

Background

The *WIC Participant and Program Characteristics* (PC2006) report¹ summarizes demographic characteristics of WIC participants nationwide in April 2006, along with information on participant income and nutrition risk characteristics. A national estimate of breastfeeding initiation for WIC infants is included. The report also describes WIC members of migrant farm-worker families.

Method

PC2006 is the most recent in a series of reports that have been generated from WIC State management information systems biennially since 1992. The definition of WIC “participant” for this report’s tabulations is based on a near census of WIC participants as they are enrolled in the program (8,772,218 records). WIC issues monthly food prescription benefits through management information systems at the time of WIC certification.

In order to minimize the burden of data collection for WIC agencies, beginning in 1992, State WIC Agencies have been providing a Minimum Data Set (MDS) consisting of 20 variables from their management information systems. The MDS variables were negotiated with the National WIC Association (formerly the National Association of WIC Directors) to include income, nutrition risks, migrant status, participant category (Pregnant, Breastfeeding, Postpartum, Infant, Child), age, race, weight, height, and blood measures recorded as part of WIC Program certifications. Participation in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Medicaid, and/or the Food Stamp Program is also included. Beginning in 1998, the agreed upon list of MDS variables was expanded to include breastfeeding status and food package prescriptions. (Due to the complexity of analyzing food package codes that are unique to each of 88 State WIC Agencies, an

addendum to the current report is planned to address food prescription analysis.)

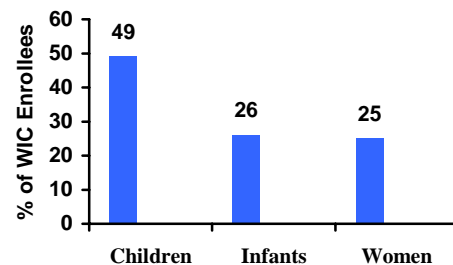
Another 13 Supplemental Data Set (SDS) items were requested of States depending on the capability of State data systems to provide such data. SDS items address such things as source of health care, education, number in household on WIC, and birth weight.

Findings

In April 2006, there were 8,772,218 women, infants and children enrolled in the WIC Program, an increase of 2.2 percent over enrollment from April 2004. The number of enrollees includes individuals who did not pick up food instruments. Fewer participants, approximately 91 percent of WIC enrollees, actually picked up their food instruments for April 2006 and were counted according to WIC regulations as participants for WIC food and administrative funding purposes.

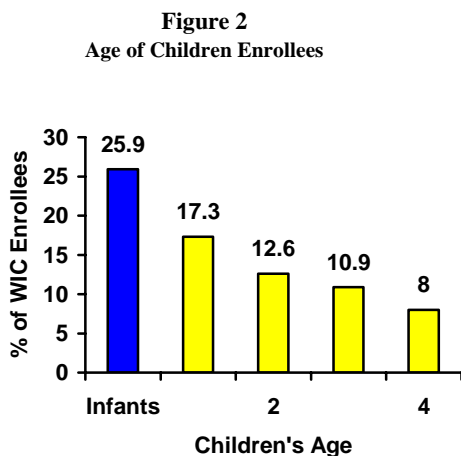
Among the eight million plus WIC enrollees, approximately half (49 percent) are children. Infants account for 26 percent and women are 25 percent of those enrolled in WIC (Figure 1).

**Figure 1
WIC Enrollees**

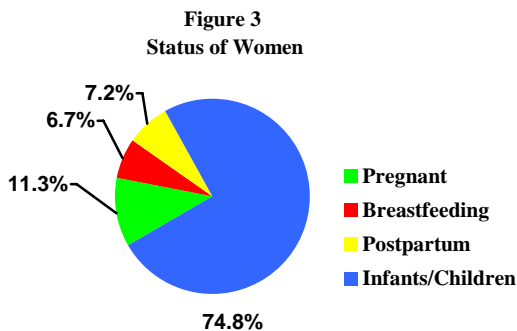


The PC2006 distributions of children, infant and women WIC enrollees have remained essentially unchanged in a decade.

Among the 49% of WIC enrollees who were children, the percent enrolled in WIC declined with age (Figure 2).

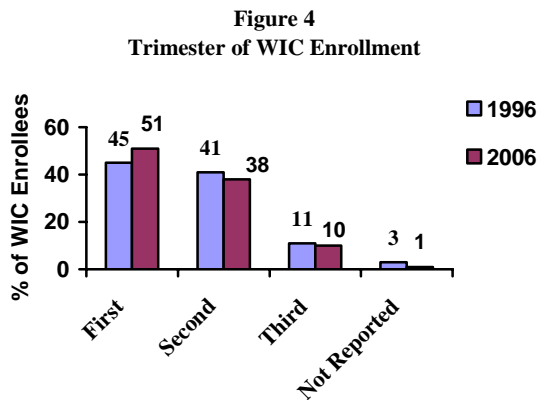


Women, as a percent of all respondents, were further divided into pregnant (11.3%), breastfeeding (6.7%), and postpartum (7.2%), as a percent of all participants (Figure 3).



