

Chapter 6E

Certification/Participation - Certification In Special Situations

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This chapter describes policies and procedures related to the certification of individuals in situations that are out of the daily routine.

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Transfer Of Certification

The primary intent of the transfer or Verification of Certification (VOC) provision is to ensure seamless and continued participation of certified participants through the entirety of their certification period.

It is important to take steps throughout the certification period to ensure that the participant/parent/guardian/caretaker know the availability, the process and purpose of the VOC to include: describing the VOC availability and process in the Rights and Responsibilities statement and routinely asking participants if they plan to move during the certification period. Populations that tend to move frequently include migrant farm workers, homeless participants, persons who live in institutions or homeless facilities, and military participants. Staff must print from the Crossroads system the Out of State Transfer Information sheet for a family in which there is a migrant farm worker and to any other family that is likely to be relocating during the certification period. Staff should also provide the NC WIC Program Notice and tailor the notice according to the participant's situation. Refer to Chapter 6D for information on providing notifications.

Participants and families moving within NC will not need the Out of State Transfer Information sheet from the local agency they are leaving. The receiving local agency (agency to which the family is transferring into) will simply transfer the family record to their agency using the Crossroads system.

■ Verification Of Certification (VOC)

The Out of State Transfer Information sheet serves as verification of certification and is provided to participants who are planning to move out of state. It is addressed to the participant (if an adult) and the parent/guardian/caretaker of an infant or child participant. VOC documents, though unique for each state and the WIC Overseas Program, are recognized nationally. North Carolina VOC is valid to the end of the participant's certification period and is designed to serve more than one participant in a family. All information for the family is compiled automatically from the Crossroads system.

VOC documents may be unique from state to state. In order to provide key information for the seamless provision of WIC services and to prevent duplicate benefit issuance (dual participation), WIC regulations include eight items that must be present on the VOC documents as described below:

- Name of participant
- Date the certification was performed
- Date income eligibility was determined
- The nutritional risk of the participant
- Date the certification expires
- The signature and printed name of the certifying local agency official.
- The name address and phone number of the certifying agency.
- An identification number or other form of VOC accountability

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Additional information provided but **not** required

- ▶ Food Benefit Data: first date to spend, last date to spend, name of exempt formula or medical food, medical reason for prescription, and prescription expiration date (if applicable) or food prescribed
- ▶ Food Prescription: participant name, (name of exempt formula, medical food, or food prescribed, medical reason and prescription expiration date if applicable). or food prescribed

State VOC Point of Contact Personnel

If clients present with questionable or missing information or without the Verification of Certification the receiving agency is encouraged to contact the sending agency to verify any questionable information contained on the VOC. If the local agency cannot successfully obtain VOC information from the sending agency they should connect with the designated VOC contact for that state. Listings of state VOC point of contact personnel may be accessed at the following website: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/wic-contacts>.

State VOC personnel have 1 business day from the contact request to retrieve necessary information. If a local agency cannot verify the certification status within this time frame local agency staff must treat the family as new applicants and determine program eligibility within appropriate processing standards. Handwritten information is permitted/acceptable if the current management information system or form does not currently include certain information.

A signed client release is not required to provide certification information to another WIC Program or WIC Overseas agency (7 CFR 246.26(d) (1) (ii) and must not routinely require participants to sign a release of information with other State of local WIC agencies. Regulations allow a sending WIC agency to share information about a transferring participant with a receiving agency, without prior consent or written release by the participant.

■ Assisting Transferring Families

Staff must assist families who are moving within NC by identifying a WIC Program in their new residence location. Staff should inform families that the receiving WIC Program will transfer electronically the family records into their agency using the Crossroads system.

- ▶ **Assist “overseas” transfers.** In addition to a VOC, a WIC participant who is a member of the Armed Forces, a civilian employee of a military department, or a Department of Defense (DOD) contractor and his/her family members who indicate intent to relocate overseas during a certification period should be given the following information about the DOD WIC Overseas Program.
 - There is no guarantee that the Department of Defense (DOD) WIC Overseas Program will be operational at the overseas site where they will be transferred. Locations of the WIC Overseas Program can be found at: <http://tricare.mil//Wic/>
 - By law, only certain individuals are eligible for the WIC Overseas Program. Issuance

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of the VOC (Out of State Transfer Information sheet) does not guarantee continued eligibility and participation in the WIC Overseas Program.

