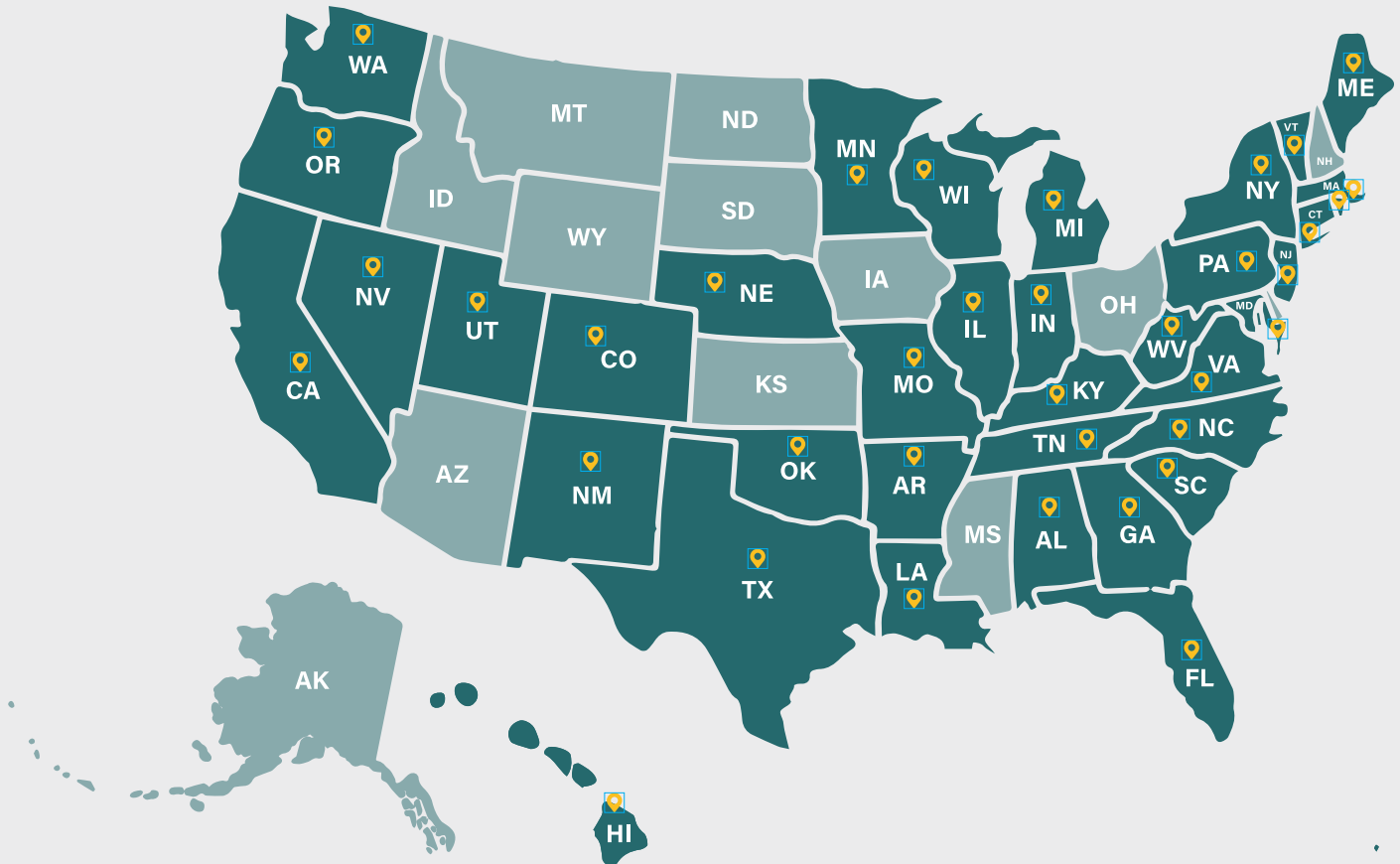


# Putting the Basic Needs of Today's Students on the Map:

A Landscape Analysis of Policies and Strategies Across 37 States



Alabama  
Arkansas  
California  
Colorado  
Connecticut  
Florida  
Georgia  
Hawaii

Illinois  
Indiana  
Kentucky  
Louisiana  
Maine  
Maryland  
Massachusetts  
Michigan

Minnesota  
Missouri  
Nebraska  
Nevada  
New Jersey  
New Mexico  
New York  
North Carolina

Oklahoma  
Oregon  
Pennsylvania  
Rhode Island  
South Carolina  
Tennessee  
Texas  
Utah

Vermont  
Virginia  
Washington  
West Virginia  
Wisconsin



**TODAY'S STUDENTS**  
**COALITION**



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# Acronyms and Abbreviations

<b>ARP</b>	American Rescue Plan
<b>CCAMPIS</b>	Child Care Access Means Parents in School
<b>CCDBG</b>	Child Care and Development Block Grant
<b>CARES</b>	Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act
<b>CRSSA</b>	Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act
<b>DSA</b>	Data sharing agreement
<b>EITC</b>	Earned Income Tax Credit
<b>FAFSA</b>	Free Application for Federal Student Aid
<b>GEER</b>	Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund
<b>HEERF</b>	Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund
<b>IHE</b>	Institution of higher education
<b>SNAP</b>	Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program
<b>SNAP E&amp;T</b>	SNAP Employment & Training program
<b>WIC</b>	Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children
<b>TANF</b>	Temporary Assistance for Needy Families
<b>WIOA</b>	Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act



# Executive Summary

Meeting the basic needs of today's students is an increasing area of focus for colleges and universities and for policymakers. Time and time again, research has shown that student retention, persistence, and completion are strongly influenced by whether students face basic needs insecurity. While many innovations to meet students' basic needs are occurring at the institutional level, state policy can drive more systemic and scalable reforms that can impact more students.

