

Title: Arizona's Public Health Nutrition Workforce: Looking to the Future, RDs for WIC

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Background/Introduction: The Arizona WIC Program has experienced difficulties in hiring and retaining sufficient numbers of Registered Dietitians (RD) to provide high risk nutrition counseling and serve as administrative leaders in local WIC agencies, particularly in rural areas. Beginning in 2009, the Arizona WIC Program began working with County Health Officers, Local Agency WIC Directors, and Dietetic Internships in Arizona to explore pathways to increase options for Arizona WIC Program staff members to complete a dietetic internship.

Methods: Through a collaborative effort, the Arizona WIC Program and the Maricopa County Department of Public Health (MCDPH) worked together to add a part-time track to the MCDPH's dietetic internship program for the Arizona WIC Program. Approval was required from the Commission on Accreditation for Dietetics Education (CADE) and the United States Department of Agriculture Western Region Office (USDA). Each year, four interns are selected from qualified applicants who have worked in the Arizona WIC Program for at least one year. The interns complete their internship requirements and continue to work in WIC half time. Each intern signs an agreement to continue work in their local WIC agency for two or three years with pay-back requirements if they do not fulfill that work requirement.

Results: The first class of Arizona WIC Program Dietetic Internship graduated in July 2012 with three of the four interns passing the registration exam on the first try. The second class of four interns is half way through their supervised practice experience and applications have been received for the third class that will begin their dietetic internship in August 2013.

Summary/Discussion: Supporting Arizona WIC Program staff become Registered Dietitians is an effective way to strengthen and support the public health nutrition workforce in Arizona. Adding a part-time track to an existing dietetic internship has been a successful approach to increase the number of RDs working in the Arizona WIC Program.