

Staffing and Supervision 5: Scope of Practice for the WIC Peer Counselor

A peer counselor provides basic breastfeeding information, encouragement and support to WIC participants and performs within the peer counselor scope of practice.

1. Perform in a professional manner in all aspects of the peer counselor role.

- A. Respect the participant's privacy, dignity and confidentiality.
- B. Respect and respond sensitively to cultural attitudes and practices of participants and the community.
- C. Work within the policies and procedures of the WIC program.
- D. Maintain records according to legal requirements and ethical practices.
- E. Recognize when assistance is needed and consult with the supervisor, Breastfeeding Coordinator and/or Peer Counselor Coordinator and other lactation specialists.
- F. Identify situations outside the Scope of Practice and refer as appropriate in a timely manner.
- G. Yield to the WIC designated breastfeeding expert (such as the local agency breastfeeding coordinator, local agency WIC coordinator, or International Board Certified Lactation Consultant [IBCLC]) for situations out of breastfeeding peer counselor Scope of Practice.
- H. Acquire ongoing breastfeeding education to maintain and build knowledge and skills.

2. Encourage and support participants to breastfeed.

- A. Use participant-focused communication techniques to best meet participant needs.
- B. Help participants identify the support available to them and educate family members.
- C. Help women identify their breastfeeding concerns, barriers, and solutions.
- D. Teach the reasons to breastfeed and the risks of not breastfeeding.
- E. Teach the importance of exclusive breastfeeding in the early weeks.
- F. Teach participants about the WIC food packages for breastfeeding mothers.
- G. Assist in infant feeding classes and peer support groups.
- H. Be available to WIC participants outside of usual clinic hours and outside of the clinic environment.
- I. Refer mothers to resources for support.
- J. Promote breastfeeding in the community, workplace, and health care system.
- K. Support breastfeeding participants from pregnancy through growth spurts, introducing solid foods, and weaning.

3. Teach basic breastfeeding to participants and help them when difficulties occur.

- A. Teach basic, evidence-based techniques that help ensure a successful start in breastfeeding, including milk production, skin-to-skin care, positioning and latch, and milk expression and storage.
- B. Identify signs of the normal course of breastfeeding, including breastfeeding frequency and duration, infant feeding cues, and normal infant weight gain and stooling patterns.
- C. Provide anticipatory guidance to help prevent the occurrence of problems.
- D. Provide guidance to mothers regarding non-evidence-based breastfeeding information they receive.
- E. Help mothers plan for a return to work/school that supports the continuation of breastfeeding.
- F. Provide basic and timely problem-solving and support.
- G. Yield mothers experiencing difficulties to the WIC designated breastfeeding expert.

Adapted from Scope of Practice for Peer Counselors materials from Michigan, California and Virginia WIC.