

## **What WIC Staff Should Know About Immigration Status Rules**

Legal immigrants were struck hard by 1996 welfare reform. California has taken steps to restore eligibility to many of those who were rendered ineligible federally, but awareness of the new eligibility rules is not widespread. **The number of US citizen children in immigrant headed households receiving food stamps fell by 75%.** The strong bond WIC has to the immigrant community in California will be an important resource to help spread the word about the expanded eligibility rules we have in California. Most WIC clients will be eligible, as about **84% of WIC women and children were born in the US.**

- **Most legally immigrated non-citizens are eligible for food stamps in California.** California has extended eligibility to many of the immigrants who were cut off federal food stamps due to welfare reform in 1996, regardless of when they came to the United States.
- **Undocumented parents may apply for benefits on behalf of their eligible children.** When applying, the undocumented parent should say that she is a “non-applicant” and that she is applying for her children (and any other legally immigrated people in her household). She need not say that she is undocumented; only that she is not applying for herself.
- **Undocumented people should not apply for themselves and they do not have to share information about their status or lack of social security number.** The food stamp office can only request the social security numbers and immigration paperwork for the applicants
- **Receiving food stamps does not affect your immigration status or attempts to become a US citizen.** The INS has written that using nutrition programs like food stamps and WIC do not count someone as a “public charge”.
- **Fingerprints and photo-images taken by Food Stamps cannot be shared with INS.** All adult household members must be fingerprinted to get benefits, even if they are undocumented people applying on behalf of eligible children.
- **Food Stamps verifies the immigration status of all applicants through an INS database. This information is only used to verify eligibility for benefits and does not affect legal status.** Food Stamp caseworkers can only contact INS if they know that the client is under an order of deportation, not if they think or know that she is “undocumented”.