

# Supporting Long-term Breastfeeding with the New WIC Food Packages

# Executive Summary

## Project Overview

The Vermont 2009 Special Project Grant, Supporting Long-term Breastfeeding with the New WIC Food Packages, provided coordinated care for mothers at risk of poor breastfeeding outcomes.

The project was comprised of two interrelated interventions with the goals of improving exclusive long-term breastfeeding rates in Vermont's WIC mother/baby pairs (You Can Do It), and of strengthening WIC's reputation as a supporter of breastfeeding (WIC Can Help).

Social marketing was used to promote the new breastfeeding food packages and to highlight mothers' needs, before and after birth, for professional support and for referrals to community lactation resources.



**YOU CAN DO IT**

At prenatal and postpartum WIC visits, enrolled moms received screening and individualized counseling to increase knowledge about breastfeeding, identify support networks and build confidence.



**WIC CAN HELP**

At detailing visits, WIC staff showed OB providers, family practitioners and pediatricians how WIC services can help mothers meet their breastfeeding goals.

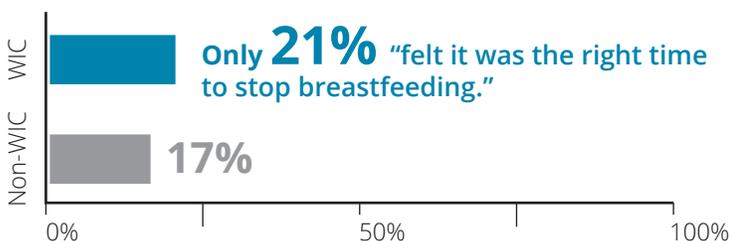
## Rationale

Most prenatal Vermont WIC participants want to breastfeed. More than 73% of babies born to WIC mothers start out breastfeeding (2009 Pediatric Nutrition Surveillance System).

Rates of exclusive breastfeeding are much lower: one third of WIC mothers supplement with infant formula by the end of the first week postpartum.

Sadly, mothers face many challenges that often lead them to stop breastfeeding before they are ready. A high percentage of mothers participating in Vermont's Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System said they stopped breastfeeding before the time was right, indicating they did not meet their goals. (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Vermont PRAMS 2004-2006



*"It was helpful just knowing I had support there (at WIC) when I needed it.*

*... that I could always go to them for questions about anything, about any of the food package, the breastfeeding, her in her 1st year of life, anything really. All together, they were a ton of help."*

*~ Study participant*

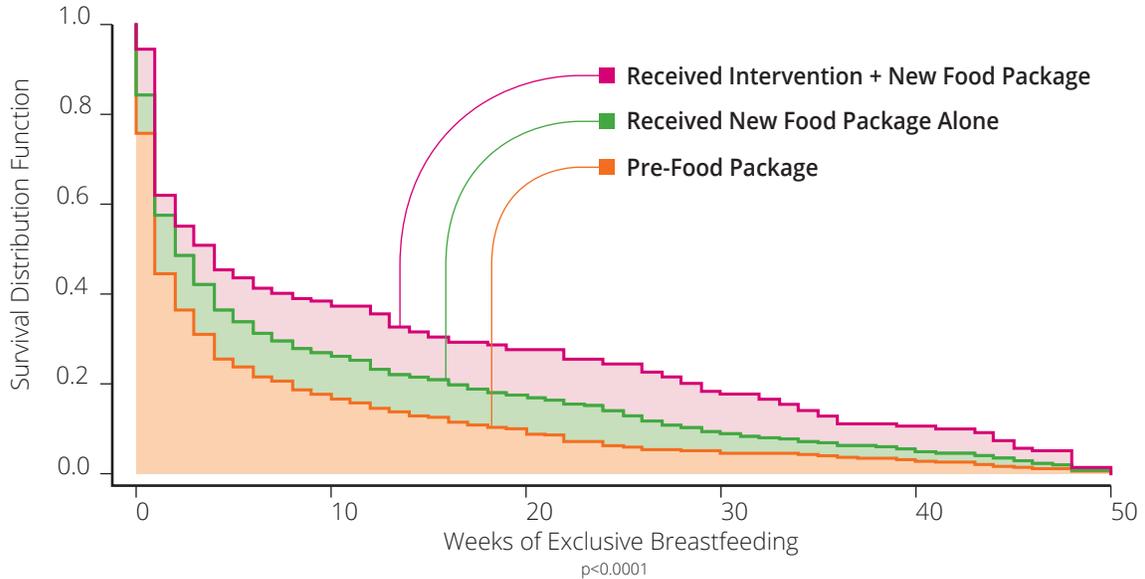
# Key Findings

## ✓ Project plus New Food Package equaled more exclusive breastfeeding over time

More mothers who received the new WIC food packages and participated in the You Can Do It intervention breastfed their infants exclusively and for longer compared to 1) mothers who received

only the new WIC food packages and to 2) mothers who received neither. These differences in exclusive breastfeeding persisted over time (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Exclusive Breastfeeding Over Time



## ✓ Project results exceeded the goal of a 10% increase in long-term breastfeeding rates

Significantly more mothers who participated in the intervention were exclusively breastfeeding at 4 weeks, 3 months and 6 months compared to mothers in the control group. (Figure 3)

Significantly more mothers who participated in the intervention were exclusively breastfeeding at 4 weeks, 3 months and 6 months compared to moms who were eligible for the intervention but declined to participate in the study when it was offered. (Figure 4)

