



## Policy and Procedure Manual

### Volume 1, Chapter 1

### Positive Participant Relations – Quality Service Delivery

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Washington State WIC Nutrition Program

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# Positive Participant Relations – Quality Service Delivery

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## Section 1: Provide Positive, Participant-Centered Services

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### **RECOMMENDATION: Provide Positive, Participant-Centered Services**

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Staff provide WIC services in a positive, participant-centered manner. Providing services this way conveys the following messages to participants:

1. WIC cares.
2. We're here to help.
3. You're important.
4. We believe in you.
5. Let's work together.
6. WIC supports you.

The first experience a participant has with staff sets the stage for future visits. The participant's first experience could happen on the phone or in person and can lead to a caring, trusting relationship when it's positive.

#### **GUIDELINES:**

Staff:

- A. Use a participant-centered approach when providing WIC services.
  1. Create a positive experience for the participant.
    - a. Greet participants when they arrive.
    - b. Help participants carry their belongings back to the counseling room.
    - c. Walk alongside participants and chat with them instead of walking ahead of them.
    - d. Take time to answer questions in person and on the phone.
    - e. Listen as much or more than you talk.
    - f. Focus on people, not on computers or forms.

2. Talk with participants in a positive, respectful way.
  - a. Ask open-ended questions to learn about the participant and his or her needs.
  - b. Listen with curiosity.
    - Reflect or restate what the participant shared to check for understanding.
    - Explore the person’s meaning and motivation.
  - c. Affirm the participant’s positive behaviors. Say something positive about the participant, the participant’s child, or the participant’s behavior.

Examples:

- “You work hard at being a good mom.”
  - “Your baby feels safe in your arms.”
  - “You’re always here on time.”
- d. Involve participants in decision-making. Help them find solutions that work for them. Ask permission before making suggestions. Exchange ideas.
  - e. Summarize actions you and the participant identified and information shared.

**Note:** Participant-centered conversations are:

- Collaborative
- Genuine
- Empathic
- Accepting
- Respectful
- Individualized
- Non-judgmental

B. Assure participant-centered clinic practices.

1. Schedule appointments that best meet participants’ needs.

- a. Offer choices for appointments.
  - b. Be flexible.
  - c. Let the participant know how long the appointment will take.
2. Respect participants' time.
- a. Start the appointment on time when possible.
  - b. Let participants know if staff are running late for appointments. Give the person the option to reschedule if it will be a long wait. Apologize for any delays.
  - c. Have a good balance between offering quick service and assuring enough time to meet the participant's needs. Don't rush people through the system.
- Note:** Recognize your participants may have different values around time. Adjust clinic practices to fit participants' cultural values and beliefs when possible.
3. Use good telephone skills.
- a. Answer calls whenever possible, rather than using answering machine or voice mail.
  - b. If you need to put a caller on hold:
    - Ask the caller if you can put the call on hold.
    - Let the caller know how long she will be on hold.
    - Offer to call the person back if a long wait is expected.
  - c. Have enough phone lines so participants rarely get a busy signal.
  - d. Limit the use of answering machines or voicemail whenever possible. Return calls within 24 hours. Create voice-mail or answering machine messages that let callers know:
    1. When staff are available to take calls.
    2. The clinic hours.

3. Staff will return the call as soon as possible. Ask the caller to leave a message including a return phone number and name.
- e. Check messages often and return calls as soon as possible.



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## Section 2: Create a Participant-Centered Environment

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### **RECOMMENDATION: Create a Participant-Centered Environment**

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Staff create a participant-centered environment. WIC participants base their first impression of your clinic on the clinic environment including the appearance of the entrance and waiting room, and the efficiency and time involved in getting through the clinic processes.

A participant-centered clinic environment is welcoming and positive. It helps participants to feel comfortable, accepted and be more open to positive, participant-centered experiences.

#### **GUIDELINES:**

Staff:

- A. Make sure the clinic, including the offices, waiting room, bathrooms, and reception area, look professional and welcoming.
- B. Have comfortable chairs to fit all shapes and sizes of people. Include rocking chairs with arms for breastfeeding mothers.
- C. Keep the temperature at a comfortable level and have good lighting.
- D. Keep the clinic organized, tidy, and non-cluttered.
- E. Create an inviting place for families and kids.
  1. Offer toys, coloring books and other activities in the waiting area and counseling offices to help keep kids engaged while talking to parents.
  2. Have colorful kids' posters on the walls.
  3. Offer toys in the blood work and weighing areas to help distract kids.
- F. Arrange furniture to encourage conversations between staff and participants.
  1. When possible, staff sit knee to knee with participants.
  2. Offer a place for the participant to sit down while signing or getting information.
- G. Use signs with positive and reinforcing messages rather than negative, unfriendly messages.

Examples of positive signs include:

- Please tell us if you've been waiting more than 10 minutes.
- We want to provide you the best service ever. Please tell us how we are doing.
- Thank you for being on time!

H. Protect participants' privacy and confidentiality.

- See [Volume 1, Chapter 25 – Legal Considerations and Confidentiality](#).

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### Section 3: Provide Leadership for Providing Participant-Centered Services

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#### **RECOMMENDATION: Provide Leadership for Providing Participant-Centered Services**

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WIC Coordinators set the tone for the clinic and WIC service delivery.

- Encourage staff to routinely provide WIC services in a positive, participant-centered manner.
- Engage staff to create a welcoming, comfortable clinic environment for participants.

#### **GUIDELINES:**

WIC Coordinators:

- A. Survey participants about the WIC services they receive.
  1. Use feedback to adjust clinic practices to better address participants' needs.
- B. Assure clinic specific policies support participants and participant-centered messages.
  1. Have scheduling policies that allow flexibility for participants' situations.
  2. Modify policies that negatively affect caseload or that conflict with participant-centered messages.
    - For example, allow staff to do a shorter certification for participants who arrive late, rather than a strict policy where participants aren't seen if they are ten minutes late.
- C. Include customer service competencies in job descriptions.
- D. Assure positive customer service is part of new employee training.
- E. Offer routine training on customer service topics such as:
  - Non-verbal communication
  - Working with difficult participants
  - Participant confidentiality
  - Working with translators
  - Cultural practices and beliefs

- Team work
  - Power of influence
- F. Involve staff in development of participant-centered clinic goals and policies.