

WIC Developmental Monitoring Evaluation Project Summary

Report produced by *Learn the Signs. Act Early.* Evaluation Team

2023



This summary provides a high-level look at the activities of this project and lessons learned that can be shared with WIC agencies who are considering how best to track and report developmental monitoring activities.

Tracking a few key developmental monitoring measures can help WIC agencies know if developmental monitoring is occurring with participants as intended and ensure children are being referred for additional supports when warranted. It also gives agencies information to help them improve their processes to make the checklist program work best for families and staff.

The findings and conclusions in this summary have not been formally disseminated by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and should not be construed to represent any agency determination or policy.

Project Description

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Developmental Monitoring Evaluation Project was a collaboration between the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) *Learn the Signs. Act Early.* (LTSAE) team, the Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD), and the Association of State Public Health Nutritionists (ASPHN). The project took place between December 2022 and July 2023.

The purpose of the project was to understand the current landscape of developmental monitoring (DM) data collection, tracking, and reporting within WIC.

Engaging WIC Staff

An advisory board composed of WIC leaders involved in developmental monitoring from 6 states (including Massachusetts, Wisconsin, Maine, Missouri, New Hampshire, Nevada) provided expert guidance and insight to inform activities throughout the project period (December 2022-July 2023).

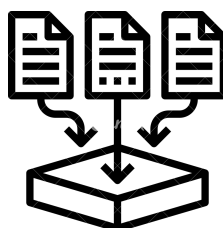
Two states, Massachusetts and Wisconsin, were selected to participate in a survey of WIC staff and developmental monitoring pilot data collection and tracking for 5 months (February-June 2023).

Project Activities

This project had 3 main activities to understand the current landscape of developmental monitoring data collection, tracking, and reporting within WIC. The activities included: a focus group of WIC advisors, data tracking pilot, and WIC staff survey.



Focus Group



Data Pilot



WIC Staff Survey

Focus Group

The focus group collected information from the WIC advisory board (WIC leaders from 6 states involved in developmental monitoring: Massachusetts, Wisconsin, Maine, Missouri, New Hampshire, Nevada) to understand the various practices to collect, track, and report developmental monitoring data.

Main Focus Group Findings

- Most state's WIC agencies are engaging in and collecting developmental monitoring data, with some state's WIC agencies implementing and collecting developmental monitoring data more than others.
- The most common developmental monitoring measures (collected in 5 out of the 6 WIC advisory board states) are: number of children for whom an LTSAE checklist was completed, and the number of referrals made for possible developmental concerns.
- There is no standard process or data system used across the state's WIC agencies to collect, track, and report developmental monitoring data. Nor are there any specific agreed upon measures for developmental monitoring, thus WIC agencies track various measures.

Data Pilot

Wisconsin and Massachusetts were selected to collect, track, and report developmental monitoring data for 5 months. In total, 31 WIC agencies in Massachusetts; and 2 WIC agencies in Wisconsin (Columbia County) participated in the data pilot.

Seven core developmental monitoring measures were identified with input from the WIC advisory board. These 7 core measures and definitions were established to ensure that, when possible, both states were collecting the same information and that any differences were documented.

The seven core measures are below and the full definition for each of the 7 measures is listed in the Appendix.

Core Developmental Monitoring Measures

- # of children eligible for developmental monitoring
- # of children offered a LTSAE checklist
- # of children who have completed a LTSAE checklist
- # of children who refused completing a LTSAE checklist
- # of children with a completed LTSAE checklist AND referred for possible developmental concern(s)
- # of children who followed through on a referral for developmental concern(s)
- # of children who received services because of the referral for developmental concern(s).

During the 5-month pilot, the 33 WIC agencies in Wisconsin and Massachusetts adapted their current practices to track and report the 7 core developmental monitoring measures. One state used a Microsoft Excel sheet, and the other state adapted their Management Information System (MIS) to add additional fields for tracking and reporting.

