

Fact Sheet: WIC Enrollment Trends in New York City *February 2020*

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) provides nutrition education, breastfeeding promotion, nutritious supplemental foods and referrals to health care for low-income, pregnant women, infants and children up to the age of five – regardless of immigration status. Since its establishment in 1974, WIC has earned the reputation of being one of the most successful federally funded nutrition programs in the country. Collective findings of studies, reviews and reports demonstrate that WIC is cost effective in protecting and improving the health of low-income women, infants and children.¹ In recognition of the critical supports that WIC provides, federal, state and local actors have long been aligned regarding broad access to WIC as a public health strategy, including through its widespread delivery of services through county health departments, hospitals, schools, mobile clinics, community centers and public housing sites.



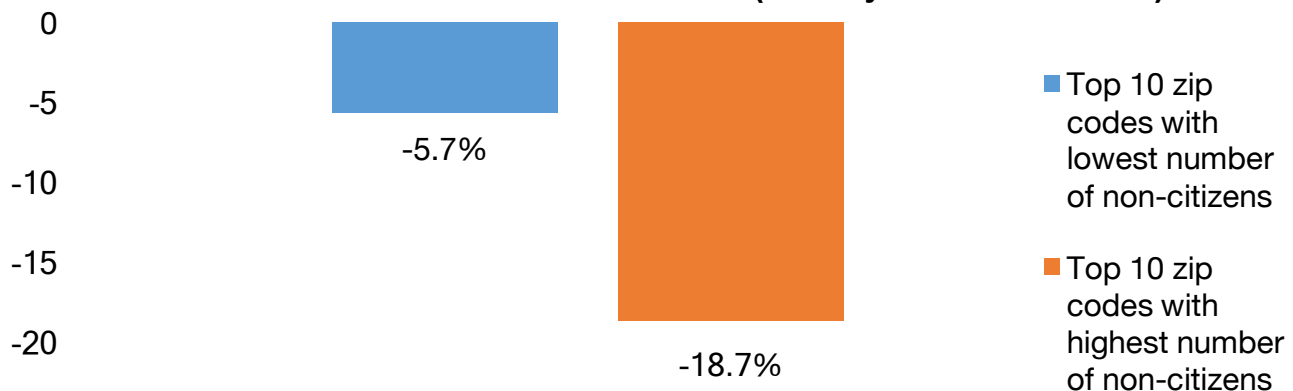
The federal government, under the current administration, has pursued a number of policy changes, such as the public charge rule,² that target immigrants' actual or perceived use of public benefits. Although use of WIC is exempt from consideration under the final public charge rule, WIC was listed as a benefit under consideration for inclusion in the public charge analysis in early 2017 when versions of a draft rule were circulated. Around this time, providers began reporting instances of immigrants withdrawing from WIC. These reports continued through 2019, when the final rule was published.

The New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), in partnership with the New York City Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA) and the New York State Department of Health (DOH), analyzed WIC enrollment data over the time period from 2009 to 2019. This analysis shows that neighborhoods with more non-citizen residents have had steeper declines in WIC enrollment as compared with neighborhoods with more U.S. citizens.³

New York City is seeing steeper declines in WIC enrollment in zip codes with more non-citizens than in zip codes with lower numbers of non-citizens. This has accelerated in 2019.

- As of June 2019, there were approximately 206,000 WIC recipients in New York City.
- In New York and across the country, WIC enrollment has declined overall over the past five years due to many factors including the improving economy, lower unemployment rates and reduced birth rates.
- There have been larger declines in WIC enrollment in zip codes with higher numbers of non-citizens compared with zip codes with lower numbers of non-citizens.

WIC Enrollment Decline in New York City Zip Codes with Top Ten Highest and Lowest Number of Non-Citizens (January 2017 to June 2019)

