

WIC VENDOR ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

Meeting Date: May 29, 2007

Attendees:

Kim Boulette, John Frassinelli, Pat Sullivan, Joanne White, Janet Rankin, Jannett Houghton, Crecencio Custodio, Wilberto Diaz, Mitch Klein, Dick Edmonds, Kevin Krusz, Donna Brewer, Scott Madeo, Adam Osmond

Agenda

The day's agenda was distributed. Kim Boulette informed the attendees that additional members would be added to this council and passed out the list of current members.

Introductions

Mitch Klein from Krasdale Foods was introduced as a new member. Dick Edmonds, Chief of the Public Health Initiatives Branch at the State of Connecticut-Department of Public Health was introduced as a guest to our group.

Paperwork drop-off policy – New Procedure

- 1) The WIC Program shared a bulletin that was sent to all WIC authorized vendors discussing the WIC Program no longer conducting business in the lobby of 410 Capitol Avenue. Kim explained that this has become a safety issue and we are not set up for this, as we do not have a reception window. All correspondence will be done via telephone, US Mail, facsimile or email. The Mailroom at 410 Capitol Avenue will receive all "hand-delivered" documents and the hours of service are listed on the bulletin.

New Food Package

- 1) In response to a member's request for clarification on the federally proposed additions to the existing WIC foods as mentioned at the first meeting, more information was provided. It has been proposed to include fresh and processed (canned or frozen) fruits and vegetables, whole grain breads, calcium set tofu, calcium and vitamin D-rich soy beverages. The CT WIC Program is in support of offering wheat-free cereals and has recommended including baby foods as part of the minimum inventory. The federal government has not yet made this rule final, though it is expected in the next few months. Also, there is no specific implementation date for the new food list; however, the CT WIC Program recommended that implementation should start at least one year from the date of publication of the final rule.

State of Connecticut Proposed Deposit Fee, ("Bottle Bill")

- 1) The new legislative proposal for adding a 5¢ deposit for water bottles and other beverage containers will not affect WIC-approved products. As originally proposed, half gallons of orange juice would have been subject to this new deposit, but changes were made to decrease the size of the container where the fee would be applicable.

Connecticut WIC Program Proposed Food List Changes/Issues

- 1) Color copies of a draft food list were distributed for the group to review with the following proposed changes:
 - a) Deli-sliced American cheese will again be included as a WIC-approved food.
 - b) Only one package of cheese will be approved for WIC purchases. The group agreed and suggested that the wording could be "up to 16 ounces" for pre-packaged cheese or 1 lb. of deli sliced American.
 - c) The new minimum size for all hot and cold cereals will be 14 oz.; therefore, some currently WIC-eligible cereals will no longer be approved in Connecticut (i.e. Multigrain Cheerios). Mitch said he received "letters to trade" (information sent from the manufacturers to the food industry) indicating the present content size of some boxes of cereal will decrease. The CT WIC Program has received a letter

from General Mills indicating their product size decreases, which is making some of their items ineligible. Kellogg's may be doing something similar.

- d) Whole Grain 100 and Enriched Bran Flakes will no longer be part of the CT WIC-approved food list. According to WIC Program reports, very few stores carry these items and the prices we do have are very outdated.
 - e) The 100 % Juice category on the existing food list will be changed to "100% Fruit Juice" to eliminate confusion about the new flavors of Juicy Juice that contain both vegetable and fruit juices. These juices are only sold in plastic bottles that are not approved in the Connecticut WIC Program.
 - f) Descriptions of Gerber Infant Cereal will change from 8 or 16 oz boxes to "8 oz boxes."
 - g) The deadline for manufacturers to submit foods for WIC program approval is September 30, 2007.
 - h) A finalization date for the changes to the food list has not been established, but it will be before the proposed food package additions. Please give all comments on the proposed Food List to Kim Boulette.
- 2) An issue was raised as to the training/instruction of participants regarding the new food list. WIC participants will be trained on any changes to the new food list by the local agency staff. Kim pointed out that all participants and all vendors have the same food list and they will be distributed at the same time.
 - 3) A suggestion was made to have the local agencies display and/or show participants a sample box or container of WIC-approved foods in order for them to know what are the appropriate foods and sizes. Presently, Hospital of St. Raphael WIC and a few other local agencies display WIC foods.
 - 4) A suggestion was made to translate the food list into foreign languages such as Albanian and Arabic based on the presently significant populations. Currently, the food list is printed in English and Spanish. Jannett Haughton said that the local agencies suggest that people with limited English bring a translator. Many times, a translator accompanies the participant to the agency, however, not to the grocery store.