States play a valuable role in ensuring there is a robust infrastructure for the delivery of basic needs resources through a variety of approaches, including, but not limited to, providing grant funding that can increase the equity of the provision of support, changing state policy governing public benefits programs so more students with low incomes can access programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and child care subsidies, and offering professional development on best practices to institutional faculty and staff. Additionally, they can provide funding, well-developed guidance, and set expectations for the quality of services.

**In this landscape analysis, conducted on behalf of the Today's Students Coalition (TSC) by Amy Ellen Duke-Benfield and Richard Davis, Jr., we examine the current state of states' basic needs policy innovations, legislative actions, and programmatic efforts spanning public benefits access, food and housing security, mental health, emergency aid, and child care.** The research presented is a comprehensive study of focus states, but not an

exhaustive review of every state's basic needs policy. Instead, through extensive qualitative interviews with state leaders and advocates, followed by deeper assessment, this report highlights policies and practices that stand out as worthwhile investments and can be instructive for other states.

Provided examples of state approaches throughout this report are currently happening at both a systemic level — those implementing policies intended to impact students' access to basic needs supports across the board — and as approaches to tackle specific areas of need. While analyzed separately in this paper as a way to provide detail on the approaches, there are lessons learned from the analysis as a whole that are critical to gain understanding of the impact and possibility of state policies to improve students' access to basic needs supports.

## What We Learned: A Summary




**Lesson 1: States are actively addressing students' basic needs at a scale much larger than even a few years ago, but policy action varies across states.**

This inconsistency isn't an indicator of concern versus complacency, but due to various factors such as *governance and political environment*—context matters. Several states we contacted did not have any state policies on basic needs, but their institutions offer robust supports. This was especially true in states without a strong centralized governing structure. State university or community college systems can play this role, but it's not universal. A state's political environment also impacts





whether the state has strong state basic needs policies. At times, California, Minnesota, and Washington have led the way in the basic needs space with a higher degree of political receptiveness to state policies that address food and housing insecurity. State policy change may look different in Texas than in New Mexico. It's important to note that many of the laws described in the paper were bipartisan.

 **Lesson 2: Like action, implementation varies across states; just because a state has a law does not mean that the students are benefitting from its implementation.** Some laws are enthusiastically embraced at the local or college level, while others aren't well implemented, requiring subsequent legislation focused on instructing how the legislation will be implemented. California offers an example of this in its efforts to require county human service agencies to designate a liaison for higher education, but we see it in other states, as well. A good law is only as effective as its implementation strategy.

 **Lesson 3: Philanthropy has played a powerful role in seeding and expanding basic needs innovations at the institutional and state levels.** Several foundations, including Annie E. Casey, Ascendium, ECMC, Ford, Gates, Joyce, Lumina, Strada, Trellis, and community foundations, have funded basic needs innovations over the past several years. Five national foundations—Annie E. Casey, Ford, Kresge, Lumina, and the Open Society Foundations—funded the Benefits Access for College Completion demonstration of benefits access activities on community college campuses in the early 2010s, which captured early lessons in benefits hubs, navigators, and an awareness of the importance of making public benefits rules more responsive to the needs of students

with low incomes. The ECMC Foundation has seeded basic needs institutional innovations and funded the development of valuable rubrics to structure high-quality basic needs interventions. The Lumina Foundation has also supported states pursuing basic needs policies to increase racial equity. Several innovations described in this paper started as foundation-funded projects that were then scaled through government funding.

 **Lesson 4: One would be remiss in telling a story about the rise of state basic needs policies without underscoring advocates' importance in initiating and supporting systems change.** Coalitions of advocates, ranging from anti-poverty and higher education advocates to student government associations and businesses, have led the charge in developing benefits navigator legislation in Oregon and basic needs support grants in Michigan. Advocates have emphasized the importance of implementing enacted legislation, seeking out state funding for successful interventions. They have asked states to measure the scale of need to have a foundation for adopting policies to address food and housing insecurity. Policy and systemic solutions would not be possible without advocates.

 **Lesson 5: Although consistently proving their own worth, investments in quality basic needs interventions are expensive.** Policies that scale these interventions are even costlier. We include funding levels in examples to give a sense of the scope of the policy response to the challenge. The infusion of federal dollars into the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF), Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund (GEER), and American Rescue Plan (ARP) played a significant role in funding new state basic needs interventions. Students received essential emergency aid



dollars, while states suddenly found they had money to invest in student mental health and scholarships that covered basic needs expenses for adults. In this report, we consciously focused on those interventions that received state budget dollars because we hope the success of the programs point toward scale and systemic responses. We also celebrate the states that moved from one-time to permanent funding. It's a costly endeavor, but states making the investment realize the outcomes for today's students have even more value than allocated costs. State budgets also play a significant role in the ability of a state to take systemic approaches to student basic needs insecurity. Those with a healthier budget outlook, like Michigan, can pursue significant policies, while others, like Illinois, may have to delay funding or take a less ambitious approach.



**Lesson 6: Advancing racial equity requires addressing student basic needs insecurity.** Today's students are diverse—42% are not white alone. These students largely [enroll in postsecondary education and training at lower rates](#) than white students, but also stop out or drop out at much higher rates. Hispanic, Latino, and Black students are [more likely to leave college](#) without a degree than their white counterparts. Although a number of factors can come into play when students decide to leave school, oftentimes basic needs insecurity plays a factor. A [recent survey](#)

shows finances are the primary concern facing students who drop out. Some of the financial challenges these students have include meeting the cost of tuition (53%) and the cost of additional expenses including books, living costs, and food (50%). These stresses affect students of color disproportionately. Students of color are [more likely](#) to experience hunger and homelessness, take on student debt, and face a higher rate of unmet need than white students. In 2020, [rates of basic needs insecurity](#) were highest among Indigenous, Native American, and Black students. If states are committed to increasing completion rates and prosperity for all residents—particularly students of color—investments in policies to address student basic needs are a necessity.

