

In May 2020, the Vermont WIC program surveyed active WIC households for feedback on services during the COVID-19 public health emergency. The survey link was texted to 6,910 active WIC households who accept text messages (approximately 94% of active households) with a reminder text sent one week later. The survey was open for two weeks. The survey garnered 1,000 responses - 850 responses were complete and 150 were partial. This represents 13.6% of the Vermont WIC actively participating caseload.

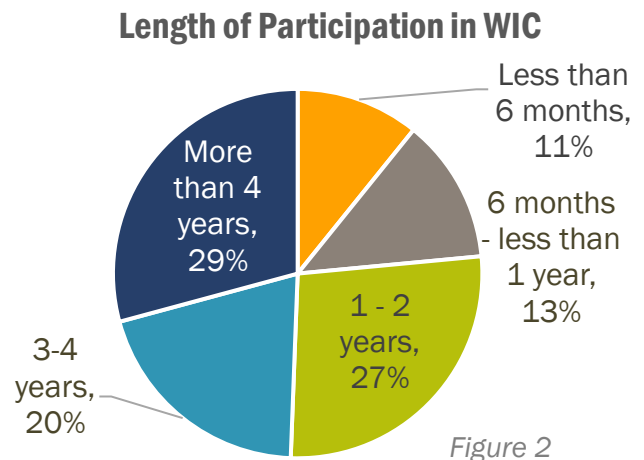
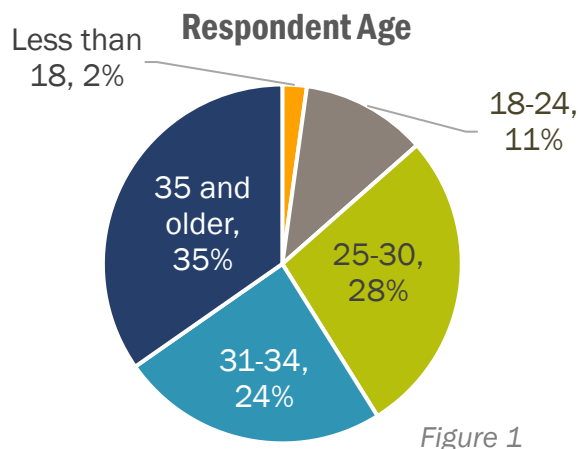
The survey included questions on remote (telephone) appointments, grocery shopping, and interest in online nutrition education. This brief focuses on remote appointments. WIC began offering all appointments by phone in mid-March 2020 in following the Vermont Stay Home, Stay Safe executive order.

### KEY POINTS

- There was an extremely high satisfaction rate with WIC appointments by phone
- Over 80% of respondents would like to continue phone appointments into the future
- More than half are interested in video appointments and interest has increased since August 2019

### Respondent Age & Length of Participation

Twenty-two respondents were less than 18 years old and were opted out of the rest of the survey. The remaining respondents were mostly 25 years and older, with 11% between 18 and 24 years old. Three quarters (77%) of respondents have participated in the WIC program for one year or more (Figures 1, 2).



### Remote (Telephone) Appointments

About half of respondents, 48%, had recently had a WIC phone appointment. For most respondents, the phone appointment would have been during the COVID-19 pandemic, though a small proportion could have answered based on participation in a phone appointment pilot from 2019.

## I was satisfied with my most recent WIC appointment by telephone

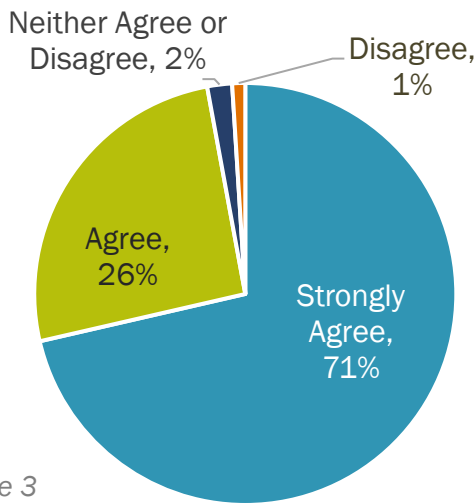


Figure 3

Almost all (97%) agreed to strongly agreed with the statement: “I was satisfied with my most recent WIC appointment by telephone.” Only a total of four respondents disagreed with the statement; none strongly disagreed with it (Figure 3). The most commonly selected reason to the question, “What did you like about your WIC appointment by telephone?” was that it was convenient (85%) followed by easy to speak with WIC staff (75%) and it saved time (74%). In the open comments, many reflected appreciating that phone appointments kept their families safe and helped them avoid any potential exposure to COVID-19 (Figure 4).

