

February 4, 2022

To: Hunger Impact Partners Board of Directors

Fr: Ellie Lucas

Re: USDA WIC On-line Pilot Update: Minnesota received a \$900K Sub-grant!

As you know, through a cooperative agreement with USDA and Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), the Gretchen Swanson Center for Nutrition evaluated competitive sub-grant proposals for WIC State agencies to implement WIC online ordering pilots.

These projects will implement and test approaches to allow WIC participants to order and/or purchase groceries online using their WIC benefits. As more than six million women, infants, and children have participated in WIC each year since the mid-1990s, online shopping has the potential to enhance the shopping experience for participants, including the added benefit of providing access to those with limited transportation or other issues impeding the participant's ability to go to a grocery store. Although WIC has demonstrated effectiveness across several health outcomes, including diet quality, participants face access and equity issues when shopping with WIC benefits. The COVID-19 pandemic has only added to and exacerbated these barriers. Households that participate in WIC should have the opportunity to shop for foods, especially those needed to address critical nutritional needs, the way anyone else shops for food, by ordering online. These projects will create a foundation for WIC State agencies and retailers to design ordering platforms and processes to allow for WIC online ordering and transactions while maintaining program integrity and a positive customer experience.

Pilots will be required to use the Blueprint for WIC Online Ordering, an implementation guide developed by Gretchen Swanson Center, for the implementation of their WIC online ordering projects. Sub-grantees will participate in learning collaborative sessions, benefit from technical assistance, and work together to evaluate the outcomes and lessons learned during the online ordering projects. The duration of funded projects is December 1, 2021–July 31, 2023.

Pilots will explore key aspects of WIC online ordering and transactions, such as factors related to successful adoption and implementation, costs, and overall impact. Results will be used to finalize the implementation guide, the Blueprint for WIC Online Ordering Projects, for WIC online ordering to reflect the real-life implementation experiences and to create a results-based report for WIC that includes a set of recommendations to potentially increase the availability of and support for WIC online ordering across the United States.

Following is a summary of the projects selected.

Minnesota (lead), Iowa, and Nebraska WIC Programs:

The Midwest States WIC Online Ordering Pilot (MSWOOP) partnership includes Minnesota, Iowa, and Nebraska WIC state agencies and aims to create an equitable shopping experience for participants by implementing online ordering at Hy-Vee grocery stores. This includes piloting an online ordering and payment solution with regional grocery retailer Hy-Vee and online WIC EBT (eWIC) processor FIS/CDP. WIC participants in these states expressed interest in online ordering and shopping to overcome transportation, time constraint barriers, and reduce stigma associated with using WIC benefits. The pandemic also created a need for online shopping, but current WIC program regulations and systems could not meet that need. The grant project will begin with one store in Des Moines, Iowa, and expand into Minnesota and Nebraska to meet the modern needs of WIC participants.

Minnesota Department of Health WIC Division is working through the waiver requirements they will need to implement this pilot. FIS/CDP is Minnesota's eWIC service provider for payment processing and data generation, and they will be developing the back-end technology applicable to Minnesota. Minnesota will be working with Hy-Vee to determine the retail location site for the state pilot. Timelines and implementation schedules will be developed over the next 60 days.

South Dakota (lead) and Rosebud Sioux Tribe WIC Programs:

The South Dakota and Rosebud WIC Programs will be implementing WIC online ordering with Buche Foods grocery stores. Customers will be able to purchase all their groceries – WIC and non-WIC – in one online transaction. Many of these participants face the dual challenge of rural and remote isolation accompanied with poverty, which combined can pose significant barriers to transportation and obtaining groceries. The WIC agencies will work together to pilot WIC online ordering in Pine Ridge located on the Oglala Lakota Indian Reservation and Mission located on the Rosebud Indian Reservation. After successful implementation at initial pilot sites, the plan is to expand online ordering to five additional Buche Foods grocery stores throughout the state.

Washington (lead) and Massachusetts WIC Programs:

Washington State WIC is partnering with Massachusetts WIC, FIS/CDP, and Walmart to bring online shopping to WIC participants in our two states. Online shopping for WIC participants using Walmart as their WIC store is expected to go live next year, using Walmart's Online Ordering Platform. The option will be available at eligible Walmart stores in both states. This option will help 120,000 WIC participants in Washington, and 115,000 in Massachusetts access their WIC benefits safely and efficiently.