### Looking Ahead

We hope the state policy innovations highlighted in this paper represent the tip of the iceberg of what states will accomplish over the next several years. There are innovations at the campus level across the country, and the call to meet all of students' needs as a means to increase completion is a widespread national conversation. By folding campus innovations into state policy, we hope states will have longer-term, more systemic impacts that don't depend on the wealth of the institution or student body. Policy change at the state level faces numerous barriers, but in talking to state policymakers and advocates across the country, we are hopeful.



## Further Analysis

The federal government also has a critical role to play in increasing students' access to basic needs supports. TSC and its member organizations have written in the past about [federal policies](#) that address student basic needs insecurity and highlight how [federal](#) and state governments and institutions can [increase access to public benefits](#).

Particular recommendations to the federal government included:

- 1 Allow states and institutions to better use Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) information to connect students with means-tested programs.
- 2 Increase funding for programs supporting emergency aid, mental health, and broadband access.
- 3 Expand or streamline students' eligibility for means-tested programs, such as SNAP and Low-Income Housing Tax Credit.



# States Address Basic Needs with Broad Strategies

**States Highlighted: Hawaii, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Virginia, and Washington**

## Basic Needs Surveys, Studies, and Strategic Plans

Understanding the prevalence of need and the specific challenges students face in a particular state can be crucial in addressing these barriers. Guided by the pioneering work and best practices of organizations such as the [Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice](#) at Temple University (formerly the Wisconsin Hope Lab) and the [Trellis Company](#), states are now embarking on their own journeys of assessing their students' basic needs. Armed with data, institutions, higher education systems, and state higher education agencies have been able to make the case for more investments in basic needs.

### Basic Needs Surveys

**Massachusetts** has a more extended history of acknowledging and addressing student basic needs insecurity than many states. In 2018, the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education (DHE) and the Wisconsin HOPE Lab jointly released the results of the first state-level study of food and housing insecurity and homelessness among college students. This research led the state to develop creative housing solutions (addressed in the housing section) for students in the few years following the study. In 2020, the Massachusetts Commissioner of Higher Education charged members of a [Basic Needs Security Advisory Committee](#) with making recommendations on how to address students' growing economic

insecurity. Until recently, DHE had a Director of Basic Needs Security on staff.

In Fall 2022, the **Washington** Student Achievement Council conducted a [basic needs survey](#) to better grasp the extent of challenges such as food insecurity, housing insecurity, homelessness, and other obstacles students face throughout their postsecondary journeys. The survey engaged over 9,000 students across 39 higher education institutions, broadly representing students of color, students with low incomes, and first-generation students. Among the findings, the state identified regions with higher rates of basic needs insecurity and assessed students' awareness of available public and campus resources. The analysis also facilitated targeted resource allocation to the areas with the highest need and enhanced outreach efforts to connect students with basic needs support.

In 2022, partially funded by the **New Mexico** Governor's Food Initiative, a team of faculty and students at the University of New Mexico conducted a year-long [survey](#) of the prevalence of food and housing insecurity at 27 colleges and universities across the state, including 17 two-year, seven four-year, and three tribal institutions. This assessment was unique in that it surveyed both students, faculty, and staff. While the data was striking and showed that most campus communities were struggling with basic needs insecurity, the survey results led to the creation of a formal statewide consortium of schools, government, and community





advocates to achieve change. The [New Mexico Basic Needs Consortium](#) is joined together in a belief that by pooling their efforts, sharing best practices, and presenting a unified call for resources, their efforts will be more effective than working in isolation.



## What we want to fix we must first measure.”

— Sarita Vargas, associate professor at the University of New Mexico (UNM) Honors College

### *State-Led Studies and Strategic Plans*

Some state leaders, including governors, state legislatures, and state higher education agencies, are using their convening power to develop working groups of higher education stakeholders and other state agency leaders. The government has sometimes tasked these groups with gathering information about campus-level basic needs activities. Other states have requested the development of comprehensive strategic plans to address basic needs insecurity at institutional and policy levels. Not all have led to significant change; some depend on the political environment and breadth of buy-in for substantive policy and institutional practice changes. Many of these examples represent time-consuming behind-the-scenes work by institutions of higher education (IHEs), students, and advocates to build the political will for leadership to request the development of a study or working group.

A handful of state legislatures, including **Tennessee** and **Oregon** have supported the development of studies, working groups, and strategic plans.

Initiated by a [legislative mandate](#), the **Tennessee** Higher Education Commission (THEC) conducted a [statewide assessment](#) in 2022 focusing on food insecurity’s prevalence within the state’s postsecondary institutions. By assessing the knowledge and experiences of campus administrators, THEC was able to highlight the [current landscape](#) of interventions and services in place to combat food insecurity among the state’s students. Additionally, THEC convened a group of diverse stakeholders, including practitioners, researchers, and policy advocates who drove the scope of the statewide assessment and informed the commission’s [recommendations](#) to the General Assembly that focus on policy, practice, and research.

In 2018, the **Oregon** legislature passed [HB 4043](#), which directed stakeholders to conduct a legislative study and determine the best methods for community college students to learn about and apply for state or federal programs that offer financial or other benefits, as well as align these public benefits to better support students with low incomes. Oregon’s governor’s office, Department of Human Services (DHS), Employment Department, Housing and Community Services, and Department of Corrections were involved in the initiative, along with the state’s 17 community colleges, Higher Education Coordinating Commission, and anti-poverty advocates. The agencies examined various public benefit programs, but focused on SNAP, housing assistance, child care assistance, and the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC); policies that would most support community college students with low incomes. The legislation, which resulted in a 2019 [study](#), codified the state’s [Pathways to Opportunity Initiative](#). Outcomes included developing and deepening partnerships between community colleges and state higher education leadership with local DHS partners, workforce providers,



anti-poverty advocates, and community-based organizations. They leveraged and maximized state investments, and staff and faculty were provided professional development to increase poverty-informed approaches and awareness of federal, state, and local resources to support students.

