

WIC Case Study: Minnesota

Key Takeaways

The Minnesota WIC program piloted the use of video appointments for recertification and expanded use of electronic eligibility documents in the Fillmore County WIC program.

- The pilot demonstrated that certification can be conducted using video appointments, which provide a flexible option for families that lack transportation or during inclement weather.
- Minnesota WIC identified a videoconferencing platform called Vidyo already used by another state program, which was available to Minnesota WIC at no cost. Minnesota WIC was able to use guidelines and support for Vidyo developed by the other state program.
- While many families found videoconferencing easy and liked the option, some had challenges using Vidyo, and in-person appointments remain the most popular option in the pilot agency.
- Access to the Minnesota Immunization Registry for WIC staff, along with the option for participants to submit electronic documents related to income, residency, and identification for the certification, reduced burden on participants, decreased contacts or trips to WIC for missing documents, and saved time for participants and staff.

WIC Agency Profile

The Minnesota WIC Program, administered by the Minnesota Department of Health, serves 103,000 participants through 56 local agencies, including 47 Community Health Boards, 7 local agencies operated by the Ojibwe Tribe, and 2 Community Action Partnership organizations. These agencies provide services in 87 counties, including urban, suburban, and rural locations. The local agency partner, Fillmore County WIC, is a small agency located in a rural area and serves approximately 400 participants at two sites.

Project Description

Strategy 1- Expand the Use of Electronic Eligibility Documents

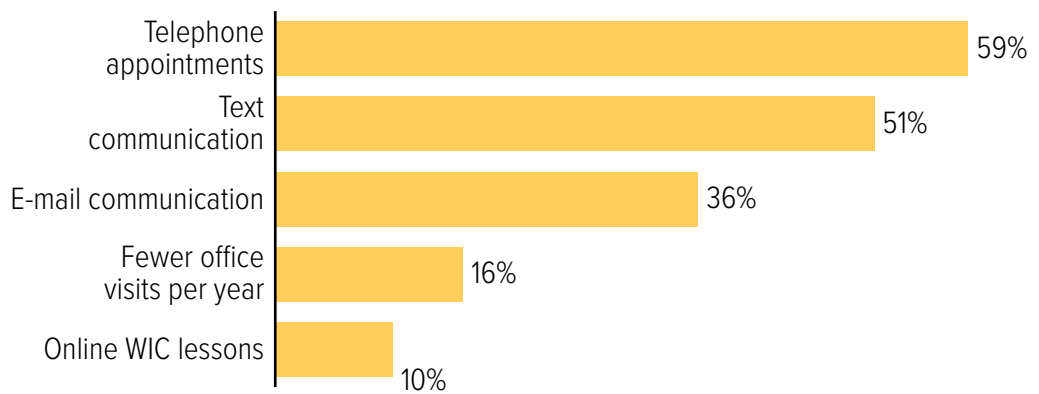
Challenge Identify and test options to make it easier for participants to complete the certification process without having to bring paper documents to the appointment or return to the WIC site with missing documents.

Goal Attract and retain WIC participants by making it easy for families to sign up for and stay on WIC.

Strategy The project partners modified state policies and local processes to allow participants to submit eligibility documents by email, and they expanded use of Minnesota's Immunization Registry for identification and residency documentation in Fillmore County WIC.

Outcome Participants provide documentation of identity, income, and residence by email or other electronic means during the certification process; WIC staff use the MN Immunization Registry as a documentation source. These practices have reduced the burden on participants because they do not have to return to the WIC site to provide missing documents. Fillmore County WIC participants surveyed prior to the video appointment pilot reported that it is easy to participate in WIC, but they suggested phone, email, and other options to engage with WIC outside of the clinic as ways to make it easier.

Pre-Pilot Survey: What Participants Said Would Make It Easier to Participate in WIC



Note: Based on 61 responses

Strategy 2- Pilot Videoconferencing For Recertification Appointments

Challenge Minnesota WIC identified video certification appointments as an opportunity to make recertification easier but had to find and implement the appropriate technology and incorporate this method into certification policies while maintaining compliance with federal regulations.

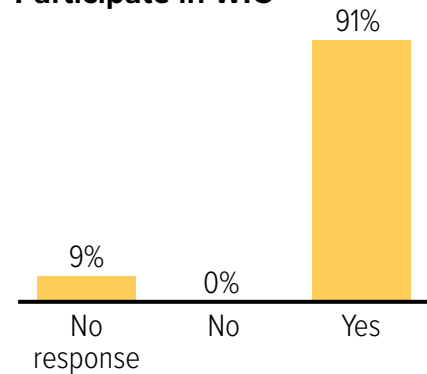
Goal Attract new participants and retain current participants by making it easy for families to participate in and stay on WIC.

