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Lowell WIC at Community Teamwork Urges Congress to Extend WIC Waivers

Lowell, MA – As nutrition and public health professionals, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) at Community Teamwork sees the direct impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on families raising young children. Families are not only dealing with the stress of the pandemic while caring for children but also struggling with job losses and lost income. In this time of incredible uncertainty, WIC provides crucial nutrition and breastfeeding support to pregnant and postpartum women, babies, and young children to age five and connects families to valuable resources and health and social services agencies.

Since March 2020, WIC has adapted in record time to shift the way the **WIC programs across the country** serve families by transitioning from in-person to remote services. Every day, new families turn to WIC for support, and **the Lowell WIC** clinics now have the option to onboard these families by phone or other remote means.

*“Clients appreciate us being available for them especially now while they are dealing with new barriers and fears.” **Marilyn Graham, Community Coordinator***

*“Clients are so happy when I tell them their appointment will be over the phone. They are nervous to come into the office and fear their child might get the virus.” – **Jennifer Diep, Program Assistant***

*“We have been able to get many of our clients back on the program and sign up new moms and children.” **Sokrinna Ou, Program Assistant***

*“Clients have been very grateful that they can receive their benefits over the phone!” **Nicole Spitalere, Nutritionist***

*“One mom and her family all had COVID-19 and were quarantined at home without any income coming in. I was still able to sign her up for WIC and her friend was able to go shopping for her and leave the foods at her door. She was so grateful!” **Leslie Boutin, Program and Nutrition Assistant***

*“Our new mothers have been feeling very isolated not being able to share their new baby with friends and family but they feel supported by the WIC staff and our Breastfeeding Peer Counselor.” **Sarah Seguin, Senior Nutritionist***

In June, Lowell WIC's average caseload for the month surpassed 5,250 participants. This is an approximate 4% increase from May, one of the largest jumps month over month Lowell WIC has ever had. Lowell WIC aims to keep up the momentum as they anticipate a surge in applications towards the end of July and into August, as the federal pandemic unemployment payments are due to run out.

Lowell WIC is looking to expand their virtual breastfeeding classes and is working on a WORLD BREASTFEEDING WEEK PARTY FOR MOMS via zoom on AUGUST 3rd. They are making STEP-BY-STEP RECIPE VIDEOS and creating informational handouts for "TIP TUESDAY" that they are sharing on their Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/CTILowellWIC>

With the everyday concern families feel about risk of COVID-19 exposure, Congress granted the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) new authority to waive in-person requirements for WIC providers through the end of September. As infection rates continue to climb and states constantly adjust or modify their reopening plans, WIC providers need these flexibilities extended well into 2021. We should not rush to open clinics that provide nutrition, health, and social services to pregnant women and new parents, especially when doctors' offices continue to adapt services that promote social distancing.

Lowell WIC at Community Teamwork urges Congress to extend WIC waiver authority until at least September 30, 2021. This will ensure that WIC continues to provide safe and critical support to families without putting their health at risk. It will likewise protect essential clinic staff and their families.

About WIC

WIC is a free nutrition program for low to moderate income Massachusetts families that provides healthy foods, nutrition education, breastfeeding support, and referrals to healthcare and other services. WIC's goal is to keep pregnant and breastfeeding women, and children under age 5 in critical stages of growth and development healthy.

www.commteam.org/WIC

About Community Teamwork

Community Teamwork is a catalyst for social change. Our driving mission is to help people help themselves with child care, family supports, nutrition, fuel assistance, housing, skills training, employment, financial education, and individual asset and small business development. As a Community Action Agency, a Regional Housing Agency, and a Community Development Corporation, Community Teamwork helps nearly 50,000 individuals from 63 cities and towns in northeastern Massachusetts gain greater economic independence.

www.commteam.org

If you have additional questions or feedback, please reach out to NWA's State Public Policy Associate, Noora Kanfash, at nkanfash@nwica.org