

Background

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) provides food, nutrition education, breastfeeding support, and referrals to health care and social services to nutritionally at-risk low-income pregnant women, new mothers, infants, and children through age 4.

This report offers updated estimates of the population that met these criteria and was eligible for WIC benefits in each of the years 2000 through 2009. This report includes some new estimates not included in previous reports: (1) estimates of the number of eligibles and coverage rates by State; (2) updated estimates in U.S. territories; (3) confidence intervals; and (4) estimates of eligible children by single year of age.

Methodology

The estimates presented below are based on a methodology developed in 2003 by the Committee on National Statistics of the National Research Council (CNSTAT). FNS contracted with the Urban Institute to use the CNSTAT methodology to extend the national estimates and to develop a new methodology to apportion the national estimate to the States using data from the American Community Survey.

The estimates consider poverty level, adjunctive income eligibility (e.g., due to participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or Medicaid), and national estimates of nutritional risk and duration of breastfeeding.

Results

WIC-Eligible Population

- FNS estimates that the average monthly WIC eligible population totaled 15.1 million in 2009, a 6.4 percent increase from the estimated 14.2 million eligible in 2008.

- Estimated numbers of WIC eligibles in almost all participant subgroups grew from 2008 to 2009 in almost all FNS regions, likely because of the economic downturn.
- Children ages 1 to 4 made up more than 60 percent of the eligible population. Most of the growth in the eligible population from 2008 to 2009 occurred in this participant category.

Average Number Eligible for WIC Benefits, in Thousands			
Participant Subgroup	# Eligible, *CY 2009	# Eligible, CY 2008	Percent Change
Infants	2,674	2,634	1.5%
Total Children Ages 1-4	9,469	8,657	9.4%
Children Age 1	2,431	2,292	6.1%
Children Age 2	2,399	2,144	11.9%
Children Age 3	2,374	2,117	12.1%
Children Age 4	2,266	2,104	7.7%
Pregnant Women	1,376	1,355	1.5%
Postpartum			
Breastfeeding Women	667	639	4.4%
Postpartum Non- Breastfeeding Women	889	886	0.3%
Total WIC Eligibles	15,075	14,171	6.4%

*Calendar Year

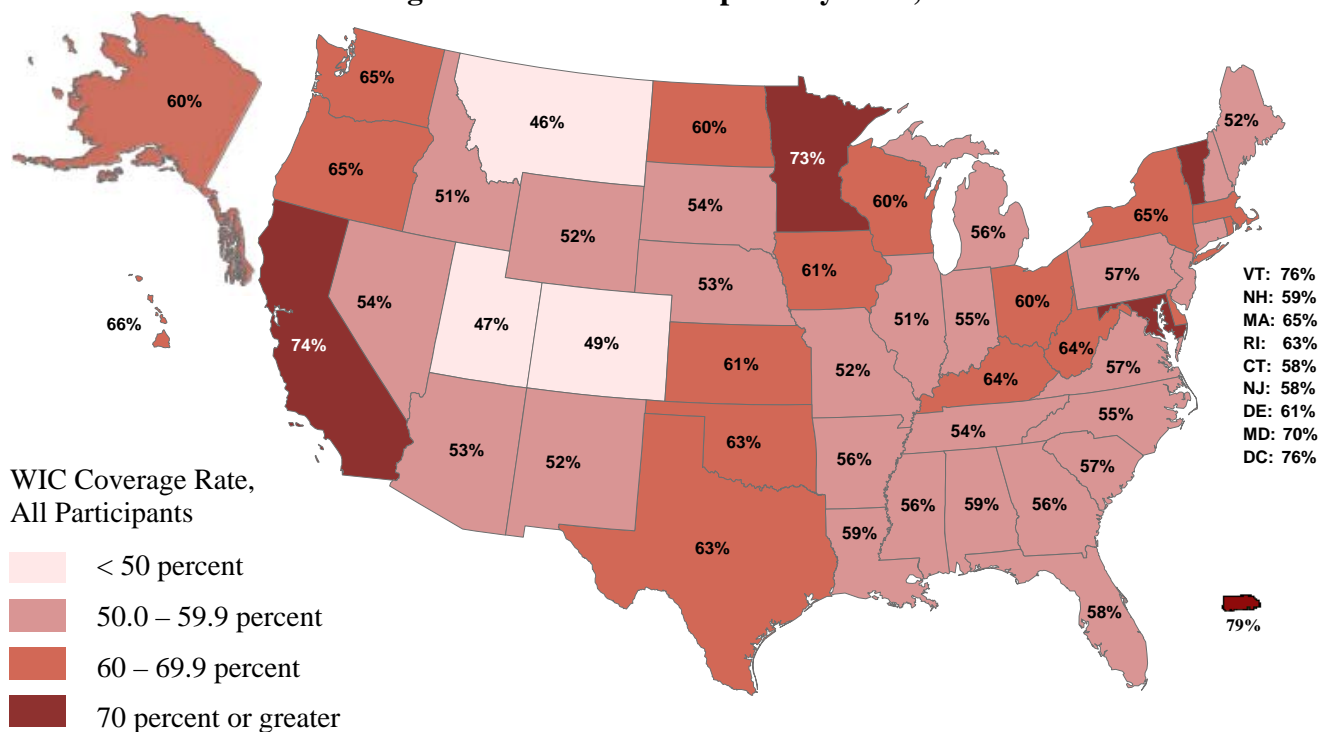
Coverage Rates

The percent of the eligible population that receives WIC benefits is the program's "coverage rate."

- In 2009, WIC served an estimated 60.9 percent of the population eligible for WIC. This is a decrease from the estimated coverage rate of 62.2 percent in 2008.
- For more than a decade, WIC's overall estimated coverage rate has fluctuated in a narrow range from 56 to 62 percent. Coverage rates by FNS region have also remained relatively stable over time, with the Mountain Plains and Southeast regions having the lowest coverage rates (between 50 and 55 percent), while the Western region has maintained a coverage rate of between 65 and 70 percent.

- Coverage of WIC-eligible infants exceeded 80 percent in 2008 and 2009, while coverage of WIC-eligible children was just above 50 percent in both years.
- WIC served 81 percent of eligible breastfeeding and nonbreastfeeding postpartum women in 2008 and 79.4 percent of eligible breastfeeding and nonbreastfeeding postpartum women in 2009.
- Although WIC participation grew by more than 1.5 million from 1997 to 2009, the coverage rate did not increase significantly because the number of eligible individuals also increased.
- Coverage rates vary substantially by State. The highest coverage rates in 2009 were generally found in the Western and Northeast regions, while the lowest coverage rates were generally found in the Mountain Plains and Southeast regions. From 2006 to 2008, all regions saw increases in their coverage rates, but coverage rates fell in all regions except the Southwest region from 2008 to 2009. (Care must be taken in interpreting single-year State eligibles estimates, especially for States with small populations, as there is less confidence in the findings for these States.)

**Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)
Coverage Rates for All Participants by State, CY 2009**



U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Research and Analysis. *National and State-Level Estimates of Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Eligibles and Program Reach, 2000-2009*, by David Betson, Michael Martinez-Schiferl, Linda Giannarelli, and Sheila Zedlewski. Project Officer: Grant Lovellette. Alexandria, VA: December 2011.

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