

Learning about Local Families in Need

*The 2005 Los Angeles County WIC Survey:
The First in a Series of Reports*

Introduction to the Survey

In the effort to collect critical data about low-income families with children aged 0–5 in Los Angeles County (LAC), First 5 LA partnered with PHFE-WIC (formerly known as Public Health Foundation Enterprises WIC Program), the largest provider of the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) in LA County, to create the Data Mining Project. Through collaborations with the six other local WIC agencies and the California state WIC Branch, the project is achieving its goal of comprehensive data gathering.

The survey, launched in spring 2005, involved 5,015 low-income families served by WIC in LA County. Administered in association with Field Research Corporation, the survey was designed to provide comprehensive information to health planners, policy makers and community leaders about local families in need—a crucial first step to better serving this vulnerable population.

This report (the first in a series of 10) presents the survey's topics, preliminary results and methodology.

Topics Explored by the 2005 Los Angeles County WIC Survey

The 2005 survey yielded critical information about low-income families in LA County served by WIC. In upcoming reports, the Data Mining Project will examine relevant survey topics (and their relationship to racial-ethnic backgrounds in geographic regions) including:

- Preschool utilization patterns
- Food intake, physical activity and childhood obesity
- Breastfeeding trends
- Childhood medical and dental health issues
- Household food security
- WIC utilization and service delivery
- Home literacy practices
- Developmental and other parenting concerns in early childhood
- Child care utilization patterns
- Maternal depression and parenting



What is WIC?

WIC is the **Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children**.

The program provides food and nutrition education to pregnant, breastfeeding and postpartum, low-income (up to 185% of the federal poverty level) women and to their infants and children up to the age of 5. Accessible in all 50 states, WIC is funded by the United States Department of Agriculture and serves over 7 million participants in seven languages—with 1.3 million clients in the state of California alone.

WIC in LA County

Approximately 550,000 women and children in LA County receive WIC services each month. Over 90% of all low-income infants born in LA County are served by WIC. Given the ethnic diversity of its staff and client population, its program size and its long-term relationships with participants (often through multiple pregnancies), WIC is in a unique position to reach most low-income families with young children in LA County.

The ethnic background* of the WIC population in LA County is:

- 81% Latino (half Spanish-speaking)
- 8% African-American
- 5% Caucasian
- 5% Asian
- <1% Native American

*Families are not asked about citizenship or immigration status.

In LA County, the approximate distribution of program participants is:

- 23% women
- 19% infants
- 58% children age 1–5

Where do LA County WIC families live?

Figure 1: Survey Sample Population by SPA

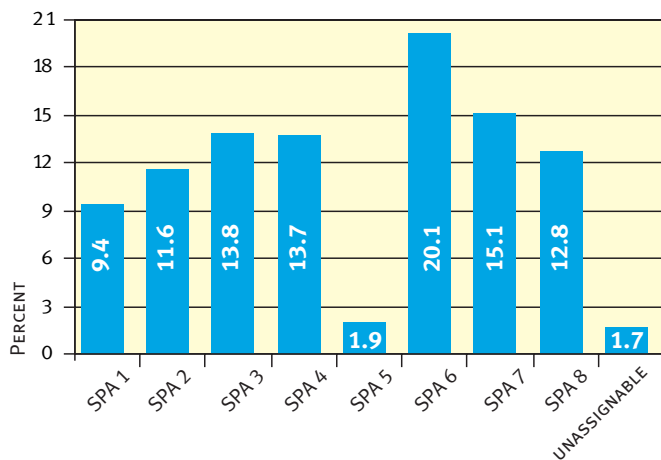


Figure 1 shows the survey sample population by SPA, illustrating the SPA 1 oversample (N=5015).

Figure 2: Total WIC Population by SPA

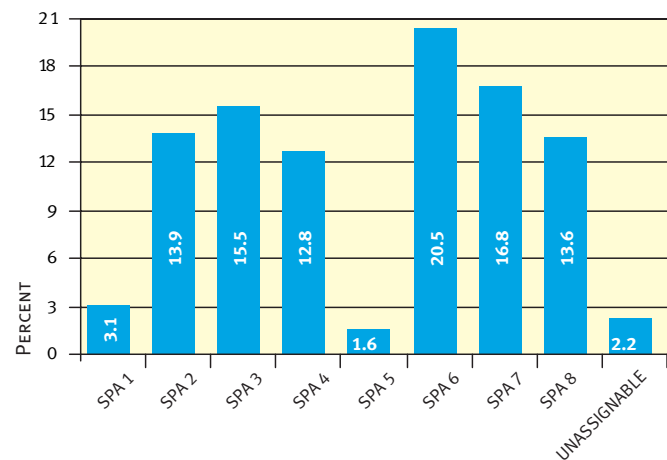


Figure 2 shows the total WIC population by SPA (N>550,000).

