

the **Nutrition Digest**

Recapping 2020, Edition 2

WHAT'S INSIDE?
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**COVID-19
Changes**

**Grow
Outdoors
SC**

text2bwellsc



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The Bureau of Community Nutrition Services consists of the Division of Women, Infants, and Children Services (WIC), Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity Prevention (DNPAO), Division of Public Health Nutrition Practice and SNAP-Ed program, and the Division of Administration. The mission of the bureau is to improve the lifelong health, nutritional status, and well-being of public health across South Carolina.



From the *Director*

**Hello,
Team!**

This past year... wow, where do I start? It has been one for the

books. The Bureau of Community Nutrition Services has been simultaneously faced with challenges and changes while using a coordinated approach to deliver services during the COVID-19 pandemic. Thank you for your hard work and dedication to serving our great state, especially amid a time of much uncertainty. In the toughest hour during the hardest storm, you continued to prevail.

ADJUST and ADAPT. That's what you have done continuously over this past year. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought many challenges causing us all to lean on each other. We have altered our service delivery to continue serving our customers and stakeholders. From WIC providing remote services telephonically to WIC participants; to SNAP-Ed providing clients the option of in-person socially distant or virtual nutrition education; to DNPAO continuing to engage and work with partners in virtual spaces on platforms like Microsoft Teams and Zoom.

However, our bureau isn't the only area adjusting to change. This past year our agency welcomed a new director, Dr. Edward Simmer, MD, MPH, DFAPA. He is a native of Ohio and served over thirty years on active duty with the United States Navy. Additionally, we are also welcoming a new Director of Public Health, Dr. Brannon Traxler, M.D. MPH. She is a native

of Greenville and served as interim director of Public Health for the agency during the COVID-19 response efforts.

The coronavirus pandemic and the changes in our work and daily lives have taken a toll on people's mental health. Stress and worry about contracting the virus, coupled with job losses, loss of childcare, and the devastating loss of loved ones due to COVID-19 are a few ways this pandemic can negatively affect your mental health. If you or a member of your team is feeling stressed or anxious, please reach out to Employee Relations at 803-898-3394 for immediate assistance and guidance.

Please take a moment to enjoy and celebrate your success as a valued work family member of Community Nutrition Services. Each one of you is crucial to our team's success.

The future is bright because you're part of this high-performing team. We have a few exciting things to look

forward to in 2021-22. Our needs met has increased and continues to grow. Currently, it's at 39%. Our WIC program will be launching its WIC online pre-screening tool in Summer/Fall 2021. SNAP-Ed will release a new recipe book, *Eating Healthy in a SNAP*, along with how to videos for many of the recipes. DNPAO is continuing its collective impact work with partners to prioritize and unify state-level efforts, including targeted work to improve early care and education and school systems to improve children's well-being and fitness.

Please take a moment as you reflect on the many accomplishments for 2020. I hope you enjoy it!

"I can't change the direction of the wind, but I can adjust my sails to always reach my destination"

– Jimmy Dean

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Barry B. Kelly". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.



Reflecting on 2020

A look back at how the Bureau of Community Nutrition Services embodied the core values of service, innovation, teamwork and excellence in a year unlike any other.

Summerville Health Department Donates During Pandemic



Summerville Health Department employees held a socially-distanced staff meeting. They were encouraged to bring in canned goods and pantry items for the local Summerville Meals on Wheels program, which serves hot meals to Dorchester County residents who are shut-in, elderly, disabled or unable to go to the grocery store due to COVID-19.

Almost 200 pounds of food were donated, and employees who donated were entered into a drawing for gift cards to local restaurants. The winners were Venetia Jefferson and Denee Butler.

Myrtle Beach WIC Team Goes Above and Beyond to Support WIC Participants



Renee Hudson, WIC Program Coordinator for the Pee Dee, shared an example of how the Myrtle Beach team is going above and beyond to promote quality customer service.

On June 19 and June 22, 2020, she sent the **Myrtle Beach Health Department** a listing of 104 participants in need of WIC services.

“I was excited to learn that the team contacted and issued benefits to 73 participants, 70% of the participants listed,” Renee said. “Additionally, the team went the extra mile and sent letters to participants who they were unable to reach over the phone. What an awesome display of teamwork to ensure participants receive their benefits!”

WIC Helps Provide Innovative Outreach to Support Modified Baby Showers During Pandemic

DHEC's WIC team continues to provide outreach to communities across the state during the COVID-19 pandemic. The new norm has forced everyone to do things differently, including outreach.

In Columbia on June 17, 2020, **Adrianna Bradley** and **Berry Kelly** attended a drive-thru baby shower hosted by the First Choice Community Center. To ensure social distancing, all the families attending the baby shower pulled up to the front of the center and remained in their cars. A paper copy of the information presented was provided to each family.

At the conclusion of the presentations, each family opened their trunks for the team to put outreach materials in their vehicles. The First Choice Community Center handed out diaper bags and car seats. WIC handed out over 30 outreach bags filled with goodies and helpful information about the program.

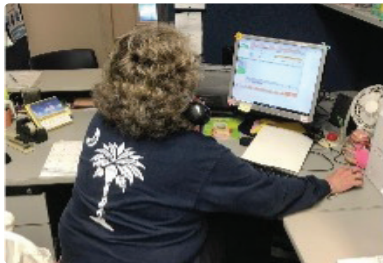
On June 24, 2020, **Christina Boughton**, Beaufort Breastfeeding Peer Counselor, also attended a drive-thru baby shower hosted by First Choice. The event took place outside of the Beaufort Salvation Army.

Christina gave a presentation on WIC and the benefits of breastfeeding. At the end of the presentation, the attendees were able to ask questions and pop their trunks for WIC outreach goodies and information on the program.



Time	Activity
Group A - 10:30 - 11:30a	10:00- Welcome SHSC (5 mins.) Susan Gay Bright Start (10 minutes) Parents as Teachers - Barbara Ramos WIC - Christina Boughton (15 minutes) 11:15 - 11:30a Car Seat distribution and departure
Group B - 12p - 1:00p	Welcome (5 mins.) 12:05pm - 12:20 pm Dr. Mario Smith (BJHC) - 15 minutes 12:20-12:30 PAT (10), WIC(10), Bright Start (5) 12:30 - 1:00p Car Seat Distribution and departure
Group C - 1:30-2:30p	same as above - Group B

Upstate and Lowcountry WIC Continue to Provide Services and Support During Difficult Times



A huge thank you to the dedicated **WIC staff** who are working both on the frontlines and in an administrative capacity to serve WIC participants. They are helping to ensure mothers and young children have access to healthy foods and breastfeeding support, as well as accurate information on maternal and child recommendations during this public health emergency.

While some locations are closed to the public, all WIC phone lines are open, and all services are available.

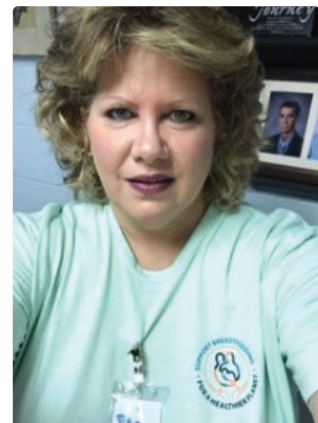
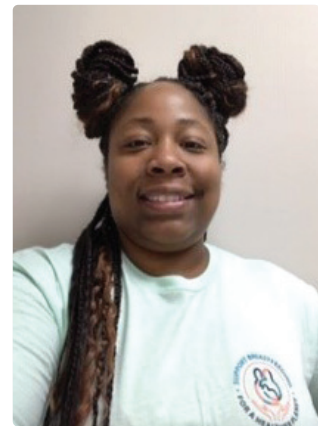
Pee Dee Adjusts Approach to Orientation Amid Pandemic

In March 2020, with the sudden onset of the COVID-19 Public Health emergency, many of the state's public health regions had to quickly adjust to several changes within the program and its operations.

Unfortunately, just as the COVID-19 pandemic was beginning, the Pee Dee region had just hired three new Breastfeeding Peer Counselors (BFPC). It left the team with one question, *"How do we train our new staff while adhering to CDC COVID-19 guidelines?"*

The region's experienced BFPC staff (Myeshia Rogers, Ashley Brown, Renee Walker-Andrews, and Renita Robinson) took on the challenge by using innovative methods to teach the new staff. Successfully the team provided the new BFPCs with virtual training through 3-way calling and Microsoft Teams. At the conclusion of the training the trainees described feeling confident they can conquer the breastfeeding promotion world. Pictured below are two of the three trainees that are now providing breastfeeding promotion in the Pee Dee region.

The Pee Dee Region has continued to take the same innovative approach to provide new orientation to all new employees gained throughout the pandemic.



WIC Hosts Its First Ever Virtual State Meeting

WIC has seen the best of what COVID-19 has to offer with many program changes and waivers affecting the program daily.

The latest adaptation by the team has been the WIC State Meeting. Last year due to the pandemic, the team hosted its first virtual state meeting. With over 400 guests joining virtually on the WebEx platform from their homes or offices, the meeting was a huge success.

