As nutrition and public health professionals, ***we*** see the direct impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on families raising young children. In this time of incredible uncertainty, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) provides crucial nutrition and breastfeeding support for pregnant and postpartum women, infants, and young children up to age five. Wisconsin WIC providers have adapted swiftly to shift the way ***we*** serve families by transitioning from in-person to safe remote services beginning in March of 2020.

Families are not only dealing with the stress of the pandemic while caring for their families, but also struggling with job losses and lost income. Every day, new families turn to WIC for support, and ***our*** clinics now have the option to onboard these families by phone or other remote means. In June of 2020, Wisconsin WIC surveyed participating families to gather perspective on how COVID-19 was affecting WIC services and purchasing of WIC foods. Overall, respondents have expressed very high satisfaction with remote services, with an overall score of 4.8 out of 5 stars. Of the respondents who had experienced both in-person WIC services prior to the pandemic and remote WIC services during the pandemic, 98% felt that their appointments were “*as good as”* or “*better than”* in-person appointments. The majority of participating families felt that remote appointments were convenient (74%) and protected their families’ health (73%) during the COVID-19 pandemic. To assess the WIC shopping experience, 23% of respondents identified that they were purchasing more WIC foods, and of those responders, 63% indicated they bought more WIC foods because COVID-19 reduced their families’ income and they relied on WIC to purchase and provide food for their family.

New families continue to join WIC as we continue to experience the effects of COVID-19 in our communities. From March to June in 2020, there has been a 5.7% average month-to-month increase in new families joining. This is the largest increase we have experienced comparing month-to-month between March and June over the last 5 years.

With the everyday concern families feel about risk of COVID-19 exposure, Congress granted the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) new authority to waive in-person requirements for WIC providers through the end of September of 2020. As infection rates continue to climb and states constantly adjust or modify their reopening plans, WIC providers need this flexibility extended well into 2021. We should not rush to open clinics that provide nutrition, health, and social services to pregnant women and new parents, especially when doctors’ offices continue to adapt services that promote social distancing.

The Wisconsin WIC Association (WWA)urges Congress to extend WIC waiver authority until at least September 30, 2021. This will ensure not only that WIC continues to provide safe and critical support to families without putting their health at risk but it will also protect essential clinic staff and their families.