stamps from the Department.

- ➔ Note: Upon implementation of eWIC, the Vendor ID stamp will no longer be utilized. However, the Department will continue to issue a WIC ID number to all authorized WIC Vendors for identification purposes.

Report of Changes

Upon ceasing operations, changing ownership, or filing bankruptcy, the Vendor must notify the Department not less than thirty (30) calendar days prior to the date that the change will occur. The Vendor must return the Vendor ID stamps within ten (10) calendar days after the change occurs (See Store Closure Notification and Change of Ownership Forms in Appendix 2 of this Manual.)

- ➔ **NOTE:** WIC Vendor authorization is not transferable. An attempted transfer will void the Vendor Contract. Therefore, if there is a change of ownership, the new owner must complete an application and meet all selection criteria to become an authorized WIC Vendor.

If the new owner would like to be authorized to accept Arizona WIC Program food instruments, please advise him/her to contact the Department at 1-866-737-3935.

Vendors must also report any change of store name, store mailing address, telephone number, or bank account to the Department through the Vendor website (<http://vendor.azwic.gov>) not less than thirty (30) calendar days before the change takes place.