### *Strategic Change Driven by Governors*

Pennsylvania's governor [announced](#) the Office of Postsecondary and Higher Education's [PA MASLOW](#) initiative addressing student basic needs in 2023. The cross-agency partnership recognizes the impact of [Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs](#) on student success. There are seven pillars of work:

- Digital equity
- Mental health
- Financial, housing, and transportation
- Physical health (including hunger)
- Adult student needs
- Safety and belonging

The state held an initial PA MASLOW convening of basic needs stakeholders, including state officials, faculty, staff, students, and advocates, in 2023, hoping to hold the meeting annually.

### *Other States with Basic Needs Plans*

States with student basic needs plans also include **Hawaii** and **New Jersey**. The University of Hawaii (UH) Student Basic Needs Committee was formed in 2019 by the UH chancellor to better understand and address basic needs insecurity in the system, which oversees the state's two- and four-year public institutions. In 2021, the UH system hired a Basic Needs Coordinator, implemented a course syllabi statement, launched a [basic needs website](#), and released basic needs survey results. In 2022, the UH System Student Basic Needs Master Plan was finalized. **New Jersey** produced a [playbook](#) to enhance New Jersey college student access

to food, housing, and other basic needs supports. The state Office of the Secretary of Higher Education also developed an outreach and social media toolkit. It launched a [basic needs website](#), a directory of statewide resources for IHEs to help meet their students' basic needs.

## **Basic Needs Centers and Navigators**

**States Highlighted: California, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, and Oregon**

In response to widespread basic needs insecurity among their students, colleges developed basic needs centers and benefit navigators to help connect students to public benefits and other resources to address basic needs insecurity. Basic needs centers, also known as benefit hubs or one-stop centers, may house a single point of contact on campus, such as a coordinator or navigator, to educate students about benefits, demystify and simplify the benefits access process, and connect students to benefits. The resource also aims to address basic needs insecurity more broadly by connecting students to other community- or campus-based resources. Both centers and navigators seek to better serve students through a holistic support approach that addresses students' non-academic needs to ensure they have the support they need to succeed in postsecondary education and training.

As with many state basic needs policies, basic needs centers and benefits navigators were developed at the institutional level first — then scaled at the state level. However, many colleges cannot sustain basic needs centers or navigators at scale through internal funding sources. State policymakers play a role in addressing students' basic needs by funding basic needs centers and using



approaches similar to the benefits navigator model. Over the past several years, **Illinois, Indiana, Oregon, Kentucky, and California** have enacted and implemented benefits needs centers or navigators.

**Oregon's** efforts to put a benefits navigator at every public Oregon college began with a pilot program. With state funding, four community colleges established benefit navigator positions on their campuses to assist students in accessing public benefits. Oregon's colleges and universities prioritized a statewide benefit navigator program, culminating in the passage of [legislation](#) in 2021 primarily due to the [actions of a coalition of Oregon anti-hunger advocates, student-led groups, and higher education leaders](#). The law requires and funds all public colleges and universities to establish the position of benefits navigator to help students apply for and receive assistance from benefits programs. Colleges must also participate in a statewide community of practice to share best practices and coordinate

and provide culturally specific resources to support students. The Oregon State Legislature allocated \$5 million over two years to establish benefit navigators at 17 community colleges and seven public universities.

**Kentucky** is the newest state to put benefits navigators on its campuses. Funded by the state's Cabinet for Health and Family Services with Medicaid dollars, "Kynectors" assist students in applying for Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program, Affordable Care Act healthcare marketplace subsidies, SNAP, and child care subsidies. The Kynectors are on every community and technical college campus, as well as two universities, with a plan to expand to other four-year institutions. As with other states' benefits navigators, they meet regularly as a community of practice.

In 2021, **California** enacted [legislation](#) requiring California community colleges to establish basic needs centers and basic needs coordinators to help California community colleges provide



**More students today are parents, first-generation, veterans, or immigrants who are struggling for food, housing, and other basic necessities... They often qualify for a variety of supports, but our systems are so complex that finding the benefits often becomes another obstacle. That's where the Benefits Navigators — now on all public universities and community colleges — step in to guide students toward the resources they need to survive and thrive."** — Rep. Jeff Reardon, Oregon's 48th District



comprehensive basic needs services to reduce equity and achievement gaps among traditionally underrepresented student populations across California. The legislation allocated \$30 million annually to the California Community College system for basic needs centers and basic needs coordinators. It provided \$100 million in one-time funding over three years to address food and housing insecurity. The basic needs centers

have a broad mandate, responsible not only for helping students navigate public benefits access but for serving as the single point of contact for students experiencing basic needs insecurity and referring those students to both on- and off-campus supports. In recent years, the sustained funding to the community college system for basic needs centers has increased to \$54 million annually.



## Further Analysis

In 2023, **Washington** enacted the [Postsecondary Basic Needs Act](#). The legislation reflected years of effort to address student basic needs insecurity at the local college and university level and an increasing number of politicians' awareness of the severity of the problem. In 2021, the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) released a survey showing that 41% of community and technical college students in Washington faced food insecurity in 2019. During the same period, the United Way of King County (Seattle) developed a benefits hub model across 10 community college campuses to meet students' basic needs. The hubs house benefits navigators who provide a single coordinated access point for basic needs support services. Policymakers saw the opportunity to more holistically respond to student basic needs insecurity and scale an innovative practice through the Basic Needs Act.

