Using the ACS to Estimate State-Level WIC Eligibility

Presented by Paul Johnson and Erika Huber

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Why this talk?

Since the early 1990’s, national-level WIC eligibility has been estimated using the CPS.

Starting in 2010, the Urban Institute added state-level eligibility estimates to the national-level estimates provided to FNS by using the ACS.

Both the CPS and ACS are used in order to achieve consistent national and state estimates.
Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)

Serves persons with the following characteristics:

- **Demographic**
  - Pregnant women
  - Postpartum and breastfeeding women
  - Infants
  - Children up to age 5

- **Financial**
  - Family income less than 185% of poverty, or
  - Enrolled in Medicaid, SNAP, TANF
Why are Our Eligibility Estimates Needed?

Help estimate total **Federal** funding requirements.

Judge the effectiveness of **States** in enrolling eligible individuals.
## Eligibility-Related Data Available from the ACS and CPS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ACS</th>
<th>CPS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Relationship</td>
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<tr>
<td>Time Period Covered</td>
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<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>State Level</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pregnancy/Breastfeeding</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Estimating Eligibility using CPS+ACS

CPS

Identify eligible infants and children in the microdata

Compute total number of infants and children eligible for WIC at the National level

Combine to create consistent National and State estimates of the number of infants and children eligible for WIC

Adjust estimates for monthly variations in income and certification periods

Adjust estimates to include women eligible for WIC

Final National and State-level WIC eligibility estimates for all groups

ACS

Identify eligible infants and children in the microdata

Compute State shares of total infants and children eligible for WIC

Combine to create consistent National and State estimates of the number of infants and children eligible for WIC

Adjust estimates for monthly variations in income and certification periods

Adjust estimates to include women eligible for WIC

Final National and State-level WIC eligibility estimates for all groups
Estimated Coverage Rates by State, 2011
Precision of State Estimates, 2011

Coefficient of Variation
- 2.5% - 4.3%
- 4.4% - 6.7%
- 6.8% - 6.9%
- 9.7% - 14.6%
- 14.7% to 19.5%
Final Thoughts

**CPS** supplies detail, but not enough sample for states

**ACS** supplies less detail, but offers state-level precision

**CPS+ACS** enhances, rather than replaces, prior estimates

**Neither** source provides everything, so adjustments are needed
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Link to latest report