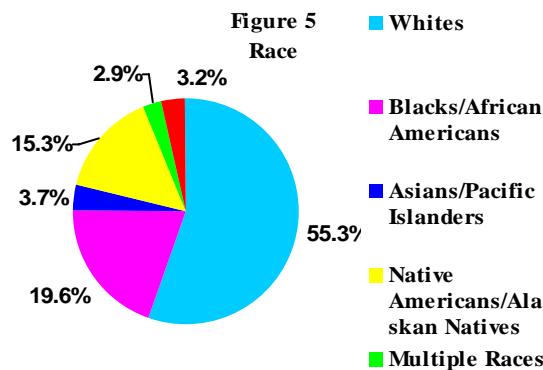
The percentage of breastfeeding women has risen steadily from 3.6 percent in 1992 to 6.7 percent in 2006.

In 2006, more pregnant WIC participants enrolled in the program during their first than second trimesters, with 51.2 percent in the first trimester and 37.9 in the second. Only 9.7 percent enrolled in the third trimester. Enrollment by trimester from 1996 to 2006 shows increases in WIC coverage of pregnant women in their early stages of pregnancy (Figure 4). Between 1992 and 2006, enrollment in the first trimester increased by almost 15 percentage points, with most of the increase occurring between 1992 and 1996.



In 2006, States were required for the first time to report race and ethnicity separately, based on new Office of Management and Budget (OMB) standards. Hispanics, as an ethnic group, make up 41.2 percent of WIC participants. The ethnic composition of the WIC program has been changing steadily since 1992 with the percentage of Hispanic WIC participants rising, while the percentage of non-Hispanic participants has fallen.

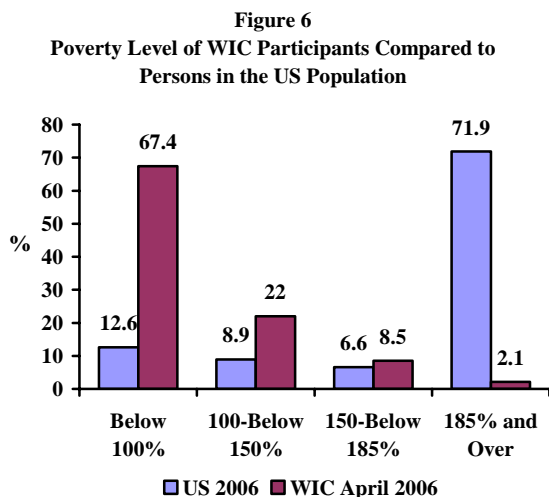
In 2006, race data was reported by the States for 96.8 percent of WIC participants. Under the new racial reporting categories, Whites are the largest group (55.3 percent), followed by Black/African Americans (19.6 percent), American Indian/Alaska Native (15.3 percent), and Asian or Pacific Islanders (3.7 percent) (Figure 5).²



² Many Hispanics and/or WIC staff viewed American Indian/Alaskan Native as the closest racial group under the new OMB definitions of racial categories.

The distribution of participants by poverty level has slightly increased from 2002 with about two-thirds of WIC participants (67.4%) at or below the poverty line (Figure 6). This compares to 12.6 percent in the U.S. general population, and is substantially below the WIC income eligibility limit.

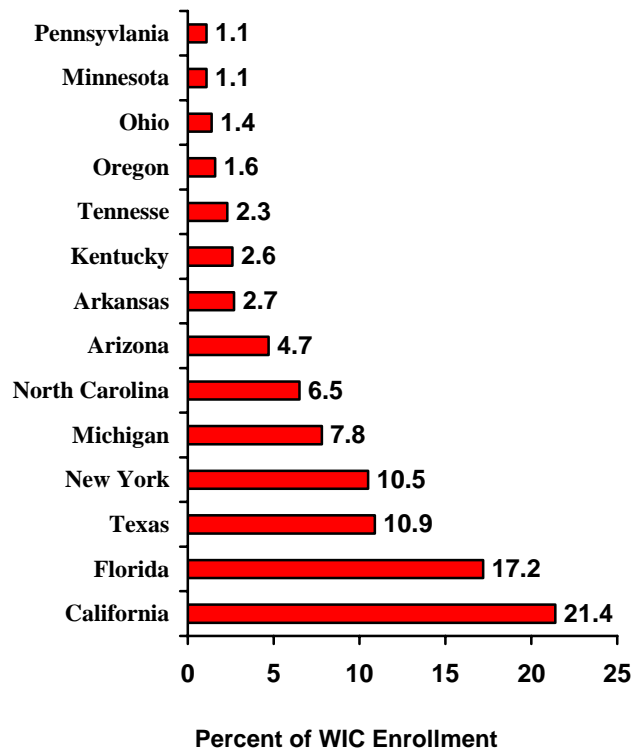
The percentage of WIC participants with incomes at or below fifty percent of poverty declined from 36 percent in 1994 to 27 percent in 2002 with an increase to 29.3 percent in 2006. Among WIC participants reporting some income, the average annualized family income in April 2006 was \$15,577, an increase of \$819 in nominal dollars (5.6 percent) since PC2004.



