

Value Enhanced Nutrition Assessment (VENA) in WIC

The First Step in Quality Nutrition Services

Executive Summary

What is VENA?

VENA is a new initiative, developed jointly by the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) and the National WIC Association (NWA), to improve nutrition services in the WIC Program by establishing standards for the assessment process used to determine WIC eligibility and to individualize nutrition education, referrals, and food package tailoring. VENA is part of the larger process known as Revitalizing Quality Nutrition Services (RQNS) in WIC.

Why is VENA Necessary?

VENA responds to recommendations made in a 2002 Institute of Medicine report, *Dietary Assessment in the WIC Program*¹. In its report, the IOM recommended that all women and children ages 2 to 5 years who meet the eligibility requirements of income, category and residency status should also be presumed to meet the requirement of nutrition risk through the category of dietary risk based on *failure to meet Dietary Guidelines*.

The IOM made clear in its recommendation that the intent was **not** to affect the current use of other nutrition risk criteria for eligibility determination. That is, information should continue to be collected for the identification of potentially serious nutrition risk factors, such as growth issues, iron deficiency, or predisposing medical conditions related to nutrition. Such information is required for the priority placement of participants, and to provide the necessary referrals and individualize other nutrition services.

As a result of the IOM report findings and recommendation for a presumed dietary risk criterion, FNS identified the need to develop comprehensive nutrition assessment guidance. VENA will not only serve to enhance the nutrition services of the WIC program, but to ensure the integrity of the WIC Program as a premier public health nutrition program.

How will VENA Change Current Assessment Procedures?

Until now, there were no clearly identified standards to assess the quality of WIC nutrition assessment protocols. VENA defines for all State and local WIC agencies the process and content of a quality and comprehensive WIC nutrition assessment upon which nutrition education, food package selection and referrals will be based. The

¹ Institute of Medicine; Committee on Dietary Risk Assessment in the WIC Program. Dietary risk assessment in the WIC program. Washington (DC): National Academy Press; 2002.

diagram below highlights and summarizes the changes anticipated with the implementation of VENA.

When will VENA be Implemented?

Implementation of VENA will be a gradual process determined by each State agency’s current staffing and nutrition assessment processes. Initially, State agencies will submit a plan for the implementation of VENA in August 2007. FNS expects that all State agencies will use the VENA nutrition assessment protocols by fiscal year 2010.

Pre-VENA

Post-VENA

