

Background

The project, conducted by Burger, Carroll & Associates, Inc., is a component of ongoing Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) efforts to effectively develop administrative data collection on important issues in local level WIC staffing. This WIC Staffing Data Collection pilot project was prompted by a 2001 General Accounting Office (GAO) report that cited a range of quality of services between local WIC agencies; expressed concern that local agencies may not be able to provide adequate services; and cited a need for improved professionalism and quality of service, as well as enhanced availability of professional staff to provide direct services.

USDA determined that additional data are required to adequately respond to GAO's concerns and other requests for information. The goal of this project was to aid FNS in identifying staffing items/questions that can successfully be answered by WIC local agencies. Both paper-and-pencil and electronic based administrative reporting instruments were developed and pilot tested in this project.

Along with literature review and public and advisory panel comment, the project provides suggestions by twelve WIC local agencies that volunteered to pilot test the instruments. These agencies provided feedback on items/questions in order to maximize data quality and minimize respondent burden.

Findings

The report indicates that:

- Many factors other than caseload have been identified that may influence WIC local staffing needs and current staffing patterns.

- There is not a common nationwide understanding of the definition of professional or paraprofessional (nutrition) staff.
- With some limitations, it is feasible to collect useful staffing related information from local WIC agencies in either an electronic or paper format. However, burden on local agencies must be considered.
- While similar agencies may have best practices to offer each other, it would be most challenging to apply national standards in all circumstances.

All available evidence from past studies as well as this pilot shows great variety in how local WIC agencies are organized and how they address staffing patterns. WIC's strength in delivering its services and nutritional benefits has been in reaching even the most remote niches of the U.S. population. As an adjunct to local health care systems, flexible WIC staffing patterns have been a factor in past success. Increased standardization of State/Tribal WIC Management Information Systems has aided in offsetting the variety in WIC staffing to bring similar treatment and uniform food benefit delivery processes across each State/Tribal jurisdiction.

This data collection and review effort identified three important areas in moving forward to address WIC local agency staffing needs and patterns:

- Come to a common vocabulary within the WIC community regarding the terms nutrition professional and paraprofessional.
- Identify or refine performance measures that constitute quality services, including the average amount of

professional staff time that is needed on an individual basis for WIC participants.

- Continue support to State and local agencies in their ongoing efforts to define requirements for staff training, including budgeting specific allocations.

The report also includes discussion of issues surrounding the data collection instruments during the course of the pilot study.

For More Information

“WIC Staffing Data Collection Project,”
Special Nutrition Program Report Series, No. WIC-05-WS, Project Officer: Ed Herzog. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Analysis, Nutrition, and Evaluation, Alexandria, VA, 2005.

The full report, as well as the data collection instruments used, can be found on-line at: www.fns.usda.gov/oane. The data collection instruments were pilot-tested as part of this project, and the report includes recommendations for revisions to the current instruments.

For additional information on the concerns identified by GAO, see GAO-02-142 Report to Congressional Committees, “WIC Faces Challenges in Providing Nutrition Services”, December 2001. The full report can be found on-line at:

<http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d02142.pdf>

For more information on WIC staffing

issues, see the FNS co-sponsored report prepared by the Association of State and Territorial Public Health Nutrition Directors (ASTPHND) “Survey of the Public Health Nutrition Workforce 1999-2000”. The executive summary can be found on-line at: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/oane/MENU/Publish ed/WIC/FILES/publichealthsurvey.htm>

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