



Colorado Department
of Public Health
and Environment

Colorado WIC Wellness Coordinator System

*Coming together is a beginning.
Keeping together is progress.
Working together is success.*

-Henry Ford

Background

In Colorado, almost one in four children, ages 2 to 5 years, from low income households, are overweight or obese. According to the Institute of Medicine, Committee on Obesity Prevention Policies for Young Children (June 2011), evidence suggests that 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 the amount of gestational weight gain and preconception Body Mass Index (BMI) of the mother, and increased risk of overweight and obesity in the child before the age of five years. In Colorado, only 33.1% of mothers gained an appropriate amount of weight during pregnancy in 2010. Slightly more than 43% of mothers were overweight or obesity before pregnancy.

Colorado's Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Program has identified early childhood obesity prevention as one of nine priorities, which focus on the following performance measures:

- Increase the percentage of live births where mothers gained an appropriate amount of weight during pregnancy
- Decrease the percentage of children, ages 2 to 5 years receiving WIC services that have a BMI at or above the 85th percentile
- Decrease the percentage of live births to mothers who were overweight or obese based on BMI before pregnancy
- Increase the percentage of mothers who breastfeed their infants at 6 months of age

The strategies of the MCH 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).

Project description and purpose

Colorado WIC's Healthy Weight Action Plan, described in the September/October 2012 WIC News, is a key strategy of the MCH priority to reduce obesity among our youngest children. The plan includes implementing the *Wellness Coordinator System*, a strategy to bring state and local WIC agencies together in addressing early childhood obesity through WIC services in Colorado. 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 defined 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:

Project 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.

Objectives	Target Dates
<i>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.</i>	<i>March 30, 2014</i>
<i>Local WIC agencies have an established staffing structure to ensure the success of the Wellness Coordinator.</i>	<i>March 30, 2014</i>
<i>All Wellness Coordinators have sufficient knowledge, skills, and confidence necessary to lead wellness efforts within their local agencies.</i>	<i>March 30, 2014</i>
<i>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>	<i>October 31, 2014</i>
<i>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.</i>	<i>October 31, 2014</i>
<i>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.</i>	<i>October 31, 2014</i>
<i>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.</i>	<i>October 31, 2014</i>

Project methodology, roles, and responsibilities

The following describes the methods to achieve each of the project objectives, and roles and responsibilities related to the objectives. 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 that local agencies may adopt if time and capacity allows.
- Local agencies with limited capacity may choose only to adopt roles that are not identified as “advanced roles”. These roles describe the minimum level of participation by state and local agencies to achieve the desired outcomes of the system.

Wellness Coordinator System
<i>Objective: By March 30, 2014, 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.</i>
<i>Responsibility: State agency and Wellness Coordinators</i>
<p><i>State agency role:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate state agency and Wellness Coordinator collaborative activities and facilitate regular communication among all parties. • Establish structured and inclusive decision-making processes that involve the Wellness Coordinators, WIC Nutrition Services Advisory Group, and state staff, for use 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. <p><i>Wellness Coordinator role:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in regular Wellness Coordinator and state agency calls approximately every 6 weeks initially, and less frequently once the system is well established. The expected duration of the calls will be one hour, and not to exceed 90 minutes. • 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: By March 30, 2014, 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>
<p><i>Local agency management role:</i></p> <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 Wellness Coordinator (state agency will provide sample language).
- 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).

Training and guidance for the Wellness Coordinator

Objective: By March 30, 2014, all Wellness Coordinators have sufficient knowledge, skills, and confidence necessary to lead wellness efforts within their local agencies.

Responsibility: State agency

State agency role:

- In collaboration with Wellness Coordinators, develop a set of competencies for Wellness Coordinators and local agency staff members.
- Provide written and clear 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.
- Create 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.

Training of local agency staff members by the Wellness Coordinator

Objective: By October 31, 2014, 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.

Responsibility: Wellness Coordinators

Wellness Coordinator role:

- 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.

Local agency early childhood obesity prevention and wellness activities

Objectives:

- 1) *By October 31, 2014, 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.*
- 2) *By October 31, 2014, 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.*

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

Strategic partnerships

Objective: By October 31, 2014, 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.