

## Title A qualitative needs assessment of WIC services and care at Lucile Packard Children's Hospital

### Abstract

**Background** Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program provides resources and care for low-income families that aligns with clinical care, but coordination remains a challenge. This includes lactation support, food, hospital-grade breast pumps, and formula. Stanford's Lucile Packard Children's Hospital adopted the San Mateo County-WIC-created hyperlink for breastfeeding support in the NICU, but utilization stopped due to turnover.

**Objective** To identify whom and when referrals were being placed and facilitators and barriers to inform improvements.

**Methods** We conducted a qualitative needs assessment with guided discussions with 26 individuals from 8/12/2022-05/30/2024. Participants included WIC, lactation, clinicians (pediatricians, obstetricians, midwifery), nursing, case management, social work, operations, and clinic management. A rapid qualitative matrix analysis was conducted.

**Results** Different professional groups used different types of WIC referrals ranging from provider-facilitated (i.e., hyperlink) to patient-reliant (e.g., paper with formula prescription or contact information). The high needs of NICU patients facilitated buy-in. Barriers to WIC referrals included limited knowledge around WIC services, workflow for placing a referral, and differing resources by care setting (e.g., well-baby, NICU). Further, the patient of focus (i.e., birthing parent or infant) differed by setting and influenced whether a healthcare provider felt that it was their role to place a referral. For example, when the infant was the patient of focus, providers were hesitant to refer the parent to WIC for a hospital-grade breast pump. Expectations that parents had the bandwidth and knowledge to request referrals and/or access WIC resources themselves was a challenge. Many individuals expressed concern over the implications of referring immigrant or undocumented families.

**Conclusion** Multiple healthcare professionals reported providing WIC referrals to patients, but in different ways. Since "WIC referrals" can happen at multiple points in care and for different reasons, clarification of roles and responsibilities between healthcare professions is needed to help patients access this community resource.