The team also had the pleasure

of having some special guests: Dr. Brannon Traxler, Public Health Director; Sandy Benton-Davis, Branch Chief Food and Nutrition Services with USDA; Georgia Mjartan, Executive Director of South Carolina First Steps; and Eric Bellamy, Chief Partner Engagement Officer for Children's Trust.

The two-day meeting covered topics ranging from professional development to goal writing skill development.

The staff ended the state meeting with its WIC Awards Ceremony. Congratulations to all the winners!

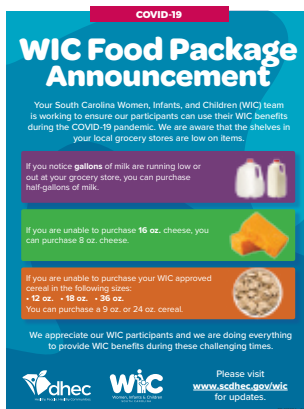
Christina Pike - Outstanding Administrative Specialist

Brittney Linton - Outstanding Breastfeeding Promotion

Ebone Edwards - Outstanding Nutrition Services

Melissa Miller - Excellence in Innovation

COVID-19 Changes



The COVID-19 pandemic required the South Carolina WIC team to adapt to new issues and concerns facing participants.

WIC quickly responded by implementing policies allowing staff to conduct certifications remotely. Both state and local agency guidance were developed and shared statewide to ensure continued services to our most vulnerable population.

Staff were provided guidance on implementation procedures to maximize telecommunications with our participants to include certifications, breastfeeding support, breast pump issuance, and nutrition education. Waiver requests approved for the South Carolina WIC Program also included the extension of certifications and updates to food package benefits to address product shortages.

Some of those extensions to the food package included the following:

- Participants can purchase gallons and half-gallons of milk
- Participants can purchase 16 oz. or 8 oz. of cheese
- Participants can purchase 36 oz., 24oz., 18oz., 12oz., and/or 9 oz.

USDA granted certain programmatic waivers to WIC

State agencies in response to COVID-19 to help address WIC product shortages that occurred. The waivers are temporary. Therefore, to meet the WIC community needs, SC WIC allowed participants the following options:

- Participants who are 2 years of age and older can make the choice to purchase 1% milk, Non-fat milk, 2% milk, lactose free 1% milk, lactose free nonfat milk, lactose free 2% milk, or soy milk.
- All participants can make the choice to purchase any fat content of yogurt (Whole, Low fat, or Nonfat).
- Participants who choose to receive cash value benefits instead of infant baby foods can not only purchase fresh, but frozen and canned fruits and vegetables.

WIC's Vendor Management Unit Successfully Training Vendors Amid COVID-19

South Carolina's WIC Vendor Management Unit faced many challenges during the past fiscal year (October 2019-September 2020). With COVID-19 restrictions in place, the Vendor Unit had to take an innovative approach to serve both WIC vendors and participants. Some techniques used were virtual pre-approvals and self-paced vendor trainings.

Annually, WIC authorized vendors are mandated by the U.S. Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) to participate in WIC training. In August 2020, authorized vendors were provided a self-paced training packet to complete and return for credit. Within the packets were a training PowerPoint presentation, assessment, checklist and evaluation.

During the fiscal year, South Carolina has completed 12 pre-approvals -- 10 were completed virtually.

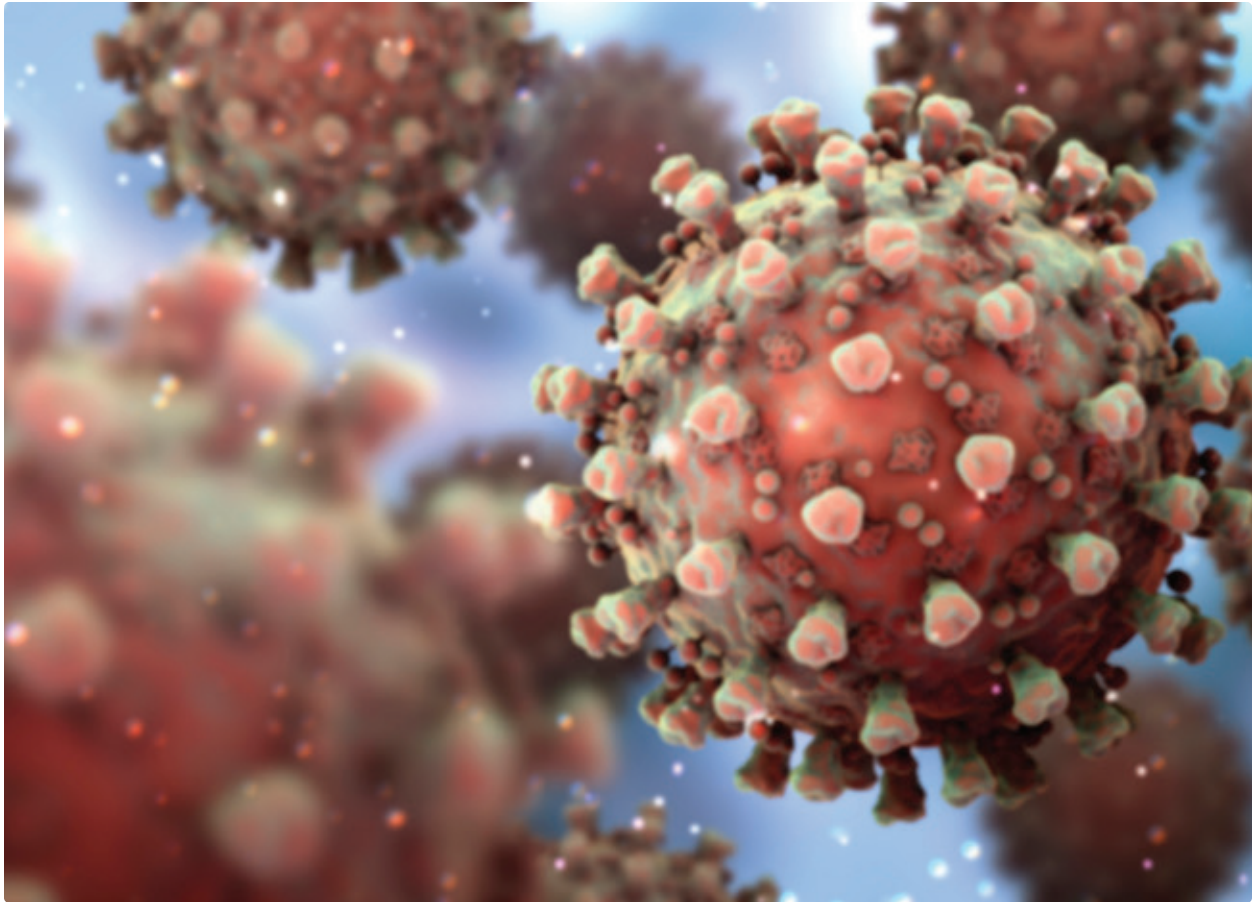
The approvals conducted were due to the following:

- vendors transferring ownership;
- locations changing;
- new stores opening;
- and corporate acquisition of stores.

The Vendor Management Unit has remained innovative by using technological advancements to not only adapt to change quickly, but to also continue serving the state's WIC vendors and participants.



Above is one of the store managers (Chris) at KJ's Market doing a virtual approval with the use of an iPhone. Chris states he is "very pleased" with the virtual process, and it has helped him "understand what investigators are looking for during approval" and is "amazed at how easy the walk through was with the assistance of the State staff".



Persevering during a Public Health Threat

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented many challenges for our nation and state. It continues to present barriers and the need for constant adjustments for WIC programs nationally and in South Carolina. While a pandemic does raise serious public health concerns, it does not halt the reproduction process and the need for programs like WIC. The South Carolina WIC team continues to monitor the status of COVID-19 and works to ensure all WIC participants can receive and use their benefits during the pandemic.

To protect the health of WIC participants and staff, beginning **April 13, 2020**, and until further notice, WIC participants are no longer required to visit their local clinics. All services are provided through

remote services telephonically. While locations are closed to the public, all WIC phone lines are open. New applicants are assessed, certified and issued benefits by local clinic staff using the telephone, computer and other technologies. The program's recent implementation of eWIC allows staff to issue food benefits remotely to those determined to be eligible for the program. If a new participant is joining the program, the eWIC card will be mailed to their address.

USDA has issued several waivers to safeguard the health of low-income women, infants and children up to age 5 who are at nutrition risk. These waivers have allowed the WIC program to respond to increased demands for nutritious foods during the pandemic. Beginning **April 27, 2020**, and until further notice, WIC participants have more buying power to purchase more options for milk, yogurts, fruits and vegetables.

Adversely, the pandemic has led to an increase in WIC participation in the Palmetto State.