The law established the benefits navigator grant program at the State Board of Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) and created a pilot program for free and reduced-price meals (described elsewhere in the report). It also created student basic needs task forces at the SBCTC, each of the public four-year IHEs, and the tribal college. The law instructs the task forces to:

- Collect and disseminate results of the biennial student basic needs survey developed by WSAC.
- Design a benefits hub to assist students in accessing public benefits, emergency financial resources, and other resources using a full-time navigator.
- Ensure access to a campus food pantry.
- Conduct outreach targeted at students likely to be low income and food insecure.
- Identify opportunities for community partnerships.

In response to the legislation, WSAC has developed a basic needs strategic planning learning community to help institutions create their basic needs strategic plan.



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## Public Benefits Access

**States Highlighted: Alabama, Arkansas, California, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Missouri, Tennessee, Washington, and West Virginia**

There are numerous ways states can provide students with access to public benefits, like SNAP and subsidized child care, to address basic needs insecurity. States are developing creative solutions to ensure students with low incomes receive the benefits they need to succeed, whether by using technology or sharing data to streamline access, conducting direct outreach from the state level, or building stronger partnerships between institutions of higher education and county and state social service and health agencies. Some states are also leveraging the flexibility they have in administering public benefits.

### *Increasing Student Awareness About and Applications for Public Benefits*

**Alabama** is developing a FAFSA integration tool to increase student knowledge about public benefits. The state analyzed eligibility rules for state and federal public benefits programs and student financial aid to build an automated system to determine which programs students *may* be eligible for and provide information about the next steps the student can take to apply for benefits. The student notification will include links to applications and aims to make the handoff to other agencies as seamless as possible. Alabama is piloting the tool with low-income independent students with dependents, a population with the most significant potential eligibility for means-tested benefits.

Several state financial aid and higher education agencies conducted SNAP outreach to students with low incomes during the COVID-19

pandemic. They sought to educate students about how SNAP student eligibility rules had been expanded to include students with an Expected Family Contribution (EFC) of zero and those who qualified for work-study. Some continued such outreach after the pandemic and expanded eligibility ended. The [Massachusetts Department of Higher Education](#) recently sent more letters to 140,000 students who filled out a FAFSA application for the 2024-25 school year to inform them of their potential SNAP eligibility and application instructions.

**Tennessee** has added benefits access to the supports available through the Tennessee Reconnect Program, a statewide initiative to help more adults attend a community or technical college tuition-free. [One-TN-Connection](#) is a simple screener that shows which public assistance programs one may qualify for and where to apply. Several other states use screeners to help students with low incomes apply for public benefits, but only some build one into the process as seamlessly as Tennessee does.

Previously, **Missouri** built a partnership called [DSS on Campus](#) between the Missouri Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development, the Department of Social Services, and several Missouri institutions across the state to place caseworkers on campuses to ease student access to social services and public benefits. Students could apply for public assistance, such as SNAP, health care, child care, energy assistance, and child support; seek help from child welfare services; access counseling; and support services for job training. The program was ended due to resource constraints.

**Arkansas** had a similar program housing Department of Human Services staff at its 22 community colleges until funding expired two years ago.



## Further Analysis

In the 2021-22 legislative session, [California](#) passed AB1326, requiring county human service agencies to designate at least one Department of Social Services (DSS) staff person to be a liaison for higher education in each of its counties. California administers its public benefits at the county level, so when connecting students to public benefits, the colleges and universities interface with the county instead of state staff. The DSS liaison was intended to serve as a point of contact and provide information on programs and services offered by DSS. Some California colleges and universities had already established relationships with their county DSS as part of their benefits access activities. Still, these relationships had never been formalized statewide, so some students benefited from close connections while others were out of luck when troubleshooting their SNAP application.

Even with the legislation, stakeholders felt implementation fell short of the legislation's intent, with varying levels of expertise among the liaisons and a lack of shared understanding of what comprises a high-quality county-college relationship. With advocacy by state IHEs and students, [AB 2150](#), which would establish a formal working group for the 58 county liaisons, is moving through the California legislature. The legislation seeks to “eliminate inconsistency in rejections and acceptances of student public benefits applications, breakdown silos to share best practices, examine data and trends for success...and convene a work group that meets quarterly” comprised of the 58 liaisons, at least four campus basic needs directors, leadership from each of the California higher education systems, and other relevant stakeholders.

### *Data Sharing Agreements*

State higher education and financial aid agencies and IHEs can enter into data sharing agreements (DSAs) with state and county public benefits agencies to match cross-program data and automate cross-program referrals. DSAs can allow state and county public benefits agencies to identify who is or is not receiving financial aid or public benefits and study the impact of benefit receipt on postsecondary persistence and completion. The state or county social service or higher education agency can use that information to reach out to students directly for enrollment or to pre-populate forms so students aren't repeatedly providing the same information. Then, the IHE or agency can contact students to collect additional information. A handful of states are

pursuing this capability, including Kentucky, Massachusetts, and Washington.

The **Washington** Student Achievement Council (WSAC) has a DSA with the Washington Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS), the state's SNAP agency. One of WSAC's goals is to increase access for recipients of the state financial aid program — the Washington College Grant (WA Grant) — to means-tested public benefits. One DSA will provide WSAC with confirmation that a student receiving the WA Grant does not receive SNAP or other state benefits, which DSHS administers. With this information, colleges can provide targeted outreach and support to students not receiving SNAP or other benefits. Another DSA will increase access to the WA Grant for recipients





of some means-tested public benefits, including high school students in families receiving SNAP.

The **Kentucky** Community and Technical College System has a DSA to match cross-program data with the Department of Community-Based Services, which will provide institution-based benefits navigators with the information to conduct targeted outreach to students who may be eligible but are not receiving public benefits. The Kentucky Center for Statistics is analyzing postsecondary outcomes for students receiving public benefits.

