



Referrals for the Whole Family

Kansas WIC

One of the core benefits of the WIC program is a quality referral to other services in the community. A referral using IRIS is about as good as it gets when connecting clients to the services they need. A referral isn't really beneficial unless a connection is made and IRIS makes a connection much more likely to happen. IRIS truly helps make WIC referrals a legitimate program benefit. We appreciate the efforts of local WIC staff partnering with this important community resource. — Dave Thomason, Nutrition and WIC Services Section Director

THE DATA

Kansas WIC Programs In IRIS	Total Referrals Sent
11	5,363
Total Referrals Received	Network Partners
2,085	120 Partners

The Vision: Referrals for the Whole Family

The Kansas Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program provides nutrition and health education, healthy food and other services to Kansas families who qualify. WIC's goal is to help keep pregnant and breastfeeding women, new moms, and kids under age 5 healthy. To do this, WIC provides:

- Personalized nutrition information and support
- A WIC EBT Card to buy healthy food
- Tips for eating well to improve health
- Referrals for services that can benefit the whole family

As local IRIS networks have developed, many Kansas WIC programs have engaged as part of their commitment to improving referral outcomes. As a result, WIC programs have used IRIS to send more than 5,300 referrals on behalf of nearly 3,900 Kansas families.

State Support for Local Implementation

The Kansas Department of Health and Environment Nutrition and WIC Services Section oversees local WIC agencies. Guidance from the state program has helped to reduce barriers for local agencies seeking to coordinate referrals through their local IRIS network. Best practices implemented at the state-level include:

- Organizing a state-wide IRIS training, reinforcing the vision for connecting families to needed services and allowing local networks to share their experience with IRIS
- Providing guidance about client consent procedures for IRIS as related to existing consent process and requirements
- Communicating the appropriate use of WIC funds when needed to support the local WIC agency's use of IRIS to make and receive referrals

Local Experiences

Getting Started

In Wyandotte County Kansas, WIC staff recently began using IRIS to enhance their referral process. Although this shift occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic while staff worked remotely, staff embraced the opportunity to make a change. To get started, staff participated in the short online IRIS New User Training and discussed workflow. Existing referral processes were prioritized first; for example, a well-established process for referring pregnant moms to a local service was moved to IRIS. Now, staff often keep the website up in front of them during phone visits to make connections to a variety of services. Although conducting visits by phone has made the process of building rapport with families more difficult, IRIS has helped to ensure that needed connections can be made.

Technology as a Component of Best Practice

The WIC program at Sedgwick County Health Department has been using IRIS to coordinate referrals for more than two years. To achieve the best possible connections for families, IRIS is integrated into a robust process for assessing need and conducting follow-up. First, staff discuss each family's needs and available services. This often includes exploration of a variety of resources including 211, United Way Resource Guide and IRIS partners to understand needs, identify available services in the community, and discuss potential fits. Currently, staff also ask specific questions about needs related to the impact of the pandemic. Next, staff use IRIS, when possible, to make direct referrals to available services that meet the family's need and interest. These referrals are also noted in WIC's specific software system to ensure follow-up at a future visit. Finally, follow-up occurs. E-mail notifications alert staff to outcome information for referrals made in IRIS. Staff also close the loop during the family's next appointment to determine if the connection was successful and if any additional referrals are needed.

Seeing Results

In 2022, Kansas WIC programs sent more than 1,300 referrals to 120 different programs across the state to support families. Connections included programs providing maternal and child health services, early childhood, behavioral health, health care, and additional resource navigation support. Furthermore, many families referred were connected. Over 37% of referrals sent resulted in families being enrolled in the services they needed, demonstrating the impact of warm-handoffs and loop closure on engagement. Kansas WIC programs act as critical access points for families to a variety of services in their community. IRIS has helped to enhance WIC's process for supporting the health and well-being of the whole family through connections to key resources.