

Highlighting the impact of multi-state research-to-policy efforts during COVID-19: Understanding perspectives and utilization of WIC adaptations in California and beyond

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Background

- The federal Special Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program for Women, Infants and Children—also known as WIC—serves over **6.2 million low-income pregnant and postpartum women, infants and children up to age 5** who are at nutritional risk.
- WIC is administered across the U.S. by 89 State WIC Agencies.
- WIC is a critical source of nutrition support for young children in families with low-income, providing access to healthy foods and a cash value benefit (CVB) for the purchase of fruits and vegetables (FV).¹
- The 2021 American Rescue Plan Act allowed the U.S. Department of Agriculture to temporarily change the CVB amount.²
- Through May 2021, the WIC CVB for children ages 1-4 was \$9/month. The value increased to \$35/month from June-September 2021, and changed to \$24/month starting October 2021.

Research Question

Is the increase in CVB for purchasing fruit and vegetables for children participating in WIC associated with higher program satisfaction, improved household food security and/or increased purchasing and consumption of FV?

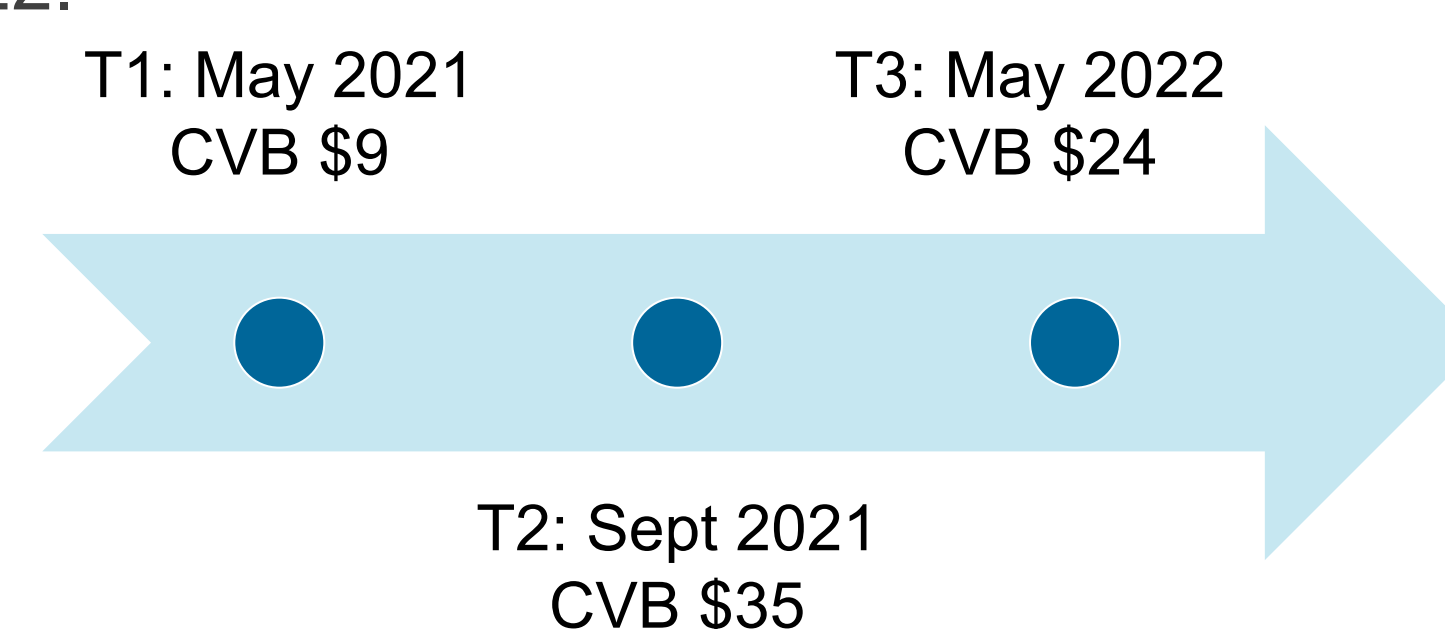


A mother and son shopping for produce at a grocery store. Photo credit: Shutterstock.

