



THE PATHWAY TO BECOMING A BREASTFEEDING PEER COUNSELOR IN WIC

THE BREASTFEEDING PEER COUNSELOR PROGRAM

As part of *Loving Support Makes Breastfeeding Work*, which is USDA's comprehensive breastfeeding support and promotion strategy,¹ state and local WIC programs have trained and deployed thousands of breastfeeding peer counselors to coach and support new parents. USDA's 2015 WIC Breastfeeding Policy Inventory documents that 93% of State WIC programs are operating some type of peer counselor program.²

BREASTFEEDING PEER COUNSELORS

Peer counselors are tasked with providing new WIC mothers education and emotional support at all points along their breastfeeding journey.³ What sets peer counselors apart from other lactation and healthcare professionals is that peer counselors understand the difficulties WIC mothers face and provide realistic and practical guidance as a result of shared personal backgrounds and experience. Peer counselors are familiar with the resources available to WIC participants and with the questions a new breastfeeding mother may ask.⁴

Recruited and hired from WIC's target population of low-income women, WIC breastfeeding peer counselors are designed and funded to advance the unique benefit of mother-to-mother breastfeeding support.⁵ All

peer counselors have previously breastfed and therefore have at least one baby of their own. Ideally, they represent the same racial/ethnic background as the mothers they support. An additional unique feature of peer counselors is that many are available to WIC participants outside of normal clinic hours and are able to provide services outside of the WIC clinic environment (e.g., visiting WIC mothers and babies in their homes).⁶

Peer counselors are paraprofessionals, meaning they do not possess extended professional training in health, nutrition, or the clinical management of breastfeeding, but rather provide specific tasks within a defined scope of practice. WIC professionals, including board-certified lactation consultants, registered dietitians, and other breastfeeding experts, train peer counselors and provide ongoing supervision and monitoring. In addition, each peer counselor is provided access to what is known as a "WIC Designated Breastfeeding Expert" for assistance with problems outside of peer counselors' scope of practice. Many peer counselors work part-time, especially when they are first starting out.

MINIMUM QUALIFICATIONS FOR BECOMING A PEER COUNSELOR ⁷

1. Previous breastfeeding experience
2. Enthusiasm for breastfeeding
3. From the WIC target population and/or a previous /current WIC participant
4. Availability to WIC clients outside clinic hours and outside the WIC clinic environment

PREFERRED QUALIFICATIONS FOR BECOMING A PEER COUNSELOR

1. High school diploma or GED
2. Car and valid driver's license
3. Ability to speak more than one language



APPLY TO BECOME A PEER COUNSELOR

Call or visit your nearest WIC clinic to see if they have a Breastfeeding Peer Counselor Program. You can find your nearest WIC clinic by visiting www.signupwic.com and entering your zip code. In addition, WIC agencies will often post openings for breastfeeding peer counselors on online job boards and/or on the website for the local WIC agency.

WIC: EMPOWERING FAMILIES, STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES

Please direct all questions to NWA at 202-232-5492.

¹ United States Department of Agriculture, Food Nutrition Service. Loving Support Makes Breastfeeding Work. Accessed online: <https://lovingupport.fns.usda.gov>.

² Forrestal S, Briefel R, Mabli J (2015) WIC Breastfeeding Policy Inventory Final Report. Available online: <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/ops/WICBPI.pdf>.

³ California WIC Association and UC Davis Center for Human Lactation (2009) Increasing Exclusive Breastfeeding in WIC: The Power of Peer Counseling. Available online: <http://www.calwic.org/storage/documents/reports/2009/peer-counsel.pdf>.

⁴ The United States Department of Agriculture, Food Nutrition Service. Loving Support. Available online: <https://lovingupport.fns.usda.gov/content/about-wic-breastfeeding-peer-counseling>.

⁵ The United States Department of Agriculture, Food Nutrition Service (2016) Breastfeeding Policy Guidance. Available online: <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/wic/WIC-Breastfeeding-Policy-and-Guidance.pdf>.

⁶ United States Department of Agriculture, Food Nutrition Service. Loving Support® Model for a Successful Peer Counseling Program. Accessed online: https://wicworks.fns.usda.gov/wicworks/Learning_Center/FNS_model.pdf.

⁷ United States Department of Agriculture, Food Nutrition Service. Loving Support® Model for a Successful Peer Counseling Program. Accessed online: https://wicworks.fns.usda.gov/wicworks/Learning_Center/FNS_model.pdf.