The Geography of WIC in LA County

In LA County, seven local WIC programs are proud to serve more than 550,000 women, infants and children. The distribution of WIC participants is:

Antelope Valley Hospital	3.1%
City of Long Beach	5.7%
LA Biomed	18.2%
Northeast Valley Health Corporation	14.1%
Pasadena Public Health Department	1.0%
PHFE	53.9%
Watts Healthcare Corporation	4.0%

LA County is divided into eight Service Planning Areas (SPAs), or geographic regions, identified for purposes of planning and coordination of services. This map illustrates the overlay of the local-agency WIC programs across the SPAs*. SPA 1 (the Antelope Valley) is the largest in square miles but has the lowest population density.** A ninth SPA—that of the American Indian Children’s Council, which serves Native American children throughout the entire county—is demographically, rather than geographically, defined.

* SPAs were assigned based on ZIP codes identified for each respondent.

** The Antelope Valley comprises approximately 3% of the total LA County WIC population. Due to the high volume of lower-income families in SPA 1, the survey purposely oversampled families in the region.

WIC Agency Boundaries Overlaid on LA County Service Planning Areas

Service Planning Areas

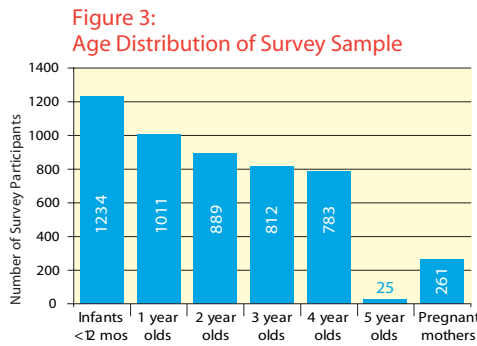
- 1 – Antelope Valley
- 2 – San Fernando
- 3 – San Gabriel
- 4 – Metro
- 5 – West
- 6 – South
- 7 – East
- 8 – South Bay/Harbor



Survey Population and Characteristics

Survey Population

Figure 3 shows the age distribution of the children who were the focus of the survey. In families with more than one child under age 5 and who were receiving WIC services, the child with the most recent birthday was selected regardless of age. ** The survey population also included a small sample of pregnant women with no children on WIC at the time of the survey. Table 1 provides descriptive data about the respondents, children and households surveyed.



** A low number of 5-year-olds were included due to the fact that children are eligible for WIC services only for the month of their 5th birthday.

Table 1: Characteristics of Survey Respondents, Children and Households

RESPONDENT CHARACTERISTICS		TARGET CHILD CHARACTERISTICS	
Survey Respondent		Sex	
Mother	94.6%	Male	51.3%
Other Relative	1.4%	Female	48.7%
Did not Specify	4.0%	Ethnicity	
Language Preference for Survey		Hispanic	83.6%
Spanish	64.0%	African-American	6.0%
English	36.0%	White	2.4%
Age in Years (Mean, SD)	29.4 Years (7.04 Years)	Asian	2.4%
Highest Grade Completed		Native American	0.5%
Less than 8th Grade	25.2%	Refused	5.1%
9th...11th Grade	26.7%	Born Outside the U.S.	2.4%
12th Grade	25.5%	HOUSEHOLD CHARACTERISTICS	
Some College	17.6%	Both Parents Live in Household	72.0%
College Degree and Higher	4.9%	Household Income below 100% FPL	67.6%
Born Outside the U.S.	71.3%		
Average Years Living in the U.S. (Mean, SD)	11.09 Years (6.92 Years)		

Survey Methodology

The survey was developed by PHFE-WIC staff in conjunction with First 5 LA. A complete draft was given to Field Research Corporation, who provided expertise and piloted the survey in March 2005. The survey was administered via telephone in English or Spanish, with Spanish translations completed through a process of translation and back translation. Survey administration was as follows:

1. A random sample of WIC participants in LA County was selected, including intentional oversampling of Antelope Valley families.
2. The random sample received a pre-survey postcard briefly explaining the survey and informing them that they may receive a phone call.
3. Unique numbers were assigned to the selected families to maintain participant confidentiality.
4. Field Research Corporation employed autodialers to ensure that callers knew only mothers' first names and could not identify them by any other means.

Telephone surveys were conducted from April 1 through June 29, 2005. The average survey duration was 20...25 minutes, and families were mailed a \$5 gift card as a gesture of appreciation for their participation. These methods yielded an overall survey response rate of 66.5% (including families who could not be reached) and a significantly high household cooperation rate of 92.6%.

First 5 LA

First 5 LA is a unique child-advocacy organization created by California voters to invest tobacco tax revenues in programs for improving the lives of children in Los Angeles County, from prenatal through age 5. First 5 LA champions health, education and safety causes concerning young children and families.

First 5 LA Staff

Amanda Bueno
 abueno@first5la.org

Marc Davidson
 mdavidson@first5la.org

For additional information about First 5 LA, our partners and projects, visit www.first5la.org

The Data Mining Project
 The Data Mining Project is a Research Partnership between PHFE-WIC and First 5 LA. The primary goal of the Project is to provide comprehensive data about the low-income, 0.5 population in Los Angeles County served by the WIC Program.

Data Mining Project Staff

Shannon E. Whaley, PhD
 Denise C. Gee, MPH, RD
 Judy Gomez, MPH, RD
 datamining@phfewic.org

For additional information about the 2005 Los Angeles County WIC Survey and the Data Mining Project, visit www.lawicdata.org.

Acknowledgments

Special thanks to the Los Angeles County WIC Program Directors and the California WIC Branch for their support, participation and contributions to this project.

