

VERMONT WIC

ACTIVE PARTICIPANT SURVEY 2019

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Introduction and Background

The Vermont WIC program surveys participants annually to solicit feedback and plan for quality improvement. In 2018, a core set of participant survey questions was developed with focus in the following areas: Customer Satisfaction, Scheduling, Breastfeeding, WIC Shopping, and Nutrition Education. The core set of questions was vetted with the Vermont Department of Health Survey Review Committee and prioritized with input from District Office WIC staff and the State WIC team. It is a web-based survey administered via text.

The 2019 survey included all the core questions and expansions in some sections. These included questions gauging interest in appointments by phone and video and additional questions on the WIC shopping experience. Through a collaboration with the University of Vermont and approval from both the University and Vermont Agency of Human Services Institutional Review Boards, additional research questions at the end assessing food security and diaper use were included. Associations between the answers to these questions and survey respondent characteristics will be analyzed in a separate research study and are not included in this report.

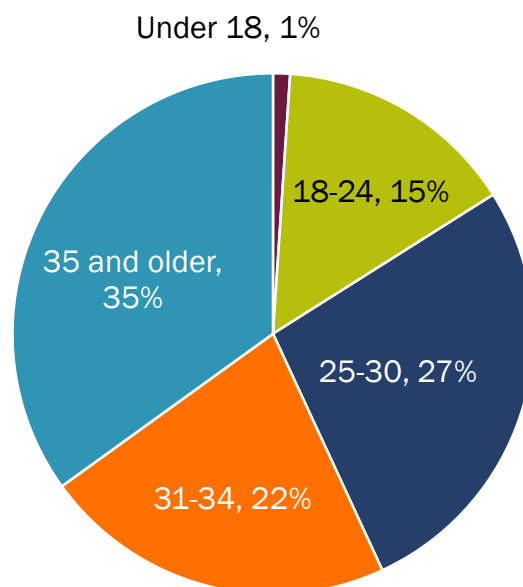
On August 23, 2019, the survey link was texted to 6,905 cell phone numbers of households that were active on WIC as of August 15, 2019 and opted into WIC's texting service. A reminder text was sent on August 30, 2019 to the same phone numbers, apart from 6 who opted out after the first text was sent.

The survey had 761 responses, with a 78% completion rate. The response represents approximately 10% of active WIC households.

Demographics

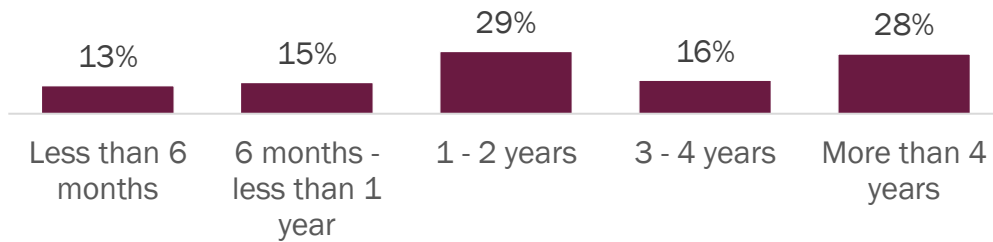
Over half (57%) of the respondents were 31 and older. Eight respondents were under 18 years old and, due to being under the age of a legal adult were opted out of completing the rest of the survey.

How old are you?



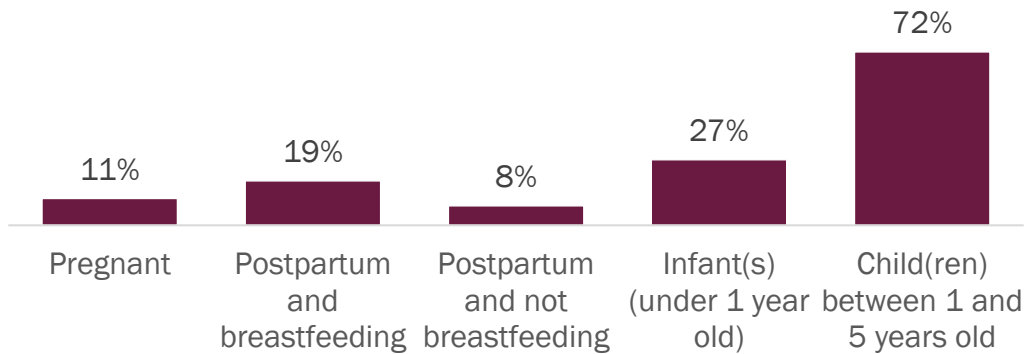
Respondents represented a mix of total time participating in the program.

Overall, how long has your family participated in the WIC Program?

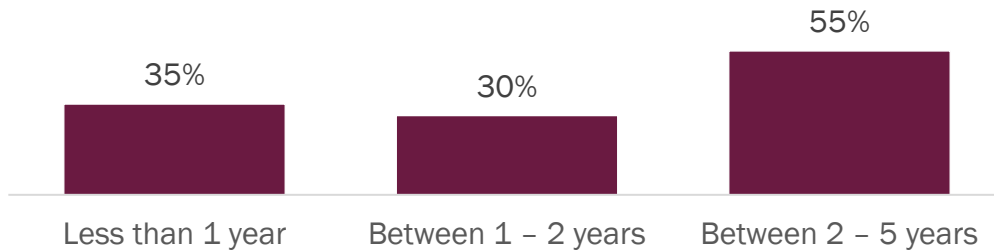


The majority of respondents (72%) had a child aged 1-5 participating in WIC. More than one in three respondents participated in WIC as a pregnant or postpartum woman.

Please tell us about your participation in WIC. (Check all that apply.)

