

Texas WIC Health and Human Services Commission

Effective September 1, 2023

Policy No. CS:16.0

WIC Certification Specialist

Purpose

To provide local agencies (LAs) guidance over WIC Certification Specialists (WCS) program application, implementation, guidelines, and training requirements for paraprofessional staff.

Authority

7 CFR Part 246.2, 246.7

Policy

The WCS Program allows LAs to train and promote exceptional paraprofessional staff working within the WIC Program to help serve clients at low nutritional risk in a time effective manner. The WCS Program should not be used to replace or eliminate other qualified professionals (Nutritionist, RDs, LVNs, Nurses) needed to maintain a level of expert care to WIC clients at nutritional risk.

The WCS Program curriculum is available through the SA for LA implementation. To implement a WCS program, LAs must submit a completed program application and receive approval prior to the start of the WCS candidate training.

Upon successful completion of the WCS Program, the candidate in training will become a State Certified WCS. A WCS has the credentials to certify applicants/clients for the WIC program.

The WCS Certificate may be used at any LA within the State of Texas at the discretion of the LA Director. It does not guarantee employment at another LA, and the credentials do not guarantee the holder will be offered a position as a WCS.

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Procedures

WCS Program Implementation

- I. The LA Director must choose a WCS Program Preceptor with adequate hours to train the candidate(s) and provide oversight of the LA's WCS Program.
 - A. The WCS Program Preceptor must be a Registered Dietitian (R.D.) on staff or working as a consultant for a minimum of 25 hours per month, or a full-time degreed Nutritionist.
 - B. The LA Director may choose a WCS Program Proxy to assist the WCS Program Preceptor as needed to fulfill the program requirements.
 1. Selected Proxies must be a Registered Dietitian (R.D.) on staff or working as a consultant for a minimum of 25 hours per month or a full-time degreed Nutritionist.
- II. The LA Director must request and complete a WCS Program application obtained from the SA WCS Program Coordinator (WCSProgram@hhs.texas.gov).
- III. The LA Director must nominate WCS candidates for the WCS Program.
 - A. The existence of a WCS program at the LA does not automatically qualify all staff to take the program.
 - B. WCS candidates must have a minimum of a high school diploma or equivalent.
 - C. WCS candidates must have a minimum 3 months working experience in a WIC clinic before s/he may be considered as a candidate.
 - D. LA Directors may set higher minimum requirements based on their agency's need.
- IV. The LA Director or WCS Program Preceptor must submit the completed WCS program application and nominated WCS candidate(s) to the SA for approval.

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- A. Once the WCS Program application and nominated WCS candidate(s) have been approved, the LA will provide the SA a date when the training of the candidate(s) will begin.
 - B. LAs may not start WCS candidate training without formal approval and submission of a training start date.
 - C. Each WCS candidate must be approved by the SA prior to starting the WCS Program. LAs who begin training WCS candidates without prior SA approval will be subject to WCS Program suspension.
 - D. An approved WCS Program application remains active for 2 years. During this time, the LA Director may nominate additional candidates for WCS training. To receive approval for additional WCS candidates without an application update, the following must be submitted:
 - 1. Attachment A: Staff List of Duties by Clinic Site
 - 2. Attachment C: Nutritional Pre-Requisite Training
 - 3. Attachment D: Candidate Profile
 - E. After 2 years, the LA Director must re-submit an updated WCS Program application and receive approval, prior to nominating additional candidates for WCS training.
- V. During the WCS candidate(s) training, the LA Directors and WCS Preceptors may develop additional criteria that are over and above the state minimum requirements.
- VI. LAs must provide the WCS candidate with dedicated time during their workday to study in an appropriate workspace.
- VII. WCS candidates must complete the training course, including passing the WCS competency-based exams within a 3-month (minimum) to 9-month (maximum) time frame.
- A. Extensions may be granted by the SA with appropriate justification from the LA Director and WCS Preceptor.

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- VIII. The WCS Program Preceptor must complete observations of the WCS candidate(s) performing competencies and submit the dates of completion along with the exam scores to the SA.
- A. The WCS Preceptor's signature is required to sign off upon the candidate's successful completion of the training.
 - B. The WCS Program Proxy may sign off on the WCS candidate(s) at the discretion of the WCS Preceptor.
- IX. Upon a WCS candidate's successful completion of the WCS Program, the SA will issue a signed certificate of completion. The candidate may then function as a Certified WCS after the LA Director signs the certificate.
- X. After the WCS candidate graduates, the LA will have a 6-month observation plan in place for the WCS.
- A. The LA may follow the SA approved plan for observing or they may submit a plan to the SA for approval.

WCS Re-Certification

- I. Once a candidate becomes a certified WCS, s/he must complete a minimum 5 hours of continuing education credits (CEC) every fiscal year beginning the fiscal year after initial certification to maintain WCS certification.
- A. Trainings may include SA trainings, LA trainings or subject appropriate trainings offered by outside entities. Trainings must be related to the following topics:
 - 1. Nutrition (includes breastfeeding & formula)
 - 2. Counseling
 - 3. Leadership Skills (e.g., team building, public speaking)
 - 4. Ethics & Professionalism
 - B. Each training will count towards one hour of WCS Continuing Education Credit (CEC), unless otherwise specified.

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- C. Verification of completion must be documented and submitted to the SA using Attachment F: Continuing Education Credit (CEC) Log.
- D. If the LA does not submit WCS CEC as required by the SA, the WCS credential will be expired until appropriate documentation is received.

WCS Formula Certification

- I. The LA Director/Preceptor has the discretion to request approval from the SA WCS Coordinator for LA WCSs to become formula certified.
- II. After successful completion of the WCS Formula Approval module, the SA will issue a signed certificate of completion with the letter "F" added to the certificate number (e.g., 1234F). This designates the WCS as a Formula Certified WIC Certification Specialists (FC-WCS) ([see policy FD:16.0](#))
- III. A FC-WCS must remain within their scope of practice as outlined in FD:16.0 and the WCS Formula Approval module. ([see policy FD:16.0](#))
 - A. FC-WCSs are not authorized to contact health care professionals regarding clarification of qualifying conditions, supplemental foods or formula quantities unless directed by a CA.
- IV. A FC-WCS must complete a minimum of one formula training per fiscal year to maintain formula certification. The formula training may count towards their continuing education.
 - A. Trainings may include but are not limited to:
 - 1. New/revised formula trainings
 - 2. Formula conference calls
 - 3. State conference formula training sessions
 - 4. Subject appropriate trainings offered by outside entities or the LA, or
 - 5. Any other related state offered formula trainings or activities.
 - B. LA's must submit verification of completion to the SA.

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WCS Program Special Circumstances

- I. LA's that do not have an existing state approved WCS program who want to hire a certified WCS must submit a program application to the SA for approval. Once the program application is approved, the WCS may join their agency and perform WCS job duties as assigned.

- II. LA's who want to hire a WCS with an expired WCS certification must complete the following procedures:
 - A. Submit a WCS Program application if there is no history of a previous state approved program.
 - B. Re-certify the WCS upon hire:
 1. If the credential has been expired less than or equal to 2 years, the WCS may test out of the full program by taking the WCS Program exams and completing the WCS Program observations.
 - a. If s/he is unable to pass the exam(s) after 1 attempt with an 80 or above, they will be required to retake the full WCS Program.
 - b. S/he must achieve a score of "satisfactory" on all observations.
 2. If the credential has been expired more than 2 years, the WCS must retake the full WCS Program to return to active certification status.