



Nourishing Special Needs Network Overview

Introduction:

The Nourishing Special Needs Network (NSNN) was created to improve access to nutrition services and support for infants and children with special needs enrolled in the Wisconsin Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program. NSNN is funded by the Wisconsin Birth Defects and Surveillance Program within the Department of Health Services (DHS) in partnership with the Waisman Center at the University of Wisconsin, Madison and with in-kind support from the WIC and Title V programs.

Background:

Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs (CYSHCN) require medical nutritional products and appropriate nutritional consultation in order to improve health status, prevent complications, and support their families' efforts to nurture their children. CYSHCN are at high risk for preventable nutrition problems. This begins with early identification of nutrition-related concerns in infants and young children, and is supported by appropriate education, referrals and care coordination. This process can be effectively implemented through WIC.

WIC projects are in every county of the state, serving half of Wisconsin's infants and one-third of Wisconsin's children under five years of age. Every local WIC project has a Nutritionist who is a Registered Dietitian and is committed to assuring all high-risk families receive appropriate nutrition support.

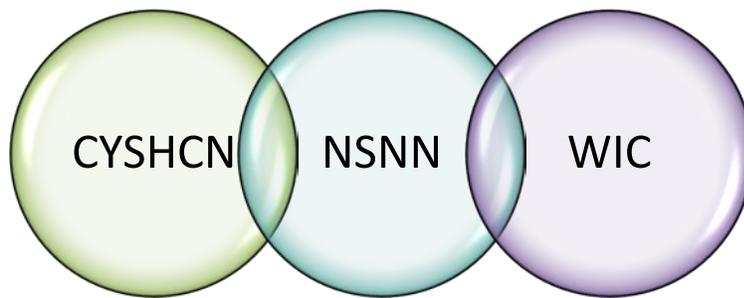
The goals of WIC are to assist in achieving positive changes in food habits and nutritional status and to prevent nutrition-related health problems. This is accomplished by:

- 1) promoting and supporting breastfeeding
- 2) providing supplemental food including several special and pediatric formulas
- 3) providing nutrition education
- 4) being an adjunct to health care

WIC Nutritionists perform a basic nutrition assessment at every certification appointment, which occurs at least twice a year. The WIC assessment includes a review of:

- 1) Anthropometric data
- 2) Hematological screening
- 3) Health and medical history
- 4) Dietary/nutrition information
- 5) Breastfeeding information

WIC staff may be the first to detect a need for referral to further assess and diagnose a suspected health care need.



Nourishing Special Needs Network:

WIC-NSNN Nutritionists from Wisconsin's five public health regions have developed a system that addresses the following:

- 1) facilitation of referrals to other services including Wisconsin Medicaid, primary care, tertiary care, the Birth to Three Program, economic assistance, Health Check, Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs Regional Centers, and registered dietitian/nutritionists providing medical nutritional therapy,
- 2) communication with families, health care providers or Birth to Three Programs, about special needs or concerns,
- 3) facilitation of the provision of special infant and pediatric formulas through WIC,
- 4) collaboration with families, health care providers and pharmacists to ensure documentation for Medicaid reimbursement of nutritional products

Toolkit:

To maximize training efforts, WIC-NSNN Nutritionists developed the WIC-CYSHCN Toolkit in June, 2008. The toolkit is currently updated and revised regularly by WIC-NSNN members. The WIC Toolkit is publicly available and hosted through a contract with the Waisman Center UCEDD:

<https://wic.waisman.wisc.edu/>. The WIC-CYSHCN Toolkit includes tools and resources for WIC Nutritionists working with families.

Mentoring Model:

The NSNN also facilitates the recruitment and training of WIC Nutritionists to serve CYSHCN using a mentoring model. WIC Nutritionists complete a work plan with integrated mentoring and leadership strategies, and targeted competency activities. The primary focus of the NSNN mentor work plan is to improve the ability of WIC Nutritionists to identify CYSHCN participants needing nutrition services beyond WIC, through enhancing knowledge of recommended resources and medical formulas and foods for infants and children. Leadership competencies to strengthen workforce mentoring skills are also available. Mentees with basic knowledge are paired with a proficient mentor. Learning opportunities include network discussion and education webinars, an in-person education day, and routine mentor-mentee contacts throughout the year. Work plan progress is tracked using an activity log. Year-end mentor and mentee evaluations are completed.

The collaboration of the NSNN, and the resulting training, data collection, targeted questionnaires, referral documents, and ongoing toolkit development, helps WIC participants with special health care needs receive relevant information, effective referrals and services in a timely manner.

For more information, contact the NSNN coordinator:

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