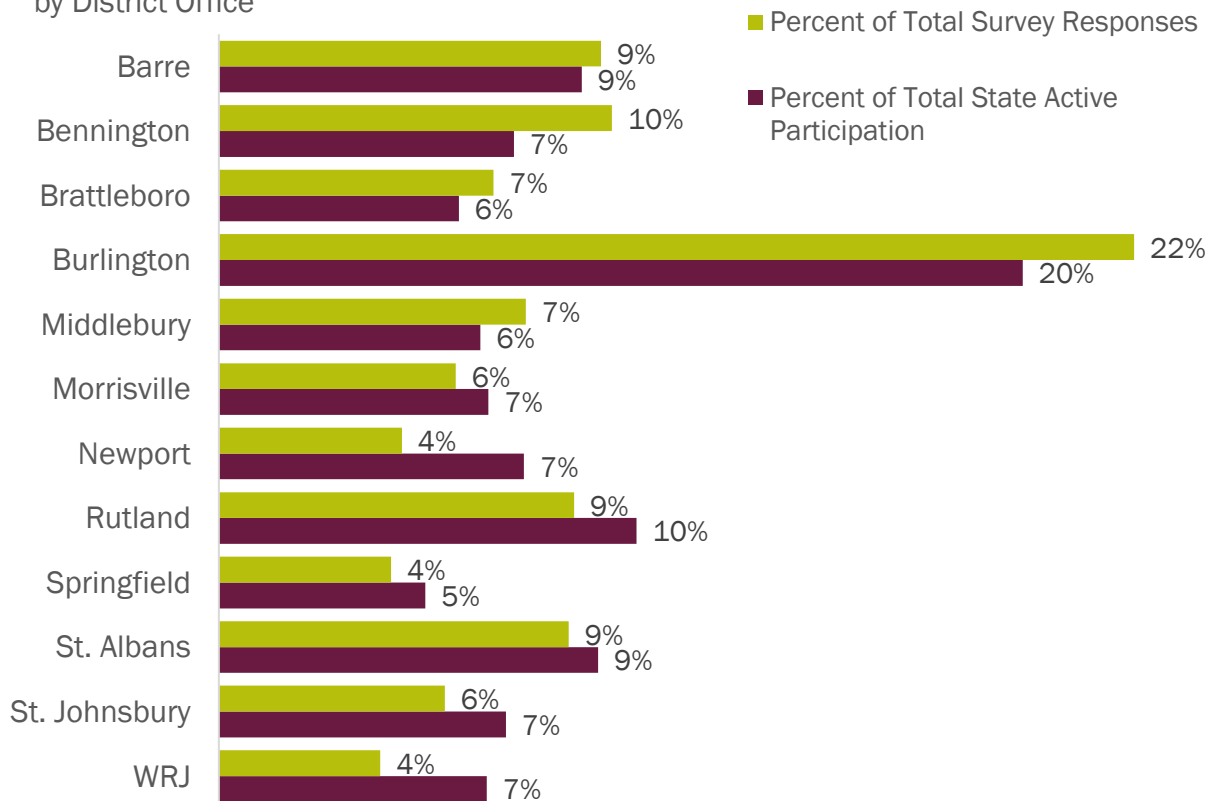


If you have children enrolled in WIC, how old are your children? (Check all that apply.)



Survey responses were geographically spread across the state, with a higher proportion of respondents from the local WIC programs with higher caseloads. The number of survey responses from each region correlates to the number of active participants. Three percent of respondents did not provide a town name.

Geographic Distribution of Survey Respondents
by District Office

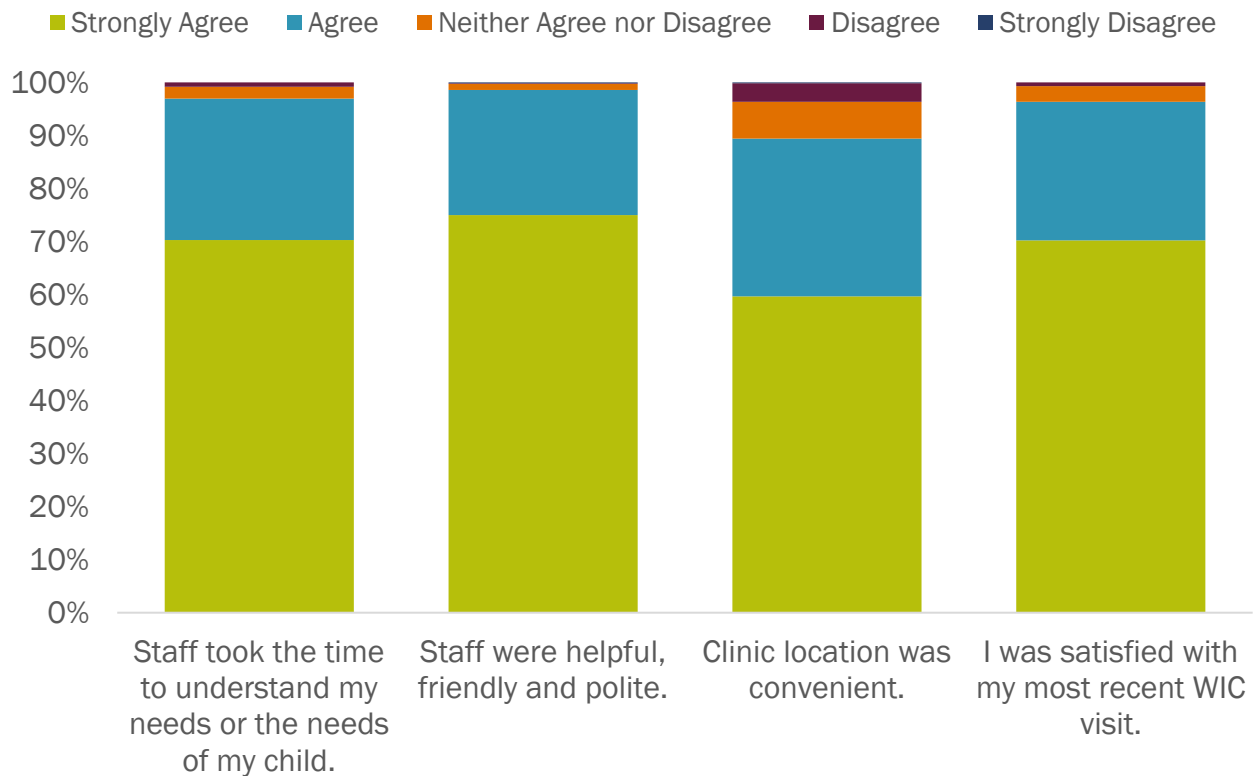


Customer Satisfaction

The survey asked a series of questions related to customer satisfaction with the most recent clinic appointment, clinic staff, and the program overall.

Over 95% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that at their last WIC appointment staff took the time to understand the needs of their child, were helpful, friendly and polite, and were satisfied with their most recent visit. Eighty-nine percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that clinic location was convenient.

