

Coming together is a **beginning**.
Keeping together is **progress**.
Working together is **success**.
-Henry Ford



COLORADO
Department of Public
Health & Environment

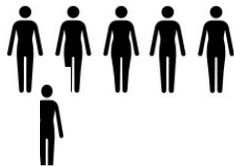
Colorado WIC Wellness Coordinator System

Background

In Colorado, over one in five children ages 2 through 4 years participating on the WIC Program are overweight or obese. Evidence suggests excessive weight gain in the first years of life can alter developing neural, metabolic and behavioral systems in ways that increase the risk for obesity and chronic disease later in life.

The scientific literature also suggests relationships between mother's preconception Body Mass Index (BMI) and the amount of gestational weight gain with increased risk of childhood overweight and obesity before five years of age.

Based on 2014 Colorado birth certificate data, prior to pregnancy approximately



5 in 10 (50.6%) mothers had a normal BMI

Fewer than 1 in 10 (3.7%) had an underweight BMI,



4.5 in 10 had either a overweight (25.7%) or obese (20.1%) BMI

Colorado was among the four states (Massachusetts, Utah and Wyoming) and the District of Columbia to have the proportion of women with a normal BMI between 50- 53 percent.

Colorado, Massachusetts and Utah, with the District of Columbia, lead the nation with a lower proportion (below 21%) of obese women. Nevertheless the trend for weight gain among Colorado mothers is increasing. Also according to Compass reporting, Colorado WIC mothers are gaining too much weight during pregnancy. In 2015, one-third (33.8%) of WIC mothers gained weight above the IOM recommendations during their pregnancy.

The strategies of the WIC- MCH- and CDC-funded early childhood obesity prevention priority address key periods of the life course, including preconception (or inter-conception), prenatal and early childhood (ages birth-5 years). Colorado's Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Program identifies early childhood obesity prevention as one of seven priorities, which focus on the following performance measures:

- Reduced the percent of children, ages 2 through 4 years receiving WIC services considered overweight or obese.
- Increased the percent of infants who are ever breastfed and infants breastfed exclusively through 6 months of age.
- Increased percent of children ages 6 through 11 who are physically active at least 60 minutes per day.

The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment's Early Childhood Obesity Prevention Unit implements evidence-based strategies to promote and support breastfeeding and to enable young children to develop and habituate to healthy practices (e.g., adequate and appropriate sleep routines, consume proper amounts of nutrient dense foods and fewer sugar sweetened beverages, engage in

adequate physical activity and limits on screen time) so they are well-equipped to handle new foods and activity opportunities when they become school aged.

Colorado WIC local agency staffs have a long practice of counseling on the majority of these healthy practices and the good news is that the percentage of WIC children ages two through four years who were overweight or obese decreased from 22.9 percent in 2012 to 20.3 percent in 2016! That decrease represents hundreds of children at healthier weights.

Project description and purpose

Colorado WIC's 2012 Healthy Weight Action Plan resulted in formalizing a *Wellness Coordinator System*, a strategy uniting state and local WIC agencies to address early childhood obesity through Colorado WIC services. Each local agency, or a regional group of local agencies, identifies a Wellness Coordinator, who is responsible for fulfilling a defined role to advance early childhood obesity prevention and wellness in WIC. The Wellness Coordinators are supported by a system of collaboration and learning developed and overseen by Colorado WIC Program staff at the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment.

In addition to the performance objectives established by MCH (above) for the early childhood obesity prevention priority, the goal and objectives of the *Wellness Coordinator System* are described below along with the many ways WIC Wellness Coordinators are advancing these objectives during the first pilot and implementation years (~ 2.5 years).

Goal: State and local WIC agency staff members have an established system of working together to advance WIC's obesity prevention and wellness efforts targeting WIC families, including their children, post partum mothers and pregnant women.

System objectives:

- 1. The state WIC staff and Wellness Coordinators have and use established methods to efficiently and effectively share early childhood obesity prevention and wellness information, monitor progress and collaborate.*
- 2. Local WIC agencies have an established staffing structure to ensure the success of the Wellness Coordinator.*
- 3. All Wellness Coordinators have sufficient knowledge, skills and confidence necessary to lead wellness efforts within their local agencies.*
- 4. As a result of the Wellness Coordinators' efforts, local agency staff members have the knowledge, skills, tools and confidence in the subject matter of early childhood obesity prevention, healthy eating, active living and wellness to support WIC families in making positive lifestyle changes.*
- 5. WIC families have exposure to a WIC experience that provides evidence based healthy living messages and early interventions in the inter-conception, prenatal and early childhood periods.*
- 6. Local agency staff members work in an environment that encourages and provides opportunities for healthy living, including stress management, support of the nursing mother, healthy eating and active living.*
- 7. State and local WIC agencies have established strategic partnerships with agencies, organizations, programs, coalitions or other entities that enhance the success of obesity prevention efforts targeting WIC families.*

Wellness Coordinator System: roles and responsibilities

The following describes methods for on-going attainment of the eight objectives and state and local WIC Program roles and responsibilities. The system allows for flexibility, based upon variability across local agencies in staffing, available time and capacity. This flexibility is described below:

- A regional group of local agencies may identify a Wellness Coordinator to fulfill the role for all of the local agencies in the regional group, rather than each agency identifying a separate Wellness Coordinator.
- Throughout this document, some local agency roles are identified as “advanced roles.” These are additional roles local agencies may adopt if time and capacity allows.
- Local agencies with limited capacity may choose to adopt only “basic roles.” These roles describe the minimum level of participation by state and local agencies to achieve the desired outcomes of the system.