While some participants were having issues getting nutritious foods due to hoarding, more South Carolina mothers began to choose

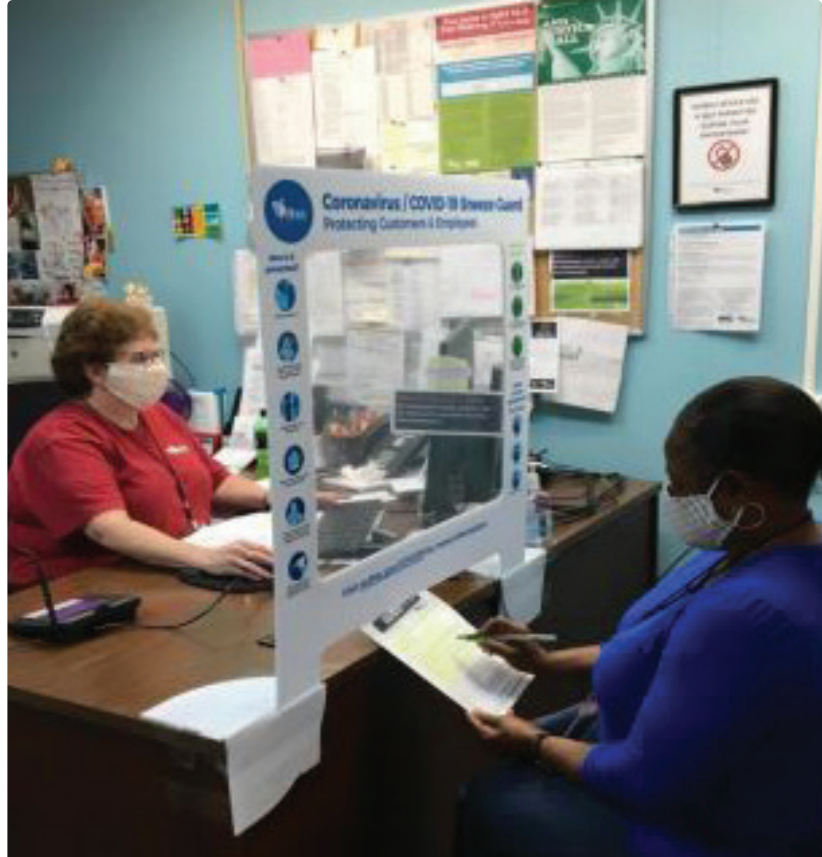
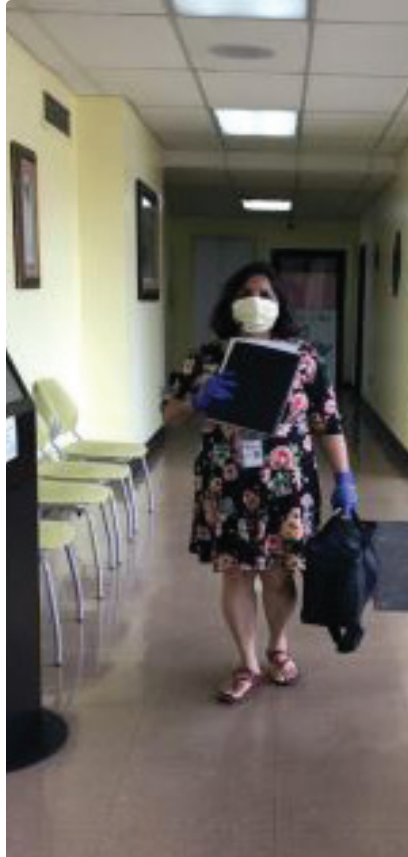
breastfeeding as the optimal option for feeding their infants. Breastfeeding rates climbed in **2020 from 20% in November 2019 to 21.2% in November 2020. Peak levels were at 21.6% in July and September 2020.** Additionally, initiation has increased from **42% in 2008 to 65.2% in 2015 to a peak of 69.5%** during the first quarter of 2020.

SC WIC’s nutrition education program is focused on helping families stay healthy and eat right during times of important growth, especially during an ongoing pandemic. The WIC team offers participants the option to complete their nutrition education sessions via the internet, allowing for social distancing and fewer risks to COVID-19 exposure. WICHealth.org is an online nutrition education website where the lessons are participant-centered and based on the stages of change model. It can be accessed by computer, tablet or smartphone 24/7. In 2020 participants completed over **70,000** lessons. **Over 70%** of the lessons were completed on a phone or tablet.

The WIC Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) was established to provide fresh,

unprepared, locally grown fruits and vegetables to WIC participants, and to expand the awareness, use of, and sales at farmers’ markets. Twenty-six public health departments and two primary care centers participated in the program. Health departments issued FMNP booklets via mail or by the curbside. Over **\$60,000** of fruits and vegetables were redeemed.

SC WIC has several partnerships with other organizations throughout the state to increase participant reach and to be inclusive of different types of participants. Through **PASOs**, a Hispanic-based outreach organization, WIC has been able to reach Hispanic communities, share valuable information and connect families to WIC services. The team has worked closely with **First Steps** and **First Choice by Select Health of South Carolina** to conduct outreach to targeted populations being impacted by the pandemic. WIC is effective for improving nutrition and health outcomes among women and young children. Demand for WIC has and will increase due to COVID-19 and resulting impacts on the economy.



Bureau of Community Nutrition Services Celebrates with Virtual Holiday Party

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way we have conducted business the majority of 2020, and it continues to impact how we celebrate holidays with our friends and families.

The Bureau of Community Nutrition Services (CNS) did not let COVID-19 steal its Christmas spirit. On Tuesday, December 15, 2020, the team held its first virtual Christmas Party.

“Normally the entire bureau goes to dinner as a team to celebrate the holidays, but with the lingering threat of COVID-19, it was just as important to still

bring the team together to celebrate virtually,” said **Berry Kelly, Bureau Director of CNS.** *“I encouraged the team to bring their extended colleagues they’ve been working alongside throughout the pandemic, their pets and children.”*

The Bureau sang Christmas Carols together and even had an ugly sweater contest where contestants modeled their ugly sweaters on screen for their colleagues to view and vote. Additionally, the team took the time to reflect on personal highlights over the year calling it “Gifts of 2020.”

“It was important to do personal reflections because everyone has been so busy adapting to changes from COVID-19 that we haven’t had the chance to celebrate the new babies, marriages, engagements and other successes throughout our teams,” **Kelly said.**

The team also reflected on achievements and milestones made throughout the year. From hosting a virtual state meeting to conducting virtual food demonstrations, the Bureau of CNS had many accomplishments to celebrate for 2020.

WIC Civil Rights Compliance

On September 30, 2020, the WIC Program closed its first Comprehensive Civil Rights Compliance Audit conducted by the USDA. From the time of the program receiving the official notice of the audit in March 2018, to entering into a Voluntary Resolution Agreement signed by the Agency Director in October 2019, to final closure, was a labor-intensive process. The program was brought into compliance by addressing 12 findings noted during the audit. Collaboration and involvement with other divisions and subject matter experts throughout the agency were essential in resolving these findings.

Agency improvements, program improvements and enhancements now ensure that everyone will have an equal opportunity to apply and participate in the WIC Program through meaningful access for individuals with limited English proficiency and reasonable modifications and auxiliary aids provided when necessary to those with physical and/or mental disabilities.

Several of the program’s accomplishments are now used as a model for other states. The WIC Program will continue to monitor, perform quality assessments, and make necessary improvements to


ensure continued compliance with Civil Rights policies and procedures.

ENGLISH
Please tell us if you have a disability and need assistance accessing our programs or services. At no cost to you, sign language interpreters and other assistance may be available. We may be able to call or visit you if you cannot come to our office.

SPANISH
Por favor, indíquenos si tiene una discapacidad y precisa asistencia para acceder a nuestros programas o servicios. Disponemos de intérpretes de lengua de señas y otro tipo de asistencia sin costo alguno para usted. Si no puede venir hasta nuestra oficina, podemos llamarlo/a o visitarlo/a.

RUSSIAN
Пожалуйста, сообщите нам, если у вас есть инвалидность, и вам нужна помощь в доступе к нашим программам или услугам. Вам могут бесплатно предоставить сурдопереводчиков и другую помощь. Мы можем позвонить вам или навестить вас, если вы не можете прийти к нам в офис.

VIETNAMESE
Vui lòng cho chúng tôi biết nếu quý vị bị khuyết tật và cần hỗ trợ tiếp cận các chương trình hoặc dịch vụ của chúng tôi. Quý vị có thể nhận được hỗ trợ với thông dịch viên ngôn ngữ ký hiệu và các hỗ trợ khác miễn phí. Chúng tôi cũng có thể gọi điện hoặc ghé thăm quý vị nếu quý vị không thể đến văn phòng của chúng tôi.

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Breastfeeding

During 2020, breastfeeding rates climbed from 20.0% in November 2019 to 21.2% in November 2020, with peak levels at 21.6% in July and September 2020. Initiation rates have also increased for SC WIC, from 42% in 2008, to 65.2% in 2015 and up to a peak of 69.5% for the first quarter of 2020.

