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Director's message regarding 2022 WIC service changes

Filling gaps in Fairbanks following the withdrawal of a long-time community partner

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What is WIC?

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants & Children (WIC) was established as a permanent program in 1974 to safeguard the health of low-income women, infants, and children up to age 5 who are at nutritional risk. This mission is carried out by providing nutritious foods to supplement diets, nutrition education (including breastfeeding promotion and support), and referrals to health and other social services. Find out more:

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/about-wic-wic-glance> and <https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/wic/wic-fact-sheet.pdf>.

WIC is administered in a variety of ways across the nation. In Alaska, WIC is administered via grants to local agencies to administer the program eligibility and the clinical and health requirements.

2022 Grants process and funding levels

On April 7, 2022, the State of Alaska, Division of Public Assistance released the first competitive WIC Request for Proposal in nine years, running from July 1, 2022 through June 30, 2025 (FY23 – FY25). This solicitation opened options for organizations statewide to compete for federal grant funds to provide WIC services to their community. The competitive solicitation closed on May 19, with formal notification of grant awards to be released shortly.

The federal formula that funds WIC is based on total statewide WIC participation rates, which have been declining in Alaska. As Alaska's WIC participation has dropped more than 25 percent since FY 2014, from approximately 20,000 in FY14 to less than 15,000 in FY21, Alaska's WIC allotment has been reduced by approximately 17 percent since FY18, or \$1.29 million.

To address the reduced funding to administer the program and to incentivize increasing participation, the state revised the funding formula for the FY2023 competitive procurement process. The methodology used estimated potential WIC eligible participants by service area divided by funding available and applied a geographic differential for rural areas. If there are more than one grantee in a service area, the funding formula addresses how to compensate for the differences in number of individuals served by each WIC grantee.

Changes to Fairbanks area services

State procurement rules require the state to solicit for competitive proposals from groups interested in distributing the federal aid to eligible Alaskans. The Resource Center for Parents and Children (RCPC) has provided WIC services for many years. However, on April 28, 2022 written notification was received by Alaska's WIC Program Office from RCPC leadership stating, "RCPC will not be applying for the FY2023 WIC grant due to the nearly forty percent reduction in funding available in this grant cycle.... RCPC would not be able to provide quality services to our clients with the amount

of funding available.” As noted, the FY2023 WIC funding formula resulted in a decrease of funding for the Fairbanks area over the previous competitive grant cycle.

RCPC chose not to compete for the Fairbanks WIC service area during the competitive grant cycle. **The State of Alaska had no input on RCPC’s internal decision.**

Once the FY23 WIC grant awards have been issued to the organizations that successfully competed for WIC grant funds then SOA WIC will be permitted by State procurement regulations to solicit WIC Grantees for the Fairbanks service area. Until new Grantees can be identified, SOA WIC will remotely provide services to families living in Fairbanks, North Pole and Salcha. Both Healy and Delta Junction families have historically received their WIC benefits from Tanana Chiefs Conference (TCC). The future physical location of the WIC office in Fairbanks depends upon organizations that respond to the intended solicitation.

Statewide focus

Many areas of the state are already served remotely for not only the WIC program but many other public assistance programs. The Division of Public Assistance is committed to ensuring that those who are eligible can receive assistance. The division is looking at this situation as an opportunity to develop more efficient practices in the administration of the WIC program and will share lessons learned to improve upon successes with WIC grantees statewide.