

# More Veggies and Fruits for WIC Families is a Win for California and the Nation

## Policy Brief

November 2021



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA  
Agriculture and Natural Resources  
Nutrition Policy Institute



The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) is a USDA-funded program that provides healthy foods, referred to as the WIC food package, to low-income pregnant and postpartum women, infants and children up to age 5. WIC reaches nearly half of all infants born in the U.S. The healthy WIC food package includes vegetables, fruit, milk, cheese, yogurt, eggs, breakfast cereal, whole grain foods, beans, peanut butter and 100% juice. All WIC foods are loaded electronically onto a WIC benefits card for use at authorized grocery stores, with monthly amounts allocated for each food. The vegetables and fruits are issued as a “Cash Value Benefit” (CVB) enabling families to buy any variety of vegetables or fruits up to the CVB amount. For the last 10 years, the monthly CVB amounts for vegetables and fruits have been \$9 for children and \$11 for women. Despite numerous health benefits, vegetables and fruits are inadequately consumed by Americans.

Thanks to additional funding from the 2021 American Rescue Plan Act, CVB amounts for all women and children on WIC were raised to \$35 per month from June-September 2021. Congressional appropriations have enabled monthly CVB amounts to continue at \$24 for all children and \$43 or \$47 for women (depending on their pregnant or lactating status) through March 31, 2022. **Congress must act to extend this benefit bump beyond March, 2022.** Data from a study of 1673 participants in Southern California demonstrate that it is essential to keep these vegetable and fruit benefits in place. As shown on the right, nearly all participants found the \$9 value to be insufficient. At the higher value, less than one quarter of participants find the value insufficient.

### With \$9 for Veggies and Fruits



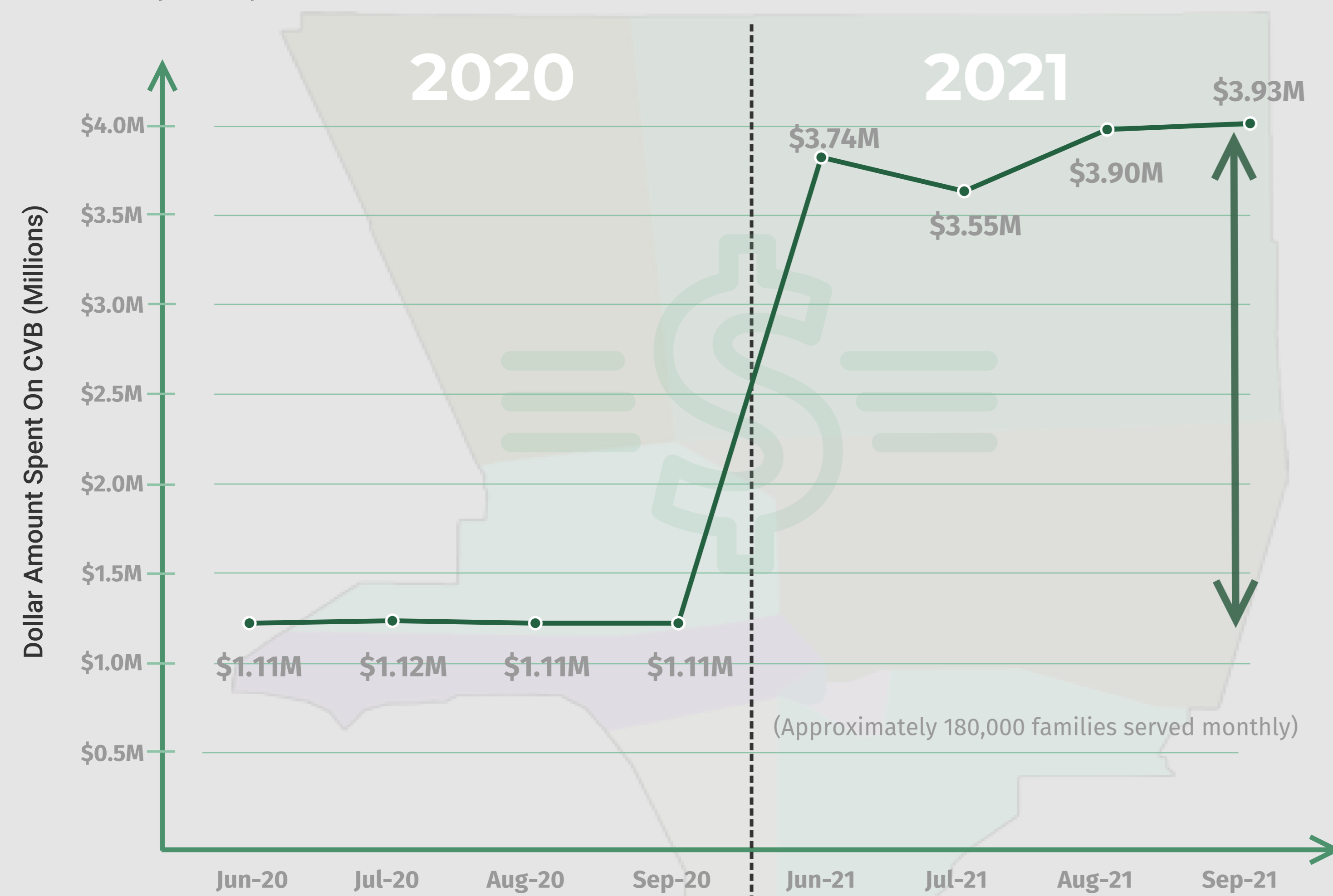
● Insufficient (93%) ● Just Right (7%)  
● Too Much (<1%)

### With \$35 for Veggies and Fruits



● Insufficient (24%) ● Just Right (76%)  
● Too Much (<1%)

### Total Dollar Amount of WIC Cash Value Benefit (CVB) for Vegetables and Fruits Spent by PHFE WIC participants



Increase in expenditures on WIC vegetables and fruits by PHFE WIC participants (June-September, 2021)

# \$10.6M

PHFE WIC, a program of Heluna Health, is the largest Local Agency WIC program in the country, serving over 180,000 participants monthly in Los Angeles, Orange and San Bernardino Counties. In the four months from June-September, 2021, families served by PHFE WIC used their increased CVB and spent over \$10.6M more on vegetables and fruits compared to the same period in 2020 (when only \$9 and \$11 per month was available through WIC). This translates to an increase of over \$50M across the state of California in WIC purchases of vegetables and fruits during a 4-month period. Making these increases permanent will ensure ongoing access to vegetables and fruits for all WIC families in the U.S. More vegetables and fruits for WIC families helps not only the families served by the program, but the communities in which these families live, the vendor communities where produce is sold and the agricultural community where produce is grown. **Every low-income community in every state in the U.S. benefits from this increase.**

Increase in expenditures on WIC vegetables and fruits by California WIC participants (June - September, 2021)

# ~\$50M

**FUNDING:** This research is supported by Healthy Eating Research, a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (Grant No. 77239 to PHFE WIC, a program of Heluna Health)