During the year, the WIC Team held regional breastfeeding trainings for each of the four DHEC regions for all breastfeeding and clinical WIC staff. The trainings were presented by Gale N. Touger, BSN, APRN, FNP-BC, IBCLC, Certified HUG Your Baby® Trainer.



WIC Personnel Engage South Carolina Fathers



WIC may be the Women, Infants, and Children's program, but fathers also have an essential role. WIC wants to empower dads and engage them in our WIC clinics, too.

The 2020 national theme for the WIC Breastfeeding Peer Counselor Update was "Fathers: The Essential Puzzle Piece." The DHEC-hosted event had 50 attendees from across the state.

Presenters included Jarold "Tom" Johnston, who recently retired from the Army as the Chief of Midwifery Services for Womack Army Medical Center, and Marc Himes, a Program Manager for the South Carolina Center for Fathers and Families. Both speakers presented on how to engage fathers and what their role is in a child's life, especially when it comes to breastfeeding and WIC clinics.

For example, many times, questions are directed to the mother, making the father feel left out. Participants learned that men "speak" in a different language. To include dad, one may need to add some humor or talk sports to make him feel comfortable enough to open up about his feelings.



WIC Farmers' Market

The WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) was established to provide fresh, unprepared, locally grown fruits and vegetables to WIC participants, and to expand the awareness, use of, and sales at farmers' markets. During the 2020 season, 26 public health departments and two primary care centers participated in FMNP and more than 7,000 participants received benefits. WIC partnered with 242 farmers, 116 farmers' markets and 50 farmer stands.

wichealth.org

WIC participants receive a minimum of two nutrition education sessions per certification. Participants can complete these sessions in a one-on-one setting, group education class, or by using WICHealth.org. The site is an online nutrition education page where lessons are participant-centered and based on the stages of change model. Participants can access WICHealth.org on their computer, tablet or smartphone 24/7. The website offers over 50 unique lessons ranging from tips on maximizing food dollars at the grocery store, oral health, prenatal and breastfeeding education and nutrition through early life, 0-5 years. In 2020, participants completed over 70,000 lessons. Check out the top 5 completed lessons in SC below:

1. Understanding Your Newborn: Sleep, Crying, and Cues
2. Feeding Your Newborn
3. Getting the Support, You Need for Baby's First Weeks
4. Offer Your Baby the Right Foods as He Grows
5. Starting Your Infant on Solid Foods



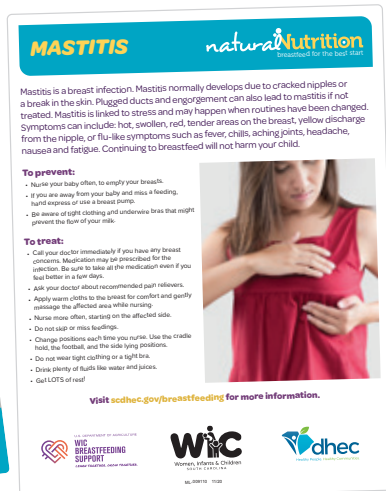
Nutrition Education Materials

Nutrition education is the program benefit that sets WIC apart from the other Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) nutrition assistance programs. The WIC Program is the only FNS nutrition assistance program with legislative and regulatory requirements to provide nutrition education to participants, as specified in sections 17(b)(7), 17(f)(1)(C)(x), and 17(j) of the Child Nutrition Act of 1966, as amended, and the Federal WIC regulations in sections 246.2 and 246.11.

Federal regulations require that WIC nutrition education be a benefit that is available at no cost to participants, be easily understood by

participants, bear a practical relationship to the participant's nutritional needs, household situation and cultural preferences, and be designed to achieve the regulatory nutrition education goal. At each nutrition education and certification appointment, WIC staff provide participants with nutrition education materials to reinforce the counseling topics they discussed that day.

In 2020, WIC staff reviewed and updated 47 education materials to make sure they aligned with the most up-to-date nutrition research. Below are a few pictures of reviewed materials.



Tofu

WIC food packages along with nutrition education are the primary means by which WIC affects the dietary quality and habits of participants. WIC foods are scientifically based and intended to address the supplemental nutritional needs of participants. During the fiscal year, 2020-21 WIC added tofu to its food packages. Tofu is a great source of protein, calcium, selenium, iron, magnesium, and manganese. It can be substituted for milk at the rate of 1 pound of tofu per 1 quart of milk.

WIC Mobile App New Feature

To utilize technology and enhance communication with participants, South Carolina WIC Mobile App introduced a new feature in October 2020. The mobile users can submit food items for consideration as a WIC-approved food. The submitted items must be nutritious and based on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. Since this enhancement, mobile user participants have submitted over 600 items to be reviewed for submission. Out of the over 600 items submitted, 200 items have been approved and added to the program.



Benefits of Using the Mobile App

Congratulations on successfully setting up your WIC mobile app account! You will see an image of your eWIC card and several icons to navigate through the app.

By using this app, you will be able to:

- View** details on upcoming appointments
- Locate** clinic information and other clinics around you
- Find** locations where to shop
- Receive** notifications for upcoming appointments and expiring benefits
- plus:** Access additional WIC resources and eWIC information
- Review** remaining benefits and other benefit information
- Scan** a UPC while shopping to see if the item is WIC Approved
- Submit** a UPC to the State for consideration as a WIC approved food

Return to the homepage by selecting the menu bar in the upper left corner and then "home."

Submitting a UPC

Click "Submit" to send a UPC to the State for consideration as a WIC approved food.

Please note, your WIC identification number will be provided to the State when a UPC is submitted for review.

1. Press **Continue**
2. Take a clear picture of the front of the product and select "**Confirm**" or "**Retake**" if a picture needs to be retaken.
3. Take a clear picture of the Nutrition Facts with the ingredients and select "**Confirm**" or "**Retake**" if a picture needs to be retaken.

Enter the product description. On this screen you will also be able to preview the pictures you took of the front of the item and its Nutrition Facts.

1. In the description box type in additional details about the item you are submitting. *Make sure to include the name of the product.*
2. Select "**Start Over**" to redo the entire process or click "**Submit**" to send the item for review.

Note: All submitted items must be nutritious and based on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and federal WIC regulations (7 CFR Part 246.10). You can visit <https://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/wic-food-packages-regulatory-requirements-wic-eligible-foods> to learn what qualifies the items you submit.

WIC **Success Stories**

*Stories of
success, service
and gratitude,
shared by WIC
team members
and participants*

WIC Continues to Make a Difference in Clients' Lives

During the COVID-19 response, the WIC program shifted to all virtual services for the safety of our clients and staff. Whether providing breastfeeding instructions or paperwork guidance, employees who serve in the WIC program in locations across the state continue to make a difference. Here are some reflections shared by our WIC team and WIC participants:

A home health nurse told me her child had been on WIC many years ago. She told the nurses she wanted to go to nursing school, and they encouraged her. She said whenever she went to the health department for WIC, they asked her how school was going and talked with her about the subjects she was studying. She even thought about being a nurse in WIC. I think this a great example of staff taking care of the whole family and not just the participant.

— Submitted by Jean Banks, WIC Program Coordinator

In late April, Lin Cook, an International Board-Certified Lactation Consultant, FaceTimed with a client whom she had been working with on multiple challenges since early February.

"She had some basic questions about teething, distraction and return to work," Lin said. "At the end of the conversation, she said that 'your counseling through those difficult months are what helped me to continue breastfeeding and now you're part of my family!' That's why I come to work every day!"

A peer counselor received kudos from a nutritionist on her team and the other from a participant she has been communicating with.

You really helped me a lot and words don't say enough because at one point I was really ready to give up. Anytime I felt like I wasn't doing enough you made sure to let me know I was and I sincerely appreciate that 💜💙

Aww. I'm definitely here to support you on your breastfeeding journey! My goal is to help you achieve your goal even when it seems overwhelming. I know exactly how it feels to breastfeed and not know if things are going right. Most of the time our bodies are doing its job but we as mothers want to be sure that we are doing our best. ❤️👉

Delivered

Briauna Salley, WIC CPA is great and all the staff as well! Briana is so nice and awesome. She gives very important tips. Frances Billips, WIC Admin was very friendly and efficient. Briauna was very thorough and clear enough so that I could understand how to better care for my child's nutrition.

— Submitted by a Goose Creek WIC Participant

As part of DHEC's COVID-19 response, the Pee Dee Region has participated in several drive-thru testing events. During these events, the WIC Services on Wheels van has been on-site to promote WIC Services to residents receiving testing. WIC Income Guidelines and Food Guides have also been distributed to residents and community partners participating in the events. At this time, we have provided WIC information to:

- Society Hill (Darlington County): 456
- Summerton (Clarendon County): 254
- Bishopville (Lee County): 505

Additional events are currently being planned. This effort has enabled the Pee Dee Region to reach hundreds of people at a time when WIC services are critical to food security for many families.