State agency role:

- Coordinate state agency and Wellness Coordinator collaborative activities and facilitate regular communication among collaborative members.
- Establish structured and inclusive decision-making processes that involve the Wellness Coordinators, related WIC Nutrition Services advisory groups and state staff, for when statewide direction or policy changes related to early childhood obesity prevention or wellness are needed.
- Establish and use methods and channels of communication among state agency staff and Wellness Coordinators.

Wellness Coordinator role:

- Participate in regular Wellness Coordinator and state agency webinar and/or calls approximately every three months. The expected duration of the calls will be one hour. When informational webinars are offered in addition to calls, the expected duration of the webinar portion will be one hour.
- Represent the interest of the local agency by providing feedback and recommendations during statewide decision making processes related to early childhood obesity prevention or wellness. These decision making processes are expected to occur no more than twice in a calendar year.

Local Agency Staffing
<i>Objective 2: Local WIC agencies have an established staffing structure to ensure the success of the Wellness Coordinator.</i>
<i>Responsibility: Local agency and clinic management</i>
<i>Local agency management role:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify at least one staff member to serve as the Wellness Coordinator. Agencies may identify more than one Wellness Coordinator if desired. Agencies may work in partnership with other local WIC agencies to identify a regional Wellness Coordinator to fulfill the role for more than one local agency.• As needed, obtain and sustain support from all levels of management (agency director, clinic supervisors, contracting agency management) for the Wellness Coordinator to fulfill his/her role.• Design the work load of the Wellness Coordinator to allow work time that is devoted to activities related to the role (estimated to be approximately 5-6 hours per month on average).• Build expectations and accountability measures into the performance evaluation plans for the

<p>Wellness Coordinator (state agency will provide sample language).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In collaboration with the Wellness Coordinator, establish a system to ensure accountability among local agency staff members for minimum expectations related to early childhood obesity prevention, healthy eating, active living and wellness (state agency will provide sample language for performance evaluations). • If finances allow, allocate funds in the operating budget to support the lead role designation for the Wellness Coordinator (advanced local agency role).
<p>Wellness Coordinators in Action! As of 2016, there are 23 Wellness Coordinators leading efforts in 18 WIC agencies: Boulder, Broomfield, Delta, Denver, Eagle, El Paso, Garfield, Jefferson, Larimer, Lincoln, Mesa, Northeast, Pueblo, San Juan Basin, Summit, Tri-County, Valley-Wide and Weld.</p>

<p>Training and guidance for the Wellness Coordinator</p>
<p><i>Objective 3: Wellness Coordinators have sufficient knowledge, skills and confidence necessary to lead wellness efforts within their local agencies.</i></p>
<p><i>Responsibility: State agency</i></p>
<p><i>State agency role:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In collaboration with Wellness Coordinators and directors, maintain and revise, as needed, expectations for local agencies and the Wellness Coordinators regarding the Wellness Coordinator system and role, including options for flexibility to meet the needs of local agencies of all sizes and capacities. Reference Wellness Coordinator position description in WIC Program Manual and summary of roles (located on Colorado WIC website under Wellness Coordinator Tools.) • Maintain training plans for Wellness Coordinators and provide training to build their subject matter expertise related to obesity prevention in inter-conception, prenatal and early childhood periods. • Provide written and clear expectations for the Wellness Coordinators' training and mentoring of local agency staff members. Provide materials and resources for Wellness Coordinators to use in training local agency staff members. • Provide clear guidance for Wellness Coordinators regarding implementation of specific policies related to early childhood obesity prevention, consistent messaging and special activities in local agencies.

<p>Training of local agency staff members by the Wellness Coordinator</p>
<p><i>Objective 4: As a result of the Wellness Coordinators' efforts, local agency staff members have the knowledge, skills, tools and confidence in the subject matter of early childhood obesity prevention, healthy eating, active living and wellness to support WIC families in making positive lifestyle changes.</i></p>
<p><i>Responsibility: Wellness Coordinators</i></p>
<p><i>Wellness Coordinator role:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Serve as the early childhood obesity prevention subject matter expert and a wellness role model and advocate for the local agency. • Train and mentor clinic staff members on various topics and state initiated policies and procedures related to early childhood obesity prevention and wellness. The Wellness Coordinator and state agency calls will generate topic ideas on a regular basis for the Wellness Coordinator to communicate with local agency staff. This communication may occur during local agency staff meetings, one-on-one communication with staff or through e-mail/written correspondence. State initiated policies and procedures related to early childhood obesity

prevention and wellness are expected to be less frequent, not to exceed twice per calendar year.

