



November 30, 2017

Dear Colleague:

It is widely understood by health care providers that a well-balanced and nutrient-rich diet is critical to a child's health and development. However, many Maine families do not have reliable access to essential nutrients, often resulting in malnutrition and obesity.

Food insecurity in children and families is not always easy to identify, often going unnoticed in schools and communities. The Maine Department of Health and Human Services has been diligently working to reduce the number of food insecure families and provide nutritional support to those in need. We are reaching out to health care providers to help in identifying such families and connecting them with the proper resources for support.

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) is a federally funded program that provides nutritious foods for families who are found to be at risk of, or are currently facing, food insecurity. Pregnant, breastfeeding, and postpartum women, as well as infants and children who meet the program's income guidelines receive nutrition education, breastfeeding support, health screenings and referrals, and benefits to purchase healthy foods at WIC authorized food stores.

A series of reports published by USDA show that pregnant women who participate in WIC experience longer gestation periods, have newborns with higher birth weights, and face lower insurance costs for both themselves and their babies compared to those pregnant women who did not participate. WIC participation has a positive effect on breastfeeding initiation and infant feeding practices. Additionally, the supplemental foods provided in the WIC program have been shown to increase cognitive development in child participants.¹

Health care providers play a unique and important role in the lives of children and families, including identifying and reducing food insecurity. We ask that you assist us in locating food insecure families and referring them to the WIC program. You may refer pregnant women early in pregnancy, and any child from birth to age 5 years. It is crucial that we work together to safeguard the health of low-income families by making quality nutrition more accessible, ensuring that all children in Maine can be healthy and well-nourished.

Sincerely,

Christopher Pezzullo, DO
Chief Health Officer, Maine DHHS

¹ **FMI:** [https://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/about-wic-how-wic-helps#Improved Birth Outcomes and Savings in Health Care Costs](https://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/about-wic-how-wic-helps#Improved%20Birth%20Outcomes%20and%20Savings%20in%20Health%20Care%20Costs)