

Faith - what is wic and can it make a difference

in your life? Welcome to SBH Bronx Health Talk produced by SBH health system and broadcast from the beautiful studios at st. Barnabas Hospital in the Bronx. I'm Faith Daniel.

the special supplemental nutrition program for women infants and children aka WIC provides supplemental foods healthcare referrals and nutrition education for low-income pregnant breastfeeding and non-breastfeeding women and to infants and children up to age five who are found to be at nutritional risk. For many immigrants according to the National WIC

Association a public charge is an element of immigration law that allows federal authorities to deny legal status to individuals who are determined to be primarily dependent on the government and WIC has not been considered in Immigration determination including public charge review. with me today is Jose Tuma director of WIC at SBH and Gil Bernardo assistant director of WIC welcome.

Gil and Jose -good morning thank you for having us

Faith- so please tell me a little bit more about WIC and how many people you guys support

Gil - well is a supplemental food program that assists families

mothers and children. Women from the minute that they find out they're pregnant they can qualify for WIC up to six months after giving birth. children from the minute they're born up to the age of five providing they still meet the requirements that are required by the state which are proof of address, proof of ID, nutritional risk and household income so providing that they meet those requirements, the child can continue to receive benefits up to the age of five

Faith - and do they have to call prior to coming in or can they walk in

Gil -we do both you can call us up to schedule an appointment if you're in the area you can just walk in and we also take walk-ins

Faith- so then what happens when you go to the WIC office walk me through the process if I'm a pregnant mom and I come in what's it like what benefits what I get what resources are available to me

Gil- okay so you would come in we would go over the requirements make sure that everything is met. once that's taken care of you would sit down with a nutritionist to go over some of the things that you're experiencing how far along are you in your pregnancy any problems anything

that you're experiencing that we can help you with and pretty much they'll design a package based on your needs for the pregnancy so depending if you're lactose intolerant or you can't eat certain food, they're able and they have the ability to critique the package a little bit so that it meets your needs

Faith- so it meets people where they're at and pretty much is just working on that health equity part of life just like meeting people where they are and working towards making them healthier, a healthier them

Gil- healthy birth, healthy child that's our Goal, the healthier they are the less time they have to spend in the hospital

Faith- Very true, so tell me about this E-WIC card benefit that has just happened in the Bronx. We're the first to do it, woot, woot! so please tell me about it how is it making our patients lives easier and what is it about

Gil- well it's an electronic shopping card is similar to a snap benefit card right you're able to go shopping anywhere within the state and one of the benefits of it is in the past if you lost your checks or they got damaged we weren't able or the state

Wouldn't allow us to replace those checks. argument's sake now

for let's say you lose your card you can put a stop on a card right you can come to one of our three locations we can issue you and activate you a new card and you wouldn't lose one benefit. in the past we couldn't replace checks now you lose the card we will issue you a new card, everything's done in real time you can go out shopping the same day also in the past when you went to a store you would have to cash all the items that were on a check now we give you a shopping list with all the items that you're entitled to and you can pick and choose which ones you want today come back tomorrow it's not necessarily you would have to do a whole shopping you can go let's say you just need a gallon of milk, go, just get the milk and get what you need for today so it makes shopping a lot simpler a lot easier also a lot quicker

Jose- and also one of the things we're very proud of is that the new e-WIC card allows for mothers and families to shop with discretion. we think that that's very important. you know one of the participants shared at a recent press release that we had that you know now she doesn't have to see other people rolling their eyes while she was cashing her check over at the supermarket so it's a nice easier way for parents and mothers to get what they need for their family

Faith- so I guess parents autonomy it gives them the ability to say you know I want this I want that and not feel that stigma or have it

just be known to everyone in the line that they are like on WIC

Jose- you know in fact it empowers them

Faith- and that's the goal, so there is still a lot of anxiety still around what's considered a public charge and how accessing programs like WIC will negatively impact someone's immigration status or even get them deported and as a Bronx native myself and a child of immigrants I understand the fears that that come with that so could you please expand on that a little bit more like is WIC actually considered a public charge

