

TO: Sally Zubairu-Cofield, Director of the Pennsylvania Bureau of WIC

FROM:

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SUBJECT: Considerations for the 2027 WIC State Plan of Program Operation and Administration in Pennsylvania

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Thank you for your leadership of the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) in Pennsylvania. WIC is an important resource for families in the Commonwealth, and we have appreciated how recent state plans strive for growth in program participation and improvement of user experiences.

We bring our combined expertise in clinical services, health policy and research at [PolicyLab](#) together to offer considerations for the development of the Fiscal Year 2027 State WIC Plan. In this current environment, we are especially mindful of [increasing importance](#) of WIC for the families as eligibility requirements change for other public supports, including Medicaid and SNAP.

Recommendations

1. Maximize effective cross-enrollment opportunities

State WIC plan section: Outreach

WIC is a key resource for pregnant individuals and young children, and we encourage the Bureau to strategically collaborate with state agencies that have touchpoints with eligible families to support cross-program enrollment and participation.

As concerns about food security rise and [SNAP participation declines](#), PA's WIC program can evolve to address these emerging trends and better support PA families. In the last year, we identified increases in food insecurity among families with children hospitalized at CHOP. In November 2025, with the changes to SNAP eligibility and delays in SNAP benefit distribution, 17% of all families reported concerns about food security. This represents a

nearly three-fold increase from the preceding 6 months – when an average of just 6% of families reported concerns about food security.

With PA Department of Human Services (DHS), the Bureau can engage with and support the [Keystones of Health](#) Food is Medicine pilot. Planned work includes reaching Medicaid-enrolled pregnant beneficiaries facing food insecurity with nutrition supports and connecting individuals to longer-term food assistance programs, like WIC.

- In the 2027 WIC State Plan, we recommend the Bureau describe how it will collaborate with other state programs (Medicaid, SNAP) to identify and enroll potential WIC beneficiaries.

2. Expedite transition to WIC online benefit reloading and remote certification

State WIC plan section: Organization and Management

We understand that the Bureau is progressing the transition to online benefit reloading and remote certification processes. Our research indicates that this will improve beneficiary experiences and could [increase participation](#) in the program. Although increases in participation due to remote certification may generate increased program expenditures for states in the short term, due to the greater number of beneficiaries, they are likely to pay dividends for the Pennsylvania Department of Health in the long term, given the associations between WIC participation and improved maternal, infant, and child health outcomes, including decreased rates of preterm birth, infant mortality, and childhood food insecurity. We encourage the Bureau to take steps to expedite this transition.

- In the 2027 WIC State Plan, we highlight the need for:
 - A clear timeline and strategy for how the Bureau will implement online benefit reloading, remote certification and remote nutrition education.
 - A description of the Bureau's preparation for implementation of remote certification and remote nutrition education. This will be strongest with planned engagement with community and local agencies on effective strategies for certifying beneficiaries and providing nutrition education remotely and piloting remote certification with local agencies

3. Leverage existing program flexibilities to improve the user experience

State WIC plan sections: Management Information System, Certification, Eligibility & Coordination of Services.

Our [research](#) finds that families appreciate nutrition education and support and welcome additional flexibility and choice. PA WIC's implementation of the final stages of the WIC food packaging flexibilities and rules this year was welcome. We encourage the Bureau to evaluate how these changes are impacting families and vendors. In addition, we encourage

the Bureau to discuss how they could compensate for the supplementary nutrition education activities that were offered by SNAP-ED but have now been eliminated.

- We recommend 2027 WIC State Plan reflect:
 - PA WIC's planned work with vendors to improve beneficiaries' experience by clearly labeling products and ensuring they are identifiable in-store.
 - PA WIC's expanded efforts to support families in accessing the WICShopper app.
 - PA WIC's work to identify other supportive apps and resources for benefit management.
 - PA WIC's interest in pursuing online grocery ordering and delivery options for beneficiaries.

Please contact Radha Pennotti (pennottir@chop.edu) with questions or if there is an opportunity to further discuss any of the points raised.