

Boost WIC Shopping & Increase Spending in TN Stores

*Created in partnership with the Tennessee
Grocers and Convenience Store Association*



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ABOUT TJC

The mission of the Tennessee Justice Center (TJC) is to use the law to advance economic, racial, and social justice by relentlessly working for and with Tennesseans seeking better lives for themselves and their neighbors.

We help Tennesseans one-by-one and then take what we learn from their stories to advocate for large-scale healthcare and nutrition policy changes that help others experiencing similar situations. In addition to helping individuals, we use the law and advocacy to ensure that Tennesseans can meet their most basic needs and have a pathway to opportunity.

FREE HELP

We provide **free direct services** to help Tennesseans navigate some healthcare and nutrition public benefits programs, such as TennCare, SNAP, and WIC.

TRAININGS & RESEARCH

We provide **education, trainings, and research** to help inform the community and advocates about how to navigate programs that provide healthcare and nutrition assistance. We also provide education on how we can improve and protect these programs.

LITIGATION

We **identify and fix legal issues** that prevent public programs from working as they should, ensuring that our healthcare system is fair and just for all.

PROGRAMS OF FOCUS AT TJC

★ TennCare

Tennessee's Medicaid program that offers free health insurance to pregnant women, children, caretaker relatives of children under 19, some adults aged 65 and older, and individuals with disabilities.

★ Medicare Savings Program

Medicare Savings Program (MSP) helps people pay for Medicare costs. You might know it as QMB, SLMB, QI, or QDWI.

★ CoverKids

Tennessee's Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) offers free or low cost health coverage to pregnant women and children.

★ TennCare LTSS

TennCare Long Term Support Services (LTSS) programs help pay for facility or home care for individuals with disabilities or older adults.

★ WIC

Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) supports low-income pregnant, breastfeeding, and postpartum people, along with children up to age 5, by covering food costs, offering healthcare referrals, and providing nutrition education and breastfeeding support.

★ SNAP

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) supplements family food budgets to promote access to healthy food & reduce food insecurity.

★ Summer EBT

Summer EBT provides grocery-buying benefits to low-income families with school-aged children when schools are closed for the summer.

★ School Meals for All

School Meals for All is a statewide campaign to ensure that every student in Tennessee has access to breakfast and lunch at school at no cost to their families.

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The remaining pages of this toolkit (beyond page 9) contain flyers and resources for your team to distribute. Please contact **nutrition@tnjustice.org** for questions or more information.

THE SPECIAL SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION PROGRAM FOR WOMEN, INFANTS, AND CHILDREN (WIC)

WIC is the nation's premier public health and nutrition program. WIC provides eligible individuals an EBT card to buy groceries, individualized nutrition counseling, breastfeeding support and education, and referrals to other health and social services.

Who is Eligible?

- Infants and children up to age 5
- Individuals during pregnancy, 6 months postpartum if not breastfeeding, and up to 1 year postpartum if breastfeeding
- Primary caregivers (single fathers, aunts and uncles, grandparents, foster partners, etc.) can apply for WIC benefits for eligible children in their care

TJC RESEARCH

TJC partnered with the Tennessee Grocers and Convenience Store Association (TGCSA) to research the WIC shopping experience, from both the vendor and shopper perspective. TJC used a mixed methods research design, combining qualitative and quantitative data collection methods to comprehensively understand the intricacies of the WIC transaction.

Surveys

Surveyed **91 grocers** and **356 people** who currently participate, have participated, or have never participated in WIC about their shopping experience and knowledge of WIC.

Interviews

Interviewed **13 individuals** who worked in or oversaw WIC authorized stores about their experience as a WIC vendor and knowledge of the program.

Focus Groups

Conducted **6 focus groups**, all with individuals who are eligible for WIC but not participating to understand perceptions of WIC and barriers to access.

