

1.10 Disaster Policy and Coordination

POLICY:

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance for West Virginia WIC Local Agencies in responding to disaster situations. It also outlines WIC's role regarding coordination and planning for natural disasters.

PROCEDURE:

A. Role of the USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) in Disaster Response

USDA'S Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) provides food assistance to those in need in areas affected by a disaster. This Federal assistance is in addition to that provided by State and local governments.

USDA provides disaster food assistance in three ways:

- Provides USDA foods to State agencies for distribution to shelters and other mass feeding sites;
- Provides USDA foods to State agencies for distribution directly to households in need in certain limited situations; and
- Authorizes State agencies to issue Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (D-SNAP) benefits.

B. Role of WIC in Disaster Response

Although the WIC Program is not designed to be a disaster assistance program, and therefore is not considered a first line of defense, WIC policies are designed to allow State agencies flexibility in program design and administration to support continuation of benefits to participants during times of natural or other disasters.

1. WIC is not designed or funded to meet the basic nutritional needs of disaster victims who would not otherwise be eligible for the Program.
 - a) There is no legislatively mandated role for WIC in disaster relief, nor is there legislative authority for using WIC food funds for purposes other than providing allowable food benefits to categorically eligible participants.
 - b) No additional WIC funds are designated by law for WIC disaster relief, and WIC must operate in disaster situations within its current Program context and funding.

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- c) WIC is not to be considered a first-line defense to respond to the nutritional needs for disaster victims, including the provision of infant formula.
2. There are important ways that the State Agency and Local Agency can contribute to a disaster relief effort including:
- < Continued benefit delivery to participants and outreach to potentially eligible individuals
 - < Counseling participants on food preparation and safety under disaster conditions
 - < Coordinated assistance effort through continued communication with disaster relief agencies with pre-disaster planning and during a disaster

C. Disaster Coordination and Planning

1. State Agency Disaster Coordinator
- a) The State Agency Disaster Coordinator is responsible for coordinating and planning WIC disaster relief and communicating with the West Virginia Office of Emergency Services and the FNS Regional Office.
 - b) The State Agency Disaster Coordinator will establish a working relationship with the State agency responsible for coordinating and planning disaster relief to do the following:
 - < Discuss ways they could contribute to a relief effort, such as sharing expertise about the nutritional needs of the WIC eligible population
 - < Learn how the State plans to provide food to the general population to determine how the WIC Program can appropriately assist the State in response to disasters or emergencies
2. The **WV WIC Emergency Operations Plan** will be used by the Local Agency as a guide for the continued operations by instituting alternate procedures as necessary through the following during a disaster:
- < Certification procedures that increase flexibility in required documentation
 - < Food Delivery procedures that deviate from standard food packages
 - < Increased outreach to potentially eligible individuals affected by disaster

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3. Regular staff meetings conducted on alternate procedures, training drills and test exercises will assist in successful WIC Program operation during a disaster.

D. WIC Program Management during Disaster Situations

1. Disasters may affect caseload management and could result in priority restrictions, the use of waiting lists, shifting of caseload assignments and the need to refer applicants to other sources of food assistance because of the following factors:
 - < Many people may suddenly become eligible because of loss of income; and
 - < Food package adjustments, such as the issuance of ready-to-feed infant formula because of unsafe drinking water, increase food costs affecting the number of people that can be served.
2. The Local Agency will take reasonable measures to continue providing food benefits to WIC participants in disaster situations.
3. The Local Agency operating in a disaster situation will actively promote the WIC Program to potentially eligible individuals, while operating within its capacity to actually serve newly eligible persons.
4. Certain situations may be so devastating to WIC operations that benefits must temporarily be suspended and participants referred to other programs or congregate feeding sites.
 - a) The State Agency Disaster Coordinator will contact the State disaster relief agency and the FNS Regional Office for assistance and information when the Local Agency must decide whether to suspend WIC operations in a disaster area.
 - b) Factors that determine how well a WIC clinic can operate in a disaster situation include:
 - < The extent of damage on the delivery infrastructure; and
 - < The extent that the Local Agency has planned and prepared for disaster situations.

E. Certification Procedures during Disaster Situations

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1. Income eligibility determination may deviate from the usual WIC Program operation in disaster situations.
 - a) During subsequent certification, participants who express that their income documentation was lost because of a disaster will be considered as income eligible.
 - b) It must take place within a reasonable time period (approximately 1 month) following a disaster during which they have not had time to acquire documentation.
 - c) The documentation will be verbally verified as similar to that documented during the previous certification.
 - d) A note will be placed in the **Income Overview Comments** area in the **Crossroads Income Information** with the date and the statement: “Income Documentation Lost in Disaster.”
 - e) An applicant who has a loss of income because their place of employment was completely destroyed and is likely to be out of work for an extended period of time will have income assessed based on the previous month.
 - f) An applicant who has a temporary loss of income because a business that sustained some damage or a temporary loss of utilities will have income calculated on a twelve (12) month basis.
2. While temporary shelters and tent cities in which disaster victims may stay meet the definition of a “homeless facility”, residence in such facilities does not automatically make such persons eligible for WIC. Homeless applicants must qualify through the certification process to receive WIC benefits.
3. During disasters, WIC Program employees who are also WIC participants or caretakers will not be responsible for issuing eWIC benefits/cards to themselves or members of their immediate family or conducting any aspect of the eligibility process for themselves or members of their immediate family, including issuing of VOC cards, taking anthropometric measures, and certifying the eligibility of such persons.

F. Replacement of Food Benefits during Disaster Situations

The State Agency will provide guidance on the replacement of benefits based on the situation.

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G. Outreach Procedures during Disaster Situations

The Local Agency operating in a disaster situation will increase outreach efforts to actively promote the WIC Program to potentially eligible individuals affected by disaster, while operating within its capacity to actually serve newly eligible persons.

REFERENCES:

1. SFP 93-012, WIC Income Eligibility and Natural Disasters
2. SFP 95-067, WIC Disaster Policy and Coordination
3. SFP 96-035, Revision of WIC Disaster Policy
4. SFP 96-042, Addition of Cross Reference to SFP 96-035

ATTACHMENTS:

1. West Virginia WIC Emergency Operations Plan