

WIC Case Study: Maricopa County, Arizona

WIC Agency Profile

Maricopa WIC is a county program serving 50,000 participants per month in 17 clinics in the mostly urban, Phoenix metropolitan area. Two types of staff are involved in the certification process: paraprofessional intake specialists complete demographic and income eligibility assessments, while professional nutrition staff complete nutrition assessments and provide nutrition services.

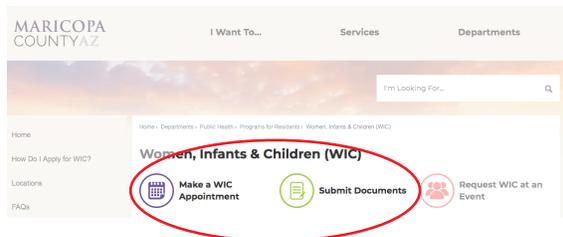
Project Description

Strategy 1: Improve Appointment Scheduling

Challenge Declining program caseloads have led to budget cuts and staffing reductions for Maricopa WIC. The agency sought to increase access for WIC participants without adding to staff members' workload. Having unique phone numbers for each WIC site within the agency created confusion for participants and additional work for staff when sites moved or closed.

Goal Improve participants access to WIC while decreasing staff workload

Strategy The agency created a universal phone number and included it on all WIC informational materials, websites, and social media sites. It also added an online appointment request option to the agency's website and linked to that form on the agency's Facebook page.



Key Takeaways

Maricopa County (AZ) WIC sought to improve appointment scheduling options and lower the share of certifications that were temporary (because applicants had not provided all required documents) by:

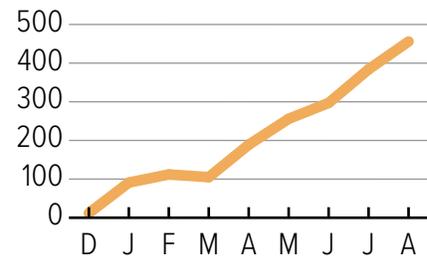
- Establishing a single public phone number for all county WIC sites;
- Building an online appointment request option; and
- Expanding options for providing electronic records to document eligibility.

As a result of these changes:

- Over 3,500 online appointment requests were received in the first 12 months.
- The share of certifications that were temporary fell from 26 percent before implementation to 12 percent within eight months and to 2 percent within 12 months.

Outcome In the first year the online request form was available, 3,564 new applicants and participants submitted appointment requests. The option continues to grow in popularity, generating an average of 500-600 requests per month

Online Appointment Requests



Strategy 2: Encourage Use of Electronic Documents to Complete Certification

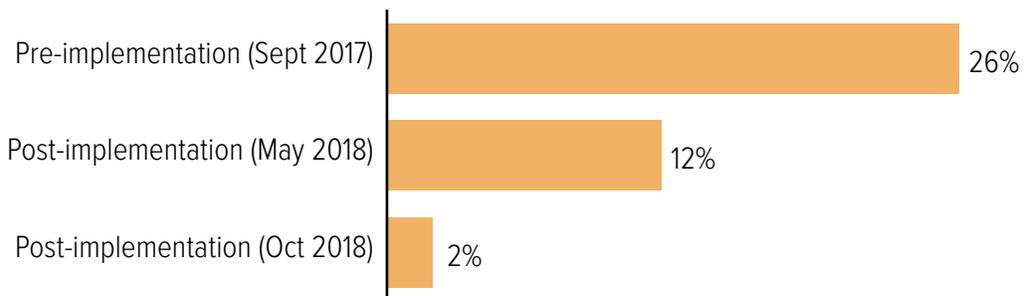
Challenge Approximately one-quarter of Maricopa WIC certifications were temporary due to incomplete documentation. Participants with temporary certifications must provide the required documentation to the WIC site within 30 days, which creates extra work for both participants and staff.

Goal Reduce the number of temporary certifications by 1) allowing participants to access eligibility documents electronically at the time of certification and 2) adding options for participants to provide missing documents electronically if they did not have them at the appointment

Strategy Maricopa WIC worked with the state agency office to review and update procedures to allow for electronic versions of certification documents viewable on phones, tablets, computers, or other devices. Staff were trained to offer these options during certification appointments when hard copies were not available and to accept documentation submitted electronically during the 30-day temporary certification period so participants would not need to bring these to the WIC site.