— Submitted by the Pee Dee Region

In January, the Richland Health Department had a mom with car trouble come late for her appointment. After completing her appointment when the mom and infant returned to their car, it would not start. The mom was frustrated and waited in the health department for help to arrive. When Mr. Rob left to go home, the mom was still waiting, but had called for help and was just waiting for them to arrive. Mr. Rob called back later to check in with Mrs. Margie and found out that the mom and infant were still sitting at the health department for their help to arrive. Mr. Rob then got back in his car and drove back to the Richland County Health Department to give the mom and baby a ride home so that she would not be stuck there late at night and to get her baby out of the 50-degree weather. When Mr. Rob arrived to pick up the family, her ride had shown up after getting off work. The lady stated his act of kindness showed compassion.

— Submitted by the Midlands Region

Christine Pike is always excited about reaching our WIC participants. Mrs. Pike visited the Alpha Center and met with Ms. Janay Gardner. After that meeting, Mrs. Pike felt a partnership was formed and Mrs. Pike was able to leave 20 WIC packets (What to bring to your WIC appointment, brochures, SC eWIC card guidelines, food guides, SC WIC mobile app rack cards, and income eligibility) that Mrs. Gardner expressed would be helpful to their clients. Mrs. Gardner told Mrs. Pike that she would make sure clients receive the information. Also, Ms. Gardner asked Mrs. Pike if she would take some Alpha Center information and display it in our client waiting area. We look forward to working with the Alpha Center of Kershaw County. Mrs. Pike will return in 3 months to replenish packets.

— Submitted by Kathy Sanders, Kershaw Co. Health Department

On February 14, 2020, we received a phone call from a WIC Participant who delivered her baby on January 13, 2020. The Peer Counselor called her while in the hospital after delivery to talk about breastfeeding. The baby was 37 weeks gestation. This mom had a lot of problems with her pregnancy and her infant lost weight while in the hospital. She stated she breastfed for a couple of weeks by pumping as her baby would not latch. The infant had complications during delivery. She ended up with problems associated with breastfeeding/pumping. When the Peer Counselor contacted her on February 14, 2020, she was very appreciative of the call and concern the Peer Counselor had for her and her baby. Mom stated she had stopped breastfeeding. They talked about her options for feeding her baby. The Peer Counselor searched for the mom and baby in SC WIC to inform her of when her appointment was and talked about eWIC benefits. The Peer Counselor advised her that it will be easier to purchase her WIC foods. The Mom asked for support phone numbers and the Peer Counselor texted the web link for this information.

This mom called the WIC Coordinator to give her praise and tell her how much it meant to know WIC cares about her and her newborn baby. She stated she could feel the kindness and genuine concern during their 40-minute conversation.

— Submitted by the Upstate Region

The Pee Dee Region represented WIC at a community health and fitness fair at the James R. Frazier Community Center in the Bucksport community of Horry County on Saturday, October 31, 2020. Melanie Smith, WIC Admin at Conway Health Department, was able to share information about WIC, including income and program guidelines, food package details, and appointment cards. She also distributed measuring cups and snack containers. She was able to promote WIC and its benefits to over 1000 people in attendance at the fair.

— Submitted by the Pee Dee Region

Since the WIC rollout in October, the Pee Dee Region has been experiencing an ongoing issue with participants not updating their Household ID in WICHealth.org when taking a web class, resulting in difficulty determining whether participants had taken the class or not. This led to time spent verifying the web class in CARES or providing additional nutrition education to ensure the educational requirements for WIC were met. In response to this problem, Karen Humphries, WIC Administrator at Sumter County Health Department, developed a set of step-by-step instructions that are attached to the web class flyer to assist the participant/authorized representative in updating their MCI # from CARES to the Household # from SC WIC. CPA staff found these instructions to be very beneficial when sharing web class information with participants and authorized representatives. It has since been shared with staff for use all across the region. Kudos to Karen for going above and beyond in recognizing a problem and working to identify a solution, resulting in great customer service.

— Submitted by the Pee Dee Region

Before getting help, breastfeeding was scary, painful, and the thought of latching my baby was nerve-wracking. After getting help from my Peer Counselor, I feel like a superwoman! Breastfeeding is much more comfortable. She helped me with latching and helped me to be more confident in knowing he is getting what he needs when he nurses. I never wanted to supplement with formula, and now I'm not having to supplement with as much as I was before I got help. My experience with the hospital lactation consultant was not a good one, but the help I received from my Peer Counselor was awesome. My baby is gaining weight well and breastfeeding is going great!

— Submitted by an Upstate WIC Participant

The Breastfeeding Peer Counselor in Pickens helped me breastfeed for the first time. The staff was amazing and friendly. I was told everything I needed to know, and the information was easy to understand.

— Submitted by an Upstate WIC Participant

I just wanted to take a moment to share a "success story" of a WIC mom on our program! This is a wonderful mother of four boys who had never breastfed. She came in to be certified and of course, me being a CLC as well as a mother of four boys and well-seasoned breastfeeder (8+ years), I began my promotion of breastfeeding. After hearing all the benefits from antibodies for a strong immune system to decreased risk of obesity and type 2 diabetes to the plethora of benefits to both mom and baby, she was hopeful of trying and that's all I asked of her. A year later, not only is she still breastfeeding, she is promoting it to all of her pregnant/new mom friends. What more success could we ask for?

— Submitted by Tanya Georgakopoulos,
Little River Medical Center

I wanted to give a huge shout-out to Melissa Miller and Amy Chang! They worked the WIC SoW Yesterday at the Navy Base for the first time and saw 11 clients! Nine of them were certifications and two were nutrition encounters. Multiple participants were brand new to WIC.

It was Amy's first time on the van and Melissa's first time since eWIC has rolled out. Great work and thank you both so much for serving participants on the van! I am so glad we started on such a positive note at the Navy Base.

Thank you also to Monica and the staff at Northwoods for promoting the van and scheduling clients. Job well done!

— Submitted by Nancy Kate Pippin,
Lowcountry WIC Coordinator

A woman for whom English was not her first language learned about WIC when she delivered her second child. She submitted the necessary documents to complete certification, but one document was missing. Sandy Polite, WIC administrator, asked Sandra Carrasco, Lead Administrator at Beaufort Health Department, to follow up with the new mom as Sandra spoke the woman's language and had been working with her.

"We were able to complete the certification successfully, and the client appreciated everything we did for her and her girls," Sandra said. "She said, 'I was not going to call you back because I didn't have all the documents you needed, but you called me back and helped me.' Mom was very thankful for WIC and the Beaufort staff. She was also grateful that she was able to do all this on the phone because she didn't have transportation and was also scared to take her kids out of the house due to the Coronavirus."

Rosalind Connell, WIC Coordinator, was working remotely for DHEC's Colleton WIC office when she had the chance to educate a mother on the changes to the WIC program. The woman found the steps with WIC difficult when she had been on it in the past, so while she signed her infant up for it, she did not apply herself.

Rosalind was able to educate this mother on the Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) system, convenient app, and new ease of shopping experience. The woman was then able to become certified with her son.

"She liked the fact that she could go to the store and just select certain items and did not have to get 'all that milk at one time,'" Rosalind said. "I felt that even though that was only one person added, it was still a success. If she likes the program, she may talk about it to her friends, and word of mouth is often the best advertisement."

The WIC team at Darlington County Health Department consists of Kathy Smith, Toshia Pigatt, Katy Duncan, and Caprisha Nash. Both Katie and Caprisha are recent new hires and have depended on the seniority of Toshia to lead them in WIC and all the changes that have occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Together they have worked smoothly as a team with excellent communication and completing what it takes to keep the WIC numbers going and even improving during this time. They have called each person on the clinic rosters daily, and even looked ahead in what they could do to help further support our current WIC clients.

One innovative idea they worked on and has been successful is looking back over the past couple of years of clients that no longer use WIC, calling them, and explaining the changes and discussing the ease of the new EWIC card and all the new foods. With this approach, the team has regained clients that had previously left the program.

They have reached out to our community, spread the word of WIC and have shown positivity and excellent customer service. They have also increased our numbers and helped many family's during this stressful time.



Division
Updates



Division of Administration

The Division of Administration is the nucleus of Community Nutrition Services. It is the governing division vetting all large purchases and projects within the bureau. The team consists of seven members split into two areas—Finance and Technology Services Unit-- that collaboratively work together. The Division of Administration aims to:

- Provide value-added support
- Ensure grants compliance
- Secure resources and sustain funding
- Manage SCWIC/eWIC operations

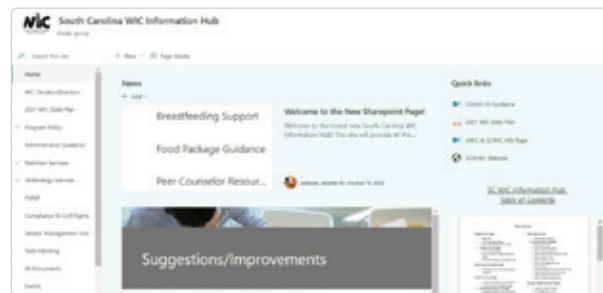
Check out some of the team's accomplishments:

Money Managing

The Division of Administration has a tough job analyzing and managing the finances and business operations of the Bureau of Community Nutrition Services. The WIC program serves more than 7 million women, infants, and children nationally each month, making it no small task to manage its finances for the Division of Administration. The WIC program's current funding is composed of several types of funding. They are the following:

- Nutrition and Administrative Services (NSA)
- Food Funds (benefits and breast pumps)
- Nestle Rebates (infant contract formula)

The amount of money being tracked going in and out of the program totals over \$100 million! Additionally, the program also receives other USDA grants like the Breastfeeding Peer Counseling Grant, Farmers Market Nutrition Program Grant, and Infrastructure Grant.



