



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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Hawai'i Department of Health extends electronic benefit card for the Women, Infants, and Children program participants on O'ahu

eWIC provides a faster, more flexible and simpler way to pay for groceries

HONOLULU, HAWAII — Following the successful launch of an electronic benefit transfer (EBT) card on Kaua'i, the Hawai'i Department of Health will now extend the benefit to Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program participants on March 3, 2020, making access to healthy food more convenient and to ensure children have a healthy start in life.

The EBT card, known as eWIC, will eliminate paper checks. Approximately 17,000 Oahu WIC participants who redeem an average of \$1.7 million in benefits each month, will transition to the eWIC card over a three-month period, depending upon when their benefits were last issued. eWIC was launched on Kaua'i in October 2019, and to date, about 1,000 Kaua'i WIC participants used a total of \$122,000 in benefits.

WIC is a public health nutrition program under the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), providing nutrition education, nutritious foods, breastfeeding support, and healthcare referrals for income-eligible women who are pregnant or post-partum, infants, and children up to age five. The program is administered in Hawai'i by the Department of Health.

"This latest upgrade will take the shopping experience for families to a new, exciting level," said Melanie Murakami, the Department of Health's WIC Services branch chief. "This new technology allows us to better serve families and makes transactions at cash registers much more efficient for both shoppers and retailers."

"For the past few months, Kaua'i families have enjoyed more convenient and easier access to nutritious foods through eWIC," said Michael Ellis, WIC vendor manager. "Faster check-out times, coupled with new food offerings such as string cheese, canned beans, and canned fruits and vegetables, have created a more positive shopping experience for both WIC participants and WIC vendors. We're looking forward to serving more families on O'ahu."

With paper checks, participants are required to spend the entire amount of their allocation in one singular transaction. With the eWIC card, which automatically tracks purchases and the remaining balance for a 30-day rolling period, participants can buy as little or as much WIC approved groceries as they need at a time.

WIC participants may only purchase groceries from a WIC-approved food list. This list is comprised of nutrient-dense foods that are essential during pregnancy, lactation, between pregnancies, and early childhood with consideration for local food preferences.

Murakami added that the eWIC program will be rolled out to other counties in the next few months, with a targeted expansion to Maui county in April and Hawai'i Island in May.

“We are pursuing a staggered approach to our rollout to ensure families in each county have our full attention during this transition,” she said.

She said Maui county will serve an estimated 2,000 participants using \$188,000 in benefits, and Hawai'i Island will serve an estimated 4,900 participants using \$380,000 in benefits.

New WIC participants can apply at the clinic nearest them. Visit the Hawai'i Department of Health's website at <https://health.hawaii.gov/wic/> for WIC clinic locations.

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