Outcome By accepting electronic documents, the program reduced the share of certifications that were temporary from 26 percent to 12 percent eight months after implementation and to 2 percent 12 months after implementation.

Percent of Total Certifications That Were Temporary Due to Lack of Documentation



Lessons Learned

Creating an online appointment request proved easier and faster than anticipated. In contrast, implementing a universal WIC phone number proved unexpectedly challenging. The diversity of phone systems made it difficult to create an automated phone tree for all WIC sites, and connecting participants who wanted to speak to specific WIC staff also created difficulties.

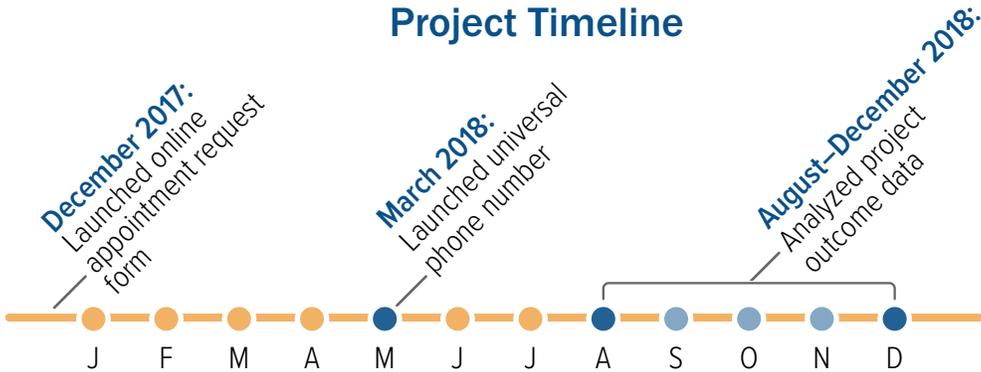
Staff were initially skeptical of the changes, but acceptance grew as they experienced the time savings. Staff especially appreciated allowing participants to show documents on their phones and to request an appointment online. Participants appreciated the option to submit eligibility documents electronically. Once participants with temporary certifications submit the missing documentation, they are certified for the full period, and WIC staff load food benefits electronically through eWIC.

An unanticipated outcome was that Maricopa WIC worked closely with both the telecom and information technology departments within the county agency throughout the project and developed a stronger relationship with department staff. These new relationships will facilitate future collaboration.

Next Steps

Maricopa WIC is exploring new approaches for participants to securely upload documents, along with other options to reduce the number of times participants must travel to the WIC office for services.

“With the addition of online scheduling and use of technology to get missing documentation, client services have greatly improved and my job is more enjoyable.”
– WIC staff member



June 2021 Update

Maricopa County WIC continues to receive many online appointment requests through the form available on its website. During the pandemic, the website was updated to let applicants and participants know that WIC was conducting appointments by phone and video and that they could request an appointment using the online form.

Maricopa WIC received an average of 1,730 appointment requests per month during 2020 – over 20,000 for the year. Having the online form already in place helped the agency quickly transition to providing services remotely.

The screenshot shows the Maricopa County website for Women, Infants & Children (WIC). The header includes the Maricopa County logo, navigation links for 'I Want To...', 'Services', and 'Departments', and a search bar. The main content area features a 'COVID-19 UPDATE' section with the following text:

WOMEN, INFANTS & CHILDREN (WIC)

COVID-19 UPDATE

Appointments
Even though we are not seeing clients in person, you can still [schedule a WIC appointment online](#) and we can meet with you over the phone or video chat. If you already have an appointment, we will contact you at your scheduled appointment time.

Expanded Food Options
WIC benefits can now be used to purchase more brands! Learn about the new options you have for milk, cheese and eggs.
[Updated English Food List](#) [Updated Spanish Food List](#)

For all other questions, please [contact your local WIC clinic](#).

Below the update are three main service buttons: 'Make a WIC Appointment', 'Submit Documents', and 'Request WIC at an Event'. At the bottom, there are two informational sections: 'What Does WIC Provide?' (listing breastfeeding support, healthy foods, and nutrition information) and 'Who is WIC For?' (listing breastfeeding women, children under age 5, and infants). A language selection dropdown is visible in the bottom right corner.

Project Team

Carrie Zavala – MS, RD

Emily Roy – MS, RD

Contact

Carrie Zavala – WIC Director
Maricopa County Department of Public Health
Carrie.Zavala@maricopa.gov