

TeleWIC: Enhancing community outreach and improving participation rates using Healthie Telehealth Platform

Study Results



Healthie

The Problems that WIC Faces

The Community Medical Centers in San Joaquin County in California consist of 3 main sites, with 6 satellite sites. Their WIC caseload is 7940, with a participation rate of 85.5% (as of September 2019). They have a staff of 30.

Declining participation rates

Many WIC centers around the country are reporting a decline in participation in their programs. "There has been much focus on this issue at both the national and state level [across WIC clinic sites]. However, the consensus is mixed about what exactly is causing this decline in WIC participation. In 2011, an estimated 1.85 million women, infants, and children were eligible for WIC benefits in California in an average month, but were not receiving WIC. We need new ways to reach WIC families." -Andrea Weiss RD, CLE

Interest expressed in remote services

A 2011 USDA Special Project Research, looked at how WIC households in the Western Region States (including California) used social media and the internet; studies found that in WIC households, nearly all participants owned cell phones with texting capabilities. Additionally, more educated mothers were more likely to use the internet to schedule and change their WIC appointments, or to log on to use online nutrition education resources. Most importantly, the same research showed very clearly that WIC participants are eager to interact with WIC online rather than having to use the telephone or schedule in person appointments at clinic sites. Further focus groups revealed that these participants want to receive more nutrition education through online classes and perceive WIC counseling through video chat just as useful as in-person counseling sessions.

Barriers to longitudinal care

For mothers with young children, many of whom work full time or have highly demanding schedules, making time to come into the clinic can be extremely difficult. They may not have the access to proper transportation routes, or simply the time to spend commuting with children to the clinics.

Not only were the participants struggling, but the WIC centers hired RDs and IBCLCs that were facing 60-90 minute commutes each day, in addition to inclement weather, like floods and rain.

Solution

At Community Medical Centers, innovation to bolster child retention and improve long-term relationships with mothers has become centered around technology, and its ability to improve engagement, track outcomes, and help this WIC center "stay ahead of the curve."

Andrea says, "Contrary to some common assumptions, research shows that current WIC participants - across all income levels and ethnicities - are just as 'wired' as the rest of their generation. Therefore, as this new generation becomes parents, incorporating technology in care is more important than ever for WIC programs across the country."

Technology that Works in Our Communities

In 2016, CDPH/WIC announced a funding opportunity of over \$4m for a 3 year period through the creation of the Innovative Strategies Mini-grants.

Mini-grants were a way for local agencies to identify, implement and evaluate innovative methods in their communities that would improve the recruitment, retention, and re-engagement of eligible WIC participants.

The intent of these strategies were to meet the changing needs of WIC participants, increase the perceived value of WIC, improve access to and/or to improve delivery of WIC services.

Goals

1. Increase child retention in our agency
2. Streamline processes utilizing technology

Rationale

By utilizing technology and implementing innovative processes to make it easier for families to meet WIC requirements, we hope to see child retention in our WIC program increase.

This project provides telehealth based WIC appointments utilizing video technology available to participants via home computer, tablet, or smartphone.

So, CMC-WIC partnered with Healthie, a HIPAA-compliant telehealth platform.

The CMC-WIC providers planned to use Healthie's telehealth platform in a pilot program to understand the impact of remote care on community engagement, healthcare outcomes, and to examine ways to bolster program efficacy. Providers would utilize HIPAA-compliant video calls with patients in the network to decrease the barriers for access to care and increase convenience of appointments. CMC-WIC patients would be able to benefit from cutting edge features in the Healthie mobile app that include visual diet logging, educational document sharing, text messaging, and tracking of custom metrics set by providers.

For mothers with young children, many of whom work full time or have highly demanding schedules, telehealth appointments will allow valuable time and cost savings by eliminating commutes. The platform's goal setting tools and educational features will allow for increased accountability and self-monitoring throughout the patient network, and provide opportunities for better health outcomes in the long term long term. WIC joins other nonprofit organizations that leverage Healthie to reduce nutrition disparities and improve outcomes in at-risk communities.