Takeaways

The research revealed that grocers can improve the WIC shopping experience for the shopper and vendor and reduce confusion in stores by the following ways:



Increase WIC knowledge among store staff



Familiarize store staff with WICShopper app and promote it to customers



Incorporate consistent WIC labeling practices that reflect customer needs

INCREASE WIC KNOWLEDGE AMONG STORE STAFF

Many grocers are familiar with WIC, but WIC program details can be tricky to remember. Increased education for store staff means better answers to WIC customers' questions. If staff training includes a comprehensive overview of the WIC program, then staff are more equipped to answer questions and customers will feel more confident using their benefits. This could have a positive impact on work efficiency, store flow, customer satisfaction, and customer retention.

How were you trained on WIC? (multiple responses allowed) n=80	Frequency	Percent
I was trained by the WIC office or health department	51	64%
I was trained by the store management	36	45%
I did not receive training on WIC	7	9%
Unsure	0	0%
Other	2	3%

Figure 1: Grocers were asked how they were trained on WIC. Seven grocers responded that they did not receive training on WIC, while the majority of respondents received some level of WIC education or training.



Staff who are knowledgeable about WIC can help customers spend more of their WIC dollars!

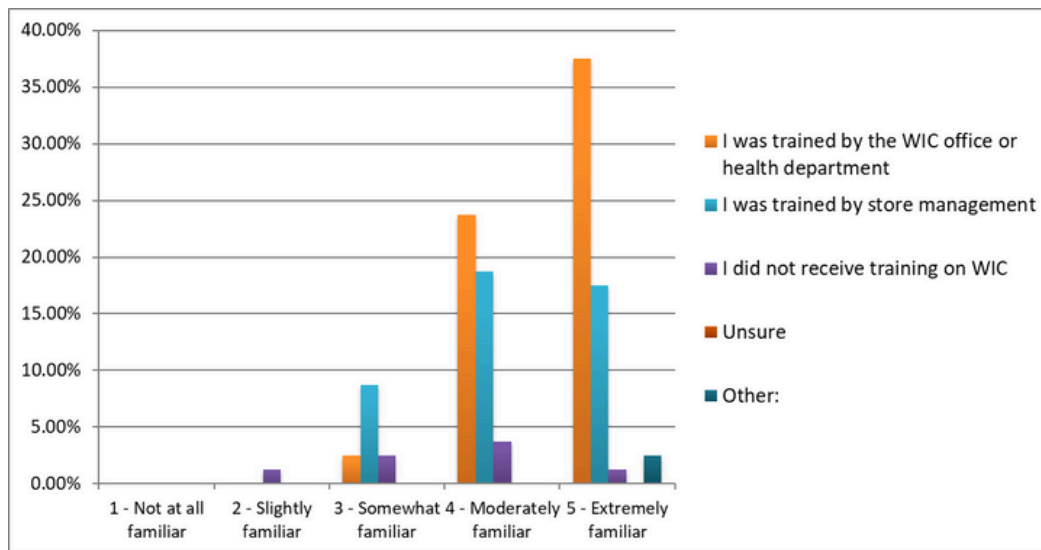


Figure 2: Store staff familiarity of WIC was compared to how store staff were trained. As shown in the graph, store staff that expressed moderate or extreme familiarity with WIC were most likely to have been trained by the WIC office or health department or store management.

The grocery store staff are knowledgeable about WIC and can answer my questions. n=248	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	126	51%
Somewhat agree	31	13%
Neither agree nor disagree	23	9%
Somewhat disagree	20	8%
Strongly disagree	33	13%
Do not use/not applicable	15	6%

Figure 3: WIC participants were asked about the ability of store staff to answer their WIC-related questions. Only 50.81% of respondents stated that they strongly agreed that store staff were knowledgeable about WIC and could answer their questions.

The significant difference in responses from grocers (Fig. 1) and WIC customers (Fig. 3) around store staff knowledge of WIC and ability to answer questions indicate a need to bolster WIC training and increase knowledge among grocer staff.

INCREASE WIC KNOWLEDGE AMONG STORE STAFF



Food Packages

WIC participants commonly voiced that WIC vendors did not know enough about the benefit package. Further education in this topic could help store flow.



WICShopper App

Education about the WICShopper app, such as how to encourage customers to download the app and the app's benefits, would help both staff and shoppers.



Stigma around WIC

Despite advancements, customers may still experience stigma when using WIC benefits. Training staff about WIC can help make customers comfortable shopping.