Strategy By exploring videoconferencing options, Minnesota WIC learned that a product called Vidyo was being used by another program within the Department of Human Services and was available to Minnesota WIC at no cost along with guidelines and support developed by the other program. The state and local agency project partners developed options for obtaining measurements and blood test results for certification and materials to inform participants about video appointments and help them use the Vidyo platform. Fillmore County WIC began scheduling video appointments in August 2019 for participants who qualified under federal rules for an exemption from being physically present at certification.

Outcome During the pilot period, video appointments were offered to all eligible families, but a small share of recertification appointments (6 percent over three months) were conducted by videoconference. While the number was small, the pilot demonstrated the feasibility of conducting recertifications by videoconference. Most videoconference participants found the Vidyo platform easy to use. At first, Fillmore County WIC staff found video appointments challenging, but by the end of the pilot they felt empowered to provide services in ways that improve access and flexibility for families. Surveys found that families like to visit WIC sites for appointments but appreciated having the option to participate in WIC appointments from home.

Fillmore County WIC continues to offer recertification appointments by videoconference and anticipates that these may be more popular during periods when weather makes travel difficult. Based on their experience with this approach, the state and local agencies revised the materials to help participants use Vidyo and complete certifications by video appointments.

Post-Pilot Survey: Did The Pilot Make it Easier to Participate in WIC



Note: Based on 54 responses

Lessons Learned

- 1) It is important to review state policies to consider how they support flexibility in offering WIC services. This can take time and requires internal as well as Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) regional office review but can make WIC easier for participants.
- 2) By networking with other state programs, Minnesota WIC identified a videoconferencing platform already being used, which Minnesota WIC could use without cost. WIC could also benefit from using existing guidelines and support.
- 3) Families may experience barriers to completing video appointments if staff are unable to obtain eligibility documents and signatures from participants or measurements and blood test values from health care providers or through “drop in” visits to WIC clinics.
- 4) Many participants say they prefer to come to WIC sites for appointments, though they like the option of videoconference appointments.
- 5) It was easy to give WIC staff access to the MN Immunization Registry, but staff found that addresses and phone numbers in this system were not always current.
- 6) It takes time for new approaches such as videoconferencing to be adopted and accepted by WIC participants and staff.

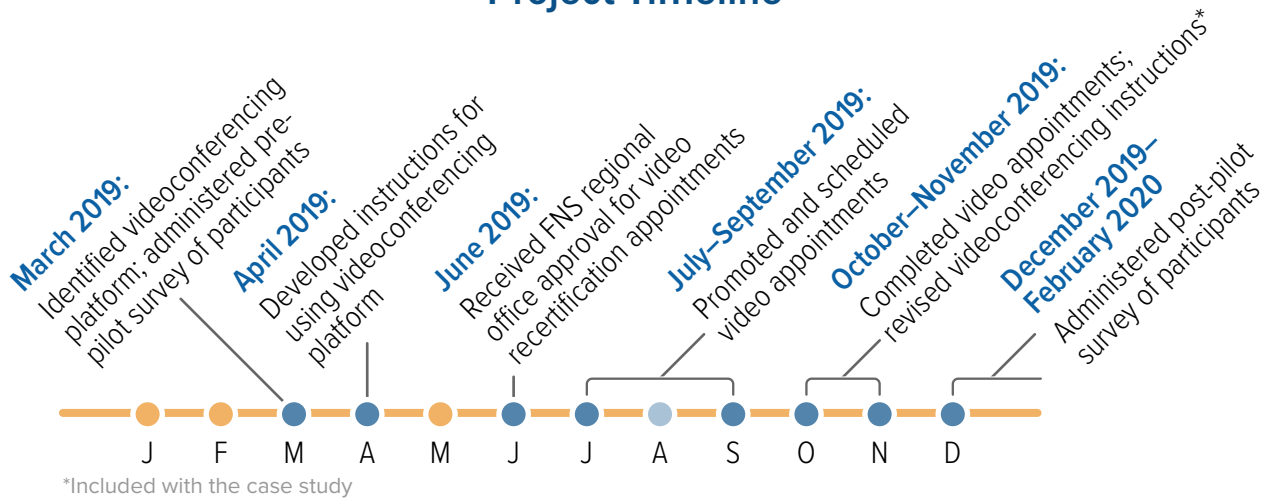
“This project helped us go about testing video appointments in a small community. The timing was perfect in allowing us to expand the teleWIC approach statewide when COVID hit.”

– Minnesota WIC Director

Next Steps

At the end of the pilot, Minnesota WIC planned to share Fillmore County's experience with videoconference appointments with all local agencies and give them the opportunity to use it. Statewide use of Vidyo occurred quickly in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, with waivers for physical presence and measurements making it easier to implement video recertification appointments. When waivers expire, Minnesota WIC agencies will continue to use Vidyo for recertification, but will update their state guidance for collecting measurements and blood test results and to comply with requirements regarding presence at certification.

Project Timeline



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