In April 2006, there were 44,077 individuals identified on State WIC enrollment files as being from migrant farm-worker families. Migrant WIC participants make up less than one percent of the population receiving WIC services. More than half of these migrants were enrolled in the WIC Program in California, Florida, or Texas.

Fourteen States reported migrant farm workers accounting for at least 1 percent of their WIC participants (Figure 7).

Figure 7
Distribution of Migrant Farm Worker WIC Participants by State*

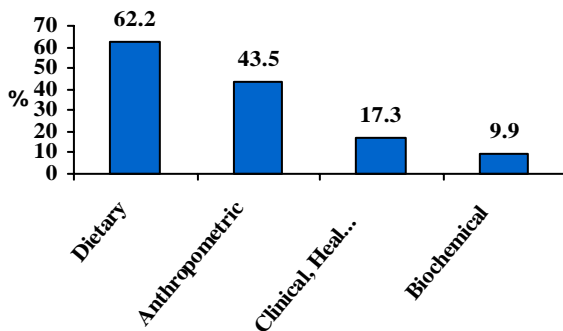


*Read as: California has 21.4 percent all migrant WIC participants in the national WIC migrant population.

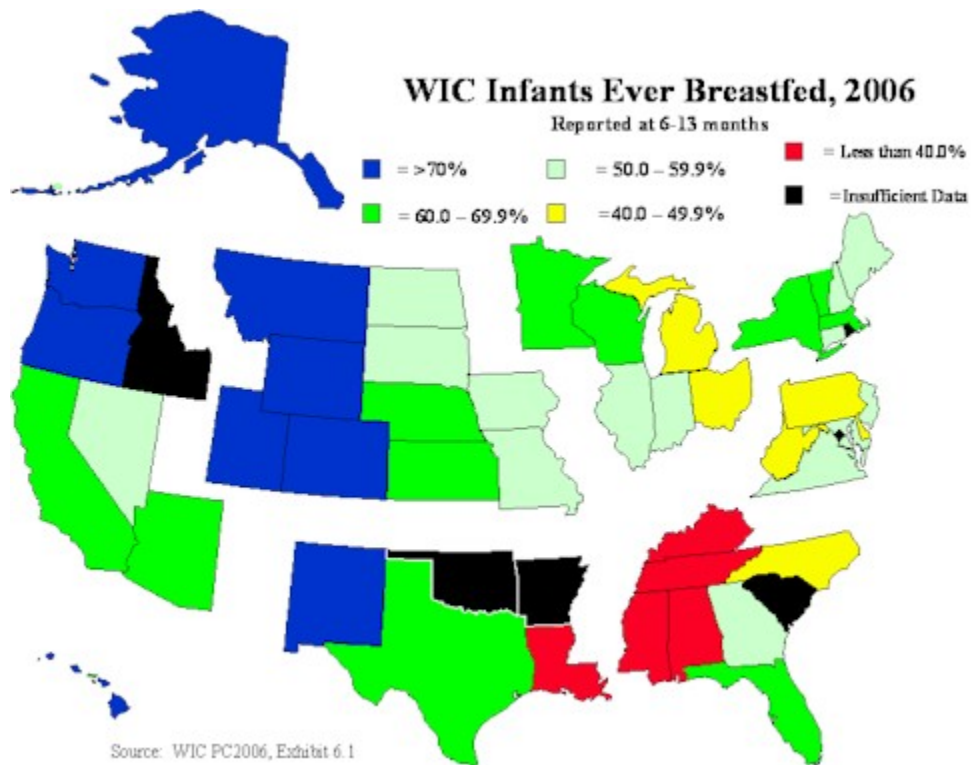
Migrant children enrollees in WIC tend to be older than the general WIC population.

