Household Size

Policy

WIC definition of a household

USDA Federal Regulations:
246.2 Family means a group of related or nonrelated individuals who are living together as one economic unit, except that residents of a homeless facility or an institution shall not all be considered as members of a single family.

USDA Certification and Eligibility Resource and Best Practices Guide: For WIC purposes, the words "household," "family," and "economic unit" may be used interchangeably to refer to people who live together and/or share economic resources. An individual does not have to receive cash to be part of an economic unit. Additionally, it is possible for more than one economic unit to reside under the same roof.

USDA Federal Regulations:
Pregnancy allowance
246.7(d)(2)(vii) Income eligibility of pregnant women. A pregnant woman who is ineligible for participation in the program because she does not meet income guidelines shall be considered to have satisfied the income guidelines if the guidelines would be met by increasing the number of individuals in her family by the number of embryos or fetuses in utero. The same increased family size may also be used for any of the pregnant woman's categorically eligible family members. The State agency shall allow applicants to waive this increase in family size.

Authority

7CFR Part 246.2
USDA Certification and Eligibility Resource and Best Practices Guide
7 CFR Part 246.7(d)(2)(vii)
WIC Policy Memo #2003-3

Procedures

Questions to determine household size
To establish if there is more than one economic unit living under one roof, ask appropriate questions to determine if there is a general economic independence (e.g. financial resources and support are retained independently). Do not use a tax return to determine household size. See below for questions to ask for the following situations.

- Do you share income and expenses with the other people in the household?
    - If yes, count as one household.

    - If no, count as separate households. (Married couples cannot be separate households.)
- Does the household provide you with free food, clothing, shelter, etc., with no expectation of payment or in-kind benefits?
    - If yes, count as one household.
    - If no, ask the next question.
- Do you pay the household for living in their home?
    - If yes, count as separate households.
    - If no, count as one household.

Household size for pregnant women

A pregnant woman must be given the option of whether or not to count her unborn baby in the household prior to delivery.

If a pregnant woman does not want the fetus to be counted as a member of the household due to cultural, personal, or religious beliefs, do not adjust the household size.

For women who wish to count the fetus prior to giving birth, use the directions below:

1. Increase her household size by the number of expected births.
2. Assess her income eligibility using the adjusted household size.
3. Use the adjusted household size for other members of the household applying for WIC and record the adjusted household size in the data system.

People experiencing homelessness

Individuals or families who have temporary accommodation (of not more than 365 days) in the residence of another individual are considered separate economic units, as are residents of a shelter or other facility for the homeless.

Applicants who are minors

It is rare for teenage applicants who are living with their parents to be considered a separate household. See below for questions to help determine whether more than one household resides at the address when the applicant is a minor (under 18 years old).

- Do your parents receive FIP/TANF, Medicaid or SNAP for you?
    - If yes, do not count the teenager or any of her children as a separate household from her parents.
    - If no, ask the next question.
- Do you live apart from your parents and other adults and work to pay for your living expenses?
    - If yes, count the teenager and any of her children as a separate household.
    - If no, ask the next question.
- Do you live with your parents or other adults who support you?
    - If yes, count all people supported by the income.

- If no, ask the next question.
- Do you live with your parents or other adults and work and pay for your room and board?
  - If yes, count the teenager and any of her children as a separate household.
  - If no, count all persons supported by the income.

Military personnel serving overseas or assigned to a military base

Even though they are not living with their families, they should be considered members of the economic unit. The income received by the military individual(s), and all other income received by members of the economic unit should be counted as income to the household.

If a military family's children live with other adults while the parents are on active duty, there are additional options for determining household size and income. Please call the state WIC office or see WIC Policy Memo 2003-3 for more information about these options when an applicant presents with these circumstances.

Institutionalized family members

- Ask the parent/guardian the following question:
  - Do you pay financial support for the institutionalized person?
    - If yes, include the person in the household size.
    - If no, do not include the person in the household.

If a family lives together in an institution, they would be considered a separate economic unit from other residents.

Foster care vs. kinship placements

- Ask the following question:
  - Is the child the legal responsibility of HHS?
    - If yes, count the child as a household of one (a separate income family).
      - The payments made by the child welfare agency, or by any other source for the care of that child are considered the income of the foster child.
    - If no, count the child as a member of the household s/he resides with.

A foster child, even if they are an infant, can never confer adjunctive eligibility to the family with which the foster child resides.

Children in the temporary care of an adult

Sometimes children are left in the care of others or even abandoned. Below are examples of questions to help determine household size and whose income to count in these situations. (Temporary care situations may make a child homeless according to the WIC definition. If so, document accordingly in the WIC data system so that the appropriate risk factor is assigned, however children in temporary care cannot be considered a household of one.)

- Do you receive any assistance for having the child in your home?

- If yes, the income source may provide adjunctive eligibility (FIP/TANF, Medicaid, or SNAP)
- If no, ask the next question.
  - Is the child the legal responsibility of HHS?
    - If yes, the child should be considered a foster child with a household size of one (see foster care section).
    - If no, count everyone in the applicant's household and consider all income sources for the household.

Note: Search the WIC database to see if the child has previously been enrolled. You may need to transfer them to the new family record.

Child custody situations

Physical custody situations vary among families. Therefore, each custody situation must be evaluated separately. Ask the following question:

- Do you have court-ordered custody of the child?
  - If yes, count the child as a member of the applicant's household.
  - If no, do not count the child as a member of the applicant's household.

For families with split custody it is strongly recommended that only one parent applies for WIC on behalf of the child and that the parents agree to share the WIC foods between the two households. However, if that cannot be worked out and both parents insist on claiming benefits for their child, both households must be income-eligible for WIC services. This means that the child will be counted as a member in both households and must have two separate and complete records in the data system (e.g., one record associated with each family ID). Each parent will be responsible for managing and completing their own certification appointment for their child. If the two households are in different WIC service areas those two agencies must work together to ensure the child only receives one full food package per month. Each agency will create a food package tailored to that parent's needs/preferences and issue it to that parent on behalf of the child on an every other month basis. See the Split Custody Procedure for more information.