WIC Information Hub Available Internally

The South Carolina WIC Information Hub, a public SharePoint site, launched in November 2020. It was created to store relevant WIC updates in one central location. The Hub ensures staff have access to the same information, as well as providing a “one-stop-shop” for all their WIC needs. Additionally, it was created to limit the number of documents sent over email that could get lost in transition between WIC Central Office and the frontline staff, who are the primary recipients of all Central Office updates. The site is being updated continuously by Central Office personnel with pertinent information regarding day-to-day activities for clinic staff.

Since the launch of the WIC Hub, the site has had over 9,000 visits and almost 300 unique viewers have accessed at least one of the pages. Monday mornings appear to be the most popular time that staff accesses the site. The top three pages visited are Nutrition Services, Program Policy, and eWIC. Staff is encouraged to continue using this resource for all their WIC needs. To ensure staff is satisfied with its functionality they are strongly encouraged to submit suggestions on improvements they would like made to the pages.

WIC Online Pre-screening Application Coming Summer/Fall 2021

Here we “GROW” again! We are excited to announce we are currently developing the South Carolina WIC Online Pre-screening Application. It is tentatively expected to go live Summer/Fall of 2021. The goal of this application is for the WIC program to utilize technology to reduce barriers to WIC services for its participants. This application will allow prospective and returning WIC participants an opportunity to pre-screen for WIC services.

The design selection was chosen in May 2020 to launch the start of the development process. The project’s lead developer, Stephanie Kirkland, reviewed and assessed the needs of the WIC program to ensure the application is robust and end user friendly. In December 2020, a demo was performed to review the phases of development and to identify areas of opportunity ahead of the application’s launch.

The application has many features like the following:

- Mobile-friendly
- Allows clinics to screen prospective and returning participants prior to scheduling appointments or remote services
- Allows documentation from clients to be uploaded from a mobile device through a secure portal
- Allows WIC staff to communicate with clients, reducing emails
- Provides quality improvement reports for regions and WIC Central Office to review trends and improvements to the program

The WIC Online Pre-screening Application will be efficient in cutting down the time participants spend in the clinic.

Introducing the SCWIC Innovation Team



The SCWIC Innovation Team (SIT), created July 2020, consist of a team of Central Office WIC staff (SC WIC Program Unit Managers, Technology Services Unit staff, Director of Administration, and Assistant WIC Director) that meets the third Tuesday of every month to share thoughts and ideas on how to enhance the SC WIC management information system (MIS) for staff and participants. The team reviews and discusses needed/required functionality changes, region/ primary care center (PCC) enhancement requests and upcoming WIC system update releases for continuous improvement of WIC services.

Information from these meetings is stored on the Technology Services Unit (TSU) SharePoint page so staff can track the process of enhancement requests.

WIC Central Office staff reviews and evaluates submitted items for practicality and how/if they fit within the guidelines set by The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS). Each unit has approximately 6 weeks to review and develop the specifics so that GCOM can determine the cost and possible creation of the enhancement.

In 2020, the SIT reviewed over 136 requests. This sharing of information allows central office staff to continually improve the SCWIC management information system (MIS). The team serves an extremely important role improving SCWIC for everyone.



Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity Prevention

The Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity Prevention (DNPAO) aims to improve access to healthier foods and opportunities for daily physical activity through policy, systems, and environmental approaches reaching South Carolinians where they live, learn, work, and play. DNPAO seeks to:

- Improve early care and education environments to support healthy eating and active living
- Improve school environments to support healthy eating and active living
- Improve student health through the implementation of a statewide, web based FitnessGram system
- Integrate access to healthy foods and opportunities for active living into community planning and design
- Engage partners to develop a plan to guide statewide and local action to prevent obesity

Lending a Helping Hand to achieve Public Health Accreditation

In 2020, Erica Ayers, Misty Pearson, and Lori Phillips, along with over 100 employees from across DHEC actively participated in the final leg of DHEC's public health accreditation process. The agency has rallied together since 2017 to become a nationally recognized, accredited public health agency. Public health accreditation is an extensive process measuring a health department's performance against a set of nationally recognized, practice-focused and evidenced-based standards.

DNPAO supported the agency's efforts by serving on domain teams and providing supporting documentation for three domains:

- Domain 3: Inform and educate about public health issues and functions
- Domain 4: Engage with the community to identify and address health problems
- Domain 10: Contribute to and apply the evidence base of public health

The team also participated in the February 2020 mock site visit and the official virtual site visit by the Public Health Accreditation Board in November 2020. DHEC received its official accreditation from the Public Health Accreditation Board (PHB) in February 2021.



Domain 3 Virtual Site Visit — November 2020

SC FitnessGram

In 2020, DNPAO was awarded a four-year grant from the BlueCross® BlueShield® of South Carolina Foundation to improve student fitness through SC FitnessGram. SC FitnessGram is a statewide effort to evaluate and ultimately improve health-related fitness among public school students in South Carolina and involves the aggregation of health-related fitness data from public schools using a statewide FitnessGram software system. Data collected using the SC FitnessGram system confirms that over one in three public school students in SC are overweight or obese and about half of students do not meet the Healthy Fitness Zone for cardiorespiratory fitness.

SC FitnessGram's next steps are focused on moving schools and other stakeholders statewide to use the data to drive decisions and to explore what works in classrooms, schools, districts, and communities to improve student fitness. Currently, there are 72 of 81 school districts, representing over 1,000 schools, participating in this effort.

Breonna Mealing, DNPAO SC FitnessGram Coordinator, along with Erica Ayers, DNPAO School Wellness Consultant, convene and co-lead the SC FitnessGram Core Team (Core Team) to provide direction for the overall project and the SC FitnessGram Advisory Council (Advisory Council) to guide the development and implementation of the project. The Core Team consists of the University of South Carolina (UofSC) Children's Physical Activity Research Group (CPARG), the UofSC's



*Pictured: Core Team - Top Left to Right: Erica Ayers, Seth Shelby, Hannah Miner
Bottom Left to Right: Beth Barry, Russ Pate, Lesley Leake, Breonna Mealing*

Core for Applied Research and Evaluation (CARE), the BlueCross® BlueShield® of South Carolina Foundation, and the Alliance for a Healthier Generation (Healthier Generation). In July 2020, the Core Team collaborated with a communications firm to develop the SC FitnessGram communications plan which identifies short, intermediate, and long-term goals (i.e., establishing a communication structure and process across participating organizations using key messaging strategies, increasing awareness of SC FitnessGram, etc.). The Advisory Council was convened in 2020 and consists of a diverse group of key educational and health stakeholders from national, state, and local level organizations. The Advisory Council will continue to convene in 2021 to take action to improve student fitness.

Intern Gains Real-World Public Health Experience with DNPAO

Lisa Willson joined DNPAO in fall 2020 as an intern. She is pursuing her master's degree in Public Health at the University of South Carolina. Lisa was required to earn 30 hours of real-world experience for her Community Health Development class. During her time with the team, Lisa was instrumental in creating a Microsoft Teams how-to guide for non-DHEC employees and improving the team's communication with external partners, including Healthy Palmetto.

"I was very fortunate to have been able to join the DNPAO team to gain real-life experience while pursuing my MPH. This team is doing amazing work

to ensure all South Carolinians have access to a healthy environment. I'm very excited to be able to join the team once more to complete my practicum experience," Lisa said.

"Lisa joining DNPAO was a win-win situation. We provided her with opportunities to put the public health skills she's learning through her master's program into practice. In return, she provided us a service by helping us reach our goals," said Erica Ayers, DNPAO School Wellness Consultant and Practicum Preceptor. "We're fortunate that Lisa will be joining our team again during the first half of 2021 while she fulfills her practicum experience to conclude her master's program."

Lisa is very interested in the prevention of childhood obesity and will be helping DNPAO with SC FitnessGram and Healthy Palmetto initiatives.

When Lisa is not a student, she teaches within the Radiology Department at the University of South Carolina School of Medicine and enjoys staying active with her two kids and husband of over 20 years!



Left to right: Lisa Willson, Breonna Mealing

Leadership Council Forced to Adjust Plans Amid Pandemic

In early 2020, the Healthy Palmetto Leadership Council was set to hold six, three-hour meetings over the year to brainstorm a collective impact approach to accomplishing its purpose. However, with COVID-19 concerns, the team had to readjust its timelines and expectations for the year. The



participation and engagement of the leadership council remained high even though the initial planned meetings were changed to six virtual 90-minute meetings. The progress made in 2020 is significant and prepares the Leadership Council for continued momentum in 2021.