Healthie

The Research Study

Specific Data Measures

1. Caseload participation for video visits
2. Lost child rate for video visits
 - a. Lost child = a child who had a cert end date and did not re-certify the following month
3. Missed appointment rate
4. Continuity of care
5. Pilot group demographics
6. Percentage of pilot group who obtain medical care at parent agency health center
7. Monitor agency wide participation rates for improvement
8. Participant survey: mid-year and final

Ongoing Activities

- Biweekly meetings held with video visits team
- Daily case management of telehealth appointments
- Marketing of telehealth appointments
- Continuing to offer video visits for certification, mid-certifications, trimester checks, and high risk appointments - 3 days per week
- Troubleshooting tech errors
- Monthly data tracking

Video Visit Appointment Process

1. Email sent to participants to register on the Healthie platform. Walk participant through App download
2. call/text to confirm appointment and the participant uploads documents to the platform prior to appointment
3. Participants get notification on the phone when it's appointment time. Clicks and connects via video
4. Appointment completed per protocol.
Handouts/resources reviewed and then sent through the platform to participants.
5. WIC staff documents in California WIC MIS

Year 1 Activities

- Collect baseline data
- Software research
- Purchase video equipments (just webcams)
- Contract agreement completed with Healthie Telehealth Platform
- Update platform to meet the needs of WIC families

Year 2 Activities

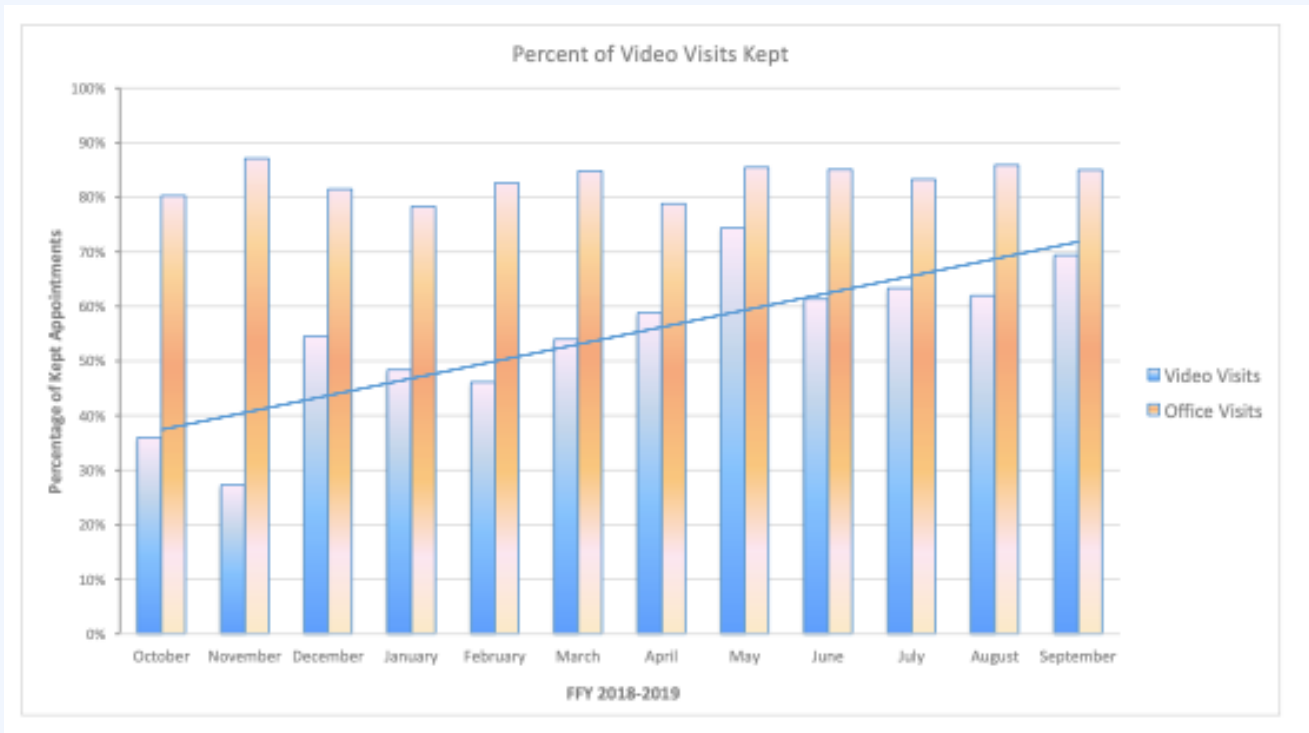
- Video visits team created - RD, & 2 WNAs
- eSign forms created within the platform
 - Participant rights & responsibilities
 - Consent forms
- Upload WIC documents to platform
- Internal video testing began
- Draft policies and protocols developed
- Go live with 1st WIC participant March 2018