Processing Order of WIC & SNAP

Grocers voiced that customers were not getting the best "bang for their buck." Train staff to process payment with WIC cards before SNAP cards.

In general, about how much of your WIC food package benefits do you use each month?

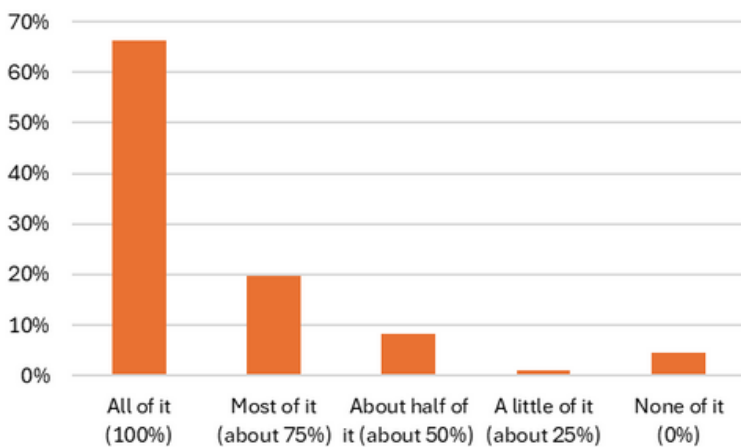


Figure 4: This chart shows that *only 66%* of respondents report using all of their WIC food package benefits each month.

This means that **WIC dollars are going unspent in Tennessee stores**. Improvements to the shopping experience could help customers spend more of their dollars in Tennessee stores, which would increase the economic gain of stores and increase the intake of nutritious food among WIC customers.

Why don't you use all of your WIC benefits each month?
"I never know what I can get and can't get."
- WIC Participant

Takeaways

Both grocers and WIC customers express confusion about WIC benefits. More education for grocer staff could bridge the knowledge gap. Training staff about WIC food package differences, advertising and downloading the WICShopper app, addressing the stigma associated with WIC, and processing WIC before SNAP benefits for maximum redemption can increase benefit spending and reduce hunger.

Recommendations

- Provide store staff with the [TN WIC Shopping Guide](#).
- Encourage staff and shoppers to download the WICShopper app.
- Conduct trainings to reduce stigma of government programs and to ease the transaction experience.
- Educate staff about processing WIC payments for BOGOs, products on sale, etc.
- Train cashiers to process WIC benefits before SNAP to give the shopper the most benefits possible.

UNDERSTAND THE WICSHOPPER APP AND PROMOTE TO CUSTOMERS

The WICShopper app is a resource for shoppers that can (1) scan barcodes to verify a product's WIC eligibility, (2) locate nearby WIC vendors, (3) view remaining balances, and more! The app is available to everyone, and can help grocers learn the details of the WIC food package.

The WICShopper app is a very useful tool that can make WIC shopping easier for the vendor and WIC customer.



The TN WICShopper app is easy to use. n=280	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	185	66%
Somewhat agree	30	11%
Neither agree nor disagree	5	2%
Somewhat disagree	30	11%
Strongly disagree	4	1%
Do not use/not applicable	26	9%

Figure 5: WIC-eligible individuals were asked about the ease of use of the WICShopper app. Overwhelming, individuals stated that they agreed, either strongly or somewhat, that it was easy to use.

“The app is very helpful... A lot of customers that switch to the app have found it to be a much better shopping experience.”
- WIC Grocer



45% of store staff respondents selected they were taught how to use the WICShopper app. Increased education about this resource may reduce store staff's confusion of the WIC food packages, especially since WIC customers continue to highlight its helpfulness.

Takeaways

The WICShopper app is an effective tool for grocers and WIC participants. Displaying WICShopper app flyers throughout the store will increase awareness of this resource, which can reduce confusion about the WIC food package among store staff and customers. Using the WICShopper app may help customers spend more of their WIC dollars in stores by informing them about what they can buy with their WIC benefits.

Recommendations

- Encourage store staff to download the WICShopper app and understand the barcode scanner tool.
- Display WICShopper app signage in English, Spanish, and Arabic (available at the end of the toolkit) throughout stores; specifically, in the baby food aisle, dairy section, and where participants are likely to look for WIC food package items.
- Advertise if Wi-Fi is available in your store for shoppers to use the app.

