

Collection of Racial and Ethnic Data

Federal regulations allow us to collect more than one race from WIC participants. **This means that when asked to identify their race, participants can select as many of the race options as they feel describes them best.** This gives us the most accurate picture of our participants and keeps us from asking them to select only one race when their heritage may reflect multiple races.

We identify ethnicity separately from race. **This means that all of our clients who request Hispanic as their race will need to select a different race or races and select Hispanic as their ethnicity.**

The Impact on You

How will we collect race and ethnicity data?

Review the “Client Demographics” lesson in the *TWIST Training Manual*. It will describe how you can select more than one race in TWIST.

Who do we collect this data for?

All participants at certification or recertification must have their racial category(s) and ethnicity updated. This includes new and existing clients.

Race and ethnicity don't change, so why do we need to check current WIC participants when they come in?

This data may have been collected over the phone when the client was prescreened and the race or ethnicity was unreported or unknown. They may have had race selected by another FamilyNet program whose race/ethnicity collection rules are different than WIC's. “Unknown” is not a valid selection in WIC, so a race may need to be selected.

Information on Race and Ethnicity

What is the difference between race and ethnicity?

Race is something that a person inherits. It is our genetic make up which comes from our parents. It is biological.

Ethnicity is part of a person's culture and comes from how they have been raised. So a person from Mexico may be White and still be Hispanic. They may be Native American and Hispanic. If they are from the Caribbean side of Mexico, they may be

Black and Hispanic. A person who was raised in Mexico, speaks fluent Spanish and now lives in Oregon may not identify themselves as Hispanic.

What are the options for race in TWIST?

USDA defines the reportable races. Each racial category can be associated with a specific descent and migration pattern. “Unknown” or “Not Available” is not a choice in WIC.

Racial Categories:

- American Indian/Alaskan Native – American Indian includes North, Central and South American Indians; Alaskan Native includes Eskimo and Aleut
- Asian – includes the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent including Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand and Vietnam
- Black or African American – associated with the black racial groups of African descent and migration patterns.
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander – includes natives of the Hawaiian Islands, Guam, Samoa and other Pacific Islands including the Caroline Islands, Fiji Islands, French Polynesia, Northern Mariana Islands, Palau Islands, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and Tokelau Islands.
- White – associated with European, Middle Eastern or Northern African descent and migration patterns, including the Arabian Peninsula.

What are the options for ethnicity in TWIST?

USDA requires the collection of ethnicity for every participant, but although there are hundreds of different ethnicities, USDA only requires collection of whether a person is Hispanic/Latino or not. “Unknown” or is not an allowable choice.

Ethnic categories:

- **Not** Hispanic or Latino
- Hispanic or Latino

What is Hispanic/Latino?

The term “Hispanic” emerged in the 1970’s and ‘80’s as a term that refers to all Spanish speaking ethnic subgroups. People often are more familiar and comfortable with the use of the word “Latino.”

When asked to identify their ethnicity, many Hispanic ethnic groups will identify with their heritage or country of origin, such as Mexican, Cuban, Salvadoran, Chilean, etc. The word “Hispanic” may not make any sense to people from other countries. You may have to explain what it means.

Who gets to decide the race and ethnicity of the participant?

In all cases, the participant is given the opportunity to select both race and ethnicity. They may need to know their choices or to have the chance to ask questions and get clarification in order to select their race and ethnicity. The WIC staff person’s role is to give them all the information and then let them decide.

Even if you feel that the person is selecting incorrectly based on appearance or on what you know about them, the participant gets to decide what is included in their record.

What do I do if the client decides not to select a race or ethnicity?

USDA has mandated that WIC staff “visually” identify the race and ethnicity of the participant. (See Policy 452, 12.2.1) You only need to pick one race and ethnicity. If someone calls on the phone and chooses not to self-identify, chose “White” and “Not Hispanic” and then update the information when the participant comes to the office for their appointment.

Is the Racial and Ethnic data collected the best reflection of the composition of my agency’s WIC caseload?

The information on race and ethnicity that is collected in TWIST can be used in many ways as an indicator of the make up of your caseload, but it is not a complete picture. Other information that can be combined with race and ethnicity to give a better view of who you are serving might include Language Spoken, Language Written, or Income.

Each person’s culture is a combination of many factors that influence who they are, what they do, how they eat, the health care decisions they make, and the way they want to be treated. No one factor can be used as a definitive indicator or criteria for action.

I feel uncomfortable asking people about their race and ethnicity. What can I do to make this process go more smoothly?

For the most part how you request this information will not change. You will continue to respectfully ask participants to describe their race and ethnicity. Since asking current participants to make changes may cause discomfort for you, Dr. James

Mason, PhD, former Director of the Office of Multicultural Health for the Department of Human Services had the following suggestions. You might want to try one or more of these strategies the next time you are in an awkward situation. Practice with your co-workers to find which ones work best for you.

1. Give the reason for collecting the information.

In other words, tell people why you want to know their race or ethnicity.

Example: In order to better serve the community, we collect racial and ethnic information from every client.

2. Tell them what you are going to do with the information.

Example: We use this information for statistical purposes only. The information we collect is confidential. This does not affect your eligibility for WIC and is not shared with any outside programs or government agencies.

3. Acknowledge that nosy questions are uncomfortable.

Example: I know this is uncomfortable, but we need to ask you your race and ethnicity.

4. Ask permission to ask the question.

Example: Is it okay if I ask you to pick your race?

5. Be humble.

Example: I don't mean to get in your business, but could you tell me if you think of your baby (self) as Hispanic or not?

6. Don't assume a person will identify themselves as Hispanic because they speak Spanish.

Example: Would you consider your child (self) Hispanic/Latino?

7. Give them their choices.

Example: How do you describe yourself? White, Black/African American, Asian, American Indian/Alaskan Native, or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. Pick as many as describe you (your child) best.

8. Ask them if there is a better way to ask the question next time.

You may want to ask for feedback from participants on the best way to ask. Perhaps you could ask every 10th person how they would prefer to be asked for this information.

Example: Just so we can get better at this, how would you like to be asked for this information when you come in to a WIC office?

9. Don't take it personally.

You are just doing your job. Use the opportunity to learn more about the best way to ask.

Example: I am sorry this is so uncomfortable for both of us. I don't want to offend you, but I need this information for your record.

10. Let them know that you will have to select the race and ethnicity to enter in the record if they decide not to self-identify.

Example: I apologize for making you uncomfortable. I don't want to assume what your race and ethnicity is, but I am required to put something in the computer. I will select something, but I would much rather it be your choice.

11. Talk about your experiences at a staff meeting.

Talking to each other about what works best for you will give you some new ideas about ways to approach the issue. If you do ask participants about how they prefer to be asked, you might be surprised at what people from different cultures say.

12. Learn what you can about the cultures of the groups you serve.

You may be able to avoid some discomfort if you find out what is considered polite or appropriate with the different cultural groups you will come in contact with.