WIC Satisfaction at Most Recent Appointment

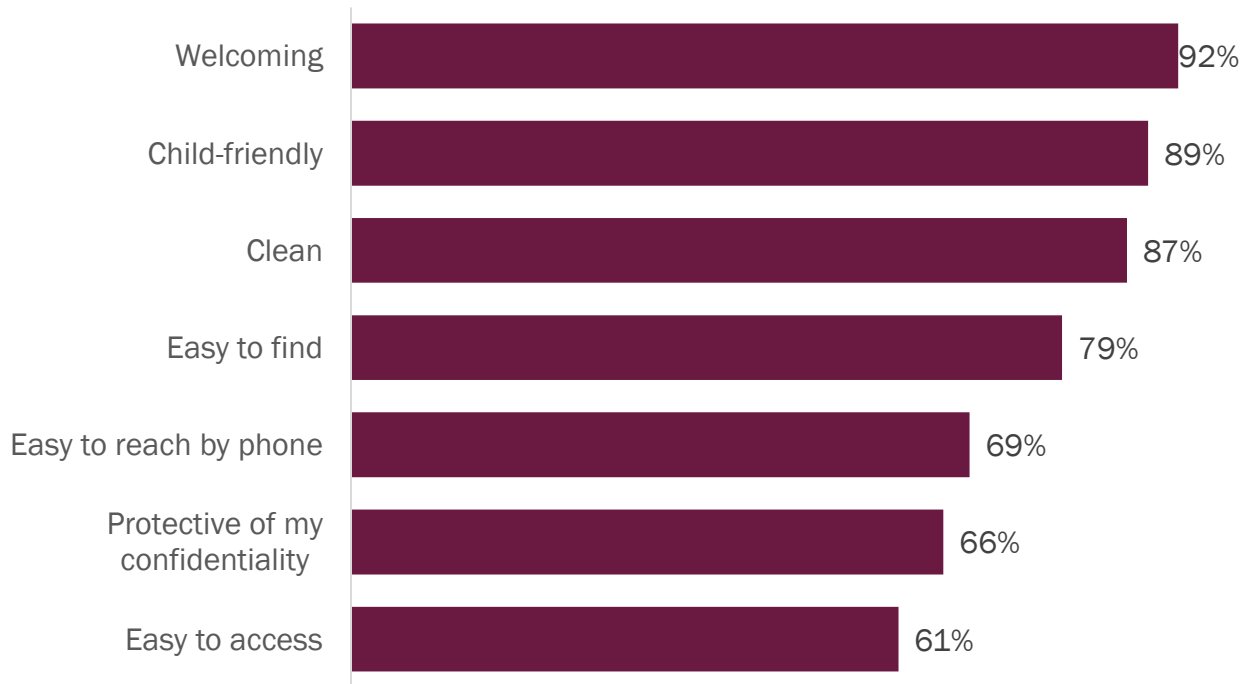


At least three quarters of respondents reported the local WIC office as welcoming, child-friendly, clean and easy to find. Approximately 69% of respondents answered the local WIC office was easy to reach by phone, 66% protective of confidentiality, and 61% that it was easy to access.

“The staff was so sweet and I didn’t feel judged for the first time in a long time.”

Open comments included specific issues with parking which could be further analyzed by location. There were several positive comments about the WIC staff and a handful of comments about poor experiences scheduling and accessing the building.

In thinking back to your last clinic appointment, the local WIC office/clinic was (Check all that apply)



When participants were asked what they liked best about the WIC program, most participants (92%) selected WIC Foods. Other top choices included nutrition information, learning about my child’s growth and development, and farmer’s market coupons.

The survey provided an opportunity for open comment regarding the parts of the WIC program participants like. Themes identified in these responses included: encouragement and support from WIC staff and valuing dental services offered. Participants also value the Farm to Family Program.

“A sounding board, so vital as a new mother who has no kid experience. This service is so helpful.”

“I don’t feel alone. Sounds silly but I’m a single mom and just to have people there for my kids feels like help and support and I love that it’s there.”

What do you like about WIC?	
WIC foods	92%
Nutrition information	74%
Learning about my child’s growth and development	66%
Farmers’ Market coupons	63%
Getting information about other programs and services that help my family	53%
Finding out my child’s iron level	41%
Nutrition activities and classes	40%
Breastfeeding support	36%

A little less than half of survey respondents (364) answered the question, “If you could make one suggestion for the WIC Program, what would it be?” Of those responses, 104 were encouragements to keep the program working as is or expressions of gratitude. Of the remaining 260 suggestions provided, some are not within Vermont WIC’s control at this time (e.g. additional money for fruits and vegetables and expanding the program for children older than five). The most frequent comments fell into the theme of changes to the food package. In addition to the suggestion to increase money for produce, additional food package suggestions include adding different protein options, increasing the variety of options, decreasing some food categories (most frequently cereal and milk), increasing local and organic options, and having more options in some food categories (e.g. more gluten free whole grain choices).

“Offering a wider variety (i.e. brands) of certain food items (breads, cereals, juice, milk) that are still healthy choices and are affordable for the WIC program budget.”

Related to accessing the WIC food benefit, the next most common theme included suggestions for improving the shopping experience. These suggestions include connecting the WIC Shopper App to a family’s current balance, allowing WIC transactions at self-checkouts, and improving identification of WIC foods.

“The app to see your benefits would be great I have so much trouble with it I end up having to call to see what I have left.”

Other program improvement suggestions are summarized in the table below.

