

Food Insecurity in Montana and How WIC Helps

Presenter Information:

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Background:

Food insecurity affects millions of Americans as well as thousands of Montanans. The inability to access food in a consistent manner can result in reduced quality of diet which can lead to short- and long-term health consequences for individuals and their communities. In November 2017, the Montana WIC Program started utilizing the validated food insecurity questions from *USDA Food Security Measure* in their nutritional assessments with families.

Goal:

The research goal was to conduct an analysis to determine if people participating in the WIC Program, over time, are reporting improvements to their food insecurities. These responses were compared against the national estimate to see if Montana WIC has higher reported food insecurity. Food insecurity rates in rural Montana were compared with urban communities as well.

Methods:

Initial WIC enrollment for infants and children from November 2017 to January 2020 were considered for this analysis of the Montana WIC Program. The participants were then grouped by county. Response to the food insecurity questions were reviewed and categorized. When comparing the Montana WIC program food insecurity rates, a test of two proportions was used to evaluate if there was a significant difference between rural and urban counties food insecurity rates. The Montana WIC food insecurity by county was compared with the national estimate for food insecurity.

Results:

When comparing WIC food insecurity rates in Montana there was statistically significant evidence (95% CI) that showed a difference in food insecurity rates in rural counties versus urban counties. There was statistically significant evidence at $\alpha = .05$ of the categorical responses of self-reported food insecurity between initial certifications and follow-up appointments. There were 14 counties that showed statistical evidence that Montana WIC has higher food insecurity among its children than the national average.

Summary:

The Montana WIC Program works with many stakeholders and partners to address food insecurity throughout Montana. The data analysis of WIC participants from 2017 to 2019 provides evidence that people participating in Montana WIC report improved food insecurity throughout their time on the program.