

Expanding ITCA WIC Reach: Encouraging SNAP participants to enroll in WIC

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KEY FINDINGS

- **A persuasive text message designed to promote WIC enrollment among eligible, non-participating SNAP households did not yield higher rates of enrollment in WIC.**
- **About 6% of SNAP households in our sample enrolled in WIC in the three-month follow-up. However, there was no difference based on whether they were sent the text message or not.**
- **To encourage enrollment in WIC, interventions may require additional strategies beyond sending a text message.**

INTRODUCTION

American Indian populations face high rates of food insecurity and nutrition-related health conditions, often living in communities with limited access to healthy, affordable foods. Participating in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) can help address these challenges as research shows that WIC participants consume healthier diets and have better health outcomes.

However, only 56% of eligible individuals in Arizona currently participate in WIC. Many households eligible for both WIC and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) only participate in the latter, thereby missing out on the crucial benefits of WIC. This brief summarizes findings from our project evaluating a targeted text message intervention aimed at encouraging SNAP participants eligible for WIC to enroll in the Inter Tribal Council of Arizona, Inc. (ITCA) WIC program. ITCA WIC administers WIC for predominantly (>80%) American Indian clients on Tribal lands and urban areas. The findings from this project provide valuable insights into effective strategies for boosting program participation and could inform future efforts to support similar populations across the country.

RESULTS

Of the 1,093 SNAP participants eligible for WIC identified in January 2024, half were sent a persuasive text message (see box) encouraging them to apply for ITCA WIC, while the other half were not sent such a message. Over a 3-month follow-up period, 61 of the 1,093 households (5.6%) enrolled in ITCA WIC, with no significant difference in enrollment rates between the two groups. Pilot studies conducted in 2018-19 in Colorado, Montana, and Virginia reported similar enrollment rates (between 6 and 9%) among WIC-eligible households participating in SNAP that received informative text messages.

Consistent with our findings, in none of these pilot studies the enrollment rate for the group that received the text was different from the enrollment rate of the group that did not receive the text (Maneely and Neuberger, 2021).

Want healthy foods for your family? WIC is just a click away. With SNAP, you may already qualify.

Visit <https://itcawic.itcastars.net/> apply or call [555-000-1111] to join.

METHODS

The ASU Food Policy and Environment Research Group partnered with ITCA to evaluate the text message intervention aimed at increasing enrollment in ITCA WIC among eligible SNAP households. ITCA coordinated with the Arizona Department of Economic Security (DES), the state agency responsible for administering SNAP, to obtain a list of our target households—those participating in SNAP and eligible for but not enrolled in ITCA WIC, as of January 2024.

In collaboration with a communication specialist, we developed 5 persuasive text messages. After field testing with ITCA WIC employees and participants, we selected the following message to send to SNAP participants: *“Want healthy foods for your family? WIC is just a click away. With SNAP, you may already qualify. Visit <https://itcawic.itcastars.net/apply> or call [555-000-1111] to join.”*

We randomly selected half of the households on the January 2024 DES list to receive the persuasive text message, while the other half did not receive any text. The text message was sent at the beginning of February 2024. We evaluated the intervention using de-identified WIC Client reports to assess enrollment in WIC over the following 3 months (February, March, and April 2024) and to determine whether the enrollment rate was higher among households that were sent the text.

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¹ Maneely J, and Neuberger Z. 2021. Targeted Text Message Outreach Can Increase WIC Enrollment, Pilots Show. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/targeted-text-message-outreach-can-increase-wic-enrollment-pilots-show> Retrieved on Nov 4, 2024.