Methods

California-based study:

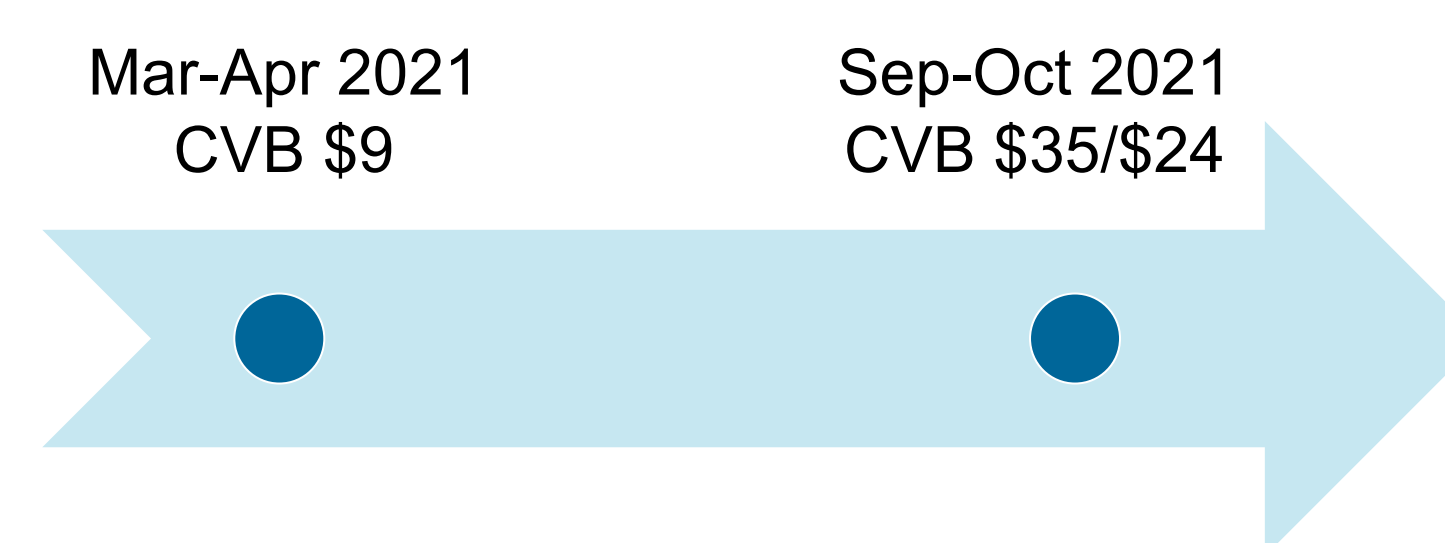
- Design:** Longitudinal study of WIC participants (n=1770) from 7 WIC sites in California with ≥1 child ages 1-4 in May 2021 and ≥1 follow-up survey in Sep 2021 or May 2022.



- Analysis:** Associations using multivariate models of the increased CVB with child FV intake, CVB redemption, satisfaction, and household food security.

Multi-state study in Connecticut, Inter Tribal Council of Arizona, Nevada, New Hampshire and New Mexico³:

- Design:** Repeat cross-sectional surveys of WIC participants from 5 states with ≥1 child ages 1-4 before (Mar-Apr 2021, n=3,590) and during (Sep-Oct 2021, n=6,449) the CVB increase.



