

Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC)

100 Years of Public Health



1960s – As educators and health workers became more aware of the impact poverty and malnutrition had on low-income individuals, pregnant women, and children, a growing desire to implement assistance programs emerged.

In 1966 – Coinciding with many of his Great Society social initiatives, President Lyndon Johnson signed the Child Nutrition Act to address the nutritional needs of children.

1967 – The Marshall Field Foundation sponsored a small task force of five physicians to examine the extent of health problems that were being seen in the summer Head Start programs.

1969 – The White House Conference on Food, Nutrition, and Health was convened with the intention of focusing national attention and resources on the problem of malnutrition and hunger due to poverty.

Among the recommendations stated in the conference report was that special attention be given to the nutritional needs of low-income pregnant women and preschool children.

1972 – Under President Richard Nixon, an amendment to Section 17 of the Child Nutrition Act formally established the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC).

The legislation, sponsored by Senator Hubert H. Humphrey, established a two-year pilot program to provide supplemental food to enrollees.

1974 – The WIC Program started in Arkansas.

During the first year, Arkansas created WIC clinics in 14 Delta counties: Arkansas, Ashley, Bradley, Calhoun, Chicot, Cleveland, Cross, Desha, Drew, Lincoln, Monroe, Phillips, Prairie, and Woodruff. Some 2,621 participants were served by the program.

1979 – All counties in the state provided WIC services to 21,342 participants through all local health units.

Participants were prescribed supplemental foods through a monthly package tailored to meet their special dietary needs. Foods were chosen to provide essential nutrients likely to be missing from the diets of low-income women, infants, and children.

By the late 1980s – There was an increased emphasis on breastfeeding promotion and support in WIC.

Pregnant women and postpartum women were added as WIC-eligible participants.

1992 – The Farmers' Market Nutrition Program was established by Congress to provide fresh, nutritious, unprepared, locally grown fruits and vegetables through farmers' markets and roadside stands to WIC participants, and to expand awareness and sales at farmers' markets and roadside stands.

2008 – The Arkansas WIC Program moved to a completely computerized system. All WIC food programs must go to Electronic Benefit Transfer by 2020 nationally and Arkansas plans to be fully implemented in 2014.

2013 – The Arkansas WIC Program is evolving in the way it reaches participants and is now using technology to educate and encourage enrollment in the program.

Benefits of the Arkansas WIC Program include getting pregnant women in early for prenatal healthcare, making referrals for well child care and immunizations, educating moms on healthy nutritional choices, reducing low birth-weight babies, and helping children develop into stronger and healthier adults. WIC contributes to the economy of Arkansas through the use of retail WIC-approved vendors and Farmers' Markets statewide.

