

National- and State-Level Estimates of the USDA Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Eligibility and WIC Program Reach in 2022 (Summary)

Background

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) administers 16 nutrition assistance programs with the mission to increase food security and reduce hunger—in partnership with cooperating organizations—by providing children and low-income people access to food, a healthy diet, and nutrition education in a manner that supports American agriculture and inspires public confidence.

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) provides supplemental foods, nutrition education, breastfeeding promotion and support, and referrals to health care and social services to low-income, nutritionally at-risk pregnant women, new mothers, infants, and children up to age 5.

This analysis offers national- and State-level estimates of the number of people eligible for WIC benefits and the percent of the eligible population participating in the average month of 2022, including estimates by participant category. The analysis also provides estimates by FNS Region, by State and territory, by race and ethnicity, and by urbanicity.

For the first time in this series of reports, estimated coverage rates for American Indian/Alaska Native (AIAN) individuals are also presented at a National level.

Key Findings

- The average monthly WIC-eligible population totaled 11.79 million in CY 2022.
- In the average month of 2022, WIC served an estimated 53.5 percent of those eligible for WIC, which is a statistically significant increase from 2021 (51.2 percent).
- Coverage rates were highest for Hispanic (63.0 percent) and lowest for non-Hispanic White (45.9 percent) WIC-eligible individuals.
- The coverage rate for non-Hispanic AIAN WIC-eligible individuals was 59.1 percent.
- Nationally, more than 50 percent of WIC-eligible SNAP and Medicaid recipients do not participate in WIC.

Methods

The national estimates are based on a methodology developed in 2003 by the Committee on National Statistics of the National Research Council.¹ The report's State-level estimates use a methodology originally developed by the Urban Institute. These methodologies use data from various sources, including the Community Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement (CPS-ASEC), American Community Survey (ACS), and National Vital Statistics. The estimates presented in this report use

the same methodology as and are consistent with the 2021 WIC eligibility estimates published in 2023.²

This report also includes two substantial improvements over the 2021 report. First, for the first time in this series of reports, this report includes analyses of WIC coverage rates for individuals identifying as non-Hispanic, American Indian/Alaska Native (AIAN). (The percentage of the eligible population that receives WIC benefits is the program's "coverage rate.")

¹ Ver Ploeg, M., & Betson, D. M. (Eds.). (2003). *Estimating eligibility and participation for the WIC program: Final report*. The National Academies Press.

² Kessler C., Bryant A., Munkacsy, K., and Gray K. (2023). National- and State-Level Estimates of the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Eligibility and WIC Program Reach in 2021. Prepared by Insight Policy Research, Contract No 12319819A0005. Alexandria, VA: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Policy Support, Project Officer: Grant Lovellette. Available online at: www.fns.usda.gov/research-analysis.

Second, this report displays 95 percent confidence intervals for key coverage rate and participation rate metrics. Confidence intervals have been added to 10 tables and a new figure (Figure 3.5 in the full report). Displaying these confidence intervals provides more context about the precision of the estimates and may help understand year-to-year and participant category variations in coverage rates.

Findings

The average monthly WIC-eligible population totaled 11.79 million in Calendar Year (CY) 2022 (Table 1), a statistically significant decrease from the estimate of 12.13 million in 2021. Concurrently, program participation increased by 105,000.

In the average month of 2022, WIC served an estimated 53.5 percent of those eligible for WIC, a statistically significant increase from the estimate for 2021 (51.2 percent).

Coverage rates were highest for WIC-eligible infants (78.4 percent) and non-breastfeeding women (73.4 percent) in 2022, while the coverage rates for WIC-eligible children (46.0 percent) and pregnant women (45.6 percent) continued to be lower than other participant categories. 2022 was the first year in which the coverage rate for pregnant women was lowest of all participant categories.

In recent years, coverage rates for pregnant women have declined more rapidly than for other participant categories, declining from 53.0 percent in 2018 to 45.6 percent in 2022, despite a small increase in coverage rates for pregnant women between 2021 and 2022.

Coverage rates were highest for Hispanic WIC-eligible individuals (63.0 percent) and lowest for non-Hispanic White WIC-eligible individuals (45.9 percent). The coverage rate for individuals who identified as non-Hispanic AIAN was 59.1 percent in 2022.

More than 50 percent of WIC-eligible SNAP and Medicaid recipients did not participate in WIC in 2022. Among WIC-eligible SNAP participants, 47 percent participated in WIC. Among WIC-eligible Medicaid participants, 39 percent participated in WIC.

The estimated coverage rate for WIC-eligible individuals in metropolitan areas in the average month of 2022 was 60 percent, while the coverage rate for WIC-eligible individuals in nonmetropolitan areas was 19 percent. Of the 11.79 million individuals eligible for WIC, an estimated 9.89 million lived in metropolitan areas in 2022.

The relative difference between coverage rates by participant category has remained mostly consistent from CY 2005 to CY 2022. Across all years, coverage rates were highest for infants, followed by those for postpartum women. Coverage rates for children were consistently the lowest, except for 2022, when the coverage rate for pregnant women was the lowest.

Coverage rates vary substantially by State, as shown in the map below (Figure 1). Confidence intervals around estimates for States with small populations are larger than for other States (see Figure 3.5 in the full report), meaning that the estimates are less precise; therefore, differences between States and across years may be less pronounced than they appear in the map.