- Information about the WIC Overseas Program may be accessed on the TRICARE website <http://tricare.mil//Wic/>
 - **Terminate the participant.** Once it is known that a family has transferred out of state, local agency staff should terminate the family from their program. Refer to Chapter 6D for information on providing notifications.

■ Accepting Transferring Families

In State Transfer: when a transferring family contacts the WIC office in their new location, WIC staff should transfer the family without delay to ensure that the family receives program benefits to which they are entitled. WIC staff must complete the transfer using the Crossroads system which moves the electronic record into the receiving agency. Refer to Section 3 for information on enrolling transferring families if the local agency has a waiting list.

Transfers from Out of State:

VOC documentation from a WIC Program in another state or WIC Overseas Program must contain at minimum these elements to be valid:

- participant name
- most recent certification date
- date the current certification period expires

Note: Transferring participants who present a VOC with a minimum of these items must be treated as if the VOC contains all of the required information. If a nutritional risk code is not documented on the VOC or if the participant was certified based on a nutrition risk condition that is no longer in use by the receiving agency, the receiving agency must use the equivalent risk code "Transfer of Certification" to establish nutritional risk for that participant. Refer to Chapter 6C for information on nutrition risk code

Some states limit the certification of infants, children, and postpartum breastfeeding women to a six-month period. If an infant, child or postpartum breastfeeding woman transfers from one of these states, their certification period will be changed to reflect the North Carolina certification period.

Staff must use professional judgment around issuance of food benefits to a transferred family from another state. Out-of-state food instruments and cash-value vouchers or an electronic benefit card (EBT) cannot be used in NC. The into-state transferring family must surrender to the local agency any unused food instruments (FIs) and cash-value vouchers (CVVs) or Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card in their possession. The local agency must destroy any FIs, CVVs or EBT card from the transferring family. Do not return the FIs, CVVs or

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EBT cards to the sending agency. Do not send the FIs, CVVs or EBT cards to the Nutrition Services Branch.

When the transferring family claims unused FIs/CVVs or EBT card are misplaced or lost during moving, staff must verify which months of food benefits have been issued by contacting the transferring agency. Staff is not allowed to reissue food benefits if the transferring agency issued food benefits and they are still in date. Refer to Chapter 8 on FIs or CVVs misplaced by the recipient.

When the transferring family provides the receiving local agency with FIs or CVVs or EBT card, staff should do the following:

- For the current month, if the family has already redeemed part of their FIs/CVVs, issue a prorated food package by adjusting the first month's food prescription, based on the amount of benefits already redeemed. If the FIs and CVVs have not been redeemed and all are in hand, then establish a family issuance day and issue a full food package.
- For future months when all FIs and CVVs are in hand, issue a complete food package.

Residents Of Institutions And Homeless Facilities

Residents of institutions and homeless facilities who are eligible for WIC may participate in the program. Refer to Chapter 6A, Section 5 on documentation of residency for residents of institutions and homeless facilities.

■ **Definition Of Institutions And Homeless Facilities**

Institutions and homeless facilities are two different types of places.

- ▶ **Institution.** An institution is any residential accommodation, other than a private residence or homeless facility, which provides meal service. Examples include women's shelters, maternity homes, institutions where pregnant women are incarcerated, and colleges.
- ▶ **Homeless Facility.** A homeless facility is any facility that fits the following definitions and also provides meal service.
 - a supervised public or privately operated shelter designated to provide temporary living accommodations (*such as a rescue mission, congregate shelter, or shelter for victims of domestic violence*); or
 - a facility that provides a temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized; or
 - a public or private place not designed for, or normally used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.

■ **Compliant Institutions And Homeless Facilities**

If a participant resides in an institution or homeless facility, the institution or homeless facility must be in compliance with the following three conditions for the participant to receive WIC Program food benefits.

