

WIC ADVISORY COUNCIL

MEETING MINUTES

March 17, 2015

Members Present: Maria Carunungan, Whitney Dunlap, Kristen Hurley, Tracey Leef, Jacqueline Marlette-Boras, Shannon Meadows, Joan Salim and Dana Silver.

Members Absent: Debra Celnik, Howard Klein, Rachael Parren, Heather Ross, and Michael Wilson.

Others Present: Deborah Morgan.

Welcome

Jackie opened the meeting and Council members re-introduced themselves.

Approval of Minutes

Tracey Leef called for a motion to approve the minutes from the November 2014 meeting. Dana Silver moved and Maria Carunungan seconded the motion. The minutes were approved as written.

WIC Advisory Council Bylaw Change

Debbie Morgan explained that the Department had requested that the Advisory Council Bylaws be amended to remove the requirement to submit an Annual Report to the DHMH Secretary (Article III.F). The Department and the Program had no records of a report having been submitted in years and determined that it was an unnecessary requirement. Ballot forms to vote on the modification were distributed and council members were asked to return the completed form to Debbie prior to leaving the meeting.

Program Updates/Information

Federal Funding

Jackie explained that federal fiscal year 2015 total funding is down approximately \$2 million from last year, primarily in food funds. We're projecting that we should still be okay for the remainder of the year due to cost containment initiatives implemented over the last several years, but noted that we will also lose our Gerber baby cereal rebate (currently being re-procured by Pennsylvania WIC) starting July 1. We will continue to monitor food expenditures; but unless there are any major, unforeseen price increases, program funding should be sufficient for the fiscal year.

Congress is now working on the FFY2016 budget. The President's request is pretty much the same as last year at \$6.623 billion; with \$60 million in Breastfeeding Peer Counselor money, \$150 million in contingency reserves, \$25 million for EBT and \$30 million for MIS.

House Budget Committee Chairman Tom Price is planning to release his FY 2016 budget resolution today. Senate Budget Committee Chairman Mike Enzi plans a two-day markup of the Senate budget resolution starting Wednesday, March 18.

Organizational Charts

Jackie pointed out that we've had some additional staff changes in the State WIC Office and distributed an updated organization chart. Connie Webster, our Nutrition Unit Chief retired in December. Sherri Sabol has taken her place and we have combined the Breastfeeding Unit and Nutrition Unit into one unit. We've hired an additional staff person in the Vendor Unit who has a law enforcement background, and we have one additional vacancy that we're trying to fill in that unit. Rachel Ready, the Analytics and Communications Unit Chief, has moved on; and we're preparing to recruit for that position. Ellen Hisamoto, our Training Center Chief is retiring this summer, so we will also be recruiting for that position. In the meantime, we've hired a nutritionist for the Training Center, who comes to us from Arizona WIC, and look forward to sharing new ideas with her.

For DHMH, the major change is the appointment of a new Health Secretary: Van Mitchell.

Participation/Enrollment

Our numbers for November through February are down, as expected for this time of year; however, compared to the numbers from last year, we are maintaining a higher participation rate. (For example, in December 2013, our participation was 137,553, compared to 142,032 this December and our January 2014 participation was 137,509 compared to 142,071 this January; February 2014 was 135,994 versus 139,259 this year.

Outreach Efforts

Jackie announced that the program has initiated a second outreach campaign, focused primarily in transit outlets across the state, and circulated a notebook containing the different ads. The program believes that this is helping us keep our numbers up in general, and in comparison to national averages. For example, there was a 9% decrease in participation nationwide from FY 2010 to FY 2014. In MD, the decrease was 5% during that same time.

Maryland reached a low participation level in December of 2013 and our numbers didn't start picking up again until June 2014, which is when we started our Friends and Family Campaign. Participation steadily increased during that campaign and so we are starting another campaign this spring focused on Sticking with WIC.