The WICShopper app is helpful. The store manager isn't called out as much to deal with issues at check-out.
- WIC vendor in Memphis

Labeling is Important

Many WIC customers report that they have trouble finding WIC approved products in their store. Customers who can easily identify WIC products face less confusion and have fewer questions. Products must be labeled accurately, so grocery stores can reduce frustration during checkout when WIC customers accidentally try to purchase ineligible products.

The WIC approved foods are clearly labeled in the store.	Frequency	Percent
<small>n=248</small>		
Strongly agree	127	51%
Somewhat agree	37	15%
Neither agree nor disagree	16	6%
Somewhat disagree	32	13%
Strongly disagree	24	10%
Do not use/not applicable	12	5%

Figure 6: 66.11% of WIC participant respondents agreed that WIC approved foods are clearly labeled in the store, while 22.57% disagreed that WIC approved foods are clearly labeled in the store.

Why don't you use all of your WIC benefits each month?
 "Can't seem to find WIC approved products in my store"
 - WIC Participant

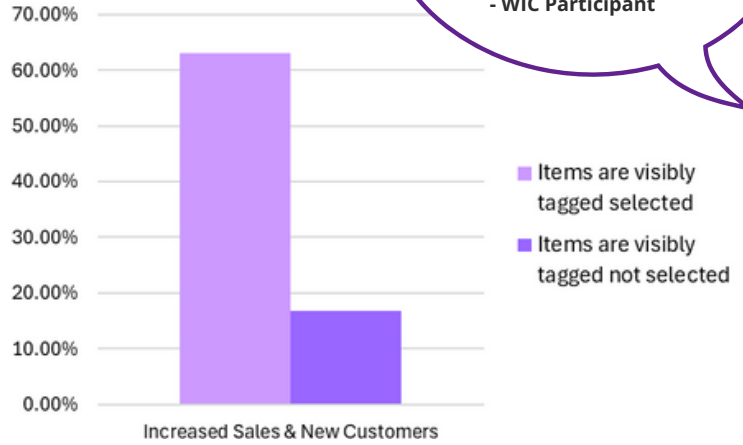


Figure 7: More than 60% of grocers who selected that WIC approved items were visibly labeled in their store mentioned increased sales and new customers as benefits of being a WIC vendor. Whereas less than 20% of those who did NOT select that their items were visibly tagged reported increased sales and customers.

These findings show that labeling WIC approved items helps customers spend more WIC dollars!

Takeaways

Correct labeling and targeted resources may help WIC customers locate WIC products with more ease and support WIC customers to spend more of their benefits. If WIC-detailed labeling is not possible, advertising resources like the TN WIC Shopping Guide and WICShopper app can help.

Recommendations

- Implement WIC labeling options that are both manageable for your store staff & beneficial for WIC customers.
- Make the **TN WIC Shopping Guide** available to show WIC customers pictures of eligible products.
- Display the WICShopper app flyer in English, Spanish, and Arabic (available at the end of the toolkit) and encourage customers to use the app to reduce confusion.
- Share the **TN WIC website** and **TN WIC clinic contact information list** with customers who have questions that store staff cannot answer.
- Tell WIC customers that they can request a receipt of their current benefit package before they shop.
- Display WIC flyers in English, Spanish, Arabic, and Ukrainian (available at the end of the toolkit) in sections of the grocery store where WIC products are concentrated (dairy, baby foods, grains, etc.).
- Post the WIC cash value benefit flyer in English, Spanish, and Arabic (available at the end of the toolkit) in the produce section.

SUMMARY

RESEARCH REVEALED THAT WIC DOLLARS ARE GOING UNSPENT IN TENNESSEE STORES.

However, grocers can boost WIC sales in their stores by:

1. Increasing WIC knowledge among store staff
2. Familiarizing store staff with the WICShopper app and promoting it to customers
3. Incorporating consistent WIC labeling practices that reflect customer needs



INCREASE WIC BENEFIT SPENDING. REDUCE HUNGER IN TENNESSEE.

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