In 2020, the Healthy Palmetto Leadership Council:

- Held six meetings (February, May, June, August, October and December 2020)
- Established a Common Agenda – to serve as the state coalition of organizations that collectively addresses healthy eating, active living, and healthy weight for the Live Healthy SC State Health Improvement Plan. The purpose of Healthy Palmetto is to unify and mobilize healthy eating and active living efforts that create equitable opportunities for all South Carolinians to achieve a healthy weight.
- Gained clarity on why we need to serve this purpose collectively and why each organization is important to this effort.
- Compiled information on current healthy eating, active living, and healthy weight efforts of each Leadership Council organization.
- Compiled information on current communication methods and audiences of each Leadership Council organization.
- Determined that communication processes among Leadership Council members are needed and that Microsoft Teams will be used as our collaborative platform. Initial Communications Action Team and internal Communications Action processes were established.
- Decided to use the Trust for America's Health State of Obesity Recommendations as a framework to choose the healthy eating, active living, and healthy weight efforts to unify and mobilize in 2021. Began assessing the status of each recommendation in South Carolina. These recommendations fall into the following categories:
 - ♦ Early Care and Education System
 - ♦ School System
 - ♦ Health Care System
 - ♦ Physical Activity and the Built Environment
 - ♦ Healthy Food System
 - ♦ Nutrition Education and Assistance



Healthier Outdoors: Creating Spaces that Promote Health and Learning

Staying indoors is associated with less activity while being outdoors is associated with increased activity, especially for children. To promote the importance of increased time outdoors, DNPAO coordinated Healthier Outdoors: Creating Spaces that Promote Health and Learning, a webinar focused on the childcare setting. The webinar was presented by the Natural Learning Initiative at NC State University and the SC Department of Social Services' Office of Child Care Licensing and ABC Quality. Participants received information on the benefits of children spending increased time outdoors during COVID-19 and affordable ways to create engaging, safe spaces outside. A question and answer segment with South Carolina childcare regulatory and quality staff was also included.

Grow Outdoors South Carolina

A joint effort of DHEC's DNPAO and ABC Quality at the SC Department of Social Services, Grow Outdoors South Carolina (GO SC) aims to increase young children's access to quality, naturalized, outdoor environments, in the child care setting, that support play and learning across all domains of development.



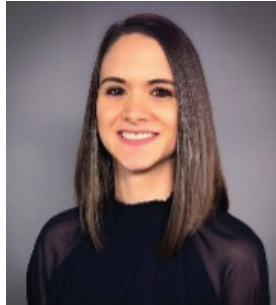
Based on the Preventing Obesity by Design (POD) model developed by the Natural Learning Initiative (NLI) at NC State University, GO SC addresses the obesity epidemic in young children attending child care by promoting physical activity, healthy eating and learning through changes in the design and management of outdoor environments at child care facilities.

In 2020, GO SC focused on development and capacity building which included:

- Creation of a fun, bold logo designed by DHEC Communications.
- Establishing a six-step process childcare providers move through to receive an outdoor learning environment design plan. The steps focus on:
 - ♦ increasing childcare providers' knowledge of outdoor learning environments;
 - ♦ enhancing policies to support outdoor time;
 - ♦ designing the outdoor space;
 - ♦ implementing the design incrementally; and
 - ♦ training on how to use the outdoor space for intentional learning.
- Engaging three SC landscape architects to complete the Designing Early Childhood Outdoor Environments online certification course developed by NLI. The goal of the course is to help participants create outdoor play and learning environment designs for young children (ages 0-7) that support active lifestyles, promote mental health and well-being, encourage healthy eating, and motivate learning in, about and through nature.
- Coordinating the enrollment of SC Child Care Licensing and ABC Quality staff members in the NLI Early Childhood Outdoor Learning Environments course. Thirty-nine participants completed eight-course modules with required lectures, videos, readings, module quizzes and a final knowledge assessment. Participation in this course provided an opportunity to establish consistent, foundational knowledge of naturalized, outdoor learning environments statewide among SC Department of Social Services Division of Early Care and Education staff.



Erica Ayers Among Three Chosen to Participate in 2020-2021 Regional Leadership Institute



Erica Ayers (DNPAO School Wellness Consultant), along with DHEC's Ashley Bruns and Ali Mansaray, has been selected to participate in the **2020-2021 Region IV Public Health Leadership Institute (PHLI)**.

This was a highly competitive process. The Region IV Public Health Training Center (R-IV PHTC) received 117 applications for just 25 spots. The PHLI is a collaboration of the R-IV PHTC headquartered at Emory University along with the J.W. Fanning Institute for Leadership Development of the University of Georgia.

By taking part in this training, these three demonstrate the DHEC core value of Pursuing Excellence and the agency strategy of Operational Excellence.

Erica Ayers is a school wellness consultant in the Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity Prevention (DNPAO). She has been working with DNPAO for almost 10 years to improve access to healthier foods and opportunities for daily physical activity through policy, systems, and environmental approaches.

“Erica’s participation in the Public Health Leadership Institute will provide additional learning opportunities for her continued growth and development as a leader,” said Lori Phillips, DNPAO director. “In her current role, this opportunity will help her to become a more effective leader of the groups she convenes and participates in as an agency representative.”

She earned her master’s in public health from the University of South Carolina and is a Master Certified Health Education Specialist.



Pictured: Breonna Mealing and Erica Ayers at the SCAHPERD virtual state conference, November 15, 2020

DNPAO & SC FitnessGram Represented at State and National Conferences

Breonna Mealing, DNPAO SC FitnessGram Coordinator, along with Erica Ayers, DNPAO School Wellness Consultant, demonstrated the DHEC core values of **Inspiring Innovation** and **Pursuing Excellence** at state and national virtual conferences in 2020.

Both presented a roundtable session at the **American School Health Association (ASHA)** annual national conference on October 1, 2020. The session, *Exploring Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC) and Fitness Data to Improve Student Health*, was presented to school health professionals and focused on the benefits of student fitness data collection through SC FitnessGram. The session also facilitated discussion on how the WSCC model can be used to support student physical and mental health at multiple levels.

At the **SC Alliance for Health, PE, Recreation, and Dance (SCAHPERD)** state conference on November 15, 2020, Breonna and Erica presented *Childhood Obesity Prevention - Past, Present, and Future* to school health and public health professionals. The session highlighted how to use SC FitnessGram data to lead change at the state, school, and community levels to support student health.

School-Aged Children & Youth Team Discuss Strategies to Help Schools During Pandemics

The **DHEC School-Aged Children & Youth Team** began meeting in the Spring of 2019 with an interest in developing relationships among DHEC initiatives across the agency, specifically focusing on the health and wellbeing of school-aged children and youth.

This team aims to bring together areas within the agency working to support the health of school-aged children and youth to improve internal and external communication of efforts that will increase awareness, enhance collaboration and prevent duplication.

COVID-19 response

As the state and agency responded to COVID-19, the team continued to meet, with an increased focus on the effects of the pandemic on schools. The team uses the network to support each other's initiatives while moving forward through the response and to determine where the team could be most effective in its impact for school-aged children and youth.

During the October meeting, special guest Dawn MacAdams, Richland School District Two Lead Health Coordinator and Past President of the SC Association of School Nurses, shared barriers facing school-based nurses as staff and students return to school.

The team also learned about various impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic from different areas of the agency, including: increased risk of rabies due to pets not being vaccinated; reduced number of students receiving scheduled immunizations; limited provision of school-based services such as dental care and SNAP-Ed nutrition education sessions; increased childhood injuries with more time being spent at home; and the impact on Adverse Childhood Experiences.

In sharing this information, the team discussed possible strategies to increase the awareness and provision of these services.

Team

The **DHEC School-Aged Children & Youth Team** is co-led by **Erica Ayers** (CNS School Wellness Consultant), **Vicky Ladd** (MCH State Nurse Consultant) and **Rebecca Williams-Agee** (PREP/ Adolescent Health Program Coordinator).



Top Left to Right: Rebecca Williams-Agee, Genine Hodges, Christina Galardi Center Left to Right: Elizabeth DeMeo, Breonna Mealing, Nicole Ekoue Bottom Left to Right: Tina Skinner, Amanda McAlhany, Sabrina Nudo, Erica Ayers

The team includes active members from the following DHEC Bureaus and Divisions:

Environmental Affairs:

- Bureau of Environmental Health Services
- Bureau of Air Quality

Public Health:

- Bureau of Chronic Disease & Injury Prevention
- Division of Injury & Substance Abuse Prevention
- Division of Oral Health
- Division of Tobacco Prevention & Control
- Bureau of Communicable Disease Prevention & Control
- Division of Acute Disease Epidemiology
- Division of Immunizations & Prevention
- Bureau of Community Health Services
- Bureau of Community Nutrition Services
- Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, & Obesity Prevention
- Division of Public Health Nutrition Practices & SNAP-Ed
- Bureau of Maternal and Child Health
- Division of Children's Health & Perinatal Services
- Division of Children and Youth with Special Healthcare Needs
- Division of Women's Health

The team meets quarterly via Microsoft Teams and is open to new members who wish to participate.