Figure 3. Exclusive Breastfeeding: Cases and Controls

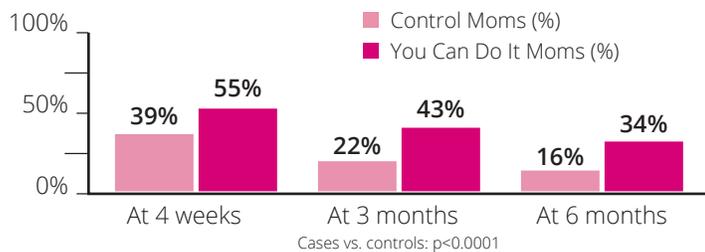
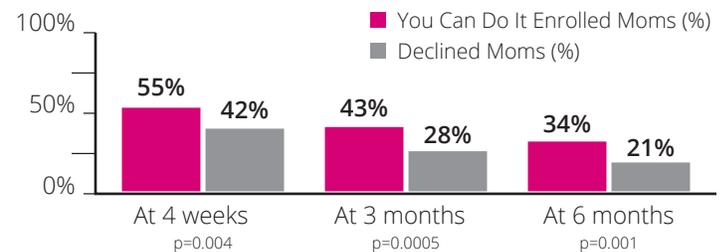


Figure 4. Exclusive Breastfeeding: Enrolled and Declined



## ✓ The 2009 Food Package Change increased long-term breastfeeding rates

Significantly more mothers at both study sites and non-study sites were exclusively breastfeeding at 4 weeks, 3 months, and 6 months after the new WIC food packages were implemented ( $p < 0.001$ ). (Figures 5 and 6)

Breastfeeding rates in study sites were historically lower than in non-study sites. After the food package change and interventions, study sites had nearly closed the gap in exclusive breastfeeding rates.

Figure 5. Exclusive Breastfeeding for Eligible Moms at STUDY SITES

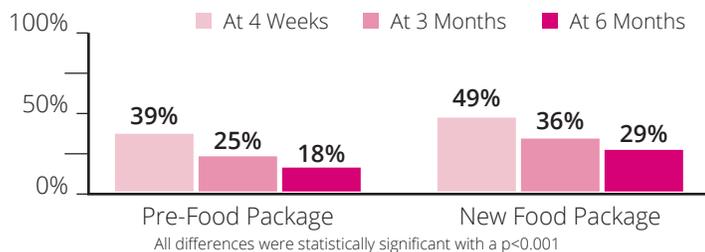
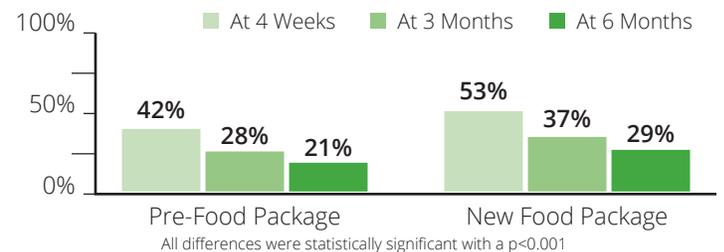


Figure 6. Exclusive Breastfeeding for Eligible Moms at NON-STUDY SITES



## ✓ WIC's reputation for supporting breastfeeding grew stronger

Qualitative data from interviews with physicians, WIC staff, breastfeeding peer counselors, and WIC mothers indicated generally favorable opinions of the social marketing messages and materials, with wide variations in which components were considered most

valuable and effective. Additionally, pre/post opinion surveys conducted with WIC moms, WIC staff and physicians showed strong increases in favorable opinions of WIC. (Figure 7)

Figure 7. Pre/Post Opinion Survey

	Moms All Districts	Moms Study Districts	Staff All Districts	Providers
WIC's Food Package is an incentive to breastfeed	▲ ★	▲	▲ ★	▲ ★
WIC supports formula feeding more than breastfeeding	▼ ★	▼	▼ ★	▼
WIC helps moms meet breastfeeding goals	▲ ★	▲ ★	▲	▲

▲▼ Change at follow-up compared to baseline    ★ Statistically significant

## Social Marketing Materials

**Checklists** Plan for breastfeeding success prenatally and continue for baby's first few months and beyond

**Detailing Packet** For WIC Staff to use during site visits to providers

**Buttons and Wristbands**  
Proudly show support for and commitment to breastfeeding

**The Hospital Experience\***  
Features infant feeding plan

**Comic** Four moms plan to breastfeed, overcome challenges and discover amazing rewards

**Website** Project materials online [healthvermont.gov/youcandoit](http://healthvermont.gov/youcandoit)

**Videos** Confidence building tips from a breastfeeding expert (DVD and online)

**New WIC Food Packages\***  
w/ Exclusive breastfeeding

**Posters** Quick tips and information about WIC services (series, 1 of 6 shown)

**License to Breastfeed**  
Summary of public and workplace breastfeeding laws

**Magazine** Inspiring mother/baby stories plus lactation consultant and peer counselor interviews



\* Adapted with permission from the Texas WIC Program

## Expert Recommendations



### Ongoing

Routinely visit OB, Family and Pediatric providers in your area and strengthen professional supports for breastfeeding moms and babies.

### 1st Trimester

Screen moms for breastfeeding challenges; counsel moms to talk to family and friends about their breastfeeding goals.

### 2nd Trimester

Provide targeted counseling based on screening; counsel moms to talk to providers about their breastfeeding goals.

### 3rd Trimester / Breastfeeding Class

Teach moms about hospital practices that support breastfeeding; counsel moms to share infant feeding plan with hospital staff and birth support team; recommend moms contact WIC soon after birth for early breastfeeding support.

### Birth and Beyond

Provide early support; refer moms to community lactation specialists, especially WIC breastfeeding peer counselors; Upgrade WIC food package to exclusive breastfeeding package.

## Knowledge + Support + Confidence = Success

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*loving support*  
makes breastfeeding work

**WIC** WOMEN INFANTS CHILDREN  
We nourish families.

**VERMONT**  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH