

# VERMONT WIC ACTIVE PARTICIPANT SURVEY 2018-19

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## Introduction and Background

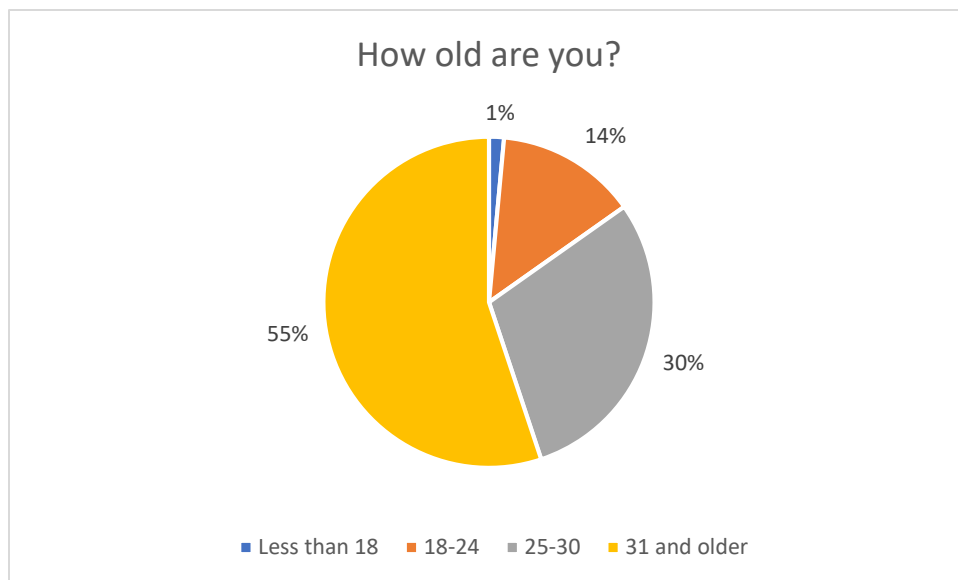
The Vermont WIC program surveys participants annually to solicit feedback and plan for quality improvement. In 2018, a core set of participant survey questions was developed with focus in the following areas: Customer Satisfaction, Scheduling, Support of Breastfeeding, WIC Shopping, and Nutrition Education. 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 that is primarily administered via text and email with some promotion at local WIC clinics.

On August 20, 2018, the survey link was texted to approximately 10,000 cell phone numbers that were opted in to WIC's texting service. A second text was sent on January 15, 2019 to roughly an additional 2,000 phone numbers that were added to the texting system after August 20. On August 22, the survey link was emailed to 3,288 unduplicated emails, about 160 of which were undeliverable. It is possible that participants received the link through both text and email.

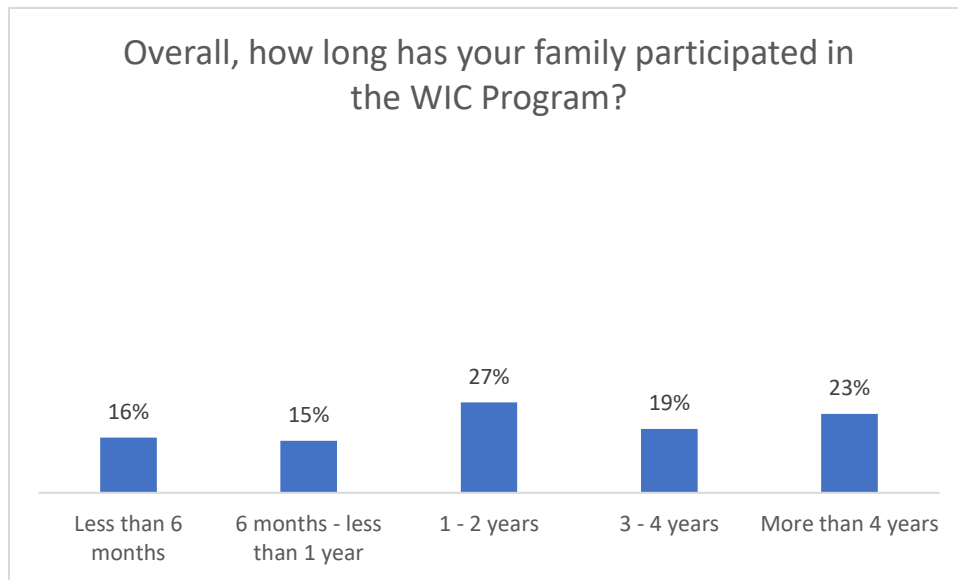
The survey had 822 responses, with a 79% completion rate. The response represents approximately 8% of active WIC households.

## Demographics

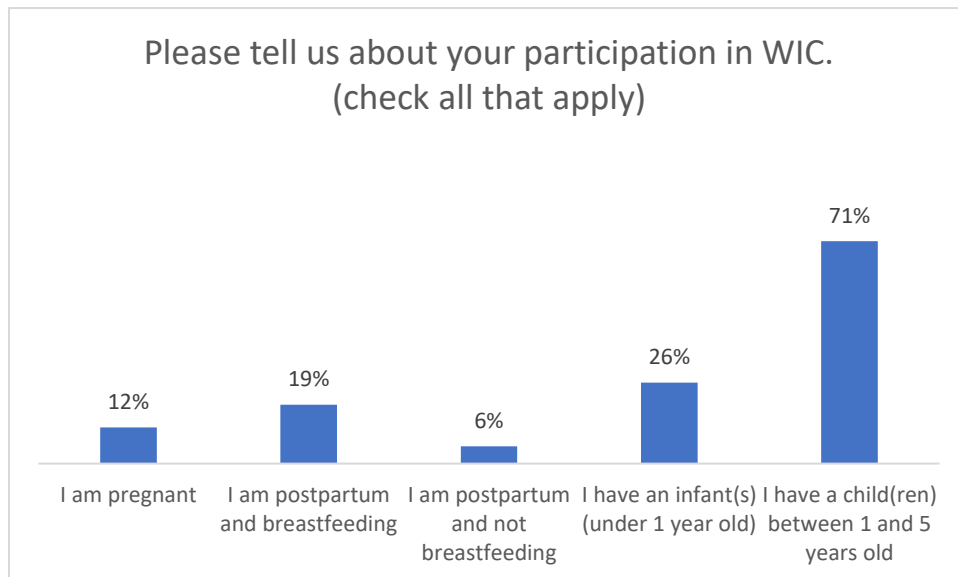
Over half (55%) of the respondents were 31 and older. Twelve respondents were under 18 years old and, due to being under the age of a legal adult were opted out of completing the rest of the survey.

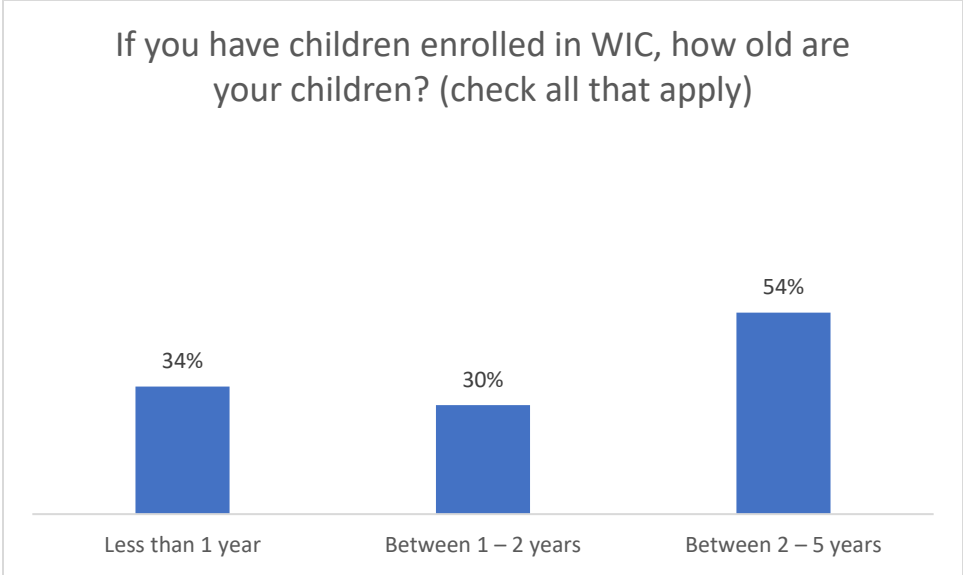


Respondents represented a mix of total time participating in the program.

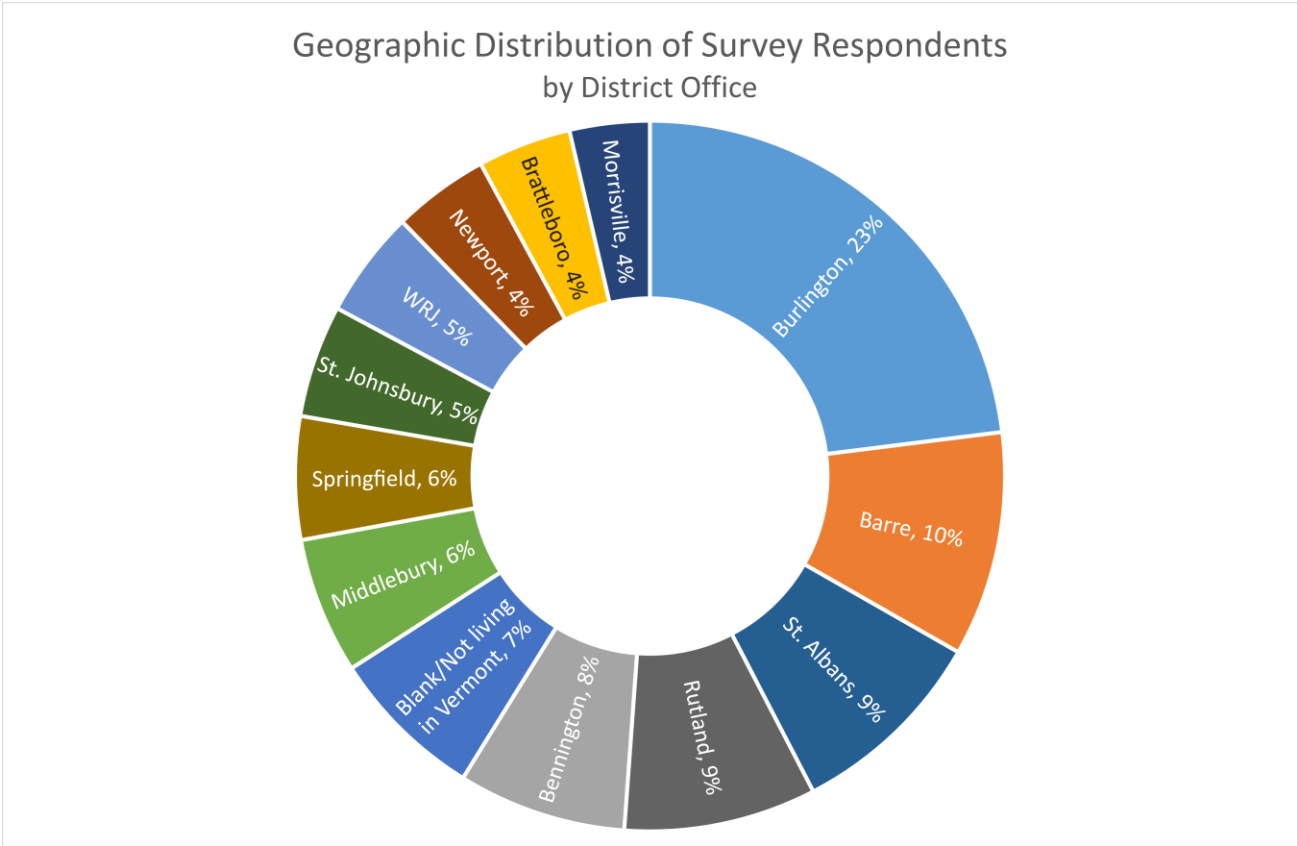


The majority of respondents (71%) have a child aged 1-5 participating in WIC. More than one in three respondents participate in WIC as a pregnant or postpartum woman.





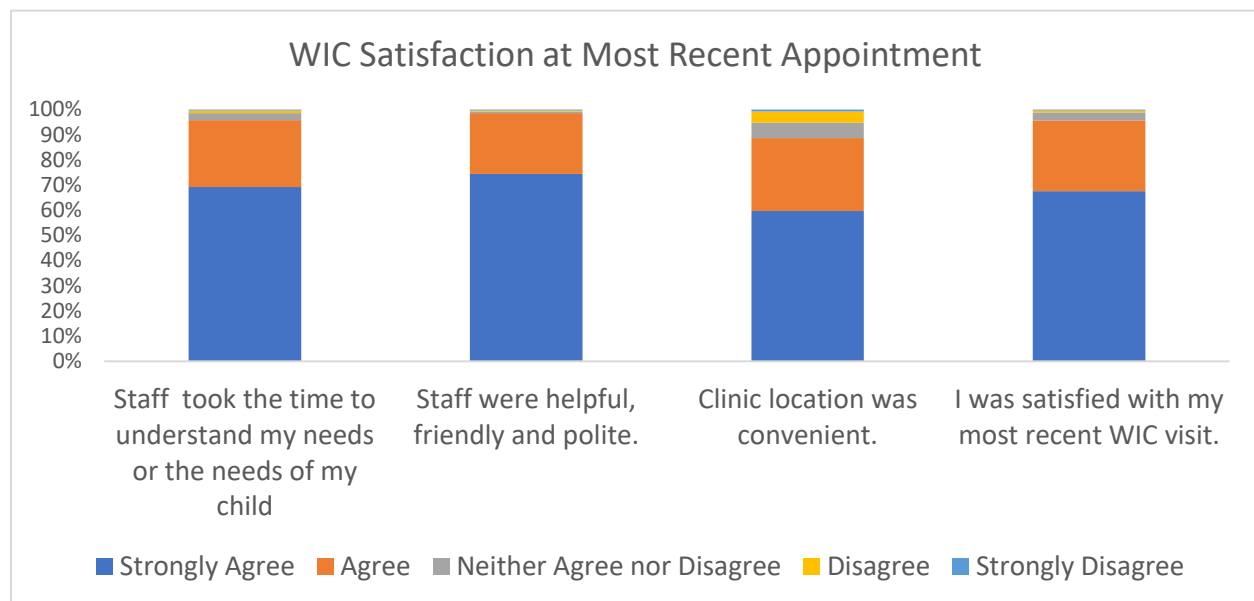
Survey responses were geographically spread across the state, with a higher proportion of respondents from the local WIC programs with higher caseloads. Some respondents that were texted the survey link have since moved from Vermont but still completed the survey. Others did not enter a town name.



## 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.



At least three quarters of respondents reported the local WIC office as welcoming, child-friendly, clean and easy to find. Approximately 60% of respondents answered the local WIC office was easy to reach by phone, easy to access, and protective of confidentiality. 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.

*“Although I can’t remember her name, the woman we saw went above and beyond. She took the time to send me additional recipes and resources for my child.”*

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 (90%) 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 the convenience of using the WIC EBT card to access the food benefit. Participants also value the Farm to Family program.

*“Nutritional support with WIC foods and Farmers Market coupons has been immensely helpful to my family!”*

**What do you like best about the WIC program? (Check all that apply)**

WIC foods	90%
Nutrition information	70%
Learning about my child’s growth and development	66%
Farmers’ Market coupons	55%
Getting information about other programs and services that help my family	51%
Finding out my child’s iron level	39%
Nutrition activities and classes	37%
Breastfeeding support	36%

*“Encouragement... it’s nice to be told you’re doing a good job.”*

Half of survey respondents answered the question, “If you could make one suggestion for the WIC Program, what would it be?” While, some suggestions are not within Vermont WIC’s control (e.g. additional money for fruits and vegetables and expanding the program for children older than five), other suggestions included ideas that are feasible and are summarized in the table below.

Suggestions from Participants
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide greater food selection on the food package, especially for food allergies, i.e. gluten.</li><li>• Employ creative scheduling and more flexibility with appointments.</li><li>• Improve stocking of WIC foods in stores and better shelf labeling.</li><li>• Improve WIC Shopper app to include balance and to make available offline.</li><li>• Improve parking at clinics.</li><li>• Consider foster parents and grandparents in requirements.</li><li>• Sponsor/Host more activities/events that bring families together to connect/socialize.</li><li>• Enhance access to Farm-to-Family coupons.</li></ul>

*“Stop offering Juice, instead offer more money toward fresh fruit....”*

*“More later in afternoon visit times for working families.”*

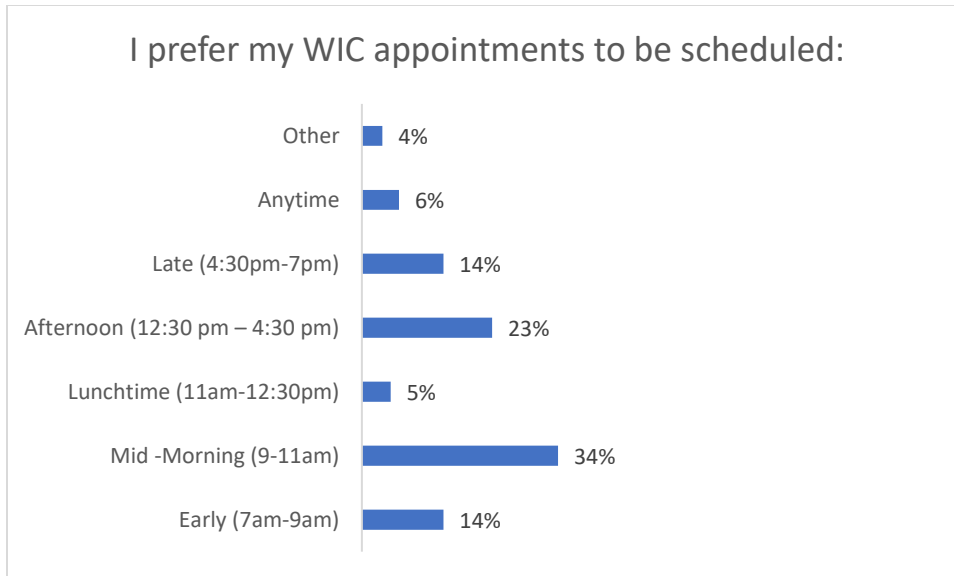
*“Love everything. I do wish more organic options were available but I am thankful for what is provided.”*

## 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.

About one-third (34%) of respondents prefer appointments to be scheduled mid-morning, which was the most popular response, followed by afternoon at 23%. A few open responses spoke to the need for flexibility around changing schedules.

*“Anytime it fits into my crazy schedule.”*



A little over one-third (36%) of respondents prefer scheduling a week or two in advance of an appointment, while about as many (31%) prefer to do it 6 months in advance (at the time of their last appointments). Thirteen percent prefer to schedule a same-day appointment or walk in, while 18% prefer the option to either schedule in advance or have a same-day appointment. Regardless of the scheduling method, about 70% report 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:

The clinic hours don't work for my schedule.	9%
I called to schedule but couldn't get a time that worked for me.	8%
I didn't receive a reminder letter, text, or phone call.	7%
I forgot to call to make my appointment.	9%

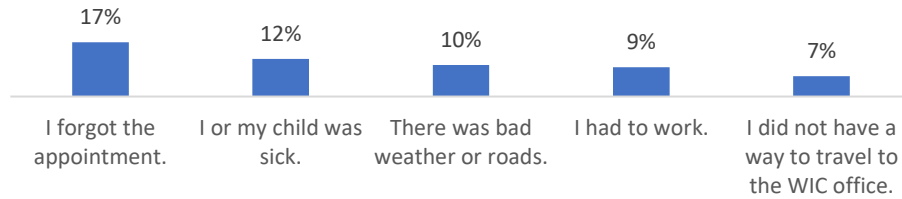
In the open comments, respondents mentioned work schedules (i.e. the need for more late appointments), challenges with same-day appointments, and not having a needed time slot available.

Approximately 62% 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.

*“Like most places, they close the same time I get out of work and have one night when they are open later. Usually that time frame is filled.”*



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

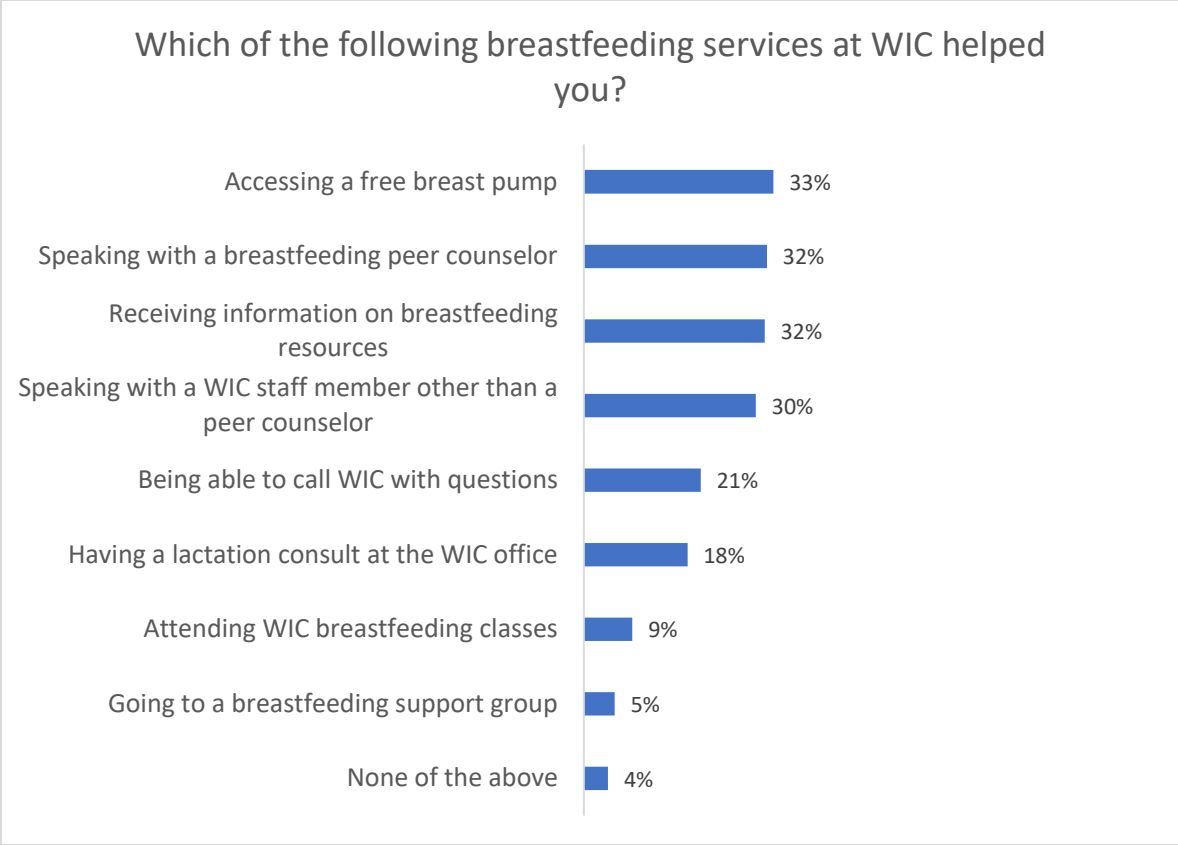


## Breastfeeding

Breastfeeding is defined as providing breastmilk by feeding the baby at the breast and/or expressing breastmilk and providing it to baby in a bottle or cup. Thirty-seven percent of respondents (256 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.

Three in four (76%) respondents were either very satisfied or satisfied with breastfeeding services offered through WIC. One-third of recently breastfeeding WIC participants reported each of the following resources helped them: speaking with a peer counselor (32%), speaking with a WIC staff member other than a peer counselor (30%), accessing a free breast pump (33%), and receiving information on breastfeeding resources (32%). Twenty-three percent did not receive any breastfeeding services at WIC.

*“I was able to have the support to breastfeed my daughter for 18 months and that was awesome for both of us.”*



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

Suggestions from Participants
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve advertisement/outreach of the breastfeeding services available through WIC, particularly to pregnant participants before childbirth.</li> <li>• Offer more group support groups, additional in-person meetings, and home visits if possible.</li> <li>• Offer meetings outside of work hours.</li> <li>• Inform women of the right to breastfeeding the workplace.</li> </ul>

*“I wasn’t aware that all of these breastfeeding service options were available. I’d love to speak with a lactation specialist.”*

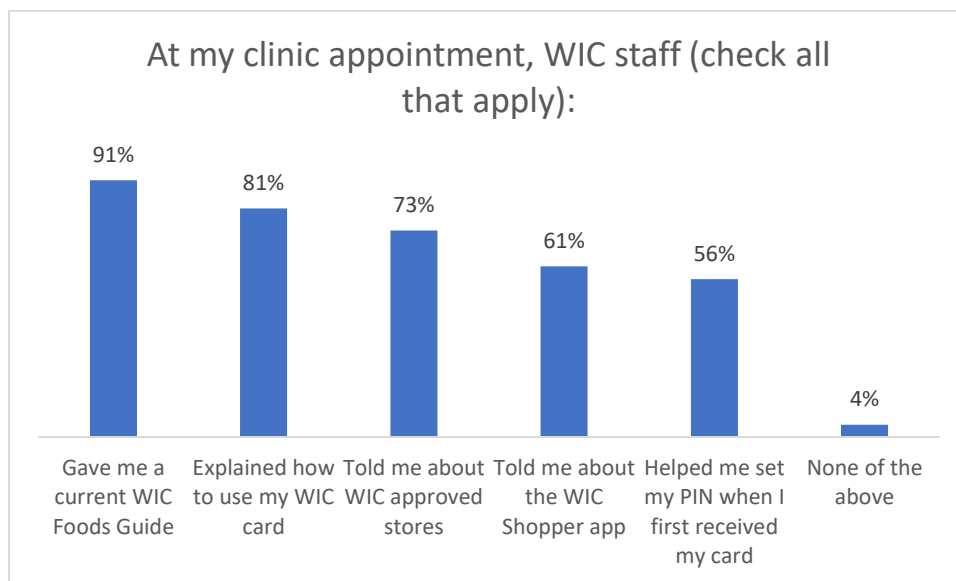
More than half (58%) of recently breastfeeding respondents were employed outside the home while pregnant and/or breastfeeding. Of these, 63% of respondents felt supported by their employer to breastfeed and/or express milk when returning to work. Thirteen percent did not feel supported, and another 13% responded “I don’t know” to the same question. The remaining respondents selected “Not applicable”.

Almost half (45%,) of respondents who have breastfeed within the last six months of their completion of the survey received a breast pump through WIC. Based on this subset of respondents, seventy-five percent received an electric breast pump, 51% received a manual pump (it is possible to receive both from WIC). Eighty-four 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 which currently is an annually updated resource. The other activities may happen at appointments early on in family's time on WIC, but less frequently if a family is experienced and confident with the shopping process.



When asked, “Of the foods that are part of your WIC package and of the foods you usually buy with your WIC card, which foods do you have trouble finding at the store?”, 38% responded they do not have trouble finding any WIC foods. The top five most challenging to find foods are listed in the table to the right.

**Challenging to Find Foods**

Whole Wheat Bread	30%
48 oz. Juice	29%
Yogurt	19%
Cold Cereal	14%
64 oz. Juice	13%

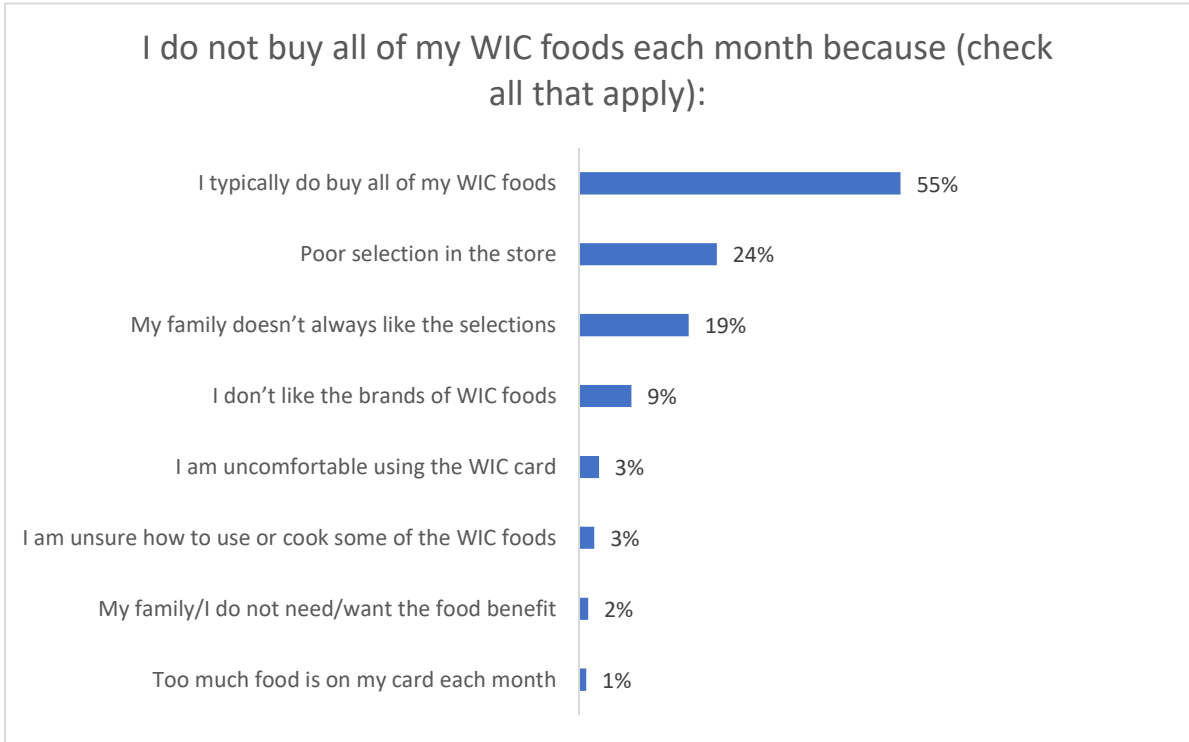
If participants have had challenges, the most common one was being unable to find the correct size (60%), followed by the correct brand (40%). These reasons contribute to the next most common response, that the rules and restrictions are too complicated (30%). Some reported not having any trouble in the open comments, while other themes that emerged include inadequate or nonexistent shelf tagging, lack of grocery store staff training about the program, and WIC-approved products declining at the register due to system issues.

*“Store marks WIC approved when it’s not or doesn’t put tags up at all.”*



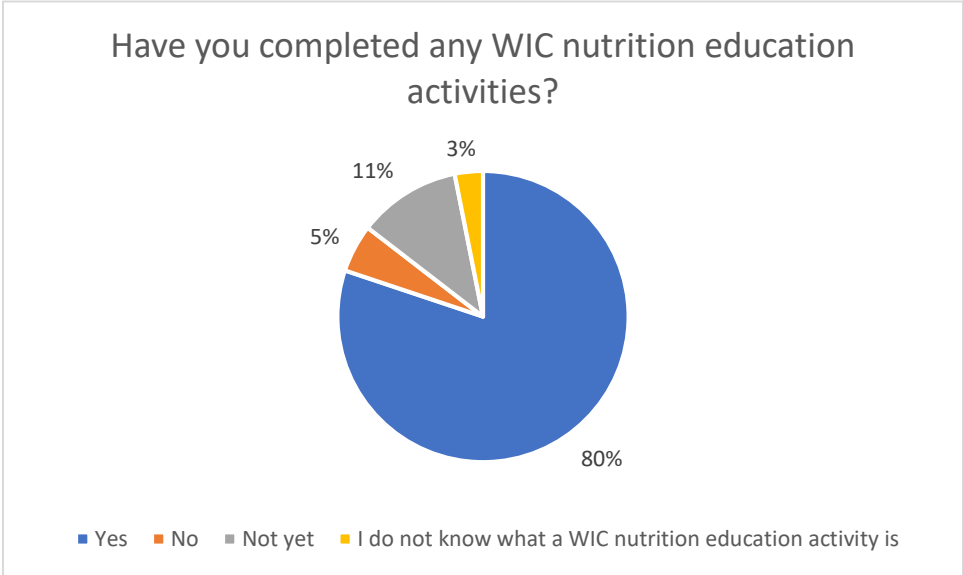
Over half (55%) responded that they buy all of their WIC food each month. Poor selection in the store (24%), not liking the selections (19%), and not liking the brands of WIC foods (9%) were the top reasons for not buying all their WIC foods each month. In the open comment, a top theme that emerged was forgetting to purchase all the food benefits before they expire at the end of the month. Other reasons include not liking specific types or categories of foods or having too much in one food category and not enough in another.

*“Too much milk is on my card everything else is great and used in full.”*



### 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](http://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 (80%) have completed an activity in the past.

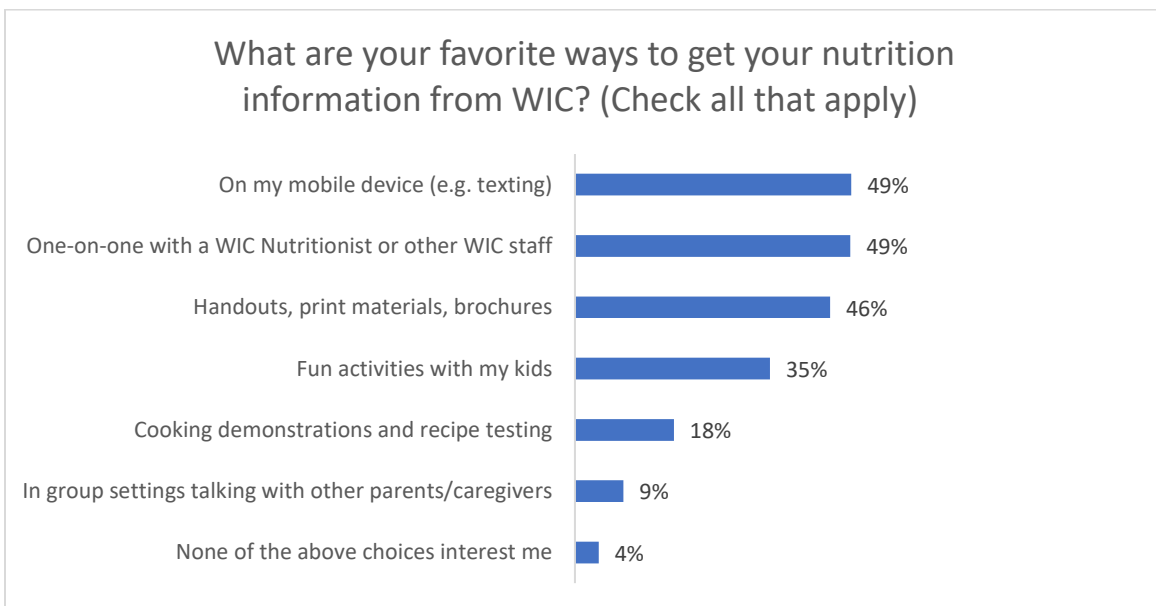


Participants are interested in a variety of nutrition education topics related to nutrition and other health behaviors including oral health. These are summarized in the table below.

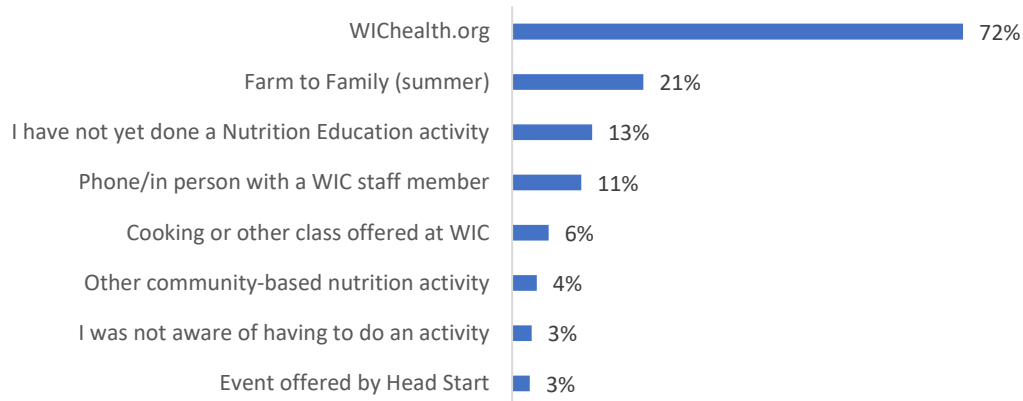
**What nutrition and health topics are you most interested in learning more about? (Check all that apply)**

How to maintain a healthy weight or losing weight	49%
Tips for stretching a household food budget	46%
Child nutrition	44%
Physical activity and active play for kids and families	28%
Ways to choose more vegetables and fruits	26%
How to cook with WIC foods	25%
Dental health	24%
Shopping for WIC/healthy foods	20%
Food safety	17%
Infant feeding	16%
Breastfeeding	15%
Lead and other environmental health topics	13%
Immunizations	12%
Healthy Pregnancy	10%
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 responses on my mobile device, one-on-one, and print materials were each selected by just under half of the respondents. In the open comment, online education was specifically mentioned several times. When asked more specifically which WIC nutrition activity they choose to do in between appointments, the overwhelming majority chose WIChealth.org (72%), Vermont WIC’s online education platform.



### 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 are eating more fruits and vegetables (51%), eating more whole grains (32%), and drinking more water (32%). Eighteen 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 are already healthy eaters just financially need a little help sometimes.”*

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

