



Testimony to the  
Joint Fiscal Committees on the SFY 2026-2027 Executive Budget  
Health Budget Hearing  
February 10, 2026

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments regarding the FY2027 New York State Executive Budget proposal for Health.

The WIC Association of New York State is a statewide nonprofit representing the 85 local WIC programs operating in hospitals, federally qualified community health care centers, local county departments of health, and community based organizations which collectively and currently serve over 462,000 nutritionally at-risk pregnant, postpartum and breastfeeding moms, infants and children up to five years of age, a significant increase of over 100,000 participants from before the pandemic, the State's highest participation since the Great Recession, and still approximately only 68% of the estimated eligible New Yorkers.

For over 50 years, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) has provided vital support for nutritionally at-risk New Yorkers during critical days of development during pregnancy, infancy and through the first 5 years of life. Because every day matters, enrollment in the WIC Program must not be delayed. Part of the policy of WIC is that we can get participants the healthy food their body needs quickly during crucial days of brain and body development.

In fact, WIC is one of our nation's most effective food security and public health programs. A strong body of research over several decades shows WIC's many benefits, including healthier births, improved maternal health, more nutritious diets, improved developmental outcomes, and reduced disparities in infant health.

Specifically, [research](#) shows that WIC participation leads to healthier outcomes including:

- reduced preterm birth
- reduced low birth weight
- reduced infant mortality
- improved maternal nutrition and prenatal care
- enhanced infant and child nutrition and feeding practices
- increased immunization and healthcare engagement

WIC also

- generates significant healthcare cost savings
- supports breastfeeding initiation and continuation

WIC staff across the state are very proud of the care they give every day. Breastfeeding peer counselors, lactation professionals, registered dietitians and qualified nutritionists all know that WIC works for participants and communities. And more importantly the hundreds of thousands of our most vulnerable New Yorkers

know it, too. Parents of our youngest children get nutrition counseling and tips to help ensure their breastfeeding or formula fed baby is getting the nutrition they need, or encourage their toddler to eat their veggies and develop a life-long practice of healthy eating. And perinatal patients get the support they need to be healthy during their pregnancy and grow a healthy baby.

### **Modernized WIC with Targeted Outreach Works**

From January 2020 – October 2025 (start of FFY2026), NYSWIC participation grew 28%, from approximately 360,000-462,000 participants, in large part due to several state initiatives: strategic outreach informing eligible New Yorkers of the benefits of WIC; long-needed modernization services such as the eWIC card and related WIC2GO app, and certification flexibilities that USDA allowed and NYS put in place during the pandemic.

At the start of Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2020, NYS WIC agencies had a 14.1% average no-show rate statewide (active participation to enrollment ratio). Required transportation to WIC offices and taking toddlers and preschoolers out of childcare and preschool to attend appointments several times a year, and the formerly outdated WIC foods shopping experience created barriers to participating for many families. During the pandemic when states were authorized to offer virtual services like certifications and appointments, NYS also allowed full implementation of national waivers based on nutrition science recommendations of increased fruits and vegetables benefits, which also helped to increase our state's child participation significantly. That 'no-show' rate dropped to 8.2% at the start of FFY 2021 with the modernized flexibilities and increased benefits were in place, and has continued to steadily decrease, and by the start of FFY2026, the no-show rate was 5.1%. This is all excellent news from a public health perspective, as we know WIC's benefits to participants increases the longer families participate.

WIC has consistently earned bipartisan support and the evidence-based food packages for participants have been fully funded by Congress for over 30 years. However, the nutrition services portion – which provides funding for the professional qualified nutritionists, lactation professionals and peer counselors has not adequately kept pace at the national level. Costs in New York State have drastically exceeded the outdated formula for determining the federal nutrition services grant allocation, known as NSA funds. For several years now, local WIC agencies from rural and urban areas alike have sounded the alarm that they are struggling to recruit and retain the qualified nutrition staff needed to serve participants in the time sensitive manner that WIC intends and mandates. Statewide, we have seen the participants to qualified nutritionist ratio grow by almost 24% - now averaging 656 participants to 1 staff. This growing imbalance has led to insufficient time to conduct thorough nutritional assessments and follow-up, reduced service quality, increased staff burnout leading to more and longer staff vacancies, and moreover causing significant strain on WIC, the cornerstone of positive maternal and child health outcomes.

While WIC's long-needed modernizations and targeted outreach have helped spur significant increased participation since the pandemic, local funding to support community-based health professionals has remained largely flat. NYS WIC Program funding approved for the period 2023-2028 is only sufficient to support approximately 443,000 participants annually; however, the statewide caseload in March 2024 nearly reached that level at over 442,000. With caseload at near capacity with an additional four years to go of the budgeted contract, agencies are underfunded to meet current and growing demand.

Most recent USDA available data while outdated, can help put the strain agencies face into context ([USDA WIC Data Tables – Annual State Level Data](#)). In FFY2021 when participation was at 368,000, USDA food costs spent in New York were nearly \$219M and USDA provided the state \$136M to provide nutrition services and administer the program. Most recent USDA data (preliminary, FFY2025) show that USDA food costs spent in New York was at least \$432M, the state received \$150M to provide nutrition services when participation was

at 455,000. In summary, from FFY2021-FFY2025, USDA funds for WIC foods purchased in New York State increased 97%, while the state received a 10% increase in funds to provide nutrition services to a caseload that had increased 24% during those same federal fiscal years.

### **Current Participants are Negatively Impacted**

In our 2025 survey to local WIC agencies statewide to discern if and how NYS WIC funding is impacting local WIC agencies and the families they serve, only 7% of agencies reported anticipating no noticeable impact.

- Between **42% and 70%** of responding agencies reported risks such as staff reductions, longer wait times to get certification or nutrition education appointments; delayed or canceled program improvements; reduced access to services; decreased availability of breastfeeding or nutrition support; and fewer outreach efforts.
- About **30%** reported losing vital participant communication services like autodialers or language interpretation; are facing barriers in issuing eWIC cards and farmers market benefits; expect increased participant confusion or frustration; and an inability to serve all eligible participants.

As a result, because of the demonstrated value WIC provides to mothers and their young children, sponsoring agencies have been subsidizing their WIC program due to the NYS budget shortfall. This practice of subsidizing a public program that is supposed to be fully funded to serve all eligible people seeking services is financially untenable.

Examples of survey comments from local WIC directors include:

- *“We experienced a loss of two program support positions and the number of hours for two hourly Peer Counselor (PC) staff positions was reduced. These PC reductions directly impact our ability to support breastfeeding services, which are vital to promoting the duration and exclusivity of breastfeeding for infants aged 6 months to 1 year and beyond.”*
- *“Without proper staffing, appointment availability becomes limited and staff stress increases. Basic interventions become limited due to high need to meet caseload goals as opposed to meeting nutritional needs. While experiencing a period of staffing shortages, our appointment wait times reached a significant low of appointment availability of 5-7 days to over 6 weeks availability. With adequate staffing, we have appointment availability of 3-5 days.”*
- *“Our Sponsoring Agency (SA) reduced our Indirect Rate from 15% to 1% to prevent staff layoffs. Our agency is at the max end of the “suggested staffing ratios” and we have a concentrated high risk and Limited English Proficient / Non-English Proficient LEP/NEP population. Reduced staffing would be detrimental to our ability to maintain caseload and compliance with NYS policies. If my SA did not absorb the budget reduction and reduce the indirect rate I would have lost 2.5 staff positions. It is unreasonable to expect the SA to provide in-kind services of this magnitude. At this point, we have reduced as many costs as possible; the only thing left to reduce are security, staffing and space costs.”*
- *“My local agency has sustained a 50% increase in caseload since the pandemic and has been operating at an average of 115% of our 2023-2028 target capacity since late 2024. We are doing everything we can to meet the needs of our community, but the math simply no longer works. Without increased funding—and without continued subsidy from my sponsoring agency—we are facing the very real possibility of closing at least one site and laying off staff in the coming year. What’s most painful is knowing my team shows up every day, delivering high-quality services, while being paid below fair*

*market value. They deserve better, and our community deserves better. Our WIC families should not have to wait an extended time for an appointment or travel farther to a WIC office. We need sustainable funding to prevent service cuts to WIC participants and to ensure that the people doing this essential work are compensated fairly.”*

## **WIC has a high return on investment for New York communities**

Beyond the many positive health impacts, WIC is also an important economic driver, funneling federal funds into New York’s local economies to provide families with needed benefits to buy healthy food at WIC-approved retailers such as grocery stores, pharmacies, and farmers’ markets, while underpinning community-based health care and local farmers across the state.

- NYS WIC Participants purchased over \$540 million in WIC prescribed foods in FFY 2025. This means almost \$1.5 million in healthy foods are purchased daily at stores accepting WIC across the state.
- NYS WIC has over 2,800 authorized vendors. Over 60% of the vendors are independent stores.
- Across rural and urban areas, an entire workforce is supported by WIC’s federal dollars; community-based credentialed nutritionists, lactation experts, paraprofessionals, peer-counselors, and vendor stores’ staff.
- New York’s family farmers authorized with the WIC Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program through participating farmers markets, stands, and mobile markets both help increase WIC participants’ access to fresh, locally grown fruits and vegetables and can help teach young children to eat healthier.

## **200,000 More New Yorkers Could Participate in WIC**

Still, many New Yorkers are eligible but not participating in this time sensitive and time-limited public health nutrition intervention program. NYS WIC estimates that we currently serve ~68% of eligible New Yorkers. An estimated 200,000 New Yorkers are eligible for WIC but not enrolled—a missed opportunity to fully leverage federally-funded food assistance amid an affordability crisis. Strategic, informed outreach helps close this gap, ensuring New York fully leverages federal resources to support nutrition and food security. But because of capacity concerns at local WIC agencies, New York State terminated the successful targeted statewide outreach project that has been closing the gap since early 2022.

Amid unprecedented federal cuts to SNAP and Medicaid, WIC remains a stable source of nutrition and public health support—but only if families can access the program. An additional state investment can ensure New York is maximizing this proven program to support the food security and health of our youngest New Yorkers and their families.

We call upon the NYS legislature and Governor to commit and invest in the future of WIC to ensure that nutritionally at-risk moms, babies and preschoolers needing WIC nutrition services continue to have access to this life changing program.

We respectfully urge the NYS Legislature to adopt these proposals in the final state budget to address current demand, stabilize operations, and protect access for all eligible women, young children and families seeking services from the NYS WIC program.

## **\$30 million in State Supplemental Funds for NYS WIC will:**

- Stabilize operations so local WIC agencies can serve all eligible families who are seeking services.
- Fund and maintain recent modernizations that have made the program more efficient and accessible.

- Support systemic outreach efforts to connect WIC to the 200,000 eligible but unenrolled New Yorkers.

### **Protect and Strengthen SNAP and Other Food Security Programs**

To build on the Governor’s focus on food security and ensure that New Yorkers are protected amidst unprecedented federal cuts, although not under the jurisdiction of the Health Committees, we ask that you prioritize additional investments in the FY2027 New York State Budget:

Amid rising food insecurity and unprecedented cuts to federal nutrition programs, this year’s budget must protect New Yorkers’ access to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and other critical anti-hunger programs. We support Executive Budget proposals to transition to SNAP EBT chip cards, increase funding for emergency food programs, and expand access to summer nutrition programs—and more is needed to respond to the food security crisis at hand.

New York should also strengthen our Nutrition Outreach and Education Program (NOEP) that supports a network of 86 community-based [SNAP navigators](#) who help low-income families across the state connect with SNAP. The program will become especially important as families navigate harsh changes to SNAP eligibility, work reporting requirements, and budgeting rules. We are asking for the FY2027 NYS Budget to include **\$8.5M** in total funding so that the program can be sustained at its current level.

All of these investments will allow New York to continue to support nutritionally at-risk low-income families and individuals and further efforts to improve nutrition and reduce hunger across the state.

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*WIC Association of NYS is the leading nonprofit organization supporting and enhancing the services of the (WIC) Women, Infants, and Children Program. Our team of providers, advocates and consumers are committed to helping support and enhance the growth of the NYS WIC Program.*