

Peer Review Plan

Preliminary Title: Cost Containment and Participant Access in the WIC Program: Evidence from the Greater Los Angeles Area

Type of Report (ERR, EIB, EB, TB, SOR,) EB

Agency: Economic Research Service [X] Influential Scientific Information
USDA [] Highly Influential Scientific Assessment

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Subject of Review: Cost containment is central to the success and expansion of the WIC program. Unlike SNAP, which is an entitlement-based program, WIC operates with a fixed budgetary appropriation. Thus, reducing costs helps WIC to provide more services to more eligible households. Because WIC participants are insensitive to price effects, WIC vendors have incentive to inflate prices of WIC food items. Previous research found that small program vendors exploit these opportunities, whereas supermarkets do not. When constructing a portfolio of WIC authorized vendors, State agencies implicitly face a tradeoff between ensuring that food costs are sufficiently contained and promoting participants' access to vendors that provide a high-quality WIC shopping experience. Large food retailers are expected to have lower prices of WIC food items compared to small food retailers—and thus impose lower food costs on State WIC programs on average—but not all participants live near large vendors or choose to shop at them even if access is not a concern. Authorizing small vendors may resolve issues of access or participant satisfaction in some cases, however State agencies may see increases in food costs and administrative costs. This report provides an in-depth look at this tradeoff in the case of the California WIC program by synthesizing several recent studies by ERS authors and collaborators California is an ideal case study because it authorizes a wide variety of retailer types to accept WIC benefits, in addition to being the largest State WIC program in the country. Each study used administrative data on WIC transactions in California to answer research questions addressing cost containment and participant access.

Purpose of Review: The purpose of the review is to ensure the high-quality of the economic analysis, transparent explanation of methods, objective interpretation of results, and effective communication to the intended audience.

Type of Review: [] Panel Review [X] Individual Reviewers
[] Alternative Process (Briefly Explain):

Timing of Review (Est.): Start: 2/12/2019 Completed: 08/13/19 Withdrawn: XX/XX/19

Number of Reviewers: [] 3 or fewer [x] 4 to 10 [] More than 10

Primary Disciplines/Types of Expertise Needed for Review: Economists

Reviewers selected by: [X] Agency [] Designated Outside Organization
Organization's Name:

Opportunities for Public Comment? [] Yes [X] No

If yes, briefly state how and when these opportunities will be provided:

How:

When:

Peer Reviewers Provided with Public Comments? [] Yes [X] No

Public Nominations Requested for Review Panel? [] Yes [X] No