### *Maximizing the Flexibility of Federal SNAP rules*

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the primary federal program that offers nutrition assistance to eligible low-income individuals and families. However, many

students struggle to access these benefits due to complicated eligibility rules and insufficient outreach. For students with low incomes, removing barriers to SNAP access can reduce food insecurity and [improve student success](#). Research has identified significant student confusion and misunderstandings about SNAP eligibility due to complex student eligibility rules. SNAP provides exemptions that allow some students enrolled at least half-time to meet eligibility requirements defined by the federal government. In addition to meeting SNAP's regular income, household, and immigration status requirements, students must meet at least one of the additional eligibility criteria. However, states have some flexibility in interpreting these requirements.

A [Government Accountability Office](#) report on college student food insecurity showed that fewer than half of the 3.3 million potentially



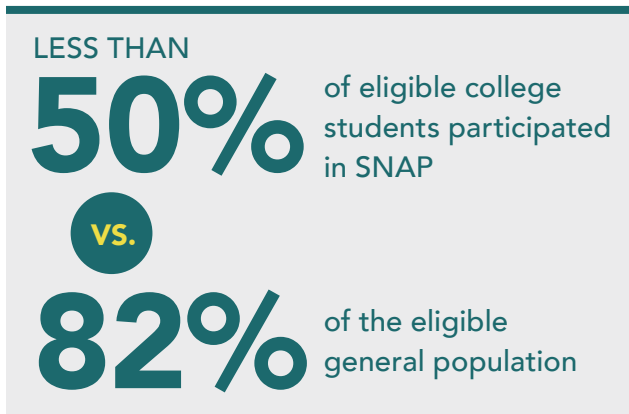
## Further Analysis

Data Sharing Agreements can be encouraged and enabled by the Federal Government. In January 2022, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) encouraged institutions of higher education to connect students to means-tested benefits, and issued a Dear Colleague Letter "Use of FAFSA Data to Administer Federal Programs" (the DCL) addressing how FAFSA data could be used to inform students of their potential eligibility for public benefits. The intent of the DCL was simple: by using the information that students have already provided on the FAFSA, financial aid administrators and other campus stakeholders are able to conduct targeted and personalized outreach to students and significantly simplify their access to benefits for which they are eligible. In July 2024, ED issued [additional guidance](#) underscoring that FAFSA data, notably the Student Aid Index and Pell Grant eligibility, can be used by institutions and state agencies for outreach to students about a broad range of public benefits programs. Previously, there had been some ambiguity about state agencies' role in outreach.

But a [recent survey](#) conducted by Higher Learning Advocates, which transitioned its work in June 2024 to operate under Today's Students Coalition, and the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA) found that less than one-third of institutions surveyed were conducting the type of outreach that is permitted under the DCL and more than 40% reported they had no plans to do so in the future.



eligible for SNAP participated in the program, far less than the 82% participation rate in the general population.



While many students may qualify for SNAP, schools or state SNAP agencies typically need to make a deliberate effort to focus on benefits access to ensure they make eligible students aware of the program and support them in the enrollment process. Students are not subject to student eligibility rules when participating in *programs equivalent to Employment and Training components operated by a state or local government*. To deem specific programs eligible at scale, higher education institutions and agencies can work with SNAP agencies

to identify broad categories of courses and programs at colleges that could be determined equivalent to an Employment and Training program. Examples include career and technical education courses defined in the Perkins Act or approved career pathway programs. [Several states have deemed specific career-oriented postsecondary programs equivalent to an Employment and Training program through state legislation or regulation following approval from the U.S. Department of Agriculture](#), including [California](#), [Illinois](#), [Maine](#), [Massachusetts](#), [New Jersey](#), [New York](#), [Oregon](#), and [Pennsylvania](#).

In 2010, [Massachusetts](#) pursued a state option allowing community college students to qualify for SNAP if their certificate or associate degree program is considered a “career or technical education” program or if the college determines the student will be more employable with the degree or certificate. In 2018, [Pennsylvania](#) adopted a similar policy. It expanded SNAP access for community college students enrolled in career and technical education programs or where the college determined the student would be more employable.



## Further Analysis

[Washington](#) and [West Virginia](#) have made it easier for students receiving public benefits to qualify for state financial aid. As noted earlier, Washington’s legislature passed a bill in 2024 that allows high school students who receive SNAP to qualify for a maximum Washington College Grant. [SNAP receipt](#) serves as proxy for income information and allows families to bypass a separate application for state aid. In [West Virginia](#), the governor recently temporarily suspended the requirement for students to complete the FAFSA in order to qualify for the state’s largest financial aid programs and instead made those students who received SNAP, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Medicaid, the Children’s Health Insurance Program, or subsidized child care automatically eligible for the state’s Promise Scholarship and the Higher Education Grant Program. These are promising practices for states that seek to streamline access to aid for those students receiving public benefits.





## Broad Basic Needs Funding

### **States Highlighted: Michigan and Rhode Island**

While many state governments explicitly appropriate state revenue dollars for institutions of higher education to address student food and housing insecurity and some Hunger-Free Campus funding can be used for a broader set of supports than food pantries, it is rare for states to provide funding directly to IHEs for basic needs more generally. However, two states, **Michigan** and **Rhode Island**, have starkly different programs but similar aims, providing IHEs flexibility to tailor support to student basic needs, whether that be technology, child care, or food and housing, and building the infrastructure for colleges to do so.

Last year, the **Michigan** legislature appropriated [\\$45 million](#) for a student success grant initiative, including \$12 million to address basic needs. The funding, which had bipartisan support, reflects strong support from the business community and the governor's commitment to achieving the goal of 60% of Michiganders having a postsecondary credential by 2030.