Division of Public Health Nutrition Practice and SNAP-Ed

The Division of Public Health Nutrition Practice and SNAP-Ed programs aims to:

- Improve health outcomes through quality nutrition services
- Deliver evidence-based nutrition services and nutrition education
- Help families on a limited budget make healthier food choices and choose physically active lifestyles
- Reduce the risk of obesity and chronic diseases through healthier eating and increased physical activity

Check out some of the team's accomplishments:

SNAP-Ed Team Provides Outreach to Support the Harden Food Justice Initiative

The SNAP-Education Team partnered with others to provide free healthy and helpful items in boxes given away during The Harden Food Justice Initiative Drive-Thru Market on Friday, July 31, 2020.

FoodShare SC provided more than 200 free produce boxes. This nonprofit provides fresh produce for underserved areas of the state to “enhance the quality of life by creating access to fresh, affordable food, quality cooking and skills education,” according to the organization’s website.



Other members of the community came together to donate nonperishable items the day prior to the event. DHEC’s contribution for the boxes included recipe books, snack books, measuring cups and nutrition manuals.

Jillian Clinton, Farrah Wigand and Jessica Morrison passed out these free food boxes and wellness bags to community members in need.

SNAP-Ed Program Proves Successful in 2019

Our **Division of Public Health Nutrition Practice** and **SNAP-Ed Program** deliver nutrition education and changes in policies, systems, and environments across South Carolina.

In 2019, the DHEC SNAP-Ed Program, was one of four implementing agencies in South Carolina that delivered direct, evidence-based education to **25,588 individuals across 44 counties**. Through evidence-based curriculums, significant numbers of SNAP-Ed participants:

- made healthier budget-conscious decisions;
- increased water consumption;
- decreased consumption of sugary beverages; and
- increased consumption of amount and types of fruits and vegetables.

Statewide, 38,220 people were reached by policy, systems and environmental changes (PSE). There were 79 PSE changes implemented in a variety of settings and sectors.

SNAP into Health with text2bwellsc

The SNAP-Ed program developed a new and innovative text messaging program called *text2bwellsc*. This program influences positive behavior change by sending weekly text messages and aligns with the SNAP-Ed program’s goal to improve the likelihood that SNAP-eligible families will make healthy food choices within a limited budget and choose physically active lifestyles. Before *text2bwellsc*, participant success was achieved by providing a short-term (six-week) in-person, interactive group class. Positive outcomes were identified by conducting pre- and post-class lifestyle surveys where participants established positive behavior change. However, to support participants in sustaining these healthy lifestyle behaviors, the program needed an intervention strategy to support positive behavior change maintenance and sustainability.

Research shows that low-income families increasingly rely on cell phones for communication. Over 90% of adults with an annual income below \$30,000 own a cell phone, and smartphone owners are using text messaging more frequently than any other feature or phone application. These statistics support our idea to use text messaging to reinforce nutrition education. In 2019, this idea became a reality through the development of *text2bwellsc*.

Details about the program:

- Messaging content is based on the SNAP-Education for individual behavior change, including healthy eating, food resource management, physical activity and reduced sedentary behavior, and food safety
- Free text messaging program for SNAP/SNAP-Eligible recipients who choose to opt-in

- Compliments adult programming – *It’s Your Health...Take Charge!* and *Walk With Ease*
- 1-2 texts messages are sent each week on healthy eating, recipes, food access, food safety, and physical activity

Healthy Eating Text Message Example:

“DHEC SNAP-Ed: Vary your protein routine 2night! Try these heart-healthy salmon patties & broccoli salad recipes 2 make it a healthy meal.”

Food Access Text Message Example:

“DHEC SNAP-Ed: Healthy Bucks (HB) for SNAP recipients: spend \$5, get \$15 in tokens thru July 31! Find farmers who participate in HB <link to GIS>”

Preliminary Survey

Recently, we performed a preliminary assessment to survey participants by texting, “DHEC SNAP-Ed We want to hear from YOU! Let us know how *text2bwellsc* has helped your overall health.” A few responses were the following:

“I’m exercising at least 4 hours/week and trying to eat better today.”

“I’m doing okay and feeling healthy.”

“I really enjoy the quick healthy menus.”

“I’m eating more fruits and vegetables.”

“I’m eating healthier and more aware of the negative impact of eating processed and canned foods.”

Future Surveys will evaluate the following SNAP-Education Indicators:

- Healthy Eating
- Food Resource Management
- Physical Activity and Reduced Sedentary Behavior
- Food Safety

text2bwellsc Timeline

1/2019	Late 2019	1/2020	3/2020	Since 3/2020	Since 6/2020
text messaging began using in-person verbal marketing to participants after a class series	development of printed marketing materials	printed marketing materials available	marketing via technology and mail	participants up 30%	participants up 50%



SNAP-Ed Engages Media to Improve Statewide Presence

A typical day for a DHEC SNAP-Ed Nutrition Educator includes lots of social interaction and ranges from teaching school children about the five food groups to cooking a healthy meal with parents to educating seniors on ways to lessen their salt intake. You can most likely find the program's Nutrition Educators in communities across South Carolina.

The COVID-19 pandemic challenges changed the team's approach to providing nutrition education.

In response to social distancing, the team developed virtual lessons, mailed numerous boxes of nutrition materials to community partners and adjusted to having social interactions through their computer screens.

Within this past year, our SNAP-Ed dietitians have had great success with reaching community members through the media. The team spent time researching various radio and media stations in the counties the program cover and reached out by phone or email to explain

the scope of the program. Over the past year, the SNAP-Ed team has increased its media presence significantly and doubled its media partnerships from two to four partners including ABC Columbia, CN2 Today Show, WRHI Radio and WGCV Radio.

Jillian Clinton, SNAP-Ed Dietitian, participates monthly on CN2's Today Show, "What's Cooking Wednesday," with healthy recipe ideas using USDA's MyPlate Kitchen or recipes from the program's Eating Healthy in a SNAP recipe book. Each recipe highlights easy, budget-friendly and healthy choices that appeal to diverse populations.

In addition to CN2, the teams SNAP-Ed dietitians, Farrah

Wigand, Jessica Morrison, and Jillian Clinton are featured monthly on WRHI and WGCV radio stations. During these segments, they speak on various topics such as National Cholesterol Education Month, strategies to eating healthy over the holidays and easy healthy lunch box ideas.

Once a community member emailed the team after watching a segment and said, "Thanks for all the great ideas. My husband and I are trying to reduce meat, increase vegetables and substitute healthier fats. We will be looking at some more of your videos. Thanks for putting them together!"

These monthly media segments have reached over 7,000 people per month. Through encouraging healthy living and media promotions the program has been able to market more direct education partnership opportunities.

Although 2020 was a difficult year, we reflect on the positive developments that have come out of this pandemic. Our increased media presence is one improvement to our program that we are excited to watch grow in the future.





Jessica Morrison Named Young Dietitian of the Year

Jessica Morrison, DHEC SNAP-Ed Nutrition Education Specialist Coordinator and Registered Dietitian received the Recognized Young Dietitian of the Year award for the state of South Carolina. She received the recognition at the South Carolina Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics annual meeting on April 3, 2020.

This award is given to a registered dietitian who has demonstrated concern for the promotion of optimal health and nutritional status of the population and provided leadership through legislation, research, education, management, or employment.

One of her letters of recommendation stated that:

“Jessica is incredibly dedicated to her job as a SNAP-Ed Dietitian and Nutrition Education Specialist Coordinator. She works days, nights, and weekends without complaint to reach our eligible SNAP recipients in 21 counties in South Carolina. Jessica always has a positive attitude and does an incredible job making her presentations very interactive and fun for the participants.

She is truly a hardworking and highly motivated individual. I cannot speak enough about how much she has impacted the community since she has been with our program. I constantly receive positive feedback from her class participants and the site contacts.”

Congratulations, Jessica, and thank you for your hard work.



SNAP-Ed Participates in Soda City Market’s 400th Saturday Market

Sherretta Thomas and Joy Price, members of DHEC’s SNAP-Ed team, masked up and shared nutrition information and pre-packaged food demo samples to attendees at Soda City Market’s 400th Saturday Market. COVID-19 has forced the team to amend the program delivery to meet the needs and safety of everyone participating.

The DHEC SNAP-Ed team partners with local farmers. Their demonstration introduces participants to recipes at farmers markets with foods grown locally.

Participants have a chance to sample foods, receive copies of recipes and purchase the fruits and vegetables used in the demonstrations. Additionally, participants can learn more about smart shopping for produce, how to include more fruits and vegetables in meals and which fruits and vegetables are available in our state by season.

The SNAP-Ed team plans to attend Soda City in the future.