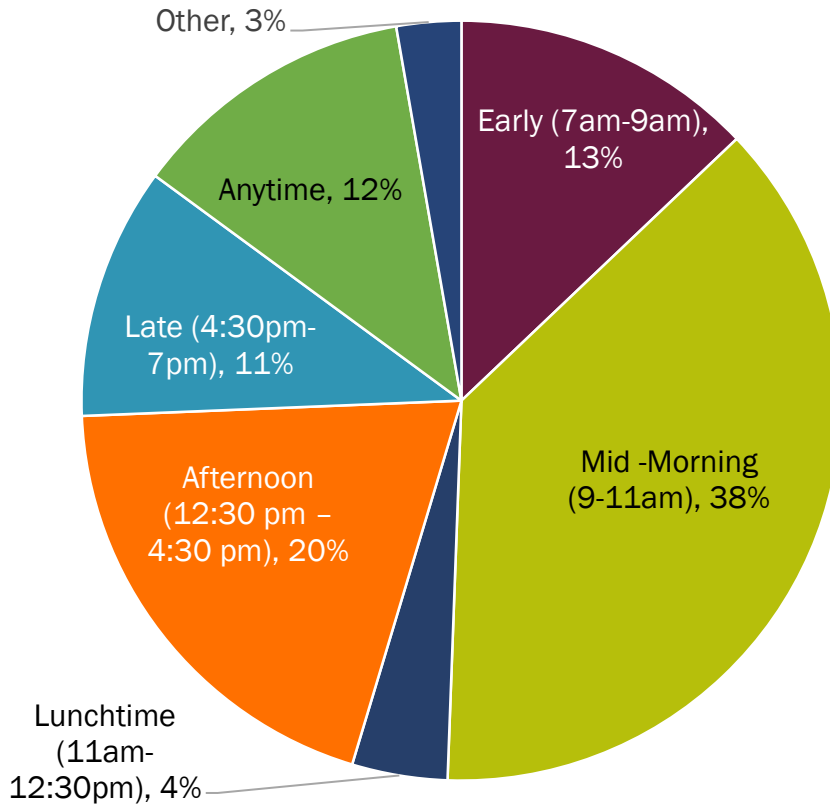
Participant Suggestions:
Improve parking at clinics.
Employ creative scheduling and more flexibility with appointments.
Enhance access to Farm-to-Family coupons.
Sponsor/Host more activities/events that bring families together to connect/socialize.
Consider foster parents and grandparents in requirements.

Scheduling

Staying connected with WIC through a certification appointment is a critical piece of active participation. The survey asked questions related to scheduling and making appointments to better understand the needs of families.

Mid-morning was the most popular choice of appointment time at 38%, followed by mid-afternoon at 20%. A few open responses spoke to the need for flexibility around changing schedules and the option to have appointments by phone or video.

I prefer my WIC appointments to be scheduled:



A little over one-third (37%) of respondents preferred scheduling their next appointment 6 months in advance (at the time of their last appointment) and 30% preferred scheduling a week or two in advance of an appointment. Twelve percent preferred to schedule a same-day appointment, while 18% preferred the option to either schedule in advance or have a same-day appointment. The remaining four percent of respondents preferred to walk-in, do not schedule appointments, or preferred another scheduling method such as calling.

Regardless of the scheduling method, about 74% reported not having difficulty scheduling an appointment. Reasons for difficulty are listed in the table below and each reason was selected by less than 10 percent of respondents:

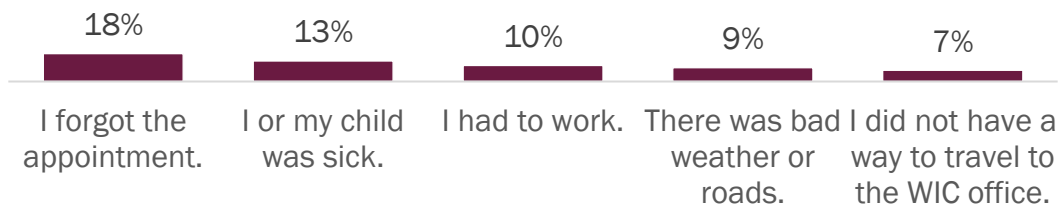
Reasons for Scheduling Difficulty:	
The clinic hours don't work for my schedule.	8%
I called to schedule but couldn't get a time that worked for me.	7%
I didn't receive a reminder letter, text, or phone call.	8%
I forgot to call to make my appointment.	7%

Approximately 63% of respondents did not miss any WIC appointments. For those that have, reasons include forgetting the appointment, illness, bad weather or roads, work schedule, or lack of transportation.

In the open comments, respondents mentioned work schedules, transportation, or not receiving reminders.

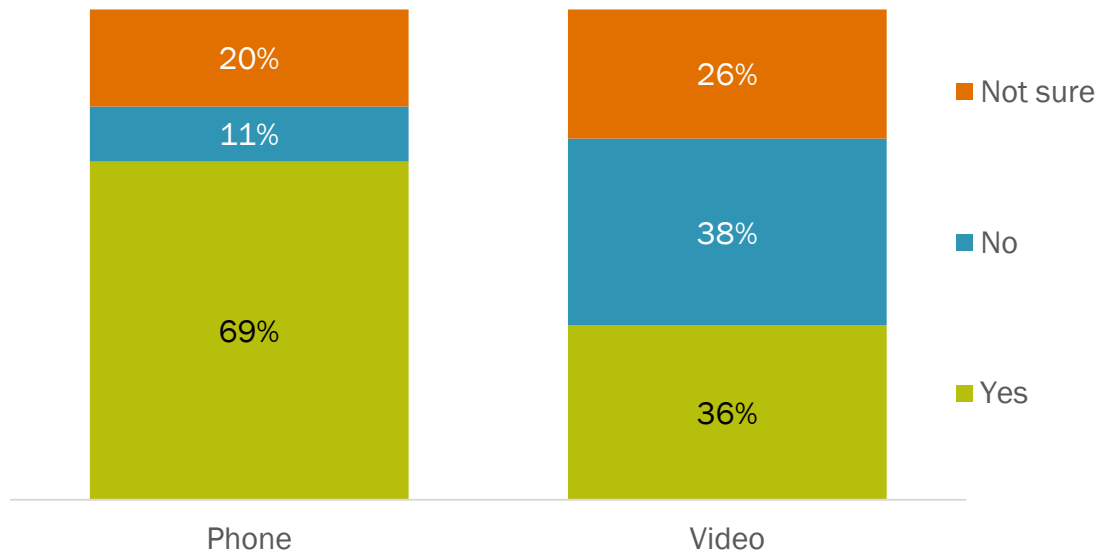
"I try to work around my work and school schedule..."

If you have missed any WIC appointments in the past, what are the reasons? (Check all that apply)



The survey asked two questions to gauge interest in completing WIC appointments by phone or video. More respondents were interested in the option to complete an appointment by phone (69%) compared to video (36%), though there was significant interest in both options.

