

## Section II: Local Agency Procedure Manual

### XI. Local Civil Rights

#### B. Barriers to Providing Services

##### Purpose

To provide guidance to Local Agencies in removing barriers to WIC services.

##### Policy

WIC program services will be accessible to all applicants and participants.

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#### 1. Barriers to Service

- Access to services and customer service is a priority of the Montana WIC Program. Barriers to apply and participate should be reduced or eliminated when possible.

#### 2. Administrative Barriers

New staff receive training on customer service, civil rights, and the goals and purpose of the WIC Program. To improve access and customer service:

- WIC staff must make every reasonable effort to have someone available to answer incoming calls during clinic hours. When someone is not available, a voicemail system must be in place.
- Receiving WIC services during standard business hours can be a barrier. WIC Staff are encouraged to make reasonable efforts to provide services outside of standard business hours.
- Multiple month benefit issuances and coordinating WIC appointments with other programs is encouraged.
- If you have a participant that does not speak English, access to interpretive services is required.

#### 3. Physical Barriers

- Easy access to your clinic by pregnant women and those participants with physical disabilities is critical to providing WIC services.
- Staff must ensure that the clinic layout can provide a private space to discuss the confidential topics in a WIC appointment, if requested by the participant or deemed necessary by WIC staff.
- WIC staff must make reasonable efforts to modify procedures to serve applicants/participants who cannot physically come to the clinic. This may include providing services in a more private or more accessible off-site location, providing services through remote communication technology (confidential and secure video chat), or by enlisting the county nurse to collect certification information while doing home visits.

#### 4. Federal Regulations

The following is adapted from "Information and Technical Assistance on the Americans with Disabilities Act, Title III: Public Accommodations and Commercial Facilities."

- The Montana WIC Program will provide services in an integrated setting, unless separate or different measures are necessary to ensure equal opportunity. WIC will eliminate unnecessary eligibility standards or rules that deny individuals with disabilities an equal opportunity to use

WIC services. WIC will make reasonable modifications in policies, practices and procedures that deny equal access to individuals with disabilities.

- In providing goods and services, WIC may not use eligibility requirements that exclude or segregate individuals with disabilities, unless the requirements are necessary for the operation of WIC. For example: requiring that a disabled individual come to an inaccessible office to be certified for participation would violate the requirement.
- Safety requirements may be imposed only if they are necessary for the safety of the applicant/participant. They must be based on actual risks and not on mere speculation, stereotypes or generalizations about individuals with disabilities.
- Examples of modifications to remove barriers include installing ramps, making curb cuts at sidewalks and entrances, rearranging tables, chairs, display racks and other furniture, widening doorways, installing grab bars in toilet stalls, arranging for the services of a person familiar with sign language to assist in serving deaf applicants/participants, and/or adding raised letters or Braille to elevator control buttons.
- First priority should be given to measures that enable individuals with disabilities to “get in the front door,” followed by measures to provide access to areas providing services. If compliance with the ADA guidelines is not readily achievable, other safe, readily achievable measures must be taken.
- Based on the Americans with Disabilities Act’s accessibility guidelines for new construction and alterations, relocation, WIC clinics must be located in sites with:
  - Van accessible parking
  - Accessible routes
  - Ramps, stairs, elevators
  - Doors, entrances
  - Bathrooms, alarms, signs, and fixed seating
- The public or common use bathroom must be accessible.