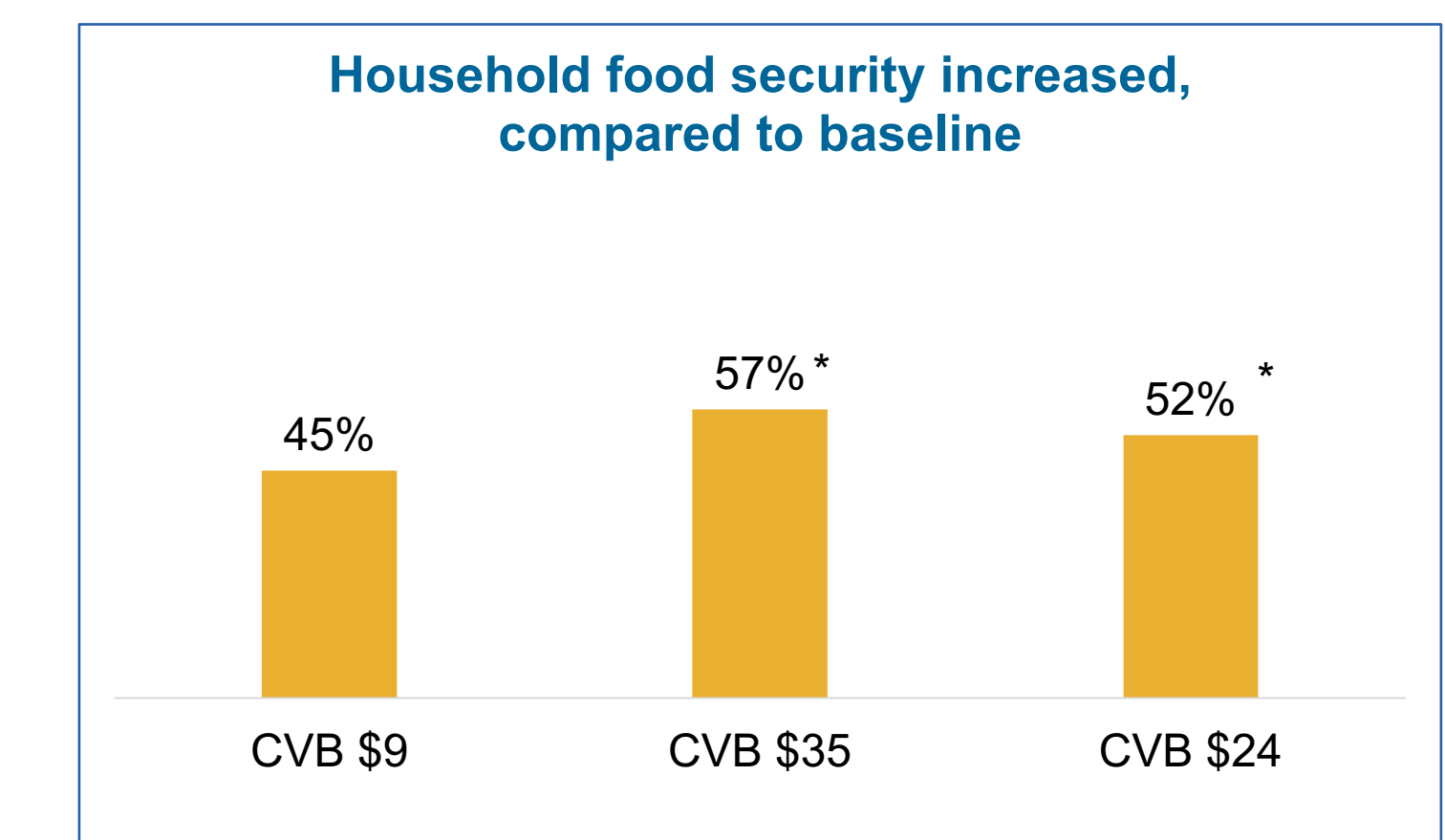
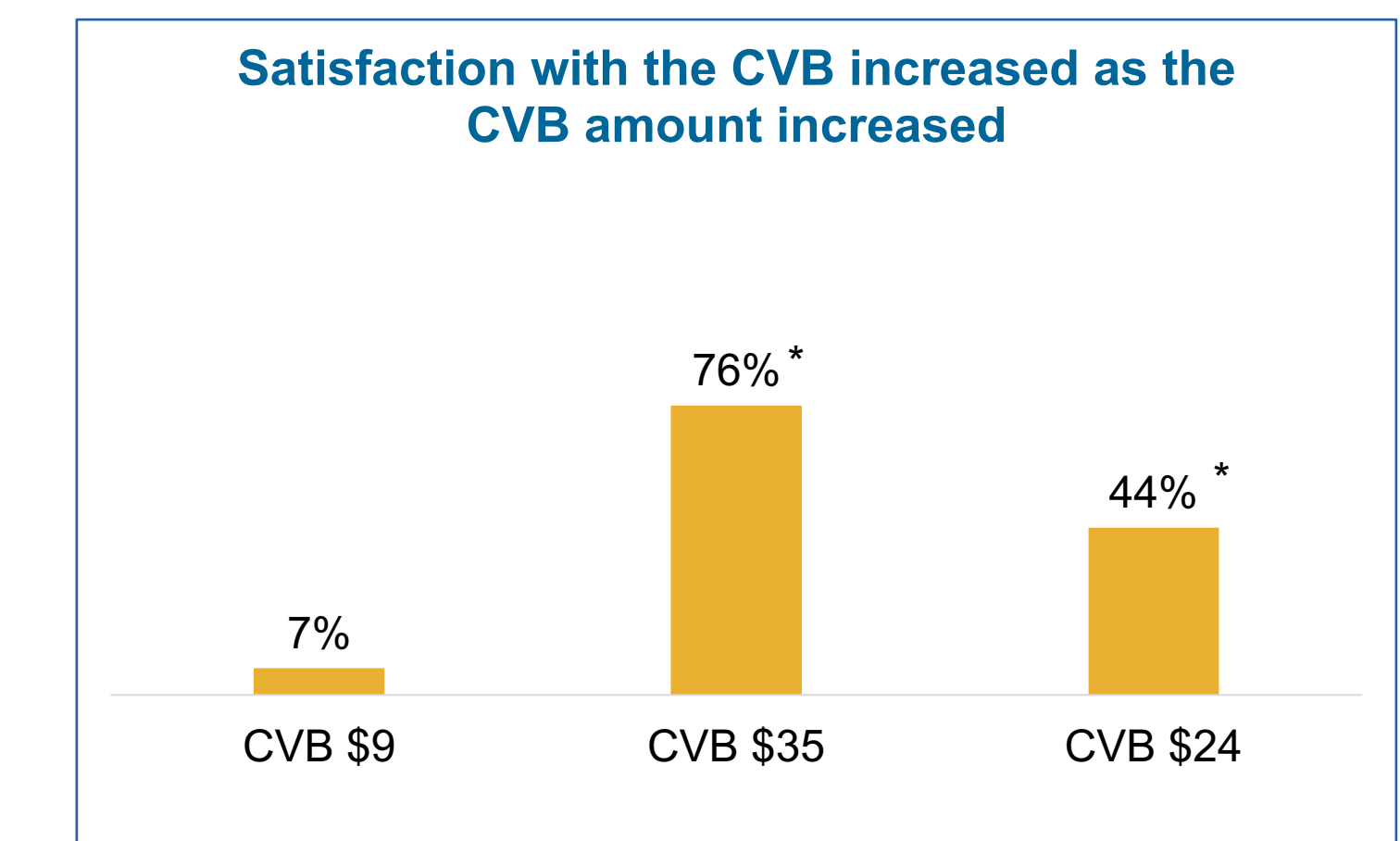
