October 2026
Replaces version: April 2025

Nutrition and Health Assessment

Policy

Purpose

WIC Policy Memo 2006-5: The VENA Policy and Guidance presents a change in philosophy from conducting nutrition assessment primarily for the purpose of determining WIC eligibility, to using assessment as a means to enhance the interaction between WIC provider and participant as well as to link collected health and diet information to the delivery of relevant nutrition education, referrals and food package tailoring.

VENA

VENA Guidance: A WIC nutrition assessment uses the Value Enhanced Nutrition Assessment (VENA) approach which is participant-centered and health outcome-based.
The VENA approach to Nutrition Assessments systematic process is shown below.



Assessment and application

USDA Federal Regulations: 246.7(e) A competent professional authority on the staff of the local agency shall determine if a person is at nutritional risk through a medical and/or nutritional assessment. This determination may be based on referral data submitted by a competent professional authority not on the staff of the local agency. Nutritional risk data shall be documented in the participant's file and shall be used to assess an applicant's nutritional status and risk; tailor the food package to address nutritional needs; design appropriate nutrition education, including breastfeeding promotion and support; and make referrals to health and social services for follow-up, as necessary and appropriate.

Documentation

246.7(i) Certification forms. All certification data for each person certified shall be recorded on a form (or forms) which are provided by the State agency. The information on the forms shall include

(7) Height or length, weight, and hematological test results;

(8) The specific nutritional risk conditions which established eligibility for the supplemental foods. Documentation should include health history when appropriate to the nutritional risk condition, with the applicant's or applicant's parent's or caretaker's consent

Authority

WIC Policy Memo #2006-5 Value Enhanced Nutrition Assessment (VENA) - WIC Nutrition Assessment Policy

VENA: Value Enhanced Nutrition Assessment in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) (page 1,16)

7 CFR Part 246.7(e)*excerpt*

7 CFR Part 246.7(i)(7-8)

Procedures

The nutrition and health interview

The participatory approach during an interview will be used. Rapport building with participants and caregivers will help to establish an interpersonal connection. When you establish a trusting relationship, questions and feedback flow in both directions, resulting in a value enhanced nutrition assessment.

Nutrition and health interview questions are completed in the WIC data system at each certification visit using the standard questionnaires developed by the state WIC office; however, staff should exercise professional discretion about which questions to ask based on the applicant/parent's concerns, needs, interests and already identified risks as well as the relevance of the question to their developmental status, previous response to the same question or comments and questions they have already made.

The WIC Competent Professional Authority (CPA) will ask more questions (beyond what is listed in the data system) to clarify or collect information, sift through all of the assessment information and use critical thinking skills to look for connections between behaviors, health conditions and risks.

Data collected in the assessment process

Data collected during the WIC appointment includes:

- Nutrition practices,

- Anthropometric measurements (weight and length/height),
- Blood tests (hemoglobin or hematocrit),
- Current and past medical conditions,
- Oral health,
- Lifestyle,
- Social Environment,
- Immunization status, and
- Access to ongoing health care.

Any risk codes supported by responses to the questions will be assigned. If the system does not automatically assign the risk, the CPA must manually do so.

Best Practices

Creating a supportive environment for effective assessments

A warm, friendly environment communicates that participants are welcome. This helps build a sense of trust and fosters good rapport with the participant who is being asked to provide personal information. The key is to engage the client in a dialog and let the conversation flow where it needs to go without trying to force it down a structured interrogation path.

Planning the most effective services for a participant means interacting with participants and parents to understand their interests, needs, concerns and potential barriers to behavior change. Tips for actively involving the participant or parent in the assessment process and improving the quality of the information obtained in interviews include the following:

- Introduce yourself. Explain what is going to happen during the time you spend with the applicant.
- Communicate a non-judgmental and interested attitude. Give your undivided attention to the applicant. Do not criticize or prematurely express your opinions.
- Listen. Pay close attention to detail, storing information mentally for later evaluation. Do not assume anything until the applicant tells you it is so.
- Use open-ended (how and what) questions when you can. Limit the use of directive or closed questions (questions that can be answered yes or no) when possible.
- Elicit the applicant's concerns, hopes, and expectations. Determine if any fears or concerns exist and identify how the applicant thinks you can help.
- Be aware of nonverbal communication. Note facial expressions, body language, posture, and signs of emotions. Observe the interaction between a mother and her children. For teleWIC appointments, listen for tone of voice and if the participant seems to be engaged in the conversation. Pay attention to anything else that may cue you into what's going on with that participant.
- Acknowledge that you understand. Let the applicant know you have understood and accepted the information shared before offering any specific advice.
- Don't let hostility be a communication barrier. Bring it to the open. Ask, "You seem to be angry with me, can you tell me why?" When you feel yourself becoming angry, ask

yourself, “Why?”

The questions that appear in the data system provide structure and a starting point for completing the nutrition practices questions; however, CPAs are encouraged to:

- Rephrase questions to fit their interviewing style or to improve the applicant’s understanding; and
- Utilize the starters and prompts that are found at the bottom of each section in the participant’s nutrition interview.
- and are cautioned against asking all of the questions as closed questions or rephrasing questions in such a way as to result in leading questions (i.e., the applicant can perceive the “right” or “acceptable” answer to the question.)

Tools to improve the assessment process

Staff will consult and utilize the following documents to improve the nutrition and health assessment process.

- VENA: Value Enhanced Nutrition Assessment in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Updated Guidance November 2020
- WIC Nutrition Services Standards