Jose- WIC is not considered a public charge in fact the National WIC Association provides a document called the FAQ were over at Albany individuals had to answer a question with respect to public charge and they found that WIC was not included as a public charge in fact the things included as a public charge would be snap, Medicaid or housing assistance would negatively impact someone. public charge is a passion of our program. we're moving to educate our participants with respect to the concept of public charge because nationally statistically the WIC program is losing a lot of participants based on the concept of public charge we've had for our own participants say hey we're not going back because my attorney told me that I would get in trouble if I received the benefits from your program so it's we have this drive

to educate our participants so we have this document in all of our sites in English and Spanish and in Chinese so that we could so we could educate our participants talking on location we have three of them we have one over at 2021 Grand Concourse Avenue between 178th and 179th we have one at 4487 third Avenue on the first floor and we have our third location is at 260 East 188 off the corner of Valentine Avenue and 188th. so whenever you know whenever you need to make an appointment you can give us a call at 718-960-9510 or 718-960-6257 or 718-220-2020

Faith- so if I'm an undocumented immigrant and I'm pregnant and I go into any one of your three sites can I access WIC safely

Gil- absolutely absolutely like we said WIC is are not a public charge program so having fear of going to the program shouldn't be there you just need to meet the requirements you would just need to meet the requirements that the state has laid out and once that's taken care of we should be able to serve you without a problem

Faith - so does WIC collect information about my immigration or citizenship status

Gil- no it doesn't we just use the information that you provide us

just to update the file the chart taking your information down you where you live your name date of birth things of that nature but at no point of time do we keep any of that information which is verified and then we return all your documents back to you so I have no point in time should you fear that you went to the program and had to leave information behind or documentation behind

Jose- faith just to let you know that it's our programs go to make sure that everyone who walks into our offices that our biggest goal is to provide the service making sure that you leave with the benefits for your family in essence we're not FBI agents we don't have we don't have a desire to stop anyone from receiving the services that we offer in fact we're looking for ways to make sure that families are getting the services that we provide

Faith- and so what are some common myths about WIC and public assistance that you guys could clear for our audience right now

Gil- well one of them is if you work you don't qualify for WIC which is a myth it all varies by the amount of people in your household to the amount of income in the household so you can work and still qualify for WIC so that's the biggest one right there and once we're past that one everything else is pretty smooth the biggest one in the community is I work I don't qualify just give us a

call you never know you might just qualify it's only gonna take a minute to find out and if you do find out and you do quantify the benefits are there for you

Faith- yeah sure and it also just aids in what you were saying about empowering our patients to utilize this resource because it's there for them it's there for you you have a right to this regardless of your immigration status

Jose- absolutely absolutely and you know our WIC program you know it's not only just issuing benefits for families while we're making sure that our participants are going to their doctors they're PCPs we're making sure that they're getting their immunizations we're making sure that they're seeing their dentists we're making sure and we're promoting breastfeeding to the fullest especially with st. Barnabas moving towards trying to be you know we're becoming a baby-friendly hospital we want to make sure that the hospital's mission and our mission are aligned so that we can provide a more well-rounded service to the community

Faith- and I know you guys just had that mommy and baby yoga recently and I saw you doing your thing

Jose- that was amazing that was truly amazing and the thing is that you know we were able to collaborate with the

Wellness Action Center over at Tremont yeah they were able to provide a yoga instructor and the mommies just loved it they loved it they didn't know yeah and she you know she tailored her yoga class for the pregnant mommies and to see the babies you know trying to emulate the positions that their mommies were doing it was just really awesome and it allowed for the staff to connect with the moms

Faith- yeah kind of humanizing the staff something not to be afraid we're here to work with you even do the yoga poses with you yeah like that's awesome

Faith- so are there any resources for individuals to check out if they wanted to learn more about WIC or to go over their rights or anything where could they check

Gil- they can check the New York State Department of Health under that they can go into WIC and it would have all the forms the requirements anything that they would need regarding to WIC or whatever information they would be able to gather it there and again if they don't find it there we're just on phone

Faith - nice awesome and then you can also check out the National WIC Association website for more information is there any comments or suggestions you'd like to make?

Gil- we're here to serve the community this is our job so we need them to come to us so that we can provide the benefits of each and every one of them deserves

Jose- and if they don't come to us trust me we're gonna come to you because we know we're working very diligently - we have this new outreach initiative where we're gonna reach out to people at churches we're gonna reach out to shelters we're gonna reach out to everyone because this is something that everyone you know if you're eligible that everyone could benefit from it so this is really our mission

Faith- and our goal is to just make the Bronx and we're healthier place and to empower our residents to be able to have everything they need to be healthy and like happy family yeah absolutely for sure but they you guys so much thank you for joining us

Gil and Jose- thank you for having us