Table 1: WIC¹ Eligibility and Coverage Rate by Participant Category, Calendar Year 2022

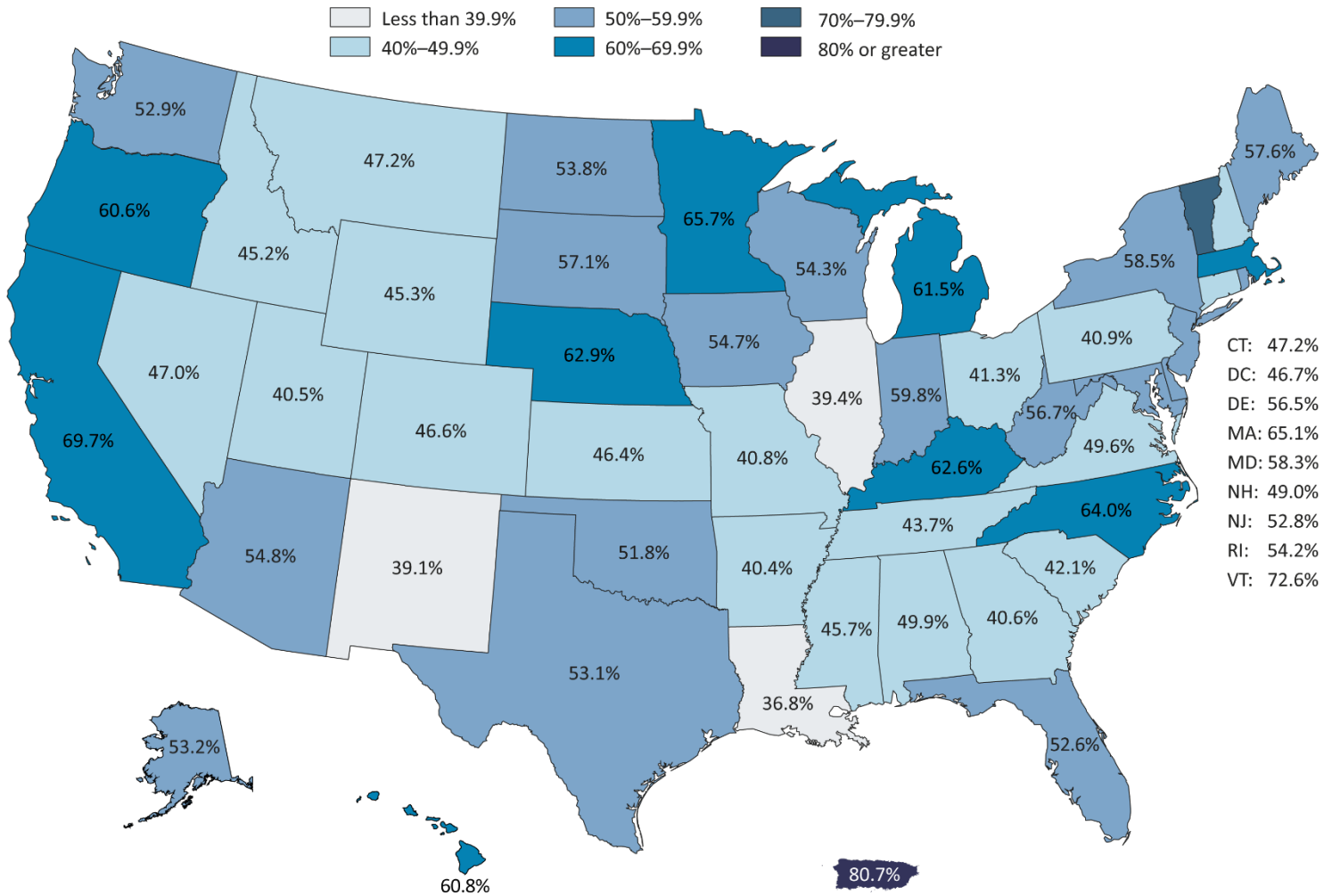
WIC Participant Category & Subcategory	Number of Eligible Individuals (Millions)	Percentage of all Eligible Individuals	Number of Participating Individuals (Millions)	Coverage Rate ²
Infants	1.83	15.5%	1.43	78.4%
Total Children	7.52	63.8%	3.46	46.0%
Children Age 1	1.85	15.7%	1.20	64.6%
Children Age 2	1.91	16.2%	0.95	49.8%
Children Age 3	1.86	15.8%	0.83	44.4%
Children Age 4	1.90	16.1%	0.48	25.4%
Pregnant Women	1.12	9.5%	0.51	45.6%
Total Postpartum Women	1.31	11.1%	0.91	68.9%
Breastfeeding Women	0.82	7.0%	0.55	66.3%
Non-breastfeeding Women	0.49	4.2%	0.36	73.4%
All Participants	11.79	100.0%	6.31	53.5%

¹WIC = Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children

²The coverage rate is the percentage of eligible individuals in the respective participant category that receive WIC benefits.

Figure 1: WIC Coverage Rates for All Participants by State, Calendar Year 2022

National Coverage Rate: 53.5 Percent



WIC = Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children

Notes: WIC is administered by 89 State agencies, including 33 Tribal organizations. Due to the constraints of the underlying data sources, separate estimates for American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Tribal Organizations are not available; a combined estimate for the four other island territories are available in Table D.7b in Volume II; and estimates for the Tribal Organizations are included in the estimates for the geographic State in which the Tribal Organization resides. See the full report for more information.

For More Information:

Kessler C., Bryant A., Munkacsy, K., and Gray K. (2024). National- and State-Level Estimates of the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Eligibility and WIC Program Reach in 2022. Prepared by Insight Policy Research, Contract No 12319819A0005. Alexandria, VA: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Policy Support, Project Officer: Grant Lovellette. Available online at: www.fns.usda.gov/research-analysis.

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