Background

• Nutrition education provided by the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) is designed to emphasize the relationship between nutrition, physical activity, and the health of pregnant, breastfeeding, and postpartum women, infants, and young children.

• State and local WIC agencies have significant flexibility to design nutrition education appropriate for the demographics of their participants to achieve program goals.

• WIC’s nutrition education component has been undergoing a transformation to a participant-centered approach since the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) launched the Revitalizing Quality Nutrition Services (RQNS) initiative in 1999.

• In 2006, FNS introduced Value Enhanced Nutrition Assessment (VENA) guidance to align WIC nutrition assessment practices with targeted and relevant nutrition education to assist families in making healthier eating and lifestyles.

• FNS Nutrition Education Guidance, also published in 2006, describes 6 relevant nutrition education topics including the environment, staffing, and resources for WIC Local Agencies (LAs) and sites.

Methods

Study Design

• Mixed methods study, consisting of web-based surveys, interviews, and review of State Plan information

• A two-stage stratified sampling approach was used to select the sample of Local Agencies (LAs) and sites

Data Collection and Analysis Methods

• Respondents included 853 LAs and 1,401 sites. While LA survey respondents provided information across all LAs, for each LA surveyed, one to three sites provided specific information to the delivery of nutrition education at that site.

• Qualitative data were obtained through 30-minute in-depth telephone interviews with site staff members from a subset of 90 sites. Interview responses were analyzed using qualitative analysis software.

• Content analyses, univariate analyses, and limited bivariate and multivariate analyses were conducted. Quantitative analyses were conducted using the survey weights to allow inferences to be made to the population of all WIC LAs and sites.

Key Findings

WIC nutrition education is becoming more individualized with increased input from participants.

“...My big thing that I try to remind myself to do is to stop talking and try to let the participant do the talking. That’s a big one that I am working on.”

Methods Used Most Often to Engage Participants

- Discussion Topics for Most One-on-One Counseling Sessions
- Topics (Weighted Percentage of Sites)

There is an increased focus on training staff in participant-centered styles of communication.

“...I remember starting at WIC straight out of school, and I just wanted to overload the client with information, lecture them, and give them handouts. After I received the VENA training, my counseling did change. I was able to be more of an active listener, and I asked better open-ended questions rather than just yes or no questions.”

Conclusions

• Nutrition education policies and practices are evolving in ways that address the needs identified 15 years ago as part of FNS’s RQNS initiative and the associated WIC Program Nutrition Education Guidance and VENA guidance.

• Results from the surveys and in-depth interviews show progress toward achieving an RQNS goal of enhancing and strengthening nutrition education through a more individualized, participant-centered approach with a focus on motivating lifelong healthy behaviors.

• Because RQNS is a “continuous program improvement” initiative, changes in WIC nutrition education documented in this study represent progress during the early years of the initiative. Ongoing attention to strengthening nutrition education policy and practice is essential for achieving the goal of RQNS: “to enhance and strengthen the effectiveness of WIC nutrition services.”

More Information

The full report may be found at: https://www.fns.usda.gov/wic-nutrition-education-study-

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