It is being [administered](#) by the Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement, and Potential Office of Sixty by 30. Public colleges and universities, including tribal colleges and nonprofits working closely with higher education, are eligible. Two pots of money—\$12 million—will be awarded to address

what the state is calling “barrier removal.” The first will go directly to students (via institutions) to address barriers to postsecondary success, including emergency aid, child care, transportation, housing, food, and internet access. Seven million dollars will be distributed to institutions based on their percentage of Pell-eligible students. The second portion of funding—\$5 million—is a competitive grant intended to grow institutional capacity to eliminate barriers for students struggling to meet their basic needs. Grants will range from \$100,000-400,000, and awardees will have up to three years to spend on their awards. Award criteria of the institutional barrier removal programs include building institutional capacity, strengthening community partnerships, and supporting cross-silo communications and collaborations. The grant also provides for the option of funds for planning.

A small number of states are trying to address student basic needs through the provision of wrap-around supports. RI Reconnect, currently funded at \$8 million over three years, provides basic needs and support for non-tuition costs to adults 21 and older in **Rhode Island** pursuing a postsecondary certificate or degree. Educational navigators assess student needs, advise students on their pathways and the transition to postsecondary and can provide funding for various services, including food, child care, counseling, internet access, and car repairs. The navigators also check in with students every other week to help ensure they stay on course.



## Further Analysis

The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s [SNAP Employment & Training program](#) (SNAP E&T) funds training, education, or work experience to improve the employability of SNAP participants. Along with a small grant funding program for each state, SNAP E&T reimburses 50% of service provider funds invested in countable activities for SNAP recipients.

SNAP E&T can fund many postsecondary costs that can improve student success, such as career counseling, tutoring and mentoring, case management, internships, apprenticeships, job placement services, and help with student tuition, books, transportation, and dependent care. SNAP E&T can also allow students subject to student eligibility rules to qualify for SNAP. Several states have built more robust SNAP E&T programs in conjunction with community colleges, including [California](#) (Fresh Success), [Connecticut](#) (SNAP E&T), [Louisiana](#), [Oregon](#) (STEP-SNAP Training and Employment Program), [Washington](#) (Basic Food Employment and Training), and [Virginia](#) (SNAP 50-50 Program).

## State Working Groups and Communities of Practice

**States Highlighted: Arkansas, Kentucky, Minnesota, and South Carolina**

Many significant innovations are happening in the student basic needs space at the institutional level. However, given the nature of the work and lack of state resources, much of this work and the lessons learned from these efforts are siloed. One area of promise has been to create state working groups and communities of practice and convenings where stakeholders across a given state can come together to assess the scope of the challenge, brainstorm new policy ideas, and learn about best practices. While some state coordinating systems have formal basic needs working groups tackling more systemic challenges, nearly all states with basic needs hubs and benefits coordinators and navigators discussed earlier in the report have communities of practice.

### State Working Groups

In 2022-23, the [Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education](#) undertook [a year-long project](#) focused on student basic needs

research and strategy development. Largely underwritten by the Lumina Foundation, the research phase included an analysis of benefit participation rates among students, research on the availability and effectiveness of campus basic needs programs, and a public benefits policy scan. The working group—the [Student Basic Needs Action Network](#)—comprised 53 stakeholders representing state agencies, nonprofit organizations, community colleges, public and private universities, workforce investment boards, and other critical education stakeholders. The group’s goal is to identify challenges and opportunities among institutions and community partners, with a focus on increasing access to basic needs support for students. Designed to be a monthly virtual meeting that is widely accessible, the group meets to share promising practices, discuss challenges, and improve the ecosystem of support available to students.

The Network arrived at eight priority recommendations that include increasing access to basic needs support and increasing postsecondary access for those individuals receiving public benefits. Recommendations include:



- Implementing basic needs screening and benefits eligibility
- Reviewing state benefit programs to increase flexibility for postsecondary students
- Increasing IHE capacity to provide basic needs support
- Providing training and professional development
- Identifying solutions to address the lack of child care availability and affordability, among others

The **Minnesota** legislature enacted and [funded](#) a [Postsecondary Student Basic Needs working group](#) in the 2023 legislation session, with a report due to the legislature in September 2024. The working group has 55 cross-functional members, which include representatives from the various Minnesota higher education systems, including tribal colleges and universities, student organizations, faculty and staff, community-based organizations, and state agencies. Membership covers rural and urban areas of the state, and student participants in the working group receive stipends for their participation. Subgroups include transportation, child care, housing, food, mental health, health care, and financial stability. The working group is expected to make specific recommendations on strategies to meet students' basic needs and include proposals for substantive and technical amendments to state law and policy changes

for the state Office of Higher Education and IHEs. State officials noted that the working group has been effective in breaking down silos between agencies and corralling support for basic needs policies.

### **Stakeholder Communities of Practice**

In February 2024, the University of **South Carolina** hosted its annual [Carolinas College Food Insecurity Summit](#), which brings together a diverse group of educators, students, community leaders, and professionals from across North and South Carolina, focused on addressing food insecurity among students. With a goal to address the critical issue of food insecurity on college campuses across both North and South Carolina, participants were able to gain insights from experts and practitioners on best practices and collaborate to develop actionable solutions.

The **Arkansas** Hunger Relief Alliance, a community-based organization, has hosted an annual [College Hunger Summit](#) for the past three years. The summit aims to raise awareness in the fight against college hunger and bring together stakeholders, including colleges and universities, students, community advocates, and lawmakers to learn from each other. A critical component of the summit is also an opportunity for individuals to get trained on how to conduct outreach on SNAP to students who may be eligible.