Year 3 Activities

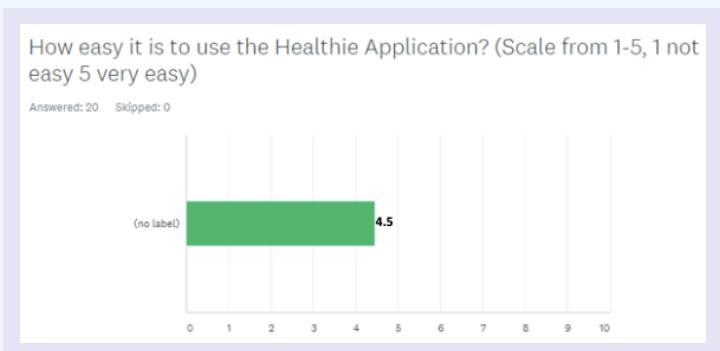
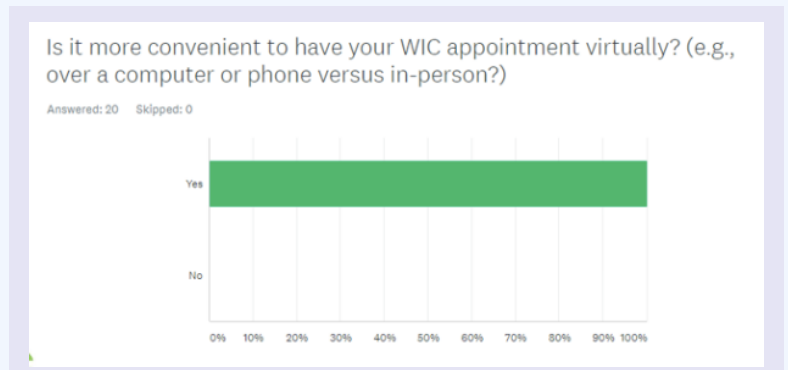
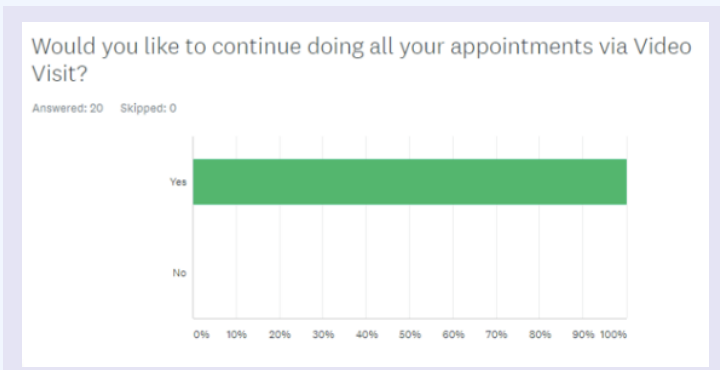
- All staff trained on scheduling/rescheduling video visits
- Marketing materials created to boost participation in pilot group
- Continued to offer video visits for mid-certifications, trimester checks and high risk appointments
- Expanded video visits to include one on one classes
- Mid-year satisfaction survey sent to pilot group in March 2019
- USDA permission given to perform recertification appointments via video for participants who meet certain exemption criteria in April 2019
- Expanded video visits to include recertification appointments in May 2019

Results

Positive trend in percentage of video visits kept



Positive responses to customer survey regarding telehealth platform



- What feedback do you have for the WIC office regarding the WIC Video Visits and Healthie App?
- It's more convenient because I have a full time job. Being able to work without going to the WIC office every month makes balancing everything a little easier.
 - It's simple and easy to use. It's also very helpful because I don't have to find a babysitter or have a grumpy/sleepy baby with me at the appointments.
 - I really love this. After having my second child it's not as easy as it used to be going out. Really convenient for us mothers. Thank you WIC!
 - It's a great advancement you have in place. I love it for the convenience of not having to pack my children every time we need to meet.
 - I love having the flexibility to come in or do my appointment virtually.

Implications

The clinic's plan is to continue this project past grant period and to work with CDPH/WIC to draft policies on statewide use of video appointments as an option throughout California.

Transferability

For other local agencies:

- Dedicated staff and time for managing project
 - HIPAA compliant telehealth platform
 - Equipment: Computer, 2 monitors and web camera
- Rural sites would really benefit

For statewide agencies:

- Integrate telehealth services into WIC management information system

Next steps:

- Promote pilot projects that test innovative education and service delivery
- Train old and new staff on advances in technology in the WIC workplace
- Find ways to streamline certification and in-person appointments
- Utilize online and social media approaches to reaching our WIC participants
- Support and encourage USDA and State WIC programs to review and update WIC eligibility regulations and guidance to reflect cutting-edge technological advance

Interested in bringing TeleWIC to
your clinic or learning more?

Email hello@gethealthie.com