We are also creating and distributing a Farmers' Market Cookbook again this year; a physician's outreach kit and brochures, and business cards.

e-WIC Update

Debbie reported that the e-WIC Quality Assurance contract selection process had been completed and that the contract was in the final stages of being signed by Treasury and the vendor, and had been submitted to the USDA for final review and approval. The evaluation committee selected Maximus Human Services, Inc., who has a vast amount of experience in the e-WIC community.

The e-WIC Processor RFP was issued on February 18 and staff are in the midst of responding to questions submitted as a result of the solicitation. Proposals are due on April 29 with a tentative contract award date of July 24.

Foods List Changes

Council members were directed to an Important Vendor Notice in their packets announcing a new Authorized Food List (AFL) effective April 1, 2015. A high level summary of changes includes the authorization of white potatoes, some additions and deletions to breads and rolls, and container size

and brand restrictions to tofu. Both the current AFL (effective October 1, 2014) and revised AFL (effective April 1, 2015) will be in effect through June 30.

Changes to Vendor Regulations

Jackie announced that the program will be submitting changes to COMAR to no longer authorize pharmacy only stores in Maryland. She explained that the program purchases the majority of our special formulas from the Community Action Program (CAP) of Lancaster County, a formula provider for numerous state WIC agencies, who ships formula directly to clinics or participant's home at costs far less than typical retailers. Pharmacy only vendors will have the option of applying to be food/pharmacy or food only stores.

Reauthorization

The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 expires September 30, 2015 and is up for review and reauthorization. Jackie directed members to a handout developed by FRAC regarding Child Nutrition Reauthorization and a report summary from the Economic Research Service entitled The WIC Program: Background, Trends and Economic Issues, 2015 Edition. Many of the issues that are outlined in your handout will be considered during reauthorization.

Issues that could significantly affect the Program include: immigration reform; a focus on adjunct eligibility and cost management, including the role of infant rebates and food costs in general.

Several staff from Maryland WIC recently attended the NWA Leadership Conference and were briefed by Senate Agriculture Appropriations Committee staffers who are currently meeting with constituents and groups. They are trying to educate their members and emphasized that the more everyone hears from constituents about a topic, the more they listen. You can help by writing to your congressman even if they are not on the committees that authorize WIC.

Institute of Medicine (IOM) Food Package Review

The IOM rationale for including white potatoes was distributed to Council members. Recommendations that have been put forth by the National WIC Association for consideration during the review are numerous but include:

- Increasing the cash value voucher for breastfeeding women;
- Modify fat levels and sugar content requirements for yogurt;
- Expanding options for culturally acceptable foods, dietary considerations, allergies, etc.; and
- Allowing ranges of container/package sizes to accommodate marketplace variations so as not to limit participant access or choice.

Maryland and Michigan WIC presented comments to the Committee on March 13, along with several other interest groups (i.e., fish and juice representatives). State comments mostly focused on the need to consider the complexities of shopping especially when the nutritional mandate doesn't match what is in the market place (e.g., juice and pasta). Industry juice representatives made the case for keeping juice as is (no more decreases in the amount of juice provided and presented argument against substituting whole fruits). The IOM recommendations are expected by the end of the summer.

Questions/Discussion/Sharing

Maria Carunungan asked that since health insurance is now a requirement for all citizens if we could advocate that premiums be counted as a deduction when applying for WIC. Jackie explained that it is currently not allowed under Federal Regulations; but, that a consequence of that type of change could be that health insurance contributions made by the employer be counted as additional income.

Kristen Hurley noted that Cecilia Tomori, a Johns Hopkins faculty member recently published a book entitled *Nighttime Breastfeeding: An American Cultural Dilemma*.

Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Advisory Council is scheduled for Tuesday, May 12, 2015 at 10:00 a.m. The location will be at the WIC Training and Temporary Services Center, 5503A Ritchie Highway, Brooklyn Park, MD 21225.