



Department of Health
Agency of Human Services



Vermont Health Department Celebrates 40th Anniversary of WIC Program

*National Public Health Week is April 7-13
Working Every Day for Your Health*



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BURLINGTON – The Vermont Department of Health is celebrating the 40th anniversary of WIC this year. WIC is the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children. Donna Bister, WIC program director has worked in public health at the department for 38 of those years.

What makes WIC special, she said, is that it supplies young families with not only healthy food, but also social and personal support as well.

"That support is particularly important for first-time parents who have lots of questions about infant nutrition and behavior," said Bister. "These families benefit from WIC's combination of healthy foods, nutrition counseling and help accessing health care services. They know they can come to us as public health professionals, and get help in a supportive and friendly environment."

Vermont was the first state in the nation to offer WIC services statewide, and is the last to offer home delivery services statewide. Established in the state in 1974, the program quickly earned a reputation as being one of the best and most successful social service programs ever developed.

WIC provides foods to help meet nutritional needs of pregnant women, new mothers and children through age 5. Nearly 15,500 Vermonters, including 12,000 children, benefit from WIC. Fifty-two percent of pregnant women enroll during their first trimester of pregnancy. Good nutrition directly impacts a child's capacity to grow and learn.

Sara Schlosser, of Sandiwood Farm in Wolcott, remembers the deliveries as reliable – a plastic milk crate at the end of a long driveway that came so early sometimes that her children would dig it out of the snow.

"It was sort of like the tooth fairy, Easter bunny and Santa Clause all in one, a dependable surprise to look forward to," she said.

Clara Nadeau relied on WIC during the 1970s as she raised her five children on a 600-acre dairy farm in Holland, Vermont.

"It was wonderful, really fantastic," she said. "We had just bought the farm and obviously it helped us as a family. We were lucky to receive it and we certainly used it, and it never went to waste. The income at that time was never great for dairy farmers. With five kids, you do it because you love it."

For the past 20 years, Nadeau has worked with other farmers on the Orleans County Dairy Promotion Board, which strives to promote a healthy diet that includes dairy foods.



The Health Department holds WIC clinics in more than 50 locations around the state. WIC food packages and nutrition services have changed over the years, and now includes more choices such as a soy beverage, tofu, fat-reduced milk and cheese, and expanded options for buying fruits and vegetables. WIC plays a critical role in building a better future for Vermont's children, enabling families to make healthy eating and lifestyle choices.

WIC is also a gateway to services such as health insurance, immunizations and other health and nutrition programs. WIC also promotes breastfeeding as the healthiest way to nurture a baby. In Vermont, WIC mothers initiated breastfeeding at a rate of 78 percent, well above the national average of 67 percent. For pregnant women, WIC also reduces the risk for adverse birth outcomes such as very low birthweight babies.

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