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California Stakeholders Urge Expansion of Online Purchasing and Grocery Delivery for WIC

Oakland, CA, (April 27, 2020) – California Food Policy Advocates and the California WIC Association released the following statements calling for an expansion of grocery delivery and online ordering to [California's Women, Infants, and Children Program](#) (WIC). Expansion of the SNAP online purchasing pilot to California was recently approved by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and implementation will launch statewide on Tuesday, April 28th with Amazon and WalMart. After a successful roll out, the California Department of Social Services plans to enroll [additional SNAP retailers](#). USDA has not yet announced plans for WIC participants to be able to purchase their WIC-approved groceries online. California's WIC participation is close to [one million](#) women, infants and children, and totals nearly [\\$500,000,000](#) in annual federal funding on food benefits alone.

Below are quotes from stakeholders on expanding online purchasing and grocery delivery for WIC:

"We appreciate the efforts of USDA to bring SNAP online purchasing to California families, but we don't think they should stop there," said **Melissa Cannon, Senior Advocate at California Food Policy Advocates**. "Many SNAP participants also rely on the supplemental food benefits made available through the WIC program. WIC participants should also be able to shop with their WIC benefits online. USDA has authority to allow online purchasing with WIC. We encourage them to work with retailers and other WIC stakeholders to roll out online purchasing."

"We applaud the new availability of online shopping for SNAP customers, but why would we not extend the same service to the women, infants, and children who rely on WIC?" said **Jared Call, Senior Advocate at California Food Policy Advocates**. "Grocery delivery helps families avoid in-person interaction at stores and adhere to stay at home orders. Even if WIC online purchasing isn't up and running statewide before the end of the pandemic, it's the right thing to do and will make us better prepared to meet families' food needs during the next emergency."

"To maximize participation in WIC and achieve the proven outcomes, the program needs to adopt modern business practices, such as online grocery ordering and delivery. Young mothers expect to use technology to conduct business. A recent example is the welcomed rollout of the WIC debit card." said **Karen Farley, Executive Director, California WIC Association**. "The COVID-19 crisis provides opportunities to immediately take steps to adopt online grocery ordering and delivery and protect food security for young families."

"The National WIC Association applauds retailers for partnering with state WIC agencies to ensure that participants can continue to access their WIC foods during the pandemic. However, online purchases, curbside pickup, and home delivery are currently not offered to WIC participants, which presents challenges given social distancing protocols," said **Elisabet Eppes, Director of Program Innovation, National WIC Association**. "As more states begin to adopt online ordering for SNAP recipients, we urge the USDA Food and Nutrition Service to permit online purchases in WIC, and we encourage retailers to continue working with WIC agencies and EBT processors to implement online purchases in WIC."

"Now more than ever, we must turn crisis into opportunity and update all systems to make it simple and convenient to meet low-income families basic human needs," said **Mary Ignatius, Parent Voices Statewide Organizer**. "Considering most WIC clients are single mothers with young kids, imagine going to your local grocer, standing in line for extended periods of time with an infant or toddler and practicing social distancing with masks and gloves. These families deserve access to healthy, nutritious meals and should benefit from online purchasing and grocery delivery."

"California families are having trouble finding critical items in stores, including formula, diapers and wipes. Allowing WIC benefits to be used online would help ensure families across the state have access to these essential products, in the safest way possible for them and others," said **Kim Goll, president of First 5 Association of California**. "Families with young children are struggling right now, and collectively we must remove unnecessary barriers that risk families' health, safety, and overall well-being. We applaud the efforts to make SNAP benefits available for online purchases, and hope these same innovations can be applied to WIC benefits."

"Using WIC benefits online for home delivery allows pregnant women and young children to better adhere to shelter-in-place orders," said **Hilary Seligman MD, Professor of Medicine, University of California San Francisco**. "For their health, and the health of our community, we must be implementing all possible strategies to support social distancing."

"It's hard enough to grocery shop and parent at the same time, let alone during a pandemic when lines are long and you're trying to keep yourself and your child safe and socially distanced. It is critical that we protect the health of mothers and children, and that includes providing options for WIC participants to utilize their food benefits to purchase groceries online so they can stay safe in their homes," said **Andrew Cheyne, Director of Government Affairs for the California Association of Food Banks**. "We are excited that California is offering online purchasing through CalFresh, and we need to expand this important new program access to WIC participants."

