LOUISIANA LEGISLATIVE AUDITOR

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Report Highlights

Vendor Regulation – Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children

Louisiana Department of Health – Office of Public Health

Audit Control # 40250038
Performance Audit Services • November 2026

Why We Conducted This Audit

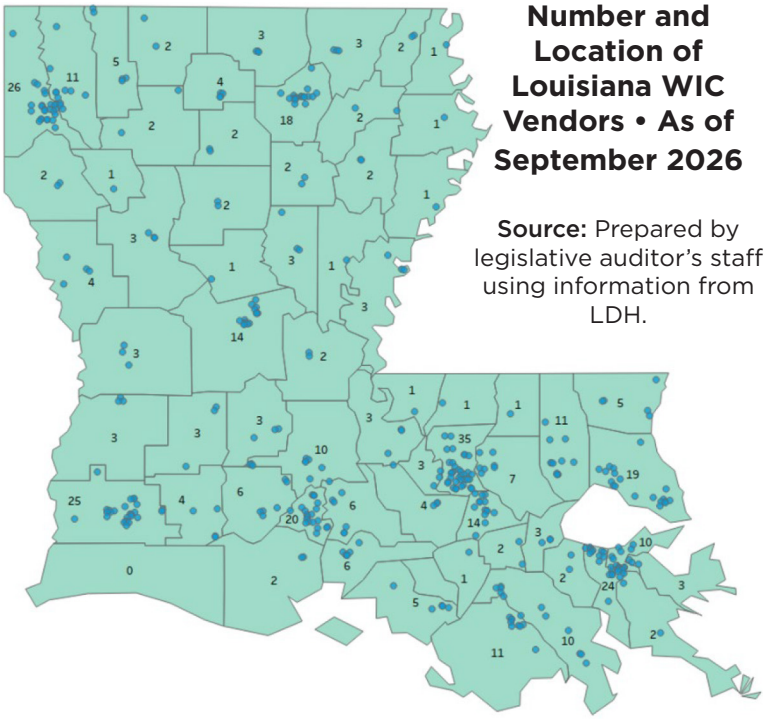
We evaluated the Louisiana Department of Health's (LDH) regulation of vendors for Louisiana's Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). During our audit and until October 1, 2026, the WIC program was administered by LDH's Bureau of Nutrition Services within the Office of Public Health. We conducted this audit because proper vendor regulation is needed to ensure sufficient access to vendors and successful redemption of food benefits which offer essential nutrition to at-risk mothers, infants, and children.

What We Found

Overall, we found LDH could make improvements in its regulation of vendors by updating vendor authorization materials and criteria, ensuring all vendors receive periodic, formal monitoring, and better addressing issues with purchasing WIC-approved foods. These improvements may increase vendor access, which could improve program participation and food benefit redemption rates. Specifically, we found the following:

As of September 2026, Louisiana had 391 authorized WIC vendors serving the state's 109,034 WIC participants (69,057 families), according to LDH.

- **Following the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) moratorium from 2014 through 2017 on Louisiana's ability to add new WIC vendors, the state lost 57.1% of its authorized vendors. Since the moratorium was lifted in 2017, LDH had only increased the number of WIC vendors by 24.5% in state fiscal year 2026. Fewer than half of Louisiana neighborhoods and only 18% of low-income neighborhoods are considered to have convenient access to an authorized WIC vendor.** We found that, on average, households with mothers who gave birth in a given month were 6.0 percentage points less likely to use their WIC benefits that month than other households. Specifically, 81.4% of households without a birth used their WIC benefits that month as compared to 75.4% of households that did experience a birth. The exhibit to the right shows the location of the 391 WIC vendors in Louisiana, along with the number of vendors in each parish, as of September 2026.



Number and Location of Louisiana WIC Vendors • As of September 2026

Source: Prepared by legislative auditor's staff using information from LDH.

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What We Found (Cont.)

- **LDH's vendor application and checklist direct applicants to the vendor requirements, but the materials do not clearly explain exceptions to the state's criteria in underserved areas. As a result, nontraditional vendors in those areas may not apply for authorization because they do not meet all requirements, even if they could qualify for an exception.** In addition, prospective WIC vendors may face delays in initial authorization by as many as four months because of LDH's authorization schedules, which could impact vendor participation.

- **While the USDA does not require state agencies to monitor all vendors at least once during a defined period of time, we found that LDH did not conduct a routine monitoring visit or compliance investigation of 223 (63.9%) of 349 vendors during federal fiscal years 2023 through 2026.** Routine monitoring is important to ensure vendors are providing proper services to WIC participants.

- **LDH could improve WIC shopping experience and participation by better addressing trends in vendor complaint data, as 72.6% of vendor complaints indicated transaction issues such as a participant not being able to complete a WIC purchase at the register.** Addressing these concerns may also increase redemption rates. In addition, the availability of certain products, such as specialty formulas, appears to cause confusion for some participants.

We made eight recommendations, and LDH agreed with all eight recommendations. See Appendix A in the report for LDH's full response.