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.