

Innovations in WIC Clinic Redesign

Families participating in WIC value efficient and engaging WIC clinic visits. WIC agencies across the U.S. are seeking ways to redesign and revitalize their spaces. As part of a broader effort to support local WIC agencies in implementing innovative changes, in 2019 No Kid Hungry and the National WIC Association (NWA) solicited grant applications from local WIC agencies and community partners ready to pilot an intervention designed to improve WIC participants' shopping or appointment experience. Many applicants sought to change families' physical experience within the clinic, identifying low-cost and accessible opportunities for improvements. In the context of declining WIC caseloads and participation rates nationally and in many regions, WIC agencies and experts point to an improved clinic experience as an essential lever for increasing participation.^{1,2} Proposals highlighted the many ways WIC agencies can go about this critical work, including improving child engagement, redesigning clinic flow, creating privacy during appointments, and improving the waiting room experience. In this innovation brief, we share learnings from two pilot projects that sought to improve the WIC clinic experience for women, children and families.

¹ Overall, 51.1% of eligible individuals participated in WIC in 2017, the most recent year for which national data is available. The coverage rate and participation had been decreasing since 2011, until the COVID-19 pandemic led to an increase in participation in many states. Gray, Kelsey, Carole Trippe, Chrystine Tadler, Clay Perry, Paul Johnson and David Betson. 2019. "National- and State-Level Estimates of WIC Eligibility and WIC Program Reach in 2017." U.S. Department of Agriculture, Nutrition Assistance Program Report

Redesigning Clinic Flow to Decrease Wait Times: Public Health Madison & Dane County (Wisconsin)

This WIC agency, serving families in Madison and the surrounding county in Wisconsin, sought to streamline the flow of participants within the clinic and decrease wait times. Their original setup created significant bottlenecks in the WIC appointment experience and led to extended wait times for participants. The pilot involved adding anthropometric and hematological screening equipment to all clinic rooms, instead of having only one clinic room with this equipment that all families had to pass through, before going on to second room to see a CPA (Competent Professional Authority) for nutrition education and other services. With new equipment purchased, each family could complete their WIC appointment in one room with one staff member.

Beyond procuring additional measurement and screening equipment for clinic rooms, the pilot required a shift in some WIC staff members' responsibilities. Specifically, staff that had previously completed health screenings prior to participants' visits with CPAs were cross-trained to complete intake,

Series, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Policy Support. <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/WICEligibles2017-Volume1.pdf>

² Food Research & Action Center. 2019. "Making WIC Work Better: Strategies to Reach More Women and Children and Strengthen Benefits Use." May 2019. <https://frac.org/research/resource-library/making-wic-work-better-strategies-to-reach-more-women-and-children-and-strengthen-benefits-use>

and CPAs completed the health screenings as part of their appointment. Public Health Madison & Dane County operates two clinics. They initially implemented their clinic flow redesign at Clinic A in August 2019, as this clinic site historically had longer wait times. Following implementation, average wait time at Clinic A decreased from an average of 15 minutes and 58 seconds in July to 11 minutes and 22 seconds in August. Average wait time at Clinic A remained lower in the months that followed. (See Figure 1.) They implemented at Clinic B mid-December 2019, reducing average wait times at both clinic sites until they closed for in-person services in March 2020 due to COVID-19.

Both participants and staff provided feedback that the appointment flow had improved, and participants especially appreciated only needing to visit one room in the clinic. In the context of COVID-19, this clinic redesign offers additional benefits, minimizing the number of spaces and amount of time participants are in clinic, and minimizing the number of contacts for both participants and staff.

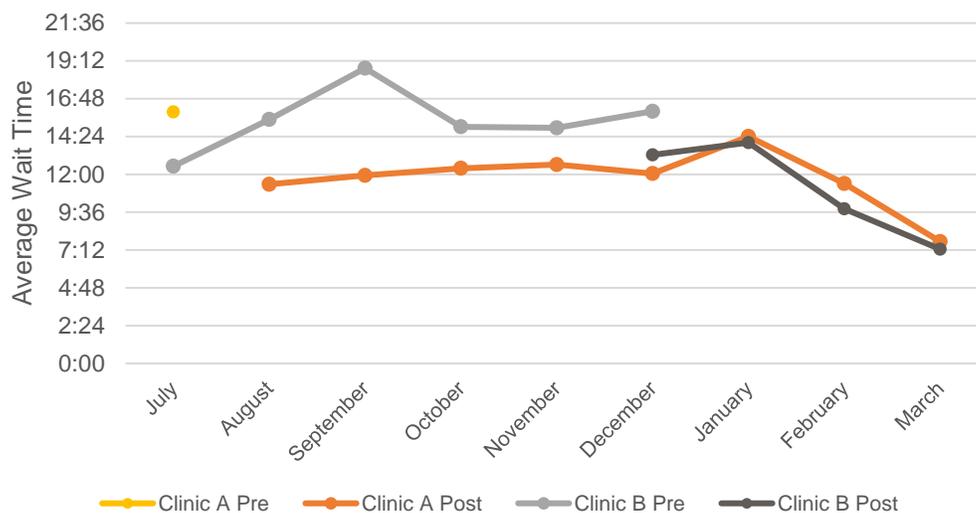
Staff Buy-in: Staff support for the initiative was critical to the intervention's success. Some staff were initially skeptical about the changes to clinic flow, but were reassured via continuous data monitoring and the willingness of clinic leadership to make adjustments in the process.

