

Special Income Situations

- I. Apply the following procedures to special income situations. Probing questions and professional discretion are required to accurately assess income in these situations. Contact the State WIC Office, Operations Manager, when further guidance is needed.
- II. Zero Income. In rare situations, an applicant may report zero income (not receiving income from any sources or programs that are included as income); these applicants shall be allowed to use self-declaration and a regular certification may be completed with full food benefits issuance.
 - a. Staff must document the applicant's responses to the questions printed on the *Signed Statement* form. These questions should help the staff and the applicant to determine:
 - i. Whether the applicant meets the definition of a household/separate economic unit (see Households, independent economic units).
 - ii. Whether the applicant has no household income and qualifies as a zero income applicant.
 - iii. Whether the applicant's income will need to be reassessed at the next food benefits issuance appointment (see income reassessment).
 - b. In addition to the questions printed on the *Signed Statement*, staff should ask other questions as necessary to assess the applicant's situation.
 - c. The Signed Statement must be scanned into the computer.
 - d. In the VISION system's drop-down menus "No Income" is selected as the source, and "0 Income Signed Statement" is selected as the proof. A zero "0" is entered as the amount, the period is monthly. A comment should be written in the note box with the date the applicant expects to receive income if any. If it is expected that the applicant will have income before the next benefit issuance then the applicant should be told to bring proof of income to the next appointment. This should be noted in the Comment/Alerts and marked as an alert so that staff knows to ask the client about income.
- III. Fluctuating or irregular income. Income should be determined using documentation of annual income, instead of current (monthly) income when it is determined by clinic staff that this best reflects the family's true gross income. If a family's level of income varies due to the frequency or regularity of employment, including professions with busy and slow periods or stretches of time with overtime pay that are not received year-round, annual income documentation should be used. This applies to families with individuals who are employed but not currently receiving income and to families who are currently earning a higher income but only on a temporary basis. This includes, but is not limited to

construction workers, seasonal agricultural workers, self-employed persons, teachers, students, military personnel, summer/winter resort employees, temporary workers and persons on extended leave due to childbirth or illness. Documentation of annual income normally includes providing income tax returns as proof (see Income Documentation).

a. Bonuses.

- i. If the applicant receives a one-time, annual or quarterly bonus, enter the amounts as part of annual income (separate income rows, Period=Annual).
- ii. If the applicant frequently receives bonuses, such as monthly or every pay period, enter the amount with their current rate of income.

b. Lump sums. A lump sum payment is a large sum of money received by the applicant at one time. Lump sum payments are counted as annual, not monthly income. Cash received through the sale of a property, house or car which is not reinvested into another purchase is also a lump sum payment and treated as annual income.

- i. The exception to lump sum payments is if the payment is an insurance payment for a covered loss such as a home owners claim or auto insurance. This type of payment is a “reimbursement,” not income and should not be included.
- ii. Input any lump sum payment received over the past 12 months as annual income into the computer.

iii. Make a comment in the computer as a note to staff regarding the month in which this sum no longer needs to be added.

iii.c. Stipends for living expenses, such as for students, are counted for the period they were meant to cover. For example, a yearly stipend is counted as annual income. A stipend given each semester should be divided by the number of months it covers and is added as monthly income. Any portion of stipends that are intended as reimbursements for books or tuition should not be counted as income.

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IV. Unemployed. Use an applicant's current rate of income if the applicant is unemployed.

- a. Wages/salary received in the past from the job which the applicant has lost does not need to be included in the current total income. There is no “waiting period” from the time a person loses a job until they become income eligible for WIC when they are unemployed and no longer receiving or expecting any income. The income sources listed below must also be considered when determining the income eligibility of an unemployed person.

- b. If the applicant continues to receive regular income in the form of pay checks, severance payments or unemployment benefits these are included as current income.
 - i. If they have not yet received their unemployment benefits or severance pay, “current income” refers to income that will be available to the family in the next 30 days, if it is known.
 - c. Cash-out of a 401K account, cash-out of vacation pay or receipt of a one-time severance payment upon termination are treated as lump sum payments and included as annual income as explained above.
 - d. When a person makes regular withdrawals from any type of savings account to cover living expenses, these withdrawals are considered income for WIC purposes. (See Income Types- Assets drawn down.)
 - e. If the applicant is receiving financial assistance from family members or other sources this is included as income.
 - f. The *Signed Statement form* should be completed if there is no income in the household.
 - g. Applicants should be reminded to notify the clinic when they become employed so that income may be reassessed.
- V. Furloughed employees. Similar to the policies for unemployed persons, workers, whether off the job on furlough or working without pay, may qualify for WIC if their other household income is below the WIC guidelines.
- a. Income received from that job in the last 30 days does not need to be included in the income record if they are not currently being paid.
 - b. If they are currently receiving unemployment pay, that amount would be included in their income.
 - c. Since furloughs are generally short term, and workers sometimes receive retroactive pay, WIC benefits should only be provided on a month to month basis.
 - d. As soon as the participant's income situation changes, and if their income goes above the WIC guidelines, staff must provide 15 days' notice of termination and take them off the program.
 - e. Even if it is expected that the applicant may receive retroactive pay, this will not prevent them from qualifying for WIC nor will there be any penalty or requirement to pay back the benefits received.

VI. Deployed military personnel.

- a. In accordance with federal law and regulations, WIC income eligibility determinations must be based on gross income. Therefore, local agencies need to ensure that gross income is computed as best it can be determined, based on available data, for such military families. All gross income must be counted except: (1) the value of in-kind housing and other in-kind benefits, (2) combat pay, and (3) payments or benefits provided under certain federal programs or acts which are excluded from consideration as income by law. (See Income Exclusions.)
- b. Military personnel have two options in terms of their paychecks if they are temporarily overseas or elsewhere in the United States.
 - i. First, military personnel have the option to direct-deposit paychecks in a joint account, accessible to their families. The majority of the servicemen and servicewomen choose this option. In some cases, the pay stub is sent to the military personnel and another copy is made available to family members, if they have power of attorney.
 - ii. Second, military personnel have the option to designate a spouse allotment and/or a child allotment, whereby the government sends the family member(s) a check in an amount authorized. The allotment(s) designated for family members may reflect only a portion of the military person's total pay.
- c. Some military families, particularly those that include military service personnel serving overseas, may have difficulty producing a pay stub or other documentation of the gross military income. As permitted in WIC regulations and policies, if the State agency determines that requiring an applicant to provide income documentation would present an unreasonable barrier to participation, it may allow the applicant to self-declare income, using an affidavit as proof. Local agencies are to use reasonable discretion on this determination and when in question contact the State agency for guidance.
- d. Some military families may begin reporting a higher gross income amount at the time of application or reapplication for WIC benefits than existed prior to a military deployment. This may occur as a result of military personnel receiving additional military compensation for hazardous or combat duty. This additional income, in most cases, may be excluded from income calculations for WIC if the military service member is deployed to a designated combat zone (see Income Exclusions).
- e. In addition, many local agencies may encounter applications from families in which one or more family members are military reservists who have been placed on active duty. If this situation is encountered, local agencies should determine such family's income eligibility based on the family's

“current” rate of income, while the reservist is on active duty, as opposed to annual income.