



WIC Discussion with Sarah Widor, director, supplemental foods division on response to Hurricane Florence

On September 13, 2018, FMI discussed both the WIC and SNAP disaster responses with USDA Food and Nutrition Services. Please find notes from the WIC discussion below (see separate document for SNAP info):

- WIC's role in responding to disasters is minimal, as the Program is neither designed nor funded to meet the basic nutritional needs of disaster survivors who would not otherwise be eligible to receive WIC benefits.
- Since there is no additional funding designated for WIC disaster relief, WIC programs must operate within its current program context and funding level even in disaster circumstances.
- WIC should not be considered a first-line defense to respond to the nutritional needs of disaster victims (including the provision of infant formula) when emergency services are available. In fact, State agencies should not issue replacement of food benefits in areas where mass care relief organizations, such as The American Red Cross or the Salvation Army, are providing feeding services.
- Each state agency can have their own disaster plan and therefore each state process can vary.
- WIC can't purchase water and it can't go beyond the current food package.
- A State agency cannot tailor food packages and maximum monthly allowances for entire categories, groups, or subgroups of WIC participants, even in response to disaster situations.
- Disaster-related evacuees who seek WIC benefits may be considered special nutritional risk applicants and, as such, receive expedited certification processing. These applicants must be notified of their eligibility or ineligibility within 10 days of the date of the first request for Program benefits.
- At the discretion of the originating WIC State agency (i.e., the WIC State agency in which the participant was initially certified), retail vendors may be authorized to accept out-of-State food instruments (voucher and check) during unique circumstances such as disaster situations.
- The receiving State WIC agency must advise vendors when this is allowed and for what length of time the practice will be in effect. If at all possible, the participant should receive the exact brand of infant formula specified on the out-of-State food instrument. If it is not possible to provide the exact brand items for the other foods listed on the out-of-State WIC food instrument, a similar item may be substituted from the receiving State's WIC-approved food list.

- Communication is key. For example, if there is a supply chain issue, retailers should notify their WIC vendor liaison immediately.
- USDA provided a document NC, SC and VA, which is federal guidance under disaster situations. This document is available on our disaster page and I have shared this information with the Carolinas Food Industry Association. Here it is, plus a supplemental document:

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/guidance>

https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/wic/September2018WICEBTDetailStatusReport_.pdf

Q & A on WIC Interoperability with Sarah Widor, USDA FNS

Q: In South Carolina they are in the implementing phase for eWIC and North Carolina is fully implemented. Is it not possible for South Carolina cards to be used in states that have already implemented? Also I know that Virginia has gone eWIC as well. Just wondering what the border issues will be in terms of being able to use WIC benefits across those state lines.

A: A State agency's WIC EBT card works with the vendors authorized by the State. If a participant evacuates then they will need to be certified in the arriving State. There are steps State agencies can take to expedite this for evacuees.

Q: How would it be handled when one state is eWIC and another is not, in the case of VA/NC versus SC?

A: Evacuees need to be certified in the arriving State. They would then receive the benefits, including the type (paper or eWIC) of transaction, offered by the arriving State WIC program.