Interest in Phone & Video WIC Appointments

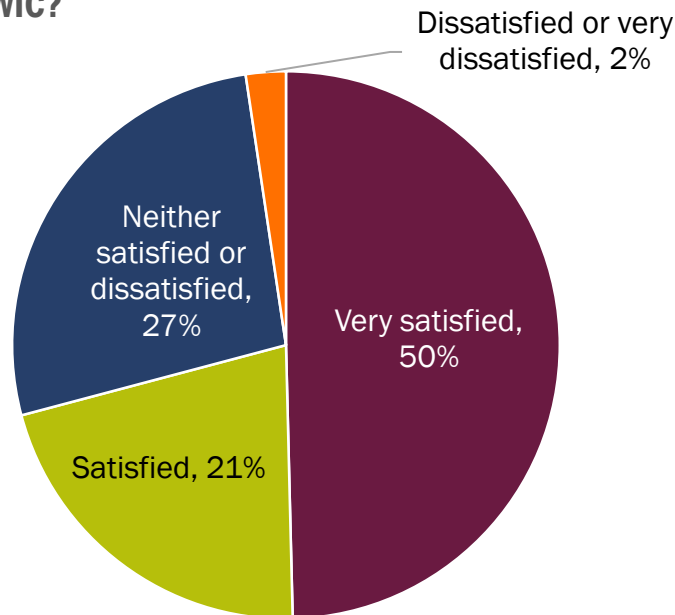


Breastfeeding

Breastfeeding is defined as providing breastmilk by feeding the baby at the breast and/or expressing breastmilk and providing it to the baby in a bottle or cup. Thirty-nine percent of respondents (265 respondents) breastfed within the last 6 months of their completion of the survey. The following section is based on the answers from this subset of respondents.

Nearly three in four (71%) respondents were either very satisfied or satisfied with breastfeeding services offered through WIC.

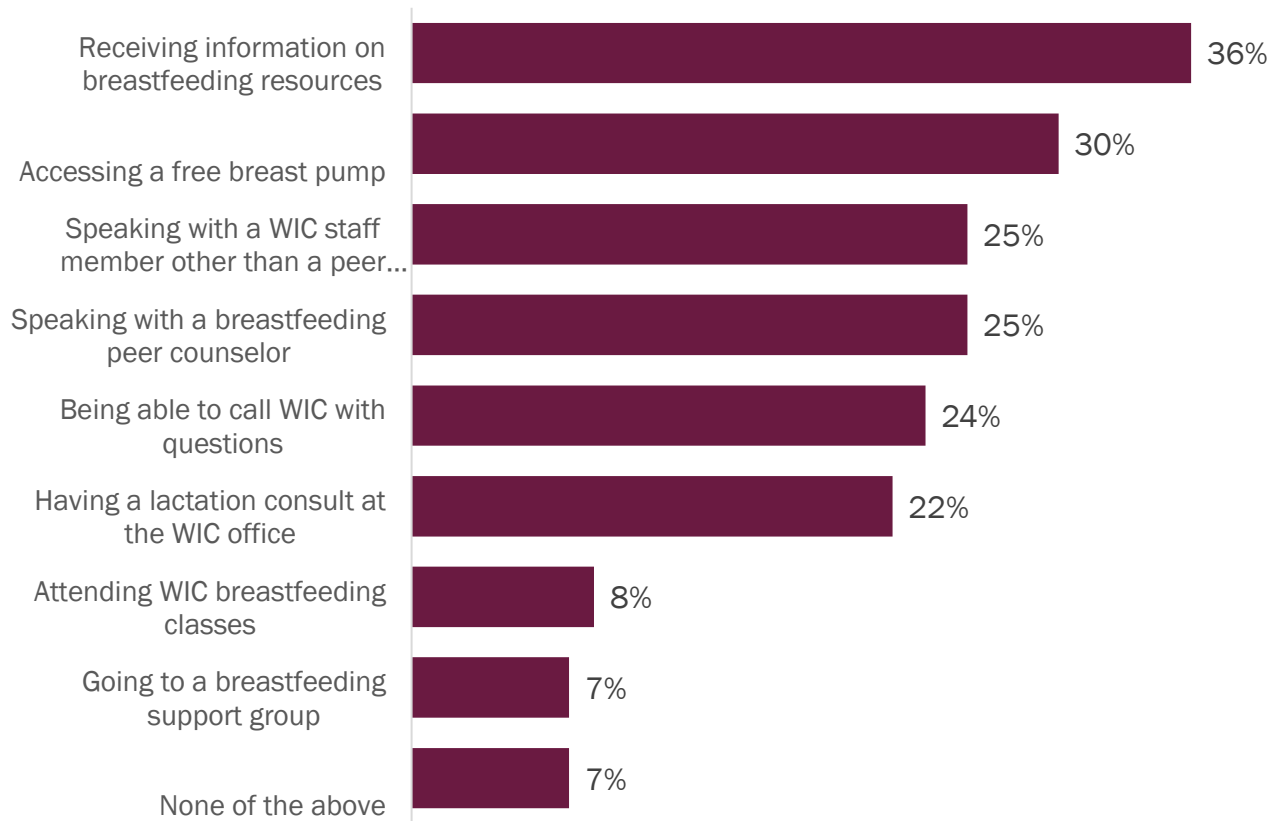
How satisfied have you felt with the breastfeeding services offered through WIC?



Thirty-six percent of recently breastfeeding WIC participants reported receiving information on breastfeeding resources helped them. The next top answer, accessing a free breast pump, helped 30% of respondents. About a quarter of respondents reported the following services helped them: speaking with a WIC staff member (25%) or breastfeeding peer counselor (25%), being able to call WIC with questions (24%), and having a lactation consult at the office (22%). Less than 10% of respondents were helped by attending a WIC breastfeeding class (8%) or going to a breastfeeding support group (7%).

"I am so grateful for the wonderful breast pump- so much better than the super old one I used with my first child!"

**Which of the following breastfeeding services at WIC helped you?
(Check all that apply.)**



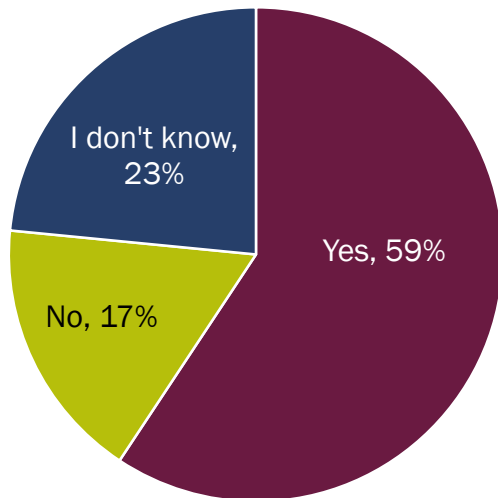
While many commented that no improvements to the breastfeeding services offered through WIC were needed, other themes emerged when respondents were asked, “How could we improve breastfeeding services offered through WIC?” These are included in the table below.