- Facilitate necessary communication as needed with staff members in their local agency. This may include sharing special announcements or updates during local agency staff meetings or by e-mail.

Wellness Coordinators in Action! *As of 2016, coordinators have modeled soda-free workplace, over five discussed 9 Ways to Grow Healthy Colorado Kids materials and how to use them, the One Stop ECOP Shop website and roll-out campaign during staff meeting; one supported implementation of the Heart Smart Moms project; over four coordinators discussed the interconception guide during all staff meetings; several set up a referral process to the Diabetes Prevention Program; over six coordinators trained staff on sleep; nine coordinators worked with staff to reinforce baby-behaviors messages and reviewed the modules; several worked with staff on appreciative inquiry and use of circle charts in counseling; one trained staff on using the ECOP referral letters; one coordinated a training for staff on the division of responsibility in feeding; and two coordinate yoga classes; several coordinate worksite wellness challenges and lead activities.*

Local agency early childhood obesity prevention and wellness activities

Objective 5: WIC families have exposure to a WIC experience that provides evidence-based healthy living messages and early interventions in the interconception, prenatal and early childhood periods.

Objective 6: Local agency staff members work in an environment that encourages and provides opportunities for healthy living, including stress management, support of breastfeeding mothers, healthy eating and active living.

Responsibility: Wellness Coordinators

Wellness Coordinator role:

- Assist in the local agency adoption and implementation of consistent messages and state initiated policies related to early childhood obesity prevention and wellness.
- Coordinate wellness activities for WIC families, which may be activities of existing annual nutrition education plans, or other activities. Examples of potential activities are:
 - Prepare wellness focused bulletin boards.
 - Determine monthly or quarterly wellness themes for participants and coordinate related materials or activities.
 - Organize a fruit and vegetable tasting event, featuring creative recipes.
- Coordinate wellness activities for local agency staff members (advanced Wellness Coordinator role). Wellness Coordinators can use established resources to promote healthy eating and active living among WIC staff. Examples of potential activities are:
 - Buddy system walks.
 - Healthy eating challenges among staff.
 - Guest speaker presentations regarding stress management.
 - Implementation of agency or clinic staff wellness policies.

Wellness Coordinators in Action! *As of 2016, majority of coordinators disseminated the 9 Ways to Grow Healthy Colorado Kids to WIC participants by tweeting the messages weekly, posting posters in WIC clinics, creating bulletin board displays on the message and disseminating sleep recommendations. Two coordinators promoted agency and community wide messaging for Let's Go! 5, 2, 1, 0 and one included health promotion tips in the WIC client newsletter. Several coordinators hosted Cooking Matters at the Store tour and Cooking Matters classes for staff and participant. Several prepared displays about sugar*

sweetened beverages and offered infused water. Some offered group classes for participants focusing on FIT WIC, sleep, maternal health, for example. Another offered a fit WIC station where kids can play with other children and make their own bean bags. One coordinator worked with staff to create a cookbook of healthy recipes. One coordinator developed a handout on nutritious drinks for kids; and another developed a handout to trigger staff to provide certain maternal wellness messages during key period of pregnancy and postpartum.

Strategic partnerships

Objective 7: State and local WIC agencies have established strategic partnerships with agencies, organizations, programs, coalitions, or other entities that enhance the success of obesity prevention efforts targeting WIC families.

Responsibility: State agency and Wellness Coordinators (advanced Wellness Coordinator role)

State agency role:

- Maintain active state partnerships with public health programs, early childhood initiatives, health care organizations and other entities to achieve a consistent early childhood obesity prevention approach throughout Colorado.
- Align statewide WIC early childhood obesity prevention efforts with other initiatives, where appropriate.

Wellness Coordinator role (advanced Wellness Coordinator role):

- Develop and maintain active community partnerships with local public health and early childhood programs, health care providers and appropriate community organizations.
- Maintain strong community referral systems and documentation of referrals that support healthy eating and active living for WIC families.
- Intentionally connect clients with community resources for chronic disease prevention, such as the Diabetes Prevention Program or other similar services in the community.
- Identify opportunities for alignment between wellness initiatives and activities of the Local Agency Breastfeeding Coordinator and the Local Agency Retail Coordinator.

Wellness Coordinators in Action! *As of 2016, several coordinators have supported community gardens and/or patio gardening; at least one coordinator contributes to local radio program on health topic; several reached out to the community (e.g., local health coalitions, Head Start, nursing staff) on 9 Ways to Grow Healthy Colorado Kids; one coordinator wrote articles for a Spanish language paper on breastfeeding and other health topics; and one worked with community recreation center to acquire scholarships and/or passes for WIC families.*