

Introduction

To maximize the effectiveness of the WIC Program, the nutrition services provided must reflect current scientific knowledge and contemporary public health issues. Recognizing this need, the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) developed the process of Revitalizing Quality Nutrition Services (RQNS), with the goal of continually improving program services. RQNS initiatives include:

- The WIC nutrition risk criteria policy¹ to ensure that all criteria are science-based; and
- The *WIC Nutrition Services Standards* (NSS)² designed to improve the quality and delivery of WIC services.

Value Enhanced Nutrition Assessment (VENA) is the latest initiative under the umbrella of RQNS. VENA builds on the information provided in the WIC nutrition risk policy and the NSS. It defines FNS policy for performing a quality WIC nutrition assessment. This policy reinforces the importance of nutrition assessment in determining eligibility *and* providing other nutrition services that are relevant to the participant's needs. A WIC nutrition assessment is defined below.



A WIC nutrition assessment is the process of obtaining and synthesizing relevant and accurate information in order to:

- Assess an applicant's nutrition status and risk;
- Design appropriate nutrition education and counseling;
- Tailor the food package to address nutrition needs; and
- Make appropriate referrals.³

¹ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Supplemental Food Programs Division: WIC Policy Memorandum 98-9, Revision 8: Nutrition Risk Criteria, March 2005. WIC State agencies can obtain a copy of this memorandum from their respective FNS Regional Office.

² U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Supplemental Food Programs Division: WIC Nutrition Services Standards, October 2001. Available from: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/benefitsand services/nutritionservicesstds.HTM>

³ Adapted from WIC Program Regulations; 7 Code of Federal Regulations; Part 246; Section 246.7(e). Available from: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/lawsandregulations/default.htm>

⁴ Lacey K, Pritchett E. Nutrition care process and Model: ADA adopts road map to quality care and outcomes management. *J AM Diet Assoc.* 2003; 103:10061-1072.

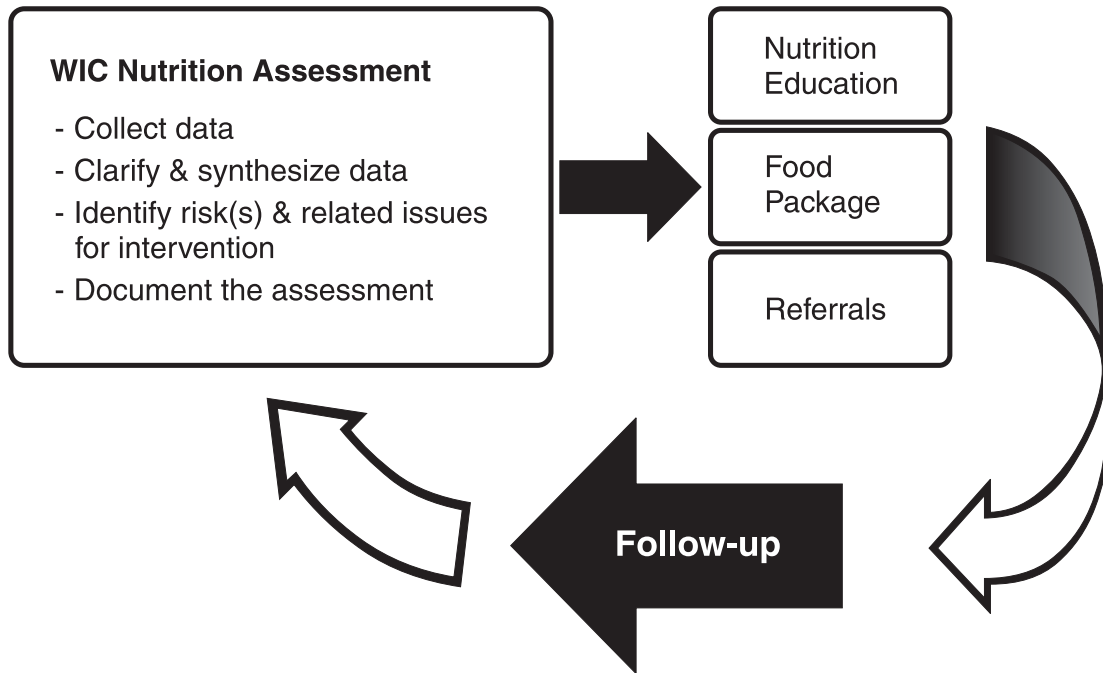
The VENA policy encompasses all aspects of a WIC nutrition assessment, which is an essential component of the WIC nutrition services process. A quality WIC nutrition assessment requires a systematic approach or standardized process of collecting nutrition assessment information to assure that all applicants are assessed in a consistent and equitable manner. However, the nutrition services provided to each participant will be *personalized*, based on need and interest identified through the assessment. The WIC nutrition services process is based on the American Dietetic Association (ADA) nutrition care process⁴, but modified to better fit the scope and public health orientation of the WIC Program.

Standardized Process versus Standardized Care

“A standardized process refers to a consistent structure and framework used to provide nutrition care, whereas standardized care infers that all patients/clients receive the same care. This process supports and promotes individualized care, not standardized care.” (ADA August 2003)

The following diagram illustrates how nutrition assessment fits into the WIC nutrition services process.

WIC Nutrition Services Process



VENA is the first step in quality nutrition services. That is, in order to provide an appropriate and personalized nutrition intervention (i.e., nutrition education, food package tailoring, and referrals), it is necessary to first conduct a nutrition assessment. Follow-up is also an important part of the nutrition services process; it allows WIC staff to monitor progress, reinforce the nutrition education message, and elicit feedback from the participant. In addition, follow-up “closes the loop” and allows for the continuity of care from initial certification visits to subsequent nutrition education and certification visits.

The information necessary for a complete WIC nutrition assessment includes anthropometric, biochemical, clinical, dietary, environmental,

and family data as well as other information (see Appendix A, *Relevant WIC Nutrition Assessment Information Tables*, for more details) that impacts nutritional status. Once relevant information is collected, it must be clarified and synthesized. Two useful methods to accomplish this are: 1) the skillful use of questions (see Appendix B, *Assessment Questions and Questionnaires*, for more details), and 2) the application of critical thinking (see *Process of a Value Enhanced WIC Nutrition Assessment* section). These methods help to ensure that the information collected is accurate, which is important for the correct identification of nutrition risk(s). In addition, the use of critical thinking facilitates a holistic view of the applicant and the interrelationship between and among risk conditions, which are necessary to plan an appropriate intervention.

All State agencies have the responsibility to develop and provide policies, procedures, and training to ensure that quality nutrition assessments are completed by all local agencies. The VENA Guidance is designed to assist State agencies by:

- Defining WIC nutrition assessment and its process.
- Explaining the implications of the Institute of Medicine (IOM) report *Dietary Risk Assessment in the WIC Program* on the WIC nutrition assessment process.
- Identifying staff competencies related to a WIC nutrition assessment.
- Describing how to implement VENA.

The appendices provide additional, more detailed information to assist State agencies by:

- Providing tables of relevant WIC nutrition assessment information.
- Outlining a model (*Health Outcome-Based WIC Nutrition Assessment*) to re-direct the assessment process away from deficiency findings to one based on the prevention of health problems and the applicant's needs.
- Including guidelines to develop valid questions and questionnaires for nutrition assessment and clarifying the appropriate use of closed-ended vs. open-ended questions.
- Listing extensive resources and references covering all aspect of nutrition assessment.

In summary, VENA is FNS Policy and Guidance that State agencies will use to enhance nutrition assessment protocols that serve to identify nutrition risks and guide WIC participant-centered services.

