Enhancing the WIC Shopping Experience

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Shopping Experience is a key factor for Program Promotion & Participant Retention!

In **January of 2018**, Michigan WIC launched the WIC Connect app to

“make it easier for potential and current clients to access benefits, schedule appointments, and locate other program information”.

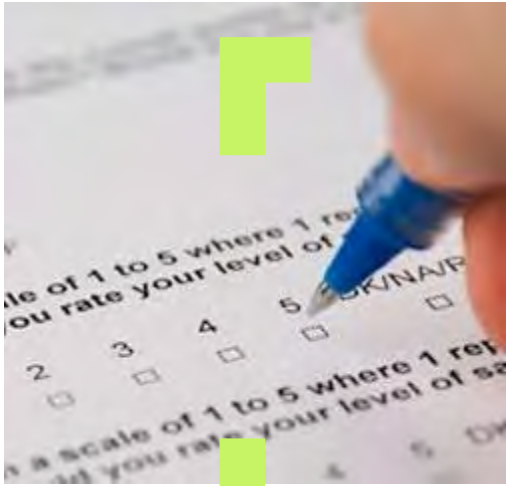
An important question was raised-

“Will the WIC Connect app improve the shopping experience of WIC clients?”

WIC Shopping Survey Development

To answer this question a WIC Shopping Experience Survey was developed to:

1. Explore the barriers WIC clients face when using their benefits
2. Quantify client familiarity with the WIC Connect app
3. Assess the efficacy of the WIC Connect app in helping clients optimize their WIC benefits & reduce barriers to thier shopping experience



What was included in the survey?

- Simple, clear, and easy to read wording
- 1 page single spaced
- Closed and open ended questions covering:
  - How easy is it for you to use your WIC EBT card?
  - Are WIC benefit foods easy to find?
  - What are the challenges you face when using your benefits?
  - Where do you normally use your WIC EBT card?
  - How familiar are you with the WIC Connect app?

Surveys were distributed at 2 time points:

Survey #1

March 2018

Survey #2

September 2018

In March 2018, Washtenaw WIC **began actively promoting** the WIC Connect app to clients.

Surveys were distributed at 2 time points:

Survey #1
March 2018

Survey #2
September 2018

As of September 2018, the WIC Connect App had been promoted for **6 months**.

Who participated in the survey?

- 166 total clients from the Washtenaw County Health Department WIC Office participated in the survey
- Surveys were distributed randomly to clients on paper and collected by dietetic interns and staff
- Respondents were all recipients of WIC or parents/ guardians of children receiving WIC benefits

From then until now...

Have there been any changes in the WIC shopping experience after 6 months of access to WIC Connect?

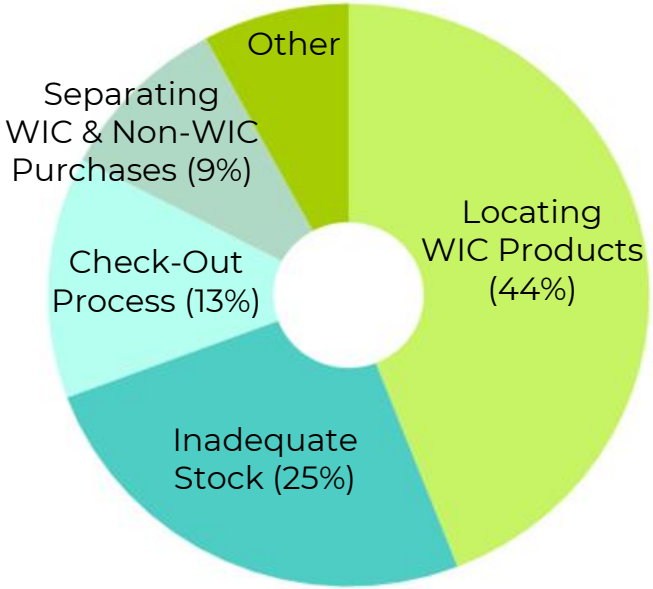
Ease of Using the WIC EBT Card

	March	September
Very Easy	77%	↑ 82%
Somewhat Easy	18%	↓ 17%
Somewhat Hard	2%	↓ 1%

