

# WIC participants' perceptions of the Cash-Value Benefit increase during the COVID-19 pandemic

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## Background

Recent changes to the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Cash-Value Benefit (CVB), which provides participants with money to spend on fruits and vegetables, have the potential to reduce disparities in healthy food access and food insecurity that were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>1,2</sup>. However, few studies have examined how the changes to the CVB allotment that occurred during the pandemic influenced WIC participants' perceptions of the benefit or their fruit and vegetable purchasing and consumption.

## Methods

We conducted semi-structured interviews with 51 WIC participants in Wilmington, Delaware.

Survey measures included demographic questions, the Hunger Vital Sign food insecurity screener, and open-ended questions regarding perceptions of the CVB increase and its influence on participants' fruit and vegetable purchasing and consumption.

## Results

Higher CVB allotments increased WIC participants' purchasing and consumption of fruits and vegetables, increased the frequency of their shopping occasions over the course of the month, and enhanced their dietary variety. Additionally, our findings suggest that although participants highly value the higher CVB allotment, many believe that in order to meet their families' needs, it should be increased further.

## Data Visualization

- Increased Purchasing of FV**
  - “So, yeah, like before the pandemic, the fruit and vegetables, it wasn't as significant, I think, as it is now, like before it wasn't as much money. So, I could probably get maybe a few bananas or whatever like that, but now I can get like a lot of fruit and a lot of vegetables, and it's like really significant. \$50 goes a long way for fresh fruit.” – Respondent 40
- Increased Consumption of FV**
  - “I guess we make healthier choices, since we have so much extra to spend on fruits and vegetables and I can make a lot more things from like scratch. I don't have to buy as many frozen vegetables or canned vegetables.” – Respondent 9
- Enhanced Dietary Variety**
  - “Yeah, just give, you know, different variety. And like I said, I tried different fruit, you know, different things. So, it did help a lot with, you know, the little bit extra.” – Respondent 23
- High Participant Valuation of the Increased CVB**
  - “They increased the amount of fruits and vegetables, I think before I was only getting like \$11 and now it's \$24, so that's, that helped a lot. I really like that.” – Respondent 52

## Implications

By advancing policymakers understanding of the beneficial effects of the increased CVB allotment, this study may promote health equity by increasing low-income children and families' access to nutritious, affordable food.

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## References

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