For PC2006, States could report up to ten nutritional risks for each participant. For women, high weight-for-height, inappropriate weight gain and "other dietary" risks were the predominant risks reported. Children showed anthropometric risks and dietary risks as their most frequently reported risks. Eighty-one percent of WIC infants were recorded at risk due, at least in part, to the WIC-eligibility of their mothers or because their mothers were at risk during pregnancy. Over all WIC participants, dietary risks were the most prevalent risk reported at certification, followed by anthropometric; clinical, health and medical; and biochemical (Figure 8).

Figure 8
WIC Participants with Specific Nutritional Risks at Certification



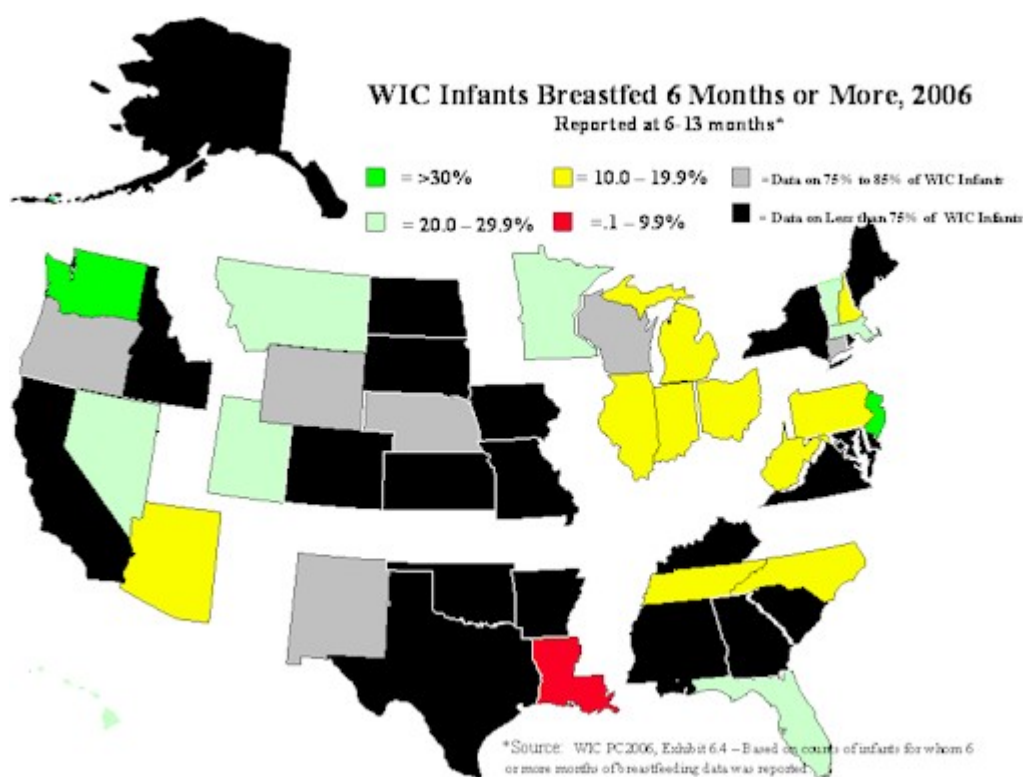
Finally, this WIC Participant and Program Characteristics report series provides the breastfeeding measures for tracking progress towards the FNS Strategic Plan 2005 - 2010 target of 60% of WIC postpartum women initiating breastfeeding by 2010. In PC 2006, 57.7 percent of WIC mothers initiated breastfeeding, up from 41.3 percent in PC 1998. The map below presents a breakout, by States, of WIC 6 to 13 month-old infants ever breastfed.



Note: This map is divided into the seven FNS Regions.

To develop estimates of breastfeeding duration, States were asked to provide information on the length of time infants were breastfed. However, many States did not provide these data, so estimates of breastfeeding duration are based on a substantially restricted sample of States and do not constitute national estimates. Only 48 State WIC agencies were able to provide duration data for at least 75 percent of infants and children aged six to thirteen months for whom breastfeeding was reportedly initiated. Across the 48 States reporting data, the median duration of breastfeeding is 13 weeks with substantial

variation existing among States. The proportion of infants and children breastfed for six or more months has an estimated lower bound estimate of 18.5 percent. An upper bound estimate of infants and children breastfed for six or more months is 28 percent. However, the upper bound estimate includes data for infants who have been breastfed for 6 months as well as infants for whom initiation and duration of breastfeeding are not known. The map below presents a breakout, by States, of the lower bound estimate of infants and children breastfed 6 months or more.



Download full report for WIC PC 2002, 2004 or 2006 at:

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/oane/>

¹U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Research, Nutrition and Analysis, *WIC Participant and Program Characteristics 2006, WIC-06-PC*, by Susan Bartlett, Ellen Bobronnikov, Michele Mendelson, et al. Project Officer, Fred Lesnett. Alexandria, VA: December 2007.

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