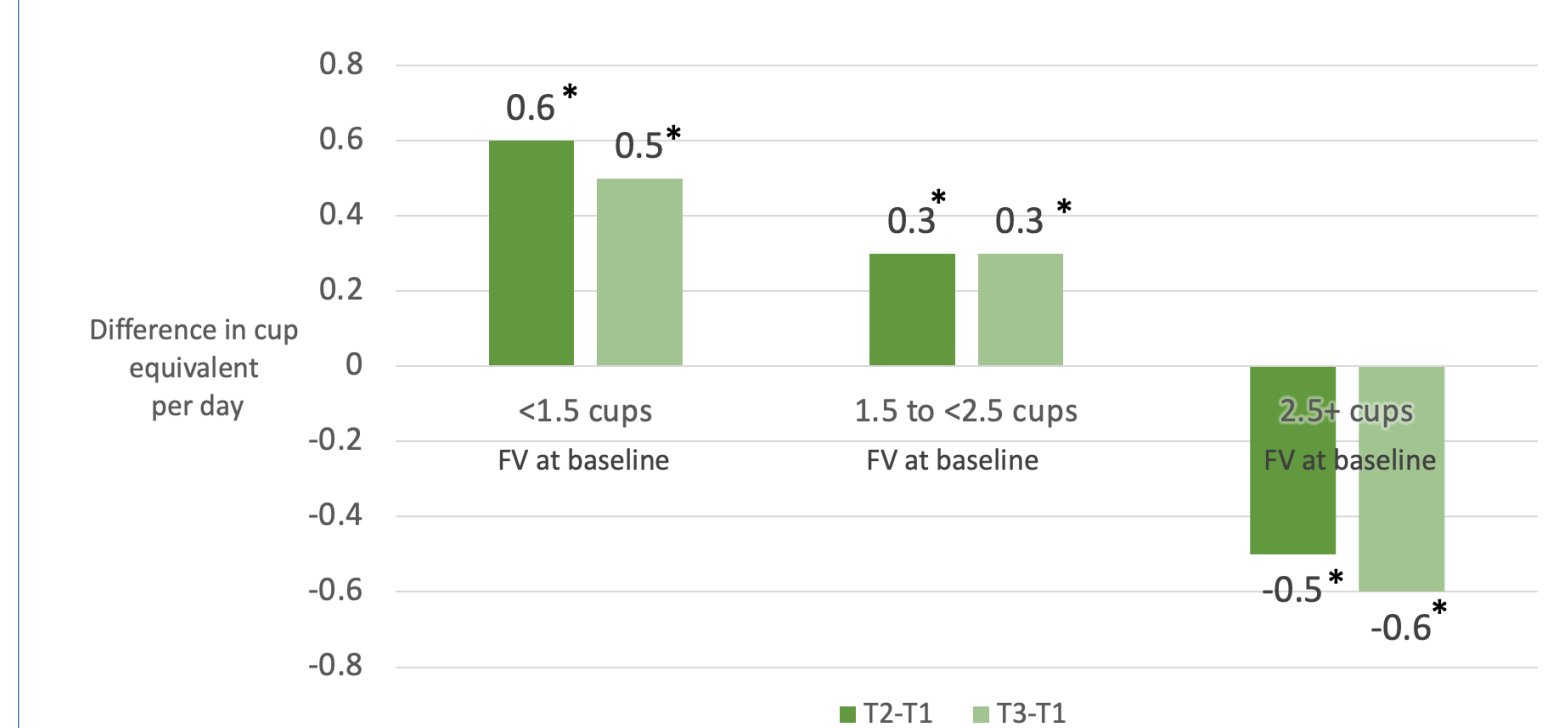
- Analysis:** Associations using multivariate models of the increased CVB with satisfaction with and perceptions of adequacy of the CVB, child FV intake, and household food security.

