



September 7, 2021

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Madam Speaker Pelosi, Minority Leader McCarthy, Majority Leader Schumer, and Minority Leader McConnell:

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) was founded in 1974 to [address growing poverty and malnutrition](#) among households with young children in the United States. Over the years, the program has grown to serve approximately 6 million people annually, including [45% of all babies born in the US](#). As a public health nutrition program, WIC has the infrastructure to rapidly improve the health of millions of low-income families simply by increasing their ability to purchase healthy food. We collectively urge Congress to move before September 30 to extend a short-term WIC benefit increase that improves nutrient intake and health outcomes for millions of low-income Americans.

Although the evidence is clear that fruits and vegetables are critical to [preventing and managing many chronic diseases](#) and supporting overall health, access to healthy food remains out of reach for many families, with communities of color often experiencing the greatest barriers. This can be traced back to racially discriminatory structures and policies that have disproportionately impacted communities of color and divested resources from low-income neighborhoods, making fresh produce both hard to find and out of reach. Though [studies](#) show that [WIC improves](#) participants' dietary intake, the current WIC food packages include a maximum supplement for fruits and vegetables (the WIC cash value benefit (CVB)) of only \$9-\$11 per month. Increasing the WIC fruit and vegetable CVB would better align WIC with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and the [National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine \(NASEM\)](#). According to the recommendations put forth by NASEM, the WIC fruit and vegetable benefit would need to be \$23-\$45 per month to help WIC families meet **just half** of the recommended intake of fruits and vegetables.

Additional [studies](#) suggest increasing the fruit and vegetable benefit in the WIC Food Package would further support healthy eating, reduce long term health care costs, and improve health

outcomes for both moms and babies. It is well documented that adequate nutrition is particularly important for the health and wellbeing of pregnant and postpartum people, developing fetuses, and young children as nutrition during these time periods has [significant impacts across the lifespan](#). On top of supporting health and nutrition, WIC has the potential for positive economic impacts statewide. A recent [study*](#) of four states found that an increased WIC fruit and vegetable benefit to \$35 per beneficiary would have an economic impact multiplier ranging from 1.1-1.6 and would result in an **additional** impact of \$11-\$332 million to the economies of individual states. Based on data from these four states, it was estimated there would be an increased national economic contribution of \$2.81 billion.

The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA) recognizes the vital role WIC plays in ensuring all families have access to healthy food. ARPA temporarily allows state agencies to increase the fruit and vegetable benefit to \$35 per child and adult per month -- a significant step towards expanding healthy food access for low-income families. This benefit increase has the potential to make a large and immediate impact in the lives of millions of Americans, many of whom are facing increased food and economic insecurity due to the pandemic. **However, the increase to the WIC fruit and vegetable benefit is only temporary and set to expire on September 30, 2021.** After September 2021, WIC families will again be left with inadequate resources to purchase foods to meet their nutritional needs, leaving millions vulnerable to food insecurity at a time when many households are still grappling with the health and financial impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

President Biden's most recent [budget proposal](#) directly recognizes and addresses the continued need for increased benefits beyond the summer months and calls on Congress to extend the enhanced WIC fruit and vegetable benefit through September 2022, demonstrating how critical maintaining these increased benefits will be to ensuring the long-term nutrition security of American families. We are thankful that both the House and Senate Agriculture Appropriations bills provide adequate funding to continue this benefit, but we recognize that families will not be able to access this benefit until the extension is signed into law.

The National WIC Association, the leading advocacy non-profit for WIC, recently released a report titled "[Enhancing the WIC Food Package: Impacts and Recommendations to Advance Nutrition Security](#)", which further supports President Biden's budget proposal. Among their chief recommendations is to increase the fruit and vegetable CVB, and USDA is poised to act permanent reforms later in fiscal year 2022. **As a group of the nation's leading food and nutrition security, health policy, child health, and retail and agriculture organizations, we urge Congress to act swiftly – before September 30 – to extend the WIC benefit increase to assure that mothers and their children have adequate resources to ensure nutrition security.** Maintaining the increased WIC CVB at \$35 per month will contribute to positive economic impacts to low-income families and the statewide economy as well as ensure families have access to healthy food, playing a critical role in improving nutrition and health across the lifespan.

Sincerely,

National WIC Association
Center for Health Law and Policy Innovation of Harvard Law School
Vouchers 4 Veggies - EatSF
1,000 Days
Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
Advocates for Better Children's Diets

*Data for this report is from the states of California, Colorado, Iowa, and Texas.

Alliance to End Hunger
Allies for Children
American Academy of Pediatrics
American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
American Heart Association
Arizona Local Agency WIC Association
Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs
Association of SNAP Nutrition Education Administrators (ASNNA)
Association of State Public Health Nutritionists
Association of State and Territorial Health Officials
Balanced
Berkeley Media Studies Group
B.Komplete
Black Infant Health
Botanical Community Development Initiatives
Bread for the World
CACFP Roundtable
California Association of Food Banks
California Food is Medicine Coalition
California WIC Association
Center for Precision Medicine and Data Sciences, UC Davis School of Medicine
Center for Science in the Public Interest
Ceres Community Project
Children's HealthWatch
Colorado Children's Campaign
Community Food Advocates NYC
Community Food & Agriculture Coalition
DC Greens
Faith Mission WIC Program
Farmers Market Coalition
First Focus Campaign for Children
Food for Thought
Food Law and Policy Clinic of Harvard Law School
Food Research & Action Center
Fresno Economic Opportunities Commission
The Health Trust
Hunger Advocacy Network
ICNA Council for Social Justice (ICNA CSJ)
InterCare Community Health Network
Jewish Healthcare Foundation
Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future
Just Harvest
Leah's Pantry
Macomb County Health Department
March of Dimes
Maryland WIC
Massachusetts Association of WIC Directors
MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger
Montana Association of WIC Agencies
Move Your Feet Before You Eat Foundation
Nashville Farmers Market

National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
National Grocers Association
National Health Foundation
Nebraska WIC Association
New York State Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
New York State Public Health Association
Norton South Health Corporation (NSHC) WIC
Nourish California
Nourish Colorado
The Nourished Principles, LLC
Nutrition First
Nutrition Policy Institute, University of California, Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources
Onslow Co Food Council
Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children
Pennsylvania WIC Association
Pinnacle Prevention
Public Health Foundation Enterprises (PHFE) WIC Program
Reinvestment Partners
RESULTS
The Root Cause Coalition
Samahan Health Centers
Same Canoe
San Diego Hunger Coalition
San Ysidro Health
Save the Children
Share Our Strength
Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior
Society of St. Andrew
The Souper Bowl of Caring Inc.
SPUR
TrueCare
Union of Concerned Scientists
United Fresh Produce Association
United Medical Centers WIC Program
Voices for Georgia's Children
Wholesome Wave
Wholesome Wave Georgia
WIC Association of Maryland (WAM)
WIC Association of NYS, Inc.
Wisconsin WIC Association (WWA)
ZERO TO THREE