

### **Summary - Overview of WIC Employee Focus Group**

Conducted March 24, 2008

Austin, TX – Hilton Austin Airport Hotel

15 Participants

#### **Employees Welcome Changes**

The employees who participated in Monday's focus group discussion expressed a great deal of job satisfaction and commitment, and felt they "made a difference" in people's lives. When asked to comment on some of the challenges they encounter at work, a few mentioned staffing issues and others noted the difficulties in keeping on top of policy changes. Some said it would be more convenient if WIC recipients could obtain their food items directly at their agency.

All in the group welcomed the changes to the new WIC food package. One noted that, as a dietician, she was "thrilled" about the addition of low fat milk and fruits and vegetables, and the other employees nodded in agreement. Several mentioned that the new package gives them an opportunity "to practice what they preach" in terms of healthy diet and nutrition. As one employee put it, "the food package will reflect more of what we're saying all along."

#### **Training Needed All Around; Special Emphasis on Whole Grains and Baby Formula**

The WIC employees recognized that their own staff, partner agencies, vendors, and most of all, the WIC recipients would need educational materials to understand and implement the new WIC changes. Several in the group suggested "marketing" the changes in a positive way to get the staff to "buy into it" with posters and informational literature. Some WIC offices have vendor liaisons that will be critical to the implementation of the new package. Others pointed out that their clerical staff will need training as well, because it is they who often answer recipients' direct questions about what types of food qualify under WIC.

In terms of vendors, the participants anticipate that grocery clerks might be confused about what qualifies under WIC with the new changes, and that the high turnover in these jobs will be difficult for the transition. They also thought that vendors might have to rethink their inventory for fruits and vegetables as a result of the new changes.

The challenge in educating recipients, as one WIC employee pointed out, is to make it clear that the current WIC package gives them too much milk, cheese, and juice. The new package is decreasing the quantities of these foods in order to supplement their diets with healthier foods. The discussion also touched on the need to focus on whole grains in particular – to explain what they are, their health benefits, how to identify them and how to prepare them.

WIC staff seem most concerned about the shift in baby formula amounts. They worry that some recipients will lie about whether they breastfeed, for fear that they will not get any or enough formula. This is an area where group members see a role for OB/GYNs and pediatricians to help explain the positives about breastfeeding and that with the new supplementary baby foods, mothers will not need the baby formula.

One of the most popular ideas that came up in the groups was a foldout pictogram that would show the proper food amounts at various stages in a child's growth.

Other ideas included:

- Mock grocery stores for staff and vendors
- Supermarket tours – from the perspective of the WIC participants
- DVDs, online interactive sessions, interactive virtual supermarkets
- Posters
- Nutrition education classes – how to read labels and ingredients
- “Cheat Sheets” or Fact Sheets
- At work or home training sessions, including online, training sessions
- WIC ambassador training
- Outreach to pediatricians: Giving literature/information, also contacting pediatric associations and participating in medical society conferences

### **Upcoming Deliverables**

Upon completion of the in-depth interviews and remaining focus groups, a comprehensive qualitative report will be generated to leverage for campaign development.