

Joan Zerzan, MS, RD, LD

Washington's Decision Tree for Medically-Necessary Infant Formula

In mid-2012, Joan took over the Washington State Department of Health's project to clarify how Medicaid recipients and WIC clients can obtain medically-necessary infant formula. WIC provides formulas to eligible infants, including post-discharge formulas to pre-term infants. Medicaid covers formulas that are medically justified, such as Nutramigen for acid reflux and allergies, as well as metabolic formulas. WIC will often pay for a portion of these formulas, but then families must rely on Medicaid to cover the balance.

Joan's goal is to make it as easy as possible for mothers of infants with special health care needs to get the formula that will work best for their babies as quickly and as inexpensively as possible.

Joan is working specifically to clarify:

- Which formulas Medicaid should reimburse.
- A process to minimize denials from Medicaid.
- How the state can better track Medicaid reimbursements and denials.

To minimize denials from Medicaid, Joan is working to educate doctors and other health care providers to ensure that they are making the proper diagnosis and to clarify with them what formulas will address the diagnosis. A key piece of Joan's work is informing providers about the various formula options and their compositions, as well as what formulas are available and what they cost.

The Key Role of the Public Health Nutritionist

Joan believes that it has been critically important to have public health nutritionists involved in this project. These nutritionists' skills and knowledge are vital to the Department's work to understand the compositions of the many formulas on the market and to be able to educate doctors and other health care practitioners about which formulas will best meet the needs of infants with special health care needs.



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About Joan

Joan is a nutrition consultant with the Washington State Department of Health. Her specific focus is on children with special health care needs. Before joining the Department in June 2012, Joan worked in many aspects of infant nutrition, including 26 years in infant intensive care units. Joan has also taught public health nutrition at the University of Washington.

Joan grew up in a military family with eleven sisters and brothers. She traveled extensively with her family while she was growing up. Joan has an undergraduate degree in biology and biochemistry and a master's degree in nutrition. Joan enjoys photography and creative writing. She has two children.

Public Health Nutritionists Are Essential

Public health nutritionists are professionals with academic training and experience in both public health **and** nutrition, who are often registered dietitians with advanced degrees. Public health nutritionists possess diverse skills and expertise ranging from nutrition science...to food systems and food environments...to finance and grant management.

More information on the role and value of public health nutritionists is available in ASPHN's briefs on **The Role of Public Health Nutrition in Obesity Prevention** and **Improving the Nutritional Well-Being of Women, Children and Families**.

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