



United States Department of Agriculture

WIC Special Project Mini Grants For Fiscal Year 2014 Summary of Final Reports

In 2014 the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) awarded three WIC State agencies – Colorado, Delaware and Vermont \$75,000 each to conduct two year projects testing innovative strategies to improve the retention of children ages 1-4 years in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). For more information about the projects and to access the final reports please visit the WIC Works Resource System. A summary of each project is below.



Texting for Retention Program - Colorado

Purpose

The Texting for Retention Program (TFRP) aimed to increase child retention rates by addressing barriers related to scheduling and attending appointments. The texting pilot sent reminders to clients to schedule/attend appointments and also provided information on the benefits of the WIC Program. The TFRP pilot assisted the Colorado WIC Program determine if appointment reminders reduced missed appointments and therefore increased retention. It also determined if messages outlining WIC benefits resulted in an increase in child retention.

Activities

Fifteen WIC clinics participated in TFRP. Each clinic was separated into three separate groups. These groups consisted of the control group (no implementation of the program), basic innovation (sent text message appointment reminders) and the augmented innovation (sent text message appointment reminders and additional information regarding the benefits of the WIC Program). The Colorado WIC Program also allows two scheduling types; standard scheduling (3 months out) or same day-next day scheduling. Colorado analyzed results in each group based on clinic size and scheduling type. In addition, Colorado conducted a survey among participating clinics regarding their experience and perception of the program.

Outcomes

Colorado examined the enrollment rates, number of kept appointments (all appointments and recertifications), number of no-shows, number of voluntary terminations (failure to pick-up benefits, failure to provide proof/documentation, and failure to reapply), and the number or reinstatements after voluntary terminations for each of the three groups. Detailed results for each of these groups are provided in the final report. The project had the largest impact on the number of reinstatements.



When compared to the control group the basic innovation group had a 20.8% increase in reinstatements and the augmented innovation group had a 31.7% increase. Overall the augmented innovation group appeared to have the greatest effects in these categories. In addition, the participant survey indicated a positive perception of the program.

Lessons Learned/Challenges

Emphasis on recording the correct phone number for participants is imperative, as it was noted that some families had the same numbers. Though it was a one-way texting service, participants attempted to respond to text messages. In order to implement the texting program statewide, cost will need to be considered and participant and staff education/training developed to overcome the issues identified during the project.

WIC Outreach Project - Delaware

Purpose

The WIC Outreach Project intended to increase retention rates among eligible children in New Castle County, Delaware through a partnership between the Delaware WIC Program and the Food Bank of Delaware. The project addressed barriers (eligibility awareness and time/travel obstacles) by creating marketing materials to increase awareness of eligibility and conducting on-site certifications at child care facilities throughout New Castle County, Delaware.

Activities

The food bank hired a WIC Outreach Coordinator who researched, created, and distributed outreach material to educate WIC eligible families about continued eligibility for WIC and the value of WIC services. The coordinator focused outreach efforts on Head Start programs and child care facilities. In addition, the coordinator conducted outreach activities at community centers, medical centers, libraries, and farmers markets.

Outcomes

The outreach coordinator contacted 82 WIC eligible families. Fifty-five of those families had previously been enrolled in WIC but were not at the time of the project. Certifications or recertifications were completed for 40 of the 55 families.

Lessons Learned/Challenges

Some families declined certifications as they were still required to travel to the WIC clinics to pick up benefits. The coordinator did not develop a set schedule but instead completed outreach each day in places where the most contacts could be made. This presented a challenge as the Head Start program was a focal contact but was closed during the summer months of the project.

WIC2Five: Using Mobile Health Education Messaging to Support Program Retention – Vermont

Purpose

Vermont's project, WIC2Five: Using Mobile Health Education Messaging to Support Program Retention, aimed to increase retention through weekly automated text messages. WIC2Five was designed to enhance quality nutrition services, increase participant satisfaction, and improve child retention by:

- Strengthening Vermont WIC's connection with families by keeping in frequent contact with them.
- Engaging parents/caregivers more fully by providing them with nutrition and health information of value.
- Using parents' preferred communication channel - text messaging.

Activities

Parents/caregivers who consented to participate in WIC2Five received automated text messages weekly from August 2015 - August 2016, containing health and nutrition information targeted to their child's age and stage of development. The automated series presented a consistent, sequential and evidence-based body of educational content, and each parent was sent the full 52-week series in sequence, no matter when they opted-in. Additionally, families received occasional "ad-hoc" messages inviting them to specific nutrition education classes and events, and prompting them to keep their WIC benefits active by making/keeping certification appointments.



Outcomes

As a proxy measure of child retention, Vermont compared child participation at baseline (July 2015), to child participation one year later (July 2016), in study and non-study sites. Although participation decreased in both groups, possibly due to concurrent major changes in the Vermont WIC program, the decrease was smaller in the five sites that implemented the text messaging. At the end of the project, Vermont conducted an opinion survey via text message. The responses were strongly positive; however, the response rate was 20%.

Lessons Learned/Challenges

The overarching challenge to implementing WIC2Five was the concurrent implementation of eWIC for food benefits and transitioning to a new computer system. On the plus side was the ability to send out "ad-hoc" one-time reminders to WIC2Five families in support of these changes. Recruitment for this project fell well below the target numbers. Recruitment was impacted by the option given to parents to complete the opt-in process at home, rather than during their clinic appointment. This often did not occur. This could be remedied by clerical staff completing entire WIC2five recruitment and enrollment process at the end of the clinic appointment when the family is checking out. Although Vermont experienced many challenges implementing and evaluating this project, based on our findings Vermont believes WIC2Five is a worthwhile strategy to include as part of a multi-component approach to child retention.