“Encourage and promote the peer counselor and support groups before birth of the child.”

Suggestions from Participants:
Improve advertisement/outreach of the breastfeeding services available through WIC.
Increase hours for breastfeeding peer counselors.
Continue WIC services past one year postpartum.

More than half (55%) of recently breastfeeding respondents were employed outside the home while pregnant and/or breastfeeding. Of these, 59% of respondents felt supported by their employer to breastfeed and/or express milk when returning to work. Seventeen percent did not feel supported, and another 23% responded “I don’t know” to the same question.

Do/Did you feel supported by your employer to breastfeed your child and/or express milk at work when returning to work after your child is/was born?



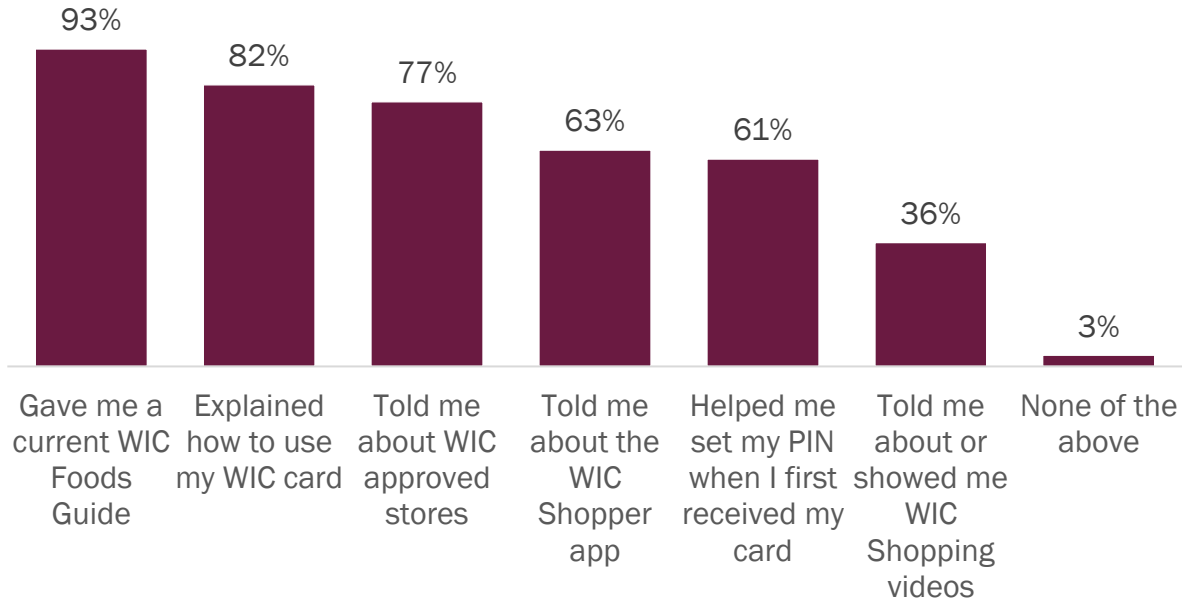
Just over one third (36%) of respondents who had breastfed within the last six months of their completion of the survey received a breast pump through WIC. Based on this subset of respondents, 74% percent received an electric breast pump, 41% received a manual pump (it is possible to receive both from WIC). Eighty-seven percent of respondents were either satisfied or very satisfied with the breast pump program.

WIC Shopping

Participants were asked a series of questions about the WIC shopping experience. Vermont WIC completed rollout of eWIC in 2016, transitioning from an over forty-year history of home delivering the WIC food package to purchasing it in grocery stores using an electronic benefit transfer (EBT) card. Given the mix of total length of time participating in WIC among survey respondents, some have experienced both methods of accessing the food benefit, while others have only accessed the food benefit in the retail environment.

Because WIC shopping can be complicated in the beginning, local WIC staff focus on this topic particularly at the initial enrollment appointment. The chart below shows different activities clinic staff engage in with participants. Just over 90% of respondents reported clinic staff gave them a current WIC Foods Guide. The other activities may happen at appointments early on in a family's time on WIC, but less frequently if a family is experienced and confident with the shopping process. In 2018, Vermont WIC developed and released a series of WIC Shopping videos that are meant to be texted to new participants and anyone having trouble shopping. Thirty-six percent of respondents reported being told about or shown the WIC Shopping videos.

At my clinic appointment, WIC staff (Check all that apply.):



The survey asked about the use of different resources when shopping for WIC foods. Checking the current WIC foods balance was the most common action taken, 73% of respondents always or usually do this. Using the WIC Foods Guide was the next most commonly used resource followed by the WIC Shopper app. Thirty-five percent of respondents never use the WIC Shopper App and 19% reported not knowing what the WIC Shopper App was or how to use it.

When shopping for WIC foods at the grocery store, how often do the following things happen?



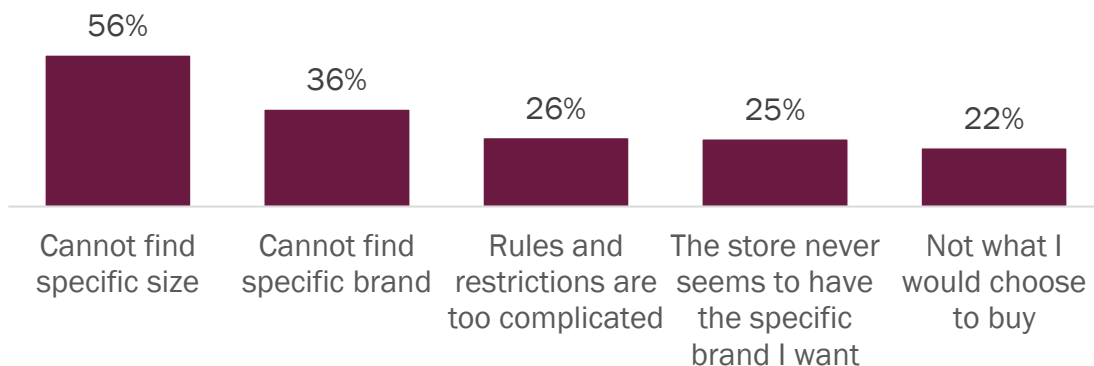
For those who never used the WIC Shopper app, 31% didn't use it because they don't know about it, 12% didn't have cell service inside the store. Nine percent didn't use it because it is not connected to their WIC account and 9% reported the app uses too much data.

