

## Households

- I. Definition of household. A household is a group of related or unrelated individuals who live together as one economic unit and share income and expenses. Also may be referred to as a family, or economic unit.
  - a. Households/economic units have one or more wage earners or have other economic resources which are shared among the group. The household/economic unit's income is used to pay bills and purchase food and other items for the group.
  - b. More than one economic unit may reside at the same address. (See Independent economic units below).
- II. Household size. The household size equals the number of individuals supported by the qualifying income.
  - a. A pregnant woman may be counted as one plus the number of fetuses she is carrying.
    - i. For example, a woman who is pregnant with twins may be counted as three family members.
    - ii. If the woman has a religious or cultural objection that precludes including the fetus as part of the household size, the fetus does not need to be included.
- III. Independent economic units. In certain circumstances an applicant who is living at the same address of other adults may be considered a separate household/economic unit. If this is the case, proof of income from the other adults may not be required for determining eligibility. Probing questions should be used to determine if the applicant is self-sufficient and can be considered a separate household. In many cases, young women who are living with their parents are part of their parent's economic unit. If this is the situation, their parent's income and household size needs to be considered for WIC. Each situation needs to be carefully evaluated in order to determine eligibility properly. If an applicant has their own source of income which is adequate for their support and the applicant pays their proportionate share of household, living and personal expenses, they may be considered a separate economic unit.
- IV. The definition of household as it pertains to WIC income requirements must be explained to all first-time applicants to ensure that the applicant reports household size accurately.

- a. Consider asking the question in a manner such as, “How many persons in the household are supported by this income?”
- b. Additional questions are often necessary to be able to determine the applicant’s living situation and economic unit.

V. Non-traditional households.

- a. A breastfed infant who is being breastfed by a woman other than the birth mother cannot be included in the household of both the birth and non-birth mother. The household size may be determined by either the birth mother or the non-birth mother.
- b. A child residing in a school or an institution, who is being supported by the parent or guardian, is counted in the household size of the parent or guardian, since the family continues to provide the economic support.
- c. A foster child who remains the legal responsibility of the state or other welfare agency is considered a family of one with no income, if so listed on the foster letter. Payments made by the welfare agency for the care of that foster child may be reported as the income of that child. Foster children are input into the computer system as an independent economic unit.
- d. An adopted child or a child for whom a family has accepted the legal responsibility is counted in the household size with whom he/she resides. The size and total income of the family are used to determine the child’s income eligibility for WIC. Income received on behalf of that child would be considered family income.
- e. In cases where joint custody has been awarded, the child is part of the household where he/she resides most often, or that of the custodial parent. Income should be based and benefits supplied to the household where the participant resides most frequently. The parent who has the child the most often should be the primary parent/guardian. The child is not counted in the family size of the other parent/guardian.
- f. When there is joint parental custody, and the child(ren) spend equal time in each home and both parents are income eligible, ask the parents to come to an agreement between themselves regarding who will be listed

as parent/guardians and how the WIC benefits will be handled. They would then be responsible to see that half of the food goes with the child(ren) to the other parent's home.

- g. WIC staff should not get involved in custody disputes. If the parents have court papers with instructions relating to issues such as this, they should be requested to bring them to the WIC clinic.
- h. Families during times of military deployment. Military personnel serving overseas or assigned to a military base, even though they are not living with their families, should be considered members of the economic unit.
  - i. The income received by the military individual(s) and all other income received by the members of the economic unit should be counted as income to the household.
  - ii. Local agencies may be confronted with dramatic household composition changes for military family members in which military service personnel are deployed overseas or assigned to a military base and their children are in the temporary care of friends or relatives. In this and similar cases, three options exist in determining family composition and income:
    - 1. One option is to count the absent parents and their children as the economic unit as would have been the case prior to the parents' deployment.
    - 2. A second option, depending on the circumstances, is to count the children as a separate economic unit; the unit must have its own source of income, e.g., child allotment(s).
    - 3. A third option, when option one or two are not applicable, is to consider the children to be part of the economic unit of the person(s) they are residing with; therefore family composition and income would be determined on this basis.
  - iii. These same options would apply if the children and one parent temporarily moved in with friends or relatives. The local agency has discretion in electing which option to utilize depending on individual family circumstances.