Unanticipated Benefits: In addition to reducing appointment wait times, agency staff found that the clinic redesign led to easier staff scheduling, increased intake capacity and fewer challenges related to covering for staff leave.

Shadow Other WIC Clinics: For others implementing a clinic redesign, staff at Public Health Madison & Dane County suggest allowing staff to shadow other clinics whose workflow is similar to the redesigned model.

Sustaining Clinic Redesign: With the purchase of necessary equipment and buy-in from staff, the intervention has become part of normal operations at both clinic sites. Public Health Madison & Dane County will continue utilizing data from their check-in system and data obtained through program surveys to identify additional opportunities to decrease wait times and improve the clinic environment.

Figure 1: Comparison of Average Wait Times



Engaging Kids and Families in the Waiting Room: Allegheny County WIC (Pennsylvania)

The Allegheny County Health Department WIC Program sought an intervention aimed at reversing trends they'd observed in recent years: an increasing missed appointment rate and a dropping caseload. From 2016 to 2019, local agency participation rates had decreased 12.8%, from 15,000 to just over 13,000 participants, mirroring similar decreases in WIC participation across the state and country.

In response to participant feedback that WIC appointments and WIC shopping were overwhelming and not conducive to attending with young children, Allegheny County partnered with the Children's Museum of Pittsburgh and WQED to transform their waiting room into an interactive space that would both improve the

appointment experience and provide education aimed at simplifying the WIC shopping experience. They sought to make the WIC clinic welcoming and comfortable for adults as well as children, increasing appointment show rates and WIC retention.

Allegheny County WIC transformed the waiting room at their Noblestown WIC clinic. Together with community partners, they developed an interactive game to help families become familiar with the Pennsylvania WIC food list, they procured toys that encourage the use of healthy foods, they provided more accessible outreach and referral information, and they made the walls and furniture more colorful and attractive to children. The Children's Museum of Pittsburgh, bringing their expertise in transforming spaces with an eye towards children's experiences, managed the design, fabrication and installation for the project.

Before:



After:



Measuring the impact of these changes to Allegheny WIC's waiting room was complicated by a phased implementation and clinic closures in the context of COVID-19. Still, early feedback on the waiting room makeover was positive. Before beginning the waiting room transformation, the Noblestown

WIC clinic asked participants how welcome they feel at the clinic (76% responded positively) and how entertained their child is when coming to the clinic (64% responded positively). After the installation began, 96% responded positively about how welcome they feel, and 94% responded positively about how entertained their child is at the clinic.

As seen in the images above, Allegheny County WIC and their partners at the Children's Museum of Pittsburgh and WQED created a colorful, welcoming, engaging space for children and their adults.

While COVID-19 has reshaped families' experiences with WIC, when families return to an in-clinic WIC experience, Allegheny County WIC hopes that this work to engage families in their waiting room—and in the broader WIC experience—will lead to increased caseload retention for children over age 1, a decrease in the no-show rate for appointments, and increased participant satisfaction, by creating a space that adults look forward to visiting with their children.

Experienced Partners: The Children's Museum of Pittsburgh had prior experience transforming waiting rooms and other places that can be challenging to visit with children into warm, engaging, safe and accessible spaces. Allegheny County WIC's partnership with the Children's Museum of Pittsburgh and WQED was key to bringing this project to life.

Adapting for COVID-19: The new realities of COVID-19 require us all to re-envision efforts like this one to engage children and families in the WIC experience. Allegheny County WIC suggests refocusing on limited touch toys, social distancing and single use/take home toys, rather than easy-clean toys. Examples could include: mirrors, projector games, eye spy wall decals, bubble walls, coloring books and promotional items.

Build in Sustainability: When engaging in clinic redesign work, invest in elements that are mobile and provide flexibility in the case of a clinic move or other unforeseen changes. Procure extra at the time of installation for items that can become damaged or lost.

Considerations

Multiple levers for improving the WIC appointment experience: Where are there challenges and opportunities in your WIC clinic, and what might work best in *your* context?

- Creating interactive waiting room experiences designed to engage the whole family
- Redesigning clinic flow to reduce wait times and optimize staff time
- Offering opportunities for child engagement throughout the clinic visit

Key stakeholders: When making changes to the WIC appointment experience, take into account staff as well as participant experience. Also consider other community stakeholders that may be able to lend their strengths to local clinic redesign efforts.

Looking ahead: In the context of uncertainty created by COVID-19 but also more routine disruptions like clinic moves, consider how to maximize flexibility while making small investments to improve the WIC appointment experience.

Thank you to the families and staff at Public Health Madison & Dane County, and Allegheny County Health Department WIC, for bringing these pilot projects to life.

To learn more about these pilot projects or our grants to local agencies to support innovative changes within WIC, please reach out to innovation@strength.org.