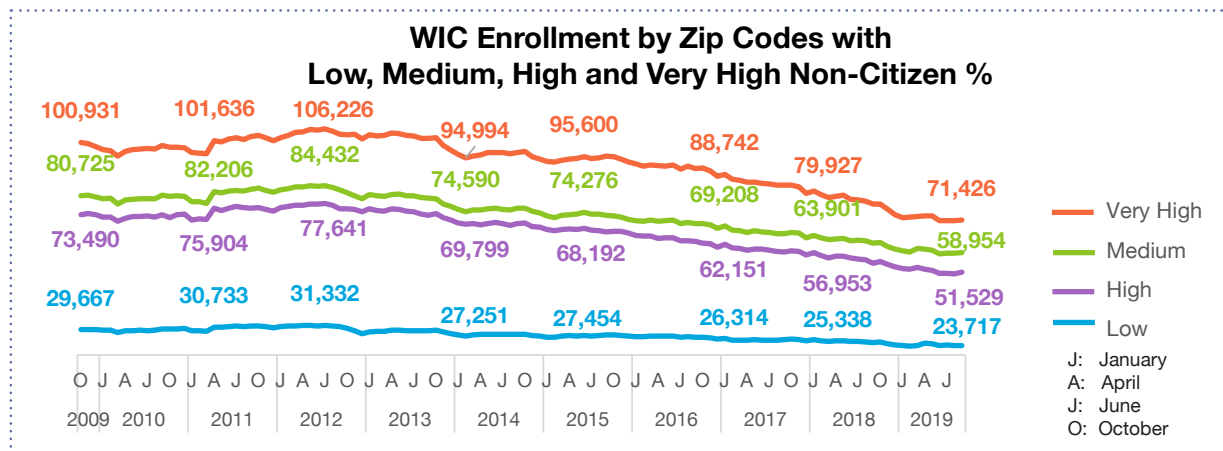


1. "About WIC – How WIC Helps," U.S. Department of Agriculture, available at <https://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/about-wic-how-wic-helps> (last visited Oct. 29, 2019).

2. Inadmissibility on Public Charge Grounds, 84 Fed. Reg. 41294 (Aug 14, 2019), available at <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2019/08/14/2019-17142/inadmissibility-on-public-charge-grounds>.

3. Emily Baumgaertner, "Spooked by Trump Proposals, Immigrants Abandon Public Nutrition Services," New York Times; Caitlin Dewey, "Immigrants Are Going Hungry So Trump Won't Deport Them," Washington Post; Helena Bottemiller Evich, "Immigrants, Fearing Trump Crackdown, Drop out of Nutrition Programs," Politico; Emily Moon, "Why Is Participation in Food Assistance Programs like WIC Declining?" Pacific Standard, May 8, 2019, <https://psmag.com/news/why-is-participation-in-food-assistance-programs-like-wic-declining>.

- These differences in WIC enrollment rates between U.S. citizens and non-citizens accelerated in 2019 despite increased outreach efforts by providers, the City and New York State to address concerns about public benefits and immigration status.
 - In zip codes with the highest number of non-citizens, while WIC enrollment had already been decreasing (-0.34% per month since September 2012), the decline accelerated in summer 2017 (-1.0% per month) through 2019.
 - In zip codes with the fewest numbers of non-citizens, enrollment had also been decreasing (-0.3% per month since 2017) but then enrollment began to increase starting in February 2019 (+1.16% per month).



- This finding also aligns with anecdotal evidence that immigrant families have been reluctant to enroll themselves or their children in critical safety net programs.⁴
- Public Health Solutions, the largest community-based WIC program in New York State, saw substantial decreases in WIC caseloads in April 2017 and May 2018. These drop-offs spiked to four to six times the usual rate (ranging from 395 to 640 families dis-enrolling) compared with normal monthly disenrollment of about 105 families.⁵

Methodology and Limitations

- The analysis looked at year-to-year changes in WIC enrollment from January 2009 through September 2019. A regression analysis was used to analyze changes over time.
- Because the WIC program does not collect information about immigration status, this is a proxy analysis of WIC enrollment declines in neighborhoods with low, medium, high and very high percentages of non-citizens based on the zip code of residence of each WIC recipient. Data on other contextual factors that might have influenced WIC declines (e.g., birth rates, employment rates) were not available at the same time periods and at this geographic scale.
- Zip Code Tabulation Areas (ZCTAs) were classified into four quartiles as having low, medium, high and very high percentages of non-citizens based on the 2011-2016 five-year American Community Survey estimates as Low ($\leq 35.94\%$; least non-citizen residents born outside the U.S.), Medium (35.95-45.56%), High (45.57-53.37%), Very high ($> 53.38\%$; most non-citizen residents born outside the U.S.)
- Top ten ZCTAs with the highest number of non-citizen residents and top ten ZCTAs with the lowest number of non-citizen residents were derived from the American Community Survey.
- WIC is not included in the final public charge rule.

4. Emily Baumgaertner, "Spooked by Trump Proposals, Immigrants Abandon Public Nutrition Services," New York Times; Caitlin Dewey, "Immigrants Are Going Hungry So Trump Won't Deport Them," Washington Post; Helena Bottemiller Evich, "Immigrants, Fearing Trump Crackdown, Drop out of Nutrition Programs," Politico; Emily Moon, "Why Is Participation in Food Assistance Programs like WIC Declining?" Pacific Standard, May 8, 2019, <https://psmag.com/news/why-is-participation-in-food-assistance-programs-like-wic-declining>.

5. Declaration of Lisa M. David at page 8, State of New York v United States Department of Homeland Security, No 1:19-cv-07777-GBD (S.D.N.Y., Sept. 9, 2019).