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DOH Confirms WIC Program Fully Funded Through November, Clarifies Difference Between WIC and SNAP Amid Shutdown

DOH said Monday night that the WIC program remains fully funded through November and separate from SNAP, which has been disrupted by the federal shutdown, though officials funding beyond November could become uncertain if the impasse continues.

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The V.I. Department of Health on Monday night assured residents that the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program continues to operate normally despite the ongoing federal shutdown. Officials emphasized that WIC is fully funded through November and remains separate from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which has been disrupted nationwide.

“Our WIC offices have been receiving calls from participants asking if their WIC benefits ended on November 1, conflating the program with SNAP,” said Acting Health Commissioner Dr. Nicole Craigwell-Syms. “We want to assure our participants that, at present, the Virgin Islands WIC Program has sufficient funding to continue serving them. Our vendors are aware of this and will continue to redeem benefits. Please feel free to visit your grocery store and shop with your eWIC card.”

The department joined the National Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Association in reminding families that while both WIC and SNAP provide food assistance, they are distinct programs with different purposes and funding streams.

The WIC program is funded annually by Congress and focuses specifically on 7 million low-income pregnant women, new mothers, and young children. In addition to food benefits, it provides nutrition education, breastfeeding support, health screenings, and referrals to social and medical services. Participants can only purchase certain healthy foods such as milk, eggs, fruits, and vegetables. WIC is currently operating with limited federal emergency funds to keep clinics open and benefits active.

SNAP, in contrast, is an entitlement program that helps all eligible low-income households buy groceries. Benefits can be used for most food items but not alcohol, tobacco, or non-food products. Unlike WIC, SNAP is automatically funded based on need, but its operations were disrupted on November 1 after no additional emergency funding was provided during the shutdown.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, which administers the program, has relied on \$300 million in Section 32 funds from prior-year customs receipts to cover October operations, with states carrying over up to 3% of fiscal year 2025 allocations for November. However, the National WIC Association (NWA) stated in an October 28 press release that "without additional support, State WIC Agencies face another looming crisis," projecting shortfalls as early as mid-November in some areas if the impasse persists. The program's \$7.6 billion annual budget, fully funded for fiscal year 2025 but exhausted by September 30.

To offset the federal lapse, Governor Albert Bryan Jr. announced that the local government would fund half of the November SNAP benefits for eligible Virgin Islands households. On Monday, he confirmed those payments had been completed, ensuring that more than 10,600 households could continue to purchase groceries during the shutdown.

Lorna Concepcion, Director of the Virgin Islands WIC Program, encouraged participants to continue using their benefits as usual.

“Our WIC team continues to provide full services — from nutrition education and breastfeeding support to food benefits,” she said. “It’s very important that participants continue to use their WIC benefits each month to keep their participation active and ensure their families receive the nutrition they need. The Department of Health WIC Program staff will contact you if there are any changes.”

Concepcion also urged families to stay informed, check with local offices for updates, and share accurate information within their communities.

Both Craigwell-Syms and Director Concepcion noted that while the Virgin Islands WIC Program can continue operating through the month of November, its future — like that of SNAP — could

become uncertain if the federal government shutdown persists.

DOH said it remains in close contact with its federal partners and continues to monitor developments to ensure uninterrupted service delivery to families across the Virgin Islands.

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