

NEWS RELEASE



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Headline: Oregon WIC Nutrition Program receives performance award for exceptional breastfeeding rates

The Oregon Nutrition and Health Screening Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) has been recognized by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service as having one of the highest breastfeeding rates in the nation among larger states.

In his announcement U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said, “The WIC program is critical to helping lower-income mothers get their children off to a healthy start and it is important that we recognize states doing an exceptional job.”

“Breastfeeding has always been more of a cultural norm in Western states such as Oregon. However, historically, rates for lower-income children have been much lower,” said Sue Woodbury, Oregon WIC director. “Helping mothers to breastfeed is a cost-effective way to improve health and address the obesity epidemic.”

More than 90 percent of the 27,907 mothers served by Oregon WIC, which is part of the Oregon Public Health Division, breastfeed their newborns. The national rate is 74 percent. Specific Oregon WIC efforts include helping mothers make breastfeeding plans during pregnancy, providing peer counseling support after the baby is born and supporting a mother’s return to work or school through the breast pump loan program. In addition, breastfeeding mothers receive the largest selection of healthy food and have access to support from breastfeeding specialists that work in community WIC clinics.

These efforts are critical, said Woodbury, because human milk reduces the risk of childhood obesity and chronic diseases such as diabetes and leukemia. Lower breastfeeding rates increase the risk of allergies, infections and sudden infant death syndrome. Mothers that do not breastfeed have higher rates of breast cancer and osteoporosis. It takes non-breastfeeding mothers longer to lose pregnancy weight gain, which can contribute to obesity.

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The risks associated with lower breastfeeding rates translate into increases in costly health services paid for by insurers, government agencies and families. Compared to breastfed babies, for every 1,000 babies not breastfed there are 2,033 more medical visits, 212 more days in the hospital and 609 more prescriptions.

The Oregon WIC program received a performance bonus of \$311,463 with the national award. In Oregon, the bonus funds will be used to implement best practices for helping mothers to breastfeed longer. Medical experts recommend exclusive breastfeeding for six months, then adding other foods and breastfeeding at least until the child reaches 1 year of age.

WIC is a successful public health nutrition program that improves health and encourages lifetime nutrition and health behaviors in lower-income families. The program reaches more 38 percent of all infants born in Oregon; in rural counties the program serves 51 percent of infants born. In addition to breastfeeding help, WIC provides healthy foods, nutrition education and referrals to other important preventive health services. Last year 179,127 mothers and children under age 5 were served in Oregon.

“This recognition should be shared with our many local partners including health jurisdictions, Tribal programs, private non-profit agencies and grassroots organizations that support breastfeeding mothers including Nursing Mothers Counsel, Community Health Partnership, the Breastfeeding Coalition of Oregon, and La Leche League,” said Woodbury.

WIC is available in all 36 Oregon counties and is funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Community and county funding also support the program. WIC is administered by Department of Humans Services, Public Health Division. To learn more about Oregon WIC visit www.oregon.gov/dhs/ph/wic .

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