- ▶ The institution or homeless facility does not accrue financial or in-kind benefits from a resident's participation in WIC (e.g. by reducing its expenditures for food service because its residents are receiving WIC foods).
- ▶ Foods provided by the WIC Program are available exclusively to the WIC participant to whom they were issued and are not used in a communal food service.
- ▶ The institution or homeless facility supports the resident's participation in the WIC Program including use of the supplemental foods and participation in nutrition education available under the Program.

Section 2: RESIDENTS OF INSTITUTIONS AND HOMELESS FACILITIES

■ **Verifying Compliance Of Institutions And Homeless Facilities**

Once a participant reports their residency as being an institution or homeless facility, staff must assure that the institution or homeless facility is “compliant” with program policy. To verify compliance, staff should take the following steps.

- ▶ **Contact the institution or homeless facility.** Contact must be made with the institution or homeless facility by phone or in person to determine that the required three conditions are met.
- ▶ **Obtain a signed letter from the institution or homeless facility.** The local agency must obtain a signed letter from the institution or homeless facility verifying their compliance with the required conditions. Refer to Attachment 1 for an example of a letter. This letter must be scanned into the participant’s record in the Crossroad system.

■ **Non-Compliant Institutions And Homeless Facilities**

When the local agency becomes aware that a WIC participant is living in an institution or homeless facility that does not meet the three required conditions or will not provide a signed letter verifying that they do, staff must:

- ▶ refer the participant/parent/guardian/caretaker to a compliant institution or homeless facility if available;
- ▶ continue providing nutrition education, breastfeeding support, food benefits, and referral services during the certification period; and
- ▶ inform the participant/parent/guardian/caretaker that the local agency will discontinue food benefits (with the exception of infant formula) at the end of the certification period if the participant still resides in a non-compliant institution or homeless facility. If the participant still lives in a non-compliant institution or homeless facility at the end of the certification period, the local agency staff must discontinue the participant's food benefits (with the exception of infant formula). Staff should print the NC WIC Program Notice and check the appropriate reason for the discontinuation of food benefits. The participant shall continue to be eligible to receive nutrition education, breastfeeding support, and referral services.

Certifications Occurring Outside The Local Agency

While most certifications for the WIC Program occur within the local agency, there may be opportunities within the community to complete the certification in settings outside the agency.

When certifying participants in settings outside the local agency, all WIC Program requirements apply. The certification must be documented in the Crossroads system.

Refer to Chapter 5 for information on the provision of nutrition education outside the setting of the local agency.

■ **Possible Settings For WIC Services**

There are a variety of settings within the community that may offer an opportunity for reaching new clients and for providing ongoing services to participants. Examples of agencies include the following.

- ▶ **Hospitals.** Hospitals provide an opportunity for certifying new mothers and infants in a timely manner. If a local agency chooses to operate the program within a hospital and/or has a cooperative arrangement with a hospital to provide WIC Program services, in addition to certifying new mothers and infants, the agency must:
 - advise potentially eligible individuals that receive inpatient or outpatient prenatal, maternity, or postpartum services, or that accompany a child under the age of 5 who receives well-child services, of the availability of program services; and
 - to the extent possible, provide an opportunity for individuals who may be eligible to be certified within the hospital for participation in the WIC Program.
- ▶ **Private Physicians' Offices.** Physicians' offices that serve a large number of infants and children and/or women who may be eligible for WIC offer opportunity to provide WIC services in a coordinated manner with primary health care.
- ▶ **Children's Developmental Services Agencies (CDSA).** Working with CDSAs offers WIC staff the opportunity to coordinate services for some higher risk children and their families.
- ▶ **Work Sites.** Work sites that employ a large number of WIC eligible women offer an opportunity to increase program accessibility for these working women.
- ▶ **Schools.** Schools that offer a school based health clinic may offer an opportunity to increase program accessibility for young mothers and their infants.
- ▶ **Head Start & Licensed Child Care Centers.** Head Start and Licensed Child Care Centers provide an opportunity to reach children who might be eligible for the WIC

Section 3: CERTIFICATIONS OCCURRING OUTSIDE THE LOCAL AGENCY

Program.

