



## Alaska WIC Program Vendor Application Process



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### **Purpose of the WIC Program**

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) was enacted by the U.S. Congress in 1972 as an amendment to the 1966 Child Nutrition Act. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) provides funding for WIC. Participant services are provided by grantee health or social services organizations and administered by the State of Alaska, Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Public Assistance, Family Nutrition Programs.

Nutrition education is the cornerstone of the WIC program. The foods offered through the program are an enhancement of these nutrition education services. WIC foods are selected because they address specific nutritional health needs and promote healthy pregnancies as well as healthy growth and development in young children. WIC checks and Fruit and Vegetable Vouchers (FVVs) are issued monthly to eligible pregnant, postpartum, and breastfeeding mothers, infants, and children under the age of five.

Consistent with federal regulations, the Alaska WIC Program authorizes only a sufficient number of vendors to assure reasonable participant convenience and access to WIC foods and to ensure the lowest practicable food prices.

Please note that the application process described in this document is for retail grocery stores, and is not applicable to authorization of farmers, farmstands, or farmers' markets for participation in the Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) and the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP). The farmers' market programs are administered under different regulations and are not funded by the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC). For more information about FMNP and SFMNP, visit the website at <http://dhss.alaska.gov/dpa/Pages/nutri/fmnp/default.aspx>.

### **Open Enrollment Period for New WIC Vendor Applicants**

The Alaska WIC Program considers new vendor applications during an Open Enrollment Period beginning on January 1 and ending on March 31 of each year. A vendor who is unable to complete the application process within the timeframe described below may reapply during the next Open Enrollment Period.

Interested vendors should thoroughly review the Vendor Selection Criteria and the Minimum Stocking Requirements before applying for authorization as a WIC vendor. It is also recommended that prospective vendors review the Alaska WIC Vendor Manual (including Appendix J, the Vendor Agreement), recent newsletters and bulletins, and other informational pieces posted on the Vendor Management section of the Alaska WIC website.

We strongly recommend that all required permits or licenses be obtained or made current before submitting an application to the WIC Program. A delay in providing a current SNAP, business license, or other authorization may result in expiration of an application.

### **Vendor Selection Criteria**

Vendors who meet the following selection criteria may be authorized to accept WIC checks and FVVs. Applicant and authorized vendors must consistently meet the all of the following criteria throughout the contract period, including any changes to the criteria. A WIC-authorized vendor must:

- be in a location accessible to program participants and State and local WIC agency staff.
- be authorized as a USDA Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), or “Food Stamp,” vendor in good standing. The vendor may not have been suspended or disqualified by SNAP within the past three years. According to Federal regulations at 246.12(g)(3)(iii), unless denying authorization of a vendor applicant would result in inadequate participant access, the State agency may not authorize a vendor applicant that is currently disqualified from SNAP.
- possess a current Alaska Business License.
- possess a current Food Establishment permit issued by the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation or the Municipality of Anchorage.
- have at least the minimum square feet of space, consistent with the assigned vendor peer group, devoted to the sale of grocery items.
- be open at least eight hours per day, six days per week.
- maintain an adequate stock of WIC food items for the number of participants regularly accessing the store; at least the minimum required stocks of WIC foods must be in the store at all times.
- purchase infant formula only from sources on the List of Authorized Suppliers of Infant Formula in Appendix I.
- purchase WIC food items only from a wholesale supplier or other nonretail suppliers; no WIC approved foods may be purchased from other retail stores for resale to WIC participants.
- provide an accurate and complete vendor application and price survey.
- if previously authorized by the program, have a satisfactory compliance record with the previous vendor agreement

- comply with business integrity requirements: a vendor applicant is not eligible if its current owners, officers, or managers have civil judgments entered against them, or have been convicted of any activity indicating a lack of business integrity. According to Federal regulations at 246.12(g)(3)(ii), unless denying authorization of a vendor applicant would result in inadequate participant access, the State agency may not authorize a vendor applicant if during the last six years the vendor applicant or any of the vendor applicant's current owners, officers, or managers have been convicted of or had a civil judgement entered against them for any activity indicating a lack of business integrity. Activities indicating a lack of business integrity include, but are not limited to fraud; antitrust violation(s); embezzlement, theft, or forgery; bribery; falsification or destruction of records; making false statements or claims; receiving stolen property; obstruction of justice; arson; conspiracy; officially removed from any federal, state, or local programs due to business improprieties.
- derive less than 50 percent of total sales from the sale of WIC foods.
- be in compliance with the program's competitive price requirements (be competitive with, and within the price limitations for similarly situated vendors in terms of type, size of store, and geographic location).
- maintain and use a cash register system in conducting all business sales transactions, and provide a printed, itemized receipt to customers. "WIC" must be printed or written on the receipt.
- maintain visible, posted prices of all WIC-authorized food items.
- not provide incentive items or advertisements with the intention to solicit WIC participants.
- comply with approved use of WIC acronym, logo, and facsimiles.

### **Submitting an Application for Authorization**

A retail grocer who wishes to be authorized as a WIC vendor may request an application packet from the Vendor Management Unit by phone (907) 465-3100, or email [wic@alaska.gov](mailto:wic@alaska.gov), or download the packet from the WIC Program website.

The following forms and information must be provided for an application to be complete:

- WIC Vendor Application Form
- Vendor Application – Agent Authorized to Act for Vendor (complete and submit this form only if an agent, such as a contracted bookkeeper, cooperative representative, or other outside party will represent the store on matters involving the WIC Program.)
- Alaska WIC Banking Information Form
- WIC Price Survey
- Current Alaska Business License
- Current SNAP Authorization Certificate
- Current Alaska DEC Food Establishment Permit

The WIC Vendor Management Unit will review the application to for completeness and to determine whether all selection criteria have been met. This review will be completed within thirty (30) days of receipt of a complete application. If the application is incomplete, the vendor applicant must provide any requested additional documents or information within 15 days of the request or the application will be considered to have expired.

### **Pre-Authorization Onsite Review and Training**

Program regulations require WIC to conduct an onsite visit to an applicant vendor's store to verify that all requirements are met. In Alaska, most pre-authorization monitoring visits are conducted by local WIC agency staff who also provide training for the manager and cashiers. During this visit, the monitor checks to make sure that the store has the minimum required WIC food items in stock, shelf prices are as reported on the price survey, the store is clean and well organized, and all other vendor selection criteria and requirements are met. The monitor makes a recommendation to State agency staff whether to authorize the vendor to accept WIC.

If the preauthorization review determines that the applicant vendor does not meet program requirements, the vendor must demonstrate compliance within 15 days in order to be authorized. If a vendor's application is not approved for authorization, the vendor may apply for authorization during the next open enrollment period.

In rural areas, a pre-authorization visit may be delayed until local WIC agency staff are able to travel to the community. A vendor whose application is pending the preauthorization review will not be penalized for the delay in completing the authorization process.

### **Authorization to Accept WIC Checks and FVVs**

Upon approval of the vendor's application, the WIC Program offers a vendor agreement to the vendor. This agreement is the standard agreement with the same terms and conditions for all authorized vendors. The agreement must be signed by an owner, corporate officer, or other representative who has legal authority to obligate the vendor and then by the WIC Program Director.

The fully signed vendor agreement will be returned to the vendor, along with a "WIC Accepted Here" sign that must be posted near the store's entrance. The Program also provides a vendor stamp with a unique vendor number that must be stamped on all WIC checks and FVVs accepted by the vendor. The vendor's account will be activated in the WIC check processing and management information systems, and the vendor will notified of the date that the store may begin to accept WIC checks and FVVs.

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