Results

California-based study:

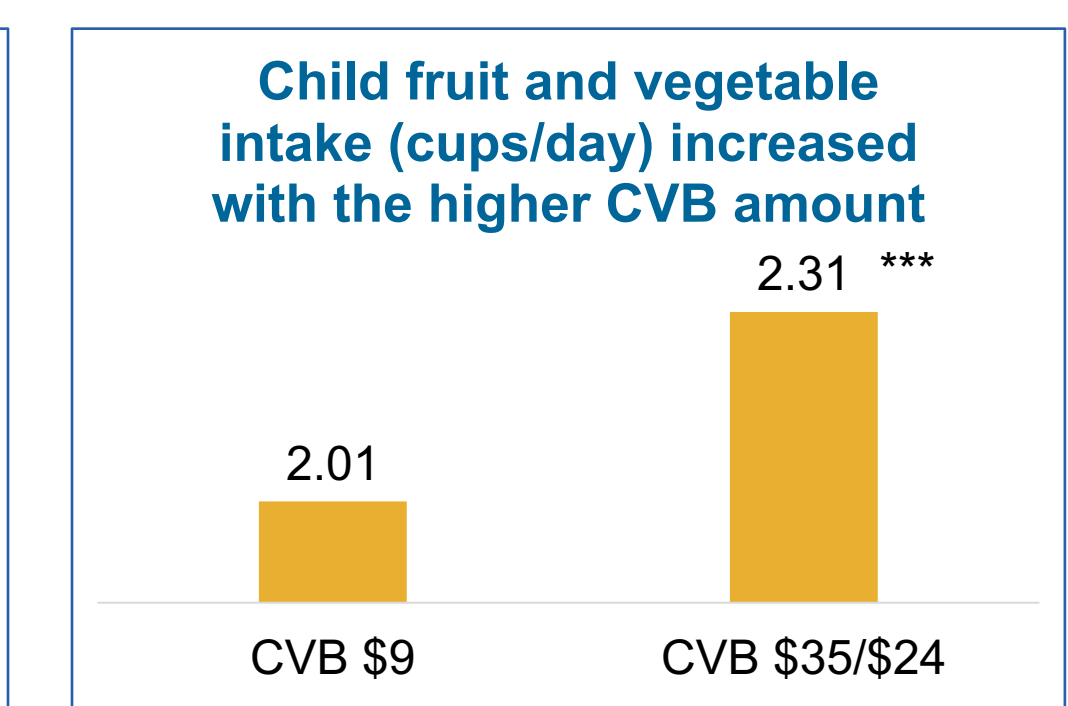
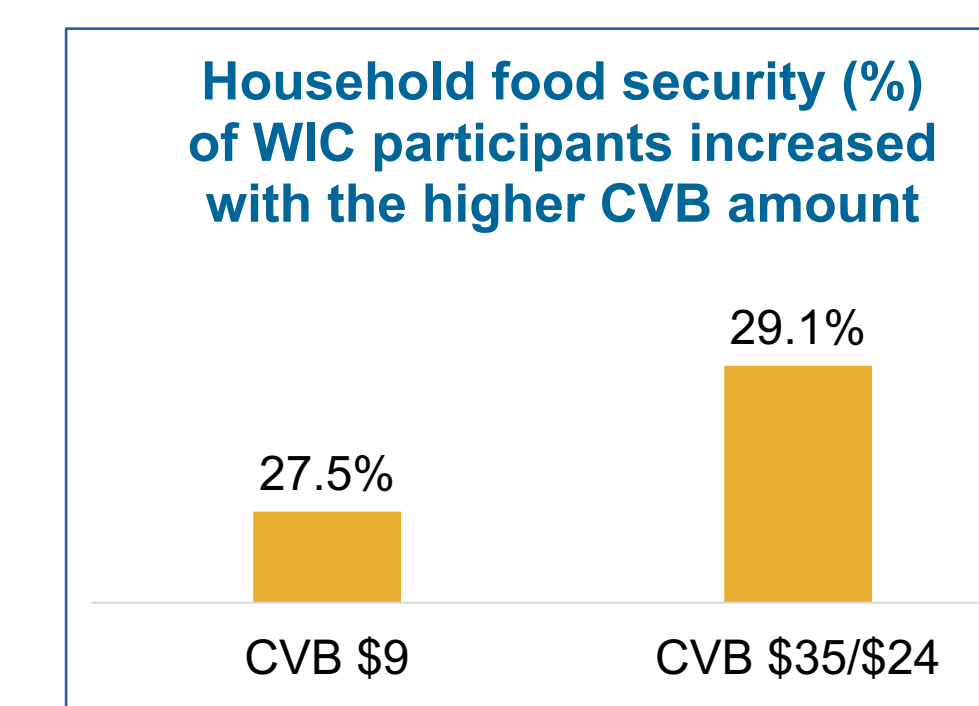
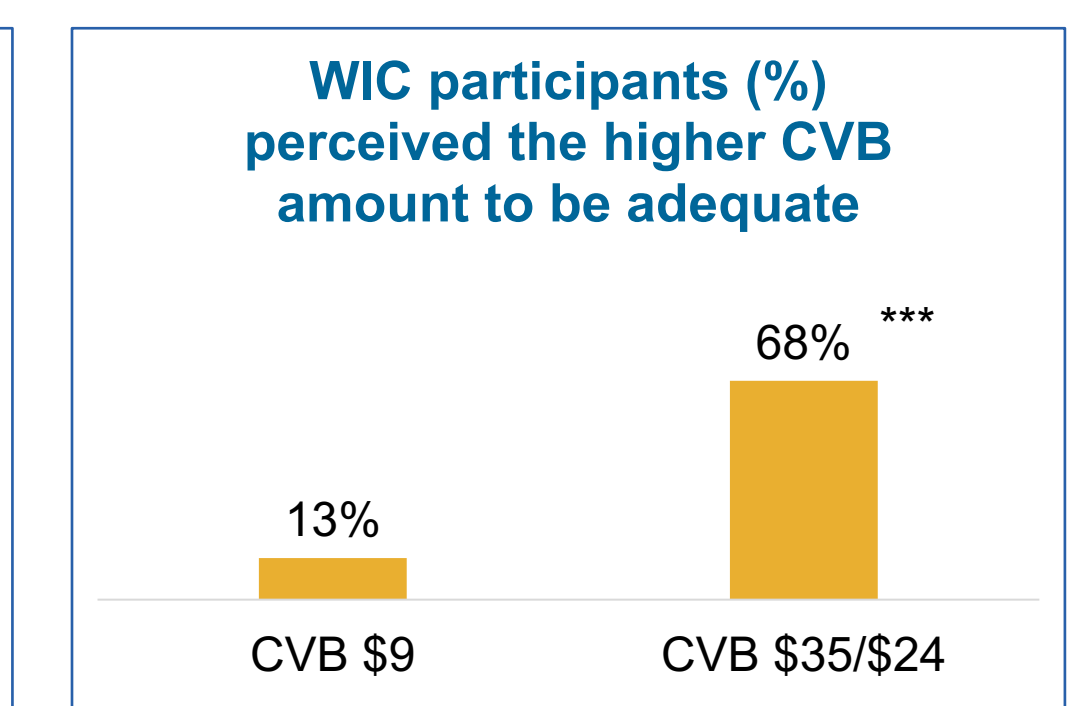
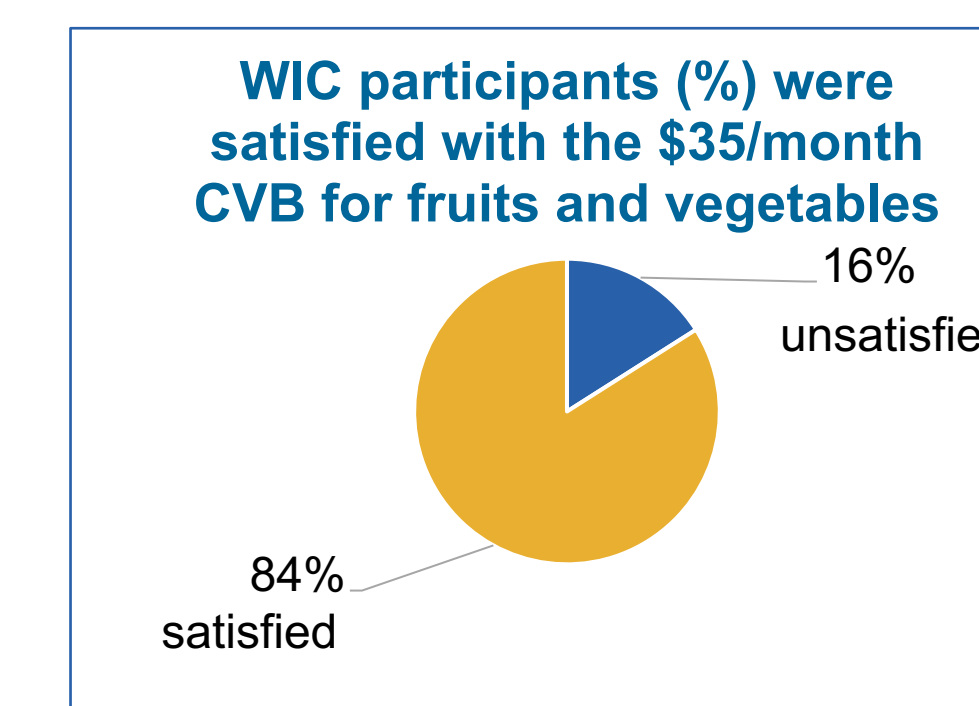
- The increased CVB was associated with significantly greater satisfaction and household food security.
- Total FV intake decreased by 0.03 cups/day in the overall sample but increased by 0.23 cups/day among children with the lowest baseline intake.

Fruit and vegetable intake increased among children whose intake was lowest at baseline



Multi-state study:

- 84% were satisfied with the CVB increase to \$35/month.
- 68% viewed the increase to \$35/\$24 per month as adequate, compared to 13% when the value was \$9/month.
- After 3 months of change, household food security increased insignificantly by 1.6%.
- Child FV intake increased significantly by 0.27 cups/day.



* P<0.05 *** P<0.001

References

- Weber S, Uesugi K, Greene H, Bess S, Reese L, Odoms-Young A. Preferences and Perceived Value of WIC Foods Among WIC Caregivers. *J Nutr Educ Behav.* Jul-Aug 2018;50(7):695-704. doi:10.1016/j.jneb.2018.04.280.
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Conclusions

- Studies documented benefits of increases to the WIC CVB for children.
- WIC policy increasing the value of WIC food packages to increase access to FV had the intended effects, lending support to making the increased CVB permanent.