We suggest that others who are thinking about or are actively tracking developmental monitoring use these 7 core measures to the guide data collection and reporting processes.

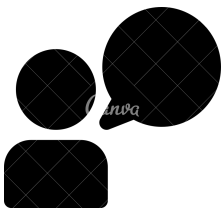
WIC Staff Survey

WIC staff from the 33 WIC agencies in Massachusetts (31 agencies) and Wisconsin (2 agencies) participating in the data collection pilot, were surveyed about implementing developmental monitoring as well as the feasibility, acceptability, and barriers of collecting, tracking, and reporting on the 7 developmental monitoring measures. Participating WIC agencies were provided with incentives to offer families (\$75 value) for each staff survey completed. Staff could accept incentives directly, so incentives were offered to families at the WIC agencies instead. There were 41 total respondents to the WIC staff survey, 37 respondents from MA and 4 respondents from WI.

Main Survey Findings

- Overall, staff reported that developmental monitoring is a **valuable, relevant, and important** part of the WIC visit.
- **85% of staff agreed that developmental monitoring complements WIC's work** to improve children's growth and nutrition.
- The **primary barrier** to developmental monitoring is finding the **time** to dedicate during the appointment to complete developmental monitoring.
- However, when developmental monitoring is completed, **60% of staff report that tracking and documenting developmental monitoring activities takes less than 1 minute.**

One Massachusetts staff member highlighted the vital role of developmental monitoring in WIC with the below quote:



"I think it [developmental monitoring] is the most important part of my job. I firmly believe many nutritional problems are a symptom of a developmental issue."

-WIC Staff, MA

Tips for Tracking Developmental Monitoring

- **Use what you have.** You can start tracking your developmental monitoring activities with the data systems you already have. With minor adjustments, you can use Microsoft Excel or add fields in your MIS or other data system.
- **Use** the 7 core developmental monitoring measures to guide your data collection processes, full definitions are found in the appendix.
- **Review** your developmental monitoring data regularly to understand if you are successfully implementing the milestone checklist program, the impact the program is having, and if improvements need to be made to better support monitoring and referral.
- **Learn** from others! Connect with other WIC sites in your state, reach out to other states, join the developmental monitoring learning collaborative (contact AmberBrown@asphn.org), visit <https://asphn.org/learn-the-signs-act-early/>, or connect with your state's [Act Early Ambassador](#) to learn more about how they engage in and/or track developmental monitoring.
- **View** [Developmental Milestones Resources for WIC Programs | CDC](#) for more information about how to implement and track developmental monitoring.

For more information about this WIC DM Evaluation Project or [Learn the Signs. Act Early.](#) materials and tools please contact ActEarly@cdc.gov.

Appendix:

Core Developmental Monitoring Measures

Below is the list of the 7 core developmental monitoring measures used throughout the project. These 7 core measures proved to be feasible in collecting data and helpful in understanding how developmental monitoring occurred in WIC agencies.

Measure	Definition
# of children eligible for developmental monitoring	The total number of children who had certification or mid-certification visits* in a specified period AND have not already been identified with a developmental disability. *or another annual or semiannual visit selected by WIC staff for completion of DM
# of children offered a LTSAE checklist	The number of children eligible for DM who have been offered a milestone checklist by WIC staff.
# of children who have completed a LTSAE checklist	The number of children eligible for DM who have completed LTSAE Milestone checklist.
# of children who refused completing a LTSAE checklist	The number of children eligible for DM who have been offered and refused to complete a milestone checklist.
# of children with a completed LTSAE checklist AND referred for possible developmental concern(s)	The number of children eligible for DM who completed a checklist and/or had a concern and were referred to a healthcare provider or professional.
# of children who followed through on a referral for developmental concern(s)	The number of children eligible for DM who saw their healthcare provider or other professional because of the referral for developmental concerns.
# of children who received services because of the referral for developmental concern(s)	The number of children eligible for DM who followed through with the referral and as a result, received some kind of services to address a developmental concern.