■ **Establishing WIC Services Outside The Local Agency**

Prior to establishing procedures for certifying individuals outside of the local agency, staff must decide if it is an efficient and effective utilization of agency resources. Some things for staff to consider during this decision making process include, but are not limited to, the following.

- ▶ Does the local agency have the resources to expand services to a setting outside of its agency? How will certification, food benefits, nutrition education, and breastfeeding support be provided in accordance with program policy?
- ▶ Does the identified partner agency interact with a sufficient number of WIC eligible clients to make the effort an efficient use of WIC resources?
- ▶ Does the identified partner agency wish to coordinate with WIC? If so, how & why?

If WIC staff feel the effort is worthwhile to pursue, they should meet with staff in the identified agency to discuss the proposal and its implementation. Discussion topics must include WIC program integrity requirements, collection of medical and nutritional information, provision of program benefits (i.e., food, nutrition education and breastfeeding support), space needs, confidentiality issues, liability issues, client access, documentation and records retention requirements, and roles and responsibilities of the staff of both agencies. If there is agreement to pursue the effort, WIC staff will need to complete an agreement or memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the agencies involved that describes how WIC services will be provided. The MOU must be approved in writing by the local agency's Regional Nutrition Consultant before any WIC Program services may be provided. Changes to any existing MOU must be reviewed and approved in writing by the local agency's Regional Nutrition Consultant.

Waiting Lists

If the State WIC Program is spending its maximum allotment of food dollars, there may be insufficient funds to continue serving all eligible participants or to serve new applicants. When North Carolina WIC applicants/participants cannot be served due to inadequate food dollars, the State WIC Program may require local agencies to implement a waiting list.

■ Implementation of a Waiting List

If waiting lists are to be implemented, NSB will notify local agencies and establish the Wait List Criteria in the Crossroads system. The notification will include the following information.

- ▶ The effective date of the waiting list. Once the need for a waiting list is determined by the NSB, individuals meeting the defined criteria will be identified by the Crossroads system at initial certification and subsequent certification. Staff should complete the screens listed in the certification process. At the point where the user can certify, Crossroads will offer the option to place the applicant/participant on the waiting list rather than having the option of clicking the Certify button.
- ▶ An applicant/participant must be notified in writing when being placed on a waiting list. The notification is printed from the Crossroads system.

When funds become available to serve additional applicants/participants, NSB will instruct local agencies on how to proceed with modifying or discontinuing their waiting list.

■ Participant Reinstatements

During the time that a waiting list is in effect, local agencies may reinstate a terminated participant only if his/her certification period is still current, his/her participant category and age are being served and, his/her priority level and risk score are being served.

Otherwise, Crossroads applies the identified wait list criteria and places the participant on the waiting list.

■ Transfer Participants

If a transferring participant from out-of-state with current verification of certification (VOC) documentation applies for services when the local agency is maintaining a waiting list, the transferring participant shall be placed on the waiting list and enrolled ahead of all other persons on the waiting list, regardless of their priority.

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-- Example Letter --

Institutions and Homeless Facilities
Letter of Compliance for the WIC Program

(When used, the correspondence must be on the institution or homeless facility letterhead)

Date

To: Name of WIC Director
 Name of Local Agency WIC Program

We understand that the following three conditions must be met for a resident of our facility to participate in the WIC Program and we agree that we are in compliance with these conditions.

- ▶ Our facility does not accrue financial or in-kind benefits from a resident's participation in WIC (e.g. by reducing its expenditures for food service because its residents are receiving WIC foods).
- ▶ The foods provided by the WIC Program are available exclusively to the WIC participant to whom they were issued and are not used in a communal food service.
- ▶ Our facility supports the resident's participation in the WIC Program including use of the supplemental foods and participation in nutrition education available under the Program.

We also agree to inform the local WIC agency if we cease to meet any of the conditions outlined above. We also agree to allow informal on-site visits by the local WIC agency to ensure compliance with the specified conditions.

Name of Facility

Name of Director/Administrator (print)

Signature of Director/Administrator

Date

Phone Number

Fax Number

email address

Facility Address

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