"It doesn't show me my current available foods after I have used up some of my benefit."

For those who never used the WIC Foods Guide, the most common answer as to why not was respondents didn't need one (19%). In the open comments, respondents reported knowing the items they usually buy, so the Guide wasn't needed, or they relied on WIC labels on shelf tags.

Thirty-nine percent responded they do not have trouble finding any WIC foods. If participants have had challenges, the most common one was being unable to find the correct size (56%), followed by the correct brand (36%). These reasons contribute to the next most common response, that the rules and restrictions are too complicated (26%). Themes that emerged in the open comments include inadequate or nonexistent shelf tagging, challenges with specific products, and WIC-approved products declining at the register due to system issues.

What challenges have you had finding some WIC foods? (Check all that apply.)

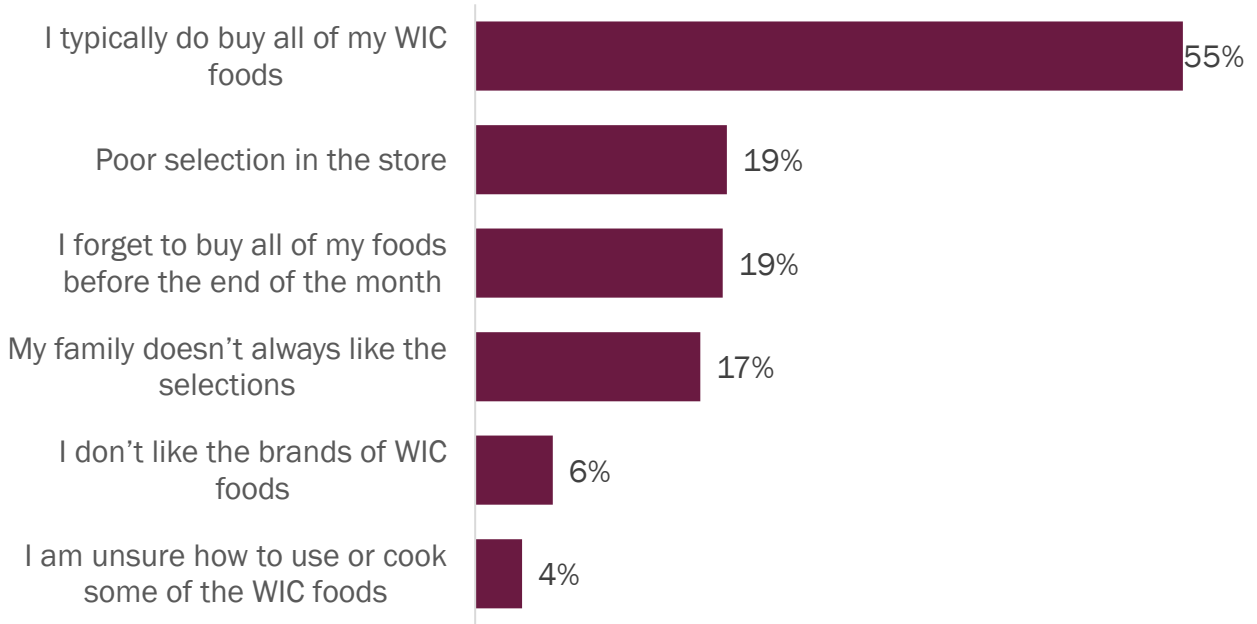


Over half (55%) responded that they buy all of their WIC food each month. Poor selection in the store (19%), forgetting to purchase all foods before the end of the month (19%), and not liking the selections (17%) were the top reasons for not buying all their WIC foods each month.

"There are some foods in my package that I'm not interested in or don't use enough to restock every month."

In the open comment, a top theme that emerged was respondents choosing to not purchase foods in specific food categories, either because they are hard to find or they are not liked by their families.

I do not buy all of my WIC foods each month because (Check all that apply.):



Similar to last year’s survey, whole wheat bread, 48 oz. juice, yogurt, cold cereal, and 64 oz juice were the top five most challenging to find WIC foods.

Top 5 Most Challenging to Find WIC Foods	
Whole Wheat Bread	29%
48 oz. Juice	26%
Yogurt	17%
Cold Cereal	12%
64 oz. Juice	10%

Nutrition Education

A cornerstone of the WIC program is nutrition education. Families complete a nutrition activity twice per year in between clinic appointments, and these can be done online at wichealth.org, or at in-person group or one-on-one activities. Completion of this nutrition activity is connected to continued food benefit issuance. Most respondents (81%) have completed an activity in the past.