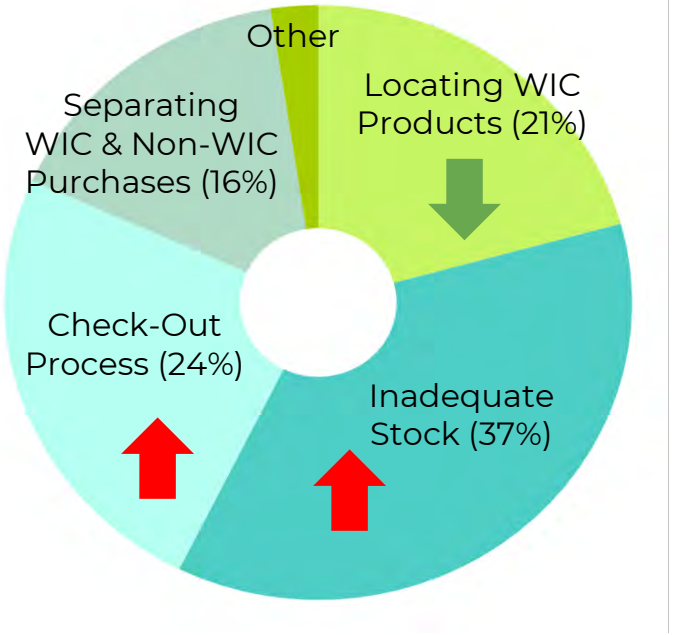
WIC Foods are Available/ Easy to Find

	March	September
Yes	59%	↑ 63%
Sometimes	40%	↓ 32%
No	1%	↑ 5%

Challenges to Using WIC Benefits



March 2018



September 2018

Other Challenges Reported by Clients

- Items in WIC Food Guide not ringing up as WIC eligible (even when listed in MI WIC food guide)
- Card readers improperly identify “no benefits”
- Shaming from cashier/ grocery managers
- Redeeming WIC benefits at self-checkouts does not work
- No rainchecks for WIC items that are out of stock

Most Frequent Shopping Location

	March	September
Kroger	52%	56%
Meijer	21%	22%
Walmart	25%	22%

Client Awareness of WIC Connect App

	March	September
Yes	47%	↑ 62%
No*	48%	↓ 38%
No Response	5%	0%

* Those clients that did not know about WIC Connect received verbal instructions and handout.

Client Use of WIC Connect App

In the second session of surveys conducted, an additional question was posed:

“If you know about the WIC Connect app, do you have it on your phone?”

47% Yes **53% No**

WIC Connect: Drawbacks and Benefits

Drawbacks:

- Phones are currently unavailable
- Limited storage
- Need a smart phone
- App difficult to use
- Too many Apps these days

Benefits:

- Free
- Easy to use, convenient, time saving
- Keeping track of benefits
- Barcode scanner
- Ease of appointment making

In Summary:

1. The WIC EBT card is becoming easier to use.
2. WIC foods are becoming easier to find in grocery stores.
3. Currently, the #1 challenge reported to using WIC benefits is “inadequate stock” of WIC items. That has changed since March when the #1 challenge was locating WIC products (44% vs. 21%).
4. More clients are “aware” of WIC Connect today, but only about 50% currently have it downloaded to their phones.
5. Not using WIC Connect is related to many factors including availability of smart phones, data usage, and storage space.
6. Clients report the main benefits of using WIC Connect include ease in checking benefits, barcode scanner, and appointment making.

Next Steps:

- WIC staff to use test App to walk clients through the App
- Help clients to connect to wichealth.org through App
- Utilize WIC Connect App for WIC outreach so potential clients can schedule their own appointments
- Create posters for WIC outreach