## What did you like about your WIC appointment by telephone?

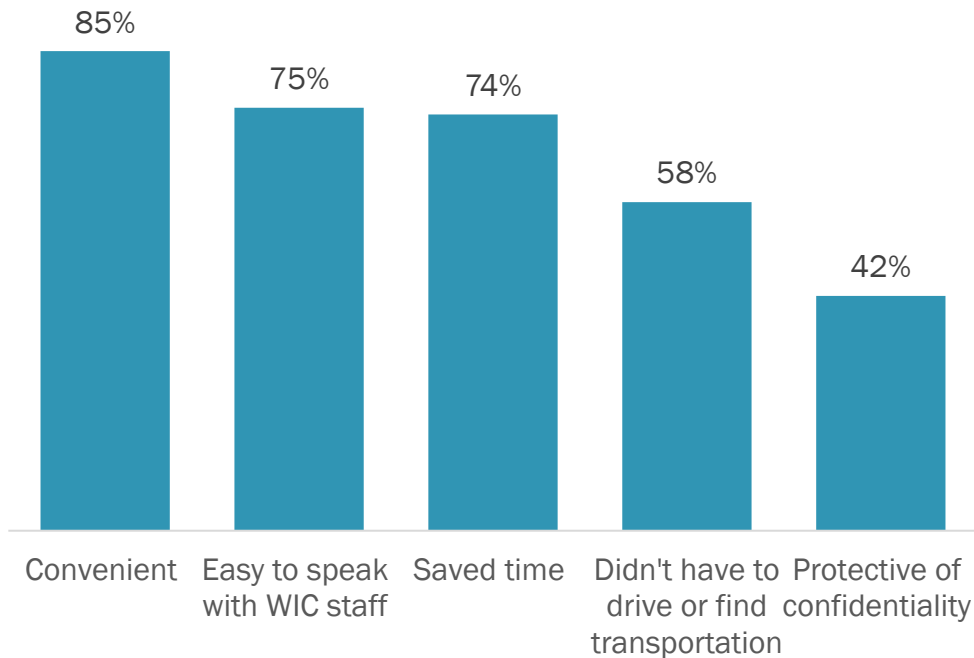


Figure 4

**It kept my family safe in this time.**

**-WIC participant**

**I like the fact that it's easy to do, but I did miss the interaction with the wonderful staff.**

**-WIC participant**

Just over half (55%) of respondents felt their appointment by phone was about the same as in-person appointment; 33% felt it was better (Figure 5).

## Telephone Appointment Compared to In-Person Appointments

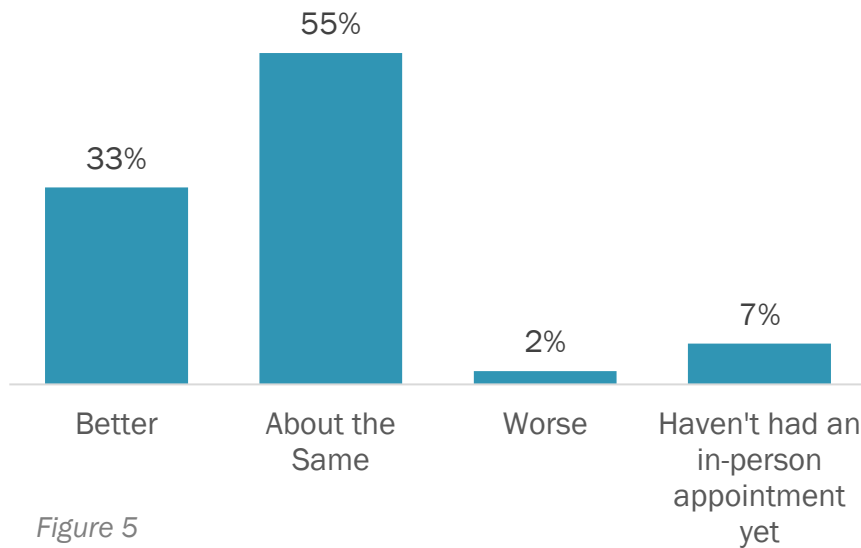


Figure 5

**The staff is so friendly, readily and easily accommodating, flexible, accessible, and very informative, that I feel the program exceeds my expectations. I am very pleased with my phone visits.**

**-WIC participant**

When asked what helped with the WIC appointment by telephone, most (87%) selected the text appointment reminder. About one-third (33%) liked information provided prior to the appointment and another third (29%) thought follow-up information after the appointment was helpful (Figure 6).