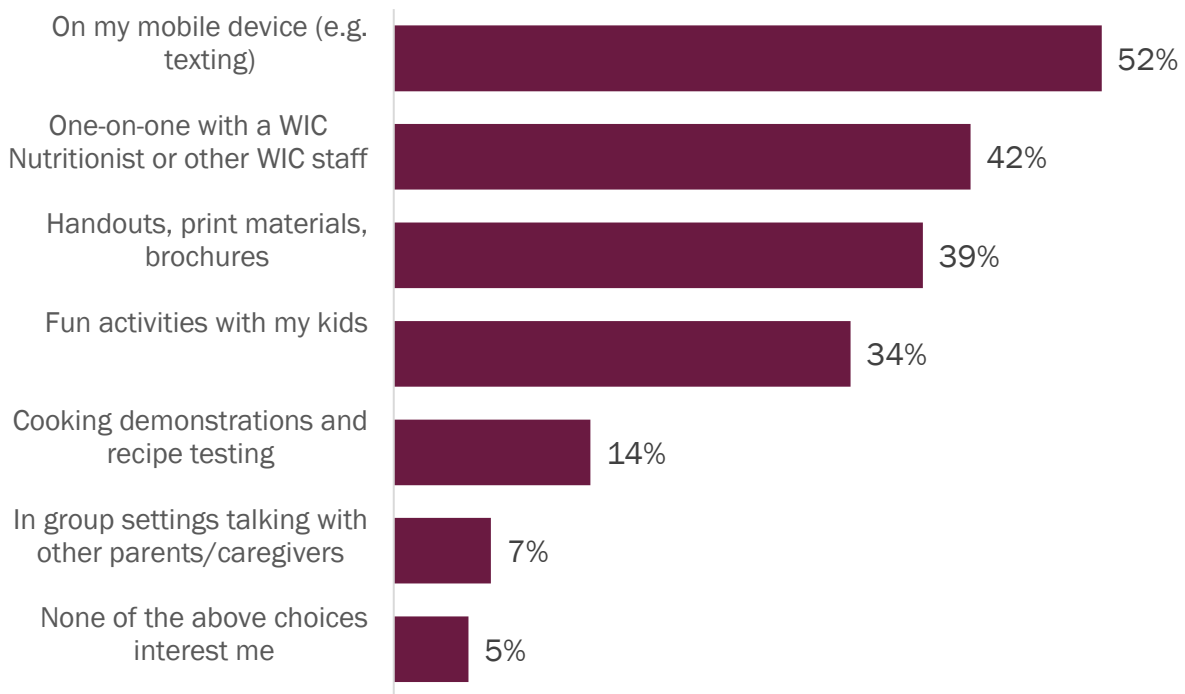
Participants are interested in a variety of nutrition education topics related to nutrition and other health behaviors. The most popular topic was “Tips for stretching a household food budget” selected by almost half (47%) of respondents, followed by “Child nutrition” (40%) and “How to maintain a healthy weight or losing weight” (38%). The full list is summarized in the table below.

Nutrition and Health Topics:	
Tips for stretching a household food budget	47%
Child nutrition	40%
How to maintain a healthy weight or losing weight	38%
How to cook with WIC foods	28%
Ways to choose more vegetables and fruits	26%
Physical activity and active play for kids and families	25%
Dental health	19%
Shopping for WIC/healthy foods	17%
Infant feeding	14%
Food safety	13%
Lead and other environmental health topics	11%
Breastfeeding	11%
Immunizations	9%
Healthy Pregnancy	8%
Returning to work and breastfeeding/pumping	8%
Quitting smoking, alcohol, or other drugs	4%

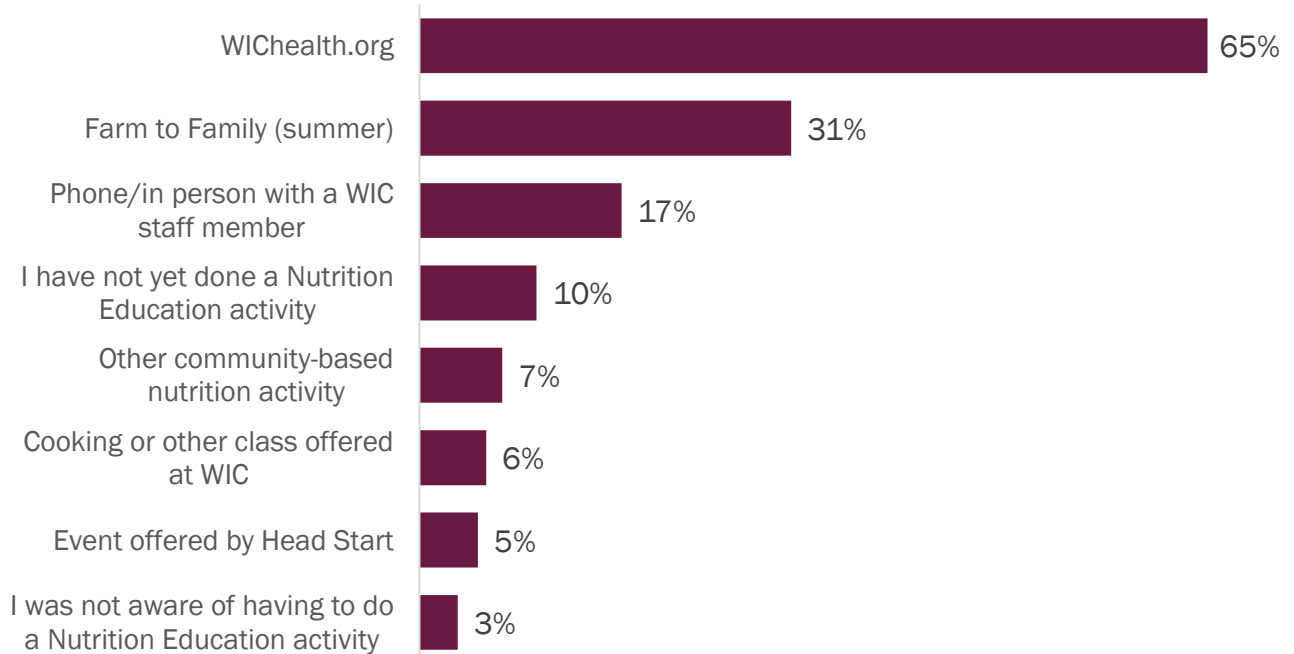
When asked, “What are your favorite ways to get your nutrition information from WIC?” the response “On my mobile device” was the top answer selected by just over half (52%) of respondents. One-on-one and print materials were the next top answers.

When asked more specifically which WIC nutrition activity they choose to do in between appointments, the overwhelming majority chose WIChealth.org (65%), Vermont WIC’s online education platform.

What are your favorite ways to get your nutrition information from WIC? (Check all that apply.)



Which WIC Nutrition Activity do you typically choose to do between appointments? (Check all that apply.)



When asked, “What health changes has WIC helped you make?” the top answers were eating more fruits and vegetables (49%), eating more whole grains (34%), and trying new foods (29%). Seventeen percent of respondents reported that WIC has not helped make any of the health changes provided in the answer choices. Open comments reflected WIC reinforcing healthy choices respondents and their families were already making, either by providing nutritious foods and/or by support from WIC staff.

“We have always had a good balanced diet, but having access to these foods helps our budget greatly and allows us to continue to provide healthy balanced meals.”

What health changes has WIC helped you make? (Check all that apply.)