"In a moment of such crisis, with all of us focused on keeping our families safe – and fed – we need to make it as easy as possible for people to access nutritional food," said **Hilary Dockray, Senior Policy Analyst with Alluma**, and a key developer of a digital WIC toolkit created with the National WIC Association. Alluma is a non-profit social enterprise that provides technology and policy support for agencies that manage CalFresh and other benefits programs. "We believe

everyone deserves to have an easy, safe, and dignified experience using an essential service, and that includes WIC participants," said Ms. Dockray. "They should have the same opportunity to purchase food online as everyone else in our state. We know from our experience that these families face other challenges in accessing support, but this is one barrier that's easily removed."

"WIC benefits do not roll from month to month and families risk losing them if left unused. Allowing WIC families (who often face transportation issues) to purchase groceries online will assist to comply with the shelter in place order. Additionally, it will remove barriers to accessing healthy and nutritious food that support critical periods of growth and development during pregnancy, infancy and early childhood." **Priti Rane, Director of Nutrition Services - NEOP and WIC Program San Francisco Department of Public Health.**

"At least two million California children are affected by food insecurity, said **Kelly Hardy, Senior Managing Director at Children Now**. Food insecurity impacts every aspect of child well-being, leading to negative outcomes such as lower birthweight, missed developmental milestones, unequal opportunities to thrive academically and socially, and greater likelihood of chronic disease. The state must do everything in its power to ensure that kids have safe access to nutrition for optimal health and development."

"To benefit from the critical lifeline that WIC represents for so many families with young children, they must be able to shop in a way that matches the reality of their lives. Even outside an unprecedented time like the COVID-19 pandemic, we should make shopping as easy as possible," said **Allison Yates-Berg, a Vice President and leader of the Economic Justice team at ideas42**, a behavioral design non-profit. "Behavioral science tells us that even small hassles can be harmful or prevent people from accessing a useful service, particularly for those who live in contexts of chronic scarcity. By adding WIC to online shopping and grocery delivery options now, retailers are taking a great step toward meeting WIC families where they are. This enables WIC families to maximize their food benefits, increase their options beyond their local store, more easily find and select food to purchase, and can help reduce stress & safety concerns (and stigma) many families face with in-person shopping in these hectic times and beyond."

"It's very good news that Californians using CalFresh will now be able to purchase groceries online for delivery using their EBT card. This, though," explained **Eli Zigas, Food and Agriculture Policy Director at SPUR**, "should just be the start. We need to expand the accessibility of grocery delivery during this pandemic - and beyond - by not only increasing the number of grocers who offer online purchasing with CalFresh, but also by broadening the payment options to include online purchasing with WIC."

"A body of research from the University of California's Nutrition Policy Institute (NPI) and other nutrition researchers solidly confirms the impressive benefits of WIC for healthy infants, toddlers, and young children. Adoption of online food purchasing is bound to make these benefits available to more families for whom a trip to the store is difficult and even dangerous during this COVID-19 period. NPI urges USDA to ensure, first, that this new service not expose

WIC online shoppers to targeted marketing by retailers and manufacturers and, second, that the WIC shoppers' contacts not be shared with other commercial interests." **Kenneth Hecht, Director of Policy Nutrition Policy Institute, University of California**

"California retailers offering online purchasing through WIC will protect young mothers, infants, children, and grocery workers from exposure to COVID-19 and make food more accessible to some of California's most vulnerable," said **Anahid Brakke, Executive Director, San Diego Hunger Coalition.**

"It comes as good news that online purchasing and delivery is now an option for Californians using CalFresh, and the same benefit should be available for WIC," said **Kathy Saile, Director of No Kid Hungry California.** "The reality at this time is that being able to purchase groceries online and have them delivered is a matter of safety, but even under normal circumstances, online purchasing and delivery reduces significant barriers for many low-income families like lack of access to transportation, childcare, and busy work schedules. Making it easier for families to purchase groceries using WIC will help ensure all kids – especially our youngest and most vulnerable – have healthy food every day."

"The statewide implementation of the SNAP online purchasing pilot in California will provide families with the much needed ability to access food in a safe manner while abiding by the CA Stay-at-Home order," said **Jeffrey Reynoso, Executive Director of the Latino Coalition for a Healthy California.** "However, we must ensure that access is shared equitably for families who receive other forms of aid, including WIC recipients. Given that over three in four WIC recipients are Latinx families, we strongly believe that an online system will set up our state and economy for future success."

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About California Food Policy Advocates

California Food Policy Advocates is a statewide policy and advocacy organization dedicated to improving the health and well-being of low income Californians by increasing their access to nutritious, affordable food. Learn more at www.cfpa.net.

About California WIC Association

California WIC Association (CWA) is a non-profit organization formed in 1992 by directors of local agencies administering the federal Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). www.calwic.org