The survey also asked what could be done to improve telephone appointments. While most said “nothing”, some suggested responses fell into the following themes:

- Add a video component
- Measurements from doctor in advance
- Flexible appointment times

## What helped with the WIC appointment by telephone?

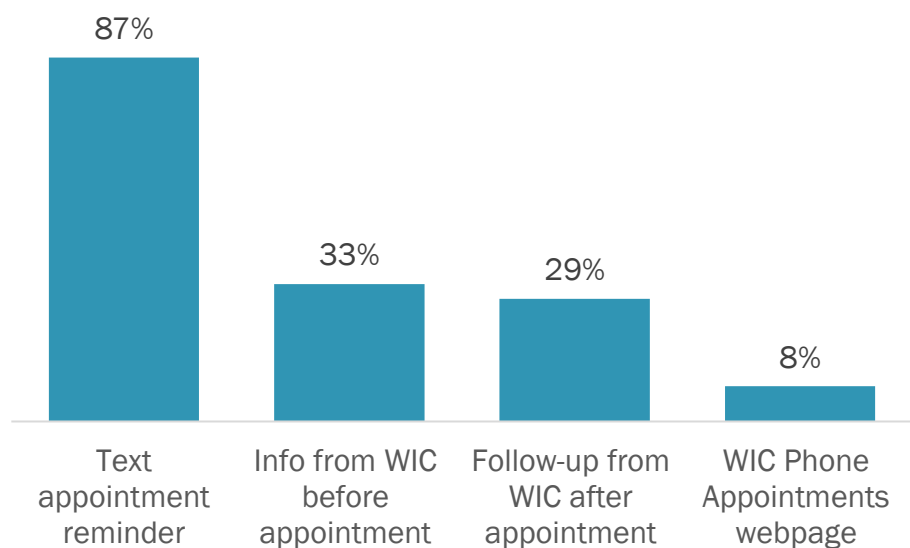


Figure 6

## WIC Services During COVID-19 | Remote (Telephone) Appointments

Most respondents (83%) would like to continue to participate in appointments by telephone. More than half (62%) would be interested in video appointments. (Figures 7, 8) The Vermont WIC program asked participants about interest in video appointments in our annual participant survey in August 2019. At that time, only 36% of respondents were interested in video appointments.

### Would you like to continue to participate in appointments by phone?

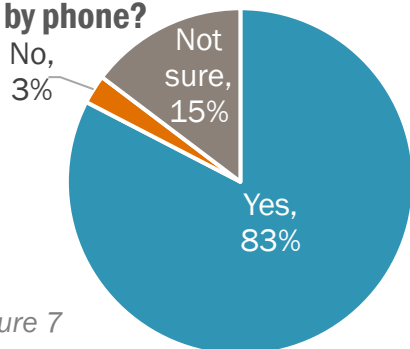


Figure 7

### Interest in Video Appointments

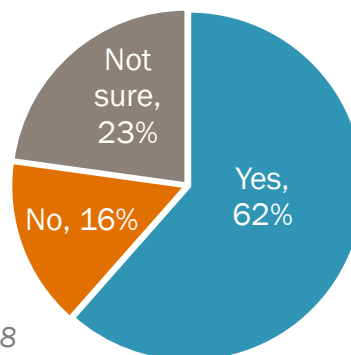


Figure 8

For those not interested in video appointments or unsure, 29% had poor or no internet and 61% are not comfortable on camera. In open comment, themes included: difficulty managing video with children present, unsure about using technology/concerns about security, and a preference for in-person appointments

## Key Takeaways

Participant survey data show an overall positive response to WIC phone appointments via telephone. In addition to keeping families safe during the COVID-19 public health emergency, families find them convenient and that it is easy to speak with staff. A survey of local WIC staff administered in the same month corroborate these results, with 93% staff reporting phone appointments are going very well or well. Staff expressed satisfaction for offering this appointment option which is convenient and timesaving for families while keeping them safe at home.

WIC administrative data on kept appointments are also greatly improved. Kept appointment rate for the month of April 2020 was around 70%, 15% higher than the kept appointment rate in the same month last year.

Because the requirements to obtain current anthropometric measurements and hematologic assessments (i.e. anemia screenings) were also waived in this time, this information was typically not available to incorporate into the WIC appointment discussion. Having this information was reported as an area for improvement by both participants and staff. The WIC program is actively taking steps to systematize referral data from medical providers prior to WIC appointments.

For more information: [wic@vermont.gov](mailto:wic@vermont.gov)

**Families are satisfied with remote, telephone WIC appointments.**

**Having access to recent measurements and anemia screenings would enhance appointments.**