Local Agency Related Issues

- 1) Kevin presented the group with issues that originated from vendors during the last renewal training session. A summary of these items are:
 - a. Participants pre-signing WIC checks. All vendor representatives said this was an issue and participants become irate because stores will not accept pre-signed checks. It was suggested that they might possibly sign the checks early as security, so no one else can take or use them. It should be presented to the local agencies for participants' compliance with WIC procedures.
 - b. No signature on WIC Identification folder. Specifically, alternate signatures or multiple alternates listed on the folder. All vendor representatives said this was an issue. Local agency staff confirmed that only one alternate is allowed at a time and their signature should be on the card or folder to be able to use WIC checks.
 - c. All vendors believe that participants need more and intensive training. Local Agency Coordinators added that they hear the reverse; that vendors should also receive more training.
- 2) It was suggested that local agencies re-emphasize that 16 ounces is the same as one pound (1 lb). Many participants are confused with this concept as they search products for the word "one-pound" while several packages read 16 ounces.
- 3) Mitch said that many participants become confused when they are issued WIC checks for 16 ounces/one pound of cheese and the store sells "free weight" packaged cheese. Free weight means that the actual size of the cheese is listed on the package (i.e., .74 ounces, .82 ounces, etc.). Possibly, the free weight system should be also explained at the participant's training session. If the phrase "up to 16 ounces" is printed on the food list, this may help participants understand also.
- 4) A suggestion was made to have a handout available in the local offices that converts our present system of weight (ounces, pounds, gallons, etc.) into metric since many participants from foreign countries are familiar with the metric system and will be able to purchase the appropriate products in respective sizes. Several members agreed that this might be helpful for participants in choosing their WIC approved items.

Infant Formula Issues

- 1) In order to clarify the purchase of the exact infant formula, pictures of these formulas (on tear-off sheets) should be given to the participant. During the conversion from Enfamil to Good Start, Nestle provided the tear-off sheets. Local agency staff stated that they are need of more.
- 2) It was suggested that UPC codes of infant formulas be printed on WIC checks. This will insure that the exact product that is listed on the checks will be sold (especially if the store uses a scanner system). The UPC codes would also assist the stores with inventory/availability and the prices of these products (for our pricing structure).
- 3) During the past week, Kevin Krusz conducted a statewide monitoring of large stores for the minimum inventory of the required infant formulas. Forty percent of these large stores failed the monitoring inspection. All representatives at this meeting said that they are not experiencing a shortage of Good Start Supreme formulas and could not determine why these stores did not have the required formula.
- 4) Wilberto said that a participant who was issued a check for an Enfamil formula insisted that this product is a minimum inventory item. It was clarified that only specific Nestle Good Start formulas are required for minimum inventory and that if the participant is persistent in her endeavors, to call the WIC Program for clarification. As a reminder, a vendor has 48 hours to obtain a WIC-approved, non-minimum inventory item for a participant.
- 5) Adam said that his store never redeems checks for Good Start Supreme Soy and his current inventory has expired. Kevin confirmed this information by adding that many stores in Bridgeport and Putnam never sell these products either. The issue was raised about vendors returning/exchanging expired Nestle infant formula. Mitch informed the group that Nestle would exchange "soon-to-be-expiring" formula by contacting Nestle or their Nestle representative. Pat and Joanne said that they print very few checks for the soy products. The State WIC Program will investigate this topic to see if soy should be a minimum inventory product.

National UPC Database

1) Kim discussed that the Connecticut State WIC Office is participating in the National UPC Database Project being designed and implemented by USDA. This will have a greater impact on the States that already have EBT systems in place who already utilize their own UPC databases. We are involved by providing comments and input, so the group was asked how the vendor community could utilize this information. Members commented that it would help them to have UPC codes for WIC-approved foods, so they know exactly which products are allowed. Mitch informed us that most items are registered in a national UPC database. He also stated that UPC codes are standard for every item as long as the product and size stays constant.

Price Changes

1) Kim wants the information relayed to all vendors that when vendors need to change their prices, that documentation is sent to the State Office as soon as possible. This information is used to calculate the maximum, not to exceed amounts for items listed on WIC checks. If we have old prices in our system and vendors don't provide the correct information, checks may bounce because the info is not current.

The meeting adjourned at 3:40. The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, July 31, 2007 from 2-4 pm at the DOT Building in Newington.