**There is a need for continued and enhanced collaboration across state agencies, community-based organizations, and postsecondary institutions to share data and information, co-create policy, provide training, connect community resources, and promote postsecondary opportunities."**

— Kentucky's Strategies and Recommendations to Address Students' Basic Needs



# States Help Today's Students Through Targeted Supports

**States Highlighted: Alabama, California, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Washington, and West Virginia**

## Food Insecurity

According to the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS: 20), 23% of community college students and 22% of students at public four-year institutions reported low or very low food security in the last 30 days. Both rates were more than double the food insecurity rate among all U.S. households. A [2023 report from Tennessee](#) found that students experiencing food insecurity are less likely than their peers to excel academically and more likely to report feeling high levels of stress. Also, food-insecure students are less likely to get adequate sleep and more likely to report anxiety and emotional distress. Several states have adopted legislation or developed programs to address student hunger.

## Hunger-Free Campuses

Since 2017, [Swipe Out Hunger](#) has worked with advocates and partnered with nearly 20 states to introduce or pass legislation establishing a [Hunger-Free Campus](#) (HFC) program. Since the passage of its first iteration in California, states have adjusted and customized these programs to meet the unique needs of their students. While each program varies, each is centered around incentivizing schools to address food insecurity through food pantries, awareness campaigns, and connecting students to public benefits programs such as SNAP. Some state HFC laws allow funding to be used for basic needs beyond hunger. Institutions with this documented work can apply for a hunger-free campus designation and earn grant funding to streamline their efforts.

## Further Analysis

In a [Johns Hopkins University](#) study of food insecurity's effect on graduation outcomes, students from food-insecure households were 43% less likely to graduate from college, including with an associate degree; 43% less likely to attain a bachelor's degree; and 61% less likely to attain a graduate or professional degree, compared to non-food-insecure students. These results were more pronounced for first-generation students as food-insecure first-generation students were less likely to graduate compared to first-generation students who were food-secure — 47.2% to 59.3%.





More than \$112 million has been distributed through HFC legislation. States that have either introduced or passed HFC legislation include **Alabama, California, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Washington, and West Virginia**. While each state is different, the funding appropriated to the grant program varies widely and can impact the program's effectiveness. Although [Pennsylvania](#) never passed the legislation, in 2022 the governor championed the program, providing \$1 million in state funding that has been reauthorized and allows some grants to be as high as \$60,000. Proving that hunger is a bipartisan issue, the [legislation](#) was [championed](#) by Republican leadership in the **West Virginia** legislature earlier this year, but it did not pass.

### State-Funded Food Security Grants

In 2022, **New Mexico**'s Higher Education Department [awarded \\$900,000 to its colleges and universities](#) to ensure students have the nutrition they need to succeed in school. Coined as "Student Food Security Grants," this funding was provided to 15 campus-based student food security projects anticipated to support more than 15,000 students. These projects focused on establishing or expanding food pantries, food hubs, and food education programs. The agency also prioritized funding for campuses committed to establishing partnerships with local food banks, helping students access state and federal food assistance such as SNAP, awarding emergency aid grants, and leading hunger awareness activities to reduce stigma.

### Free and Reduced-Priced Meals for Postsecondary Students

In 2023, the **Washington** State Legislature passed the [Postsecondary Basic Needs Act](#), which includes a three-year pilot program to provide free and low-cost meal plans or food vouchers to eligible college students with low incomes. Four community colleges and two universities were selected to participate in the pilot. Each pilot institution has a unique project designed to increase students' access to food through proactive approaches. Funding is appropriated to the [community college system](#) at \$960,000 annually for FY24-FY26; colleges may request up to \$240,000 annually. Allowable expenses can include but are not limited to:

- Free or reduced-price food vouchers
- Pre-paid meal cards
- Access to free or reduced-price food or similar, as well as program design and implementation staffing

A [2022 basic needs insecurity survey](#) of nearly 10,000 students in 39 Washington public institutions found that 37% of baccalaureate students and 39% of community college students reported experiencing food insecurity in the last 30 days.

**37%**

of baccalaureate students and

**39%**

of community college students experienced **food insecurity** in the last 30 days



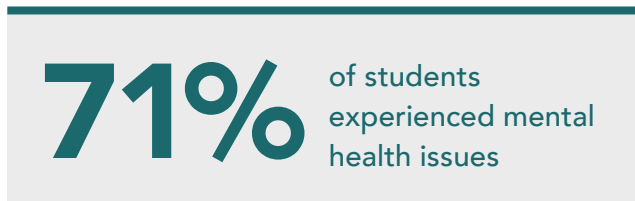


## Mental Health

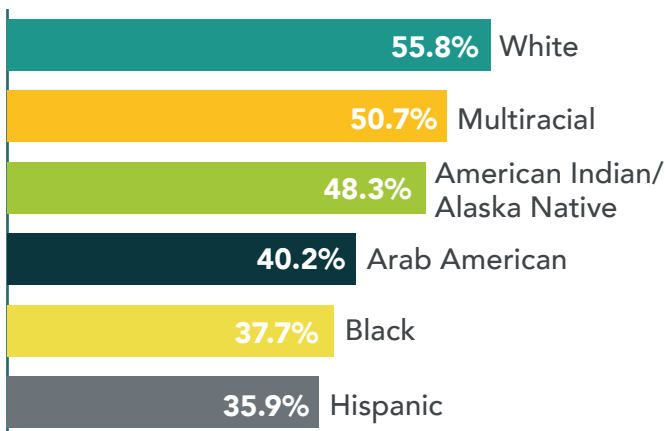
**States Highlighted: Connecticut, Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Oregon, Texas, Utah, and Wisconsin**

College students have always struggled with mental health challenges; however, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the prevalence of students seeking counseling services has significantly increased. Recent [research](#) on community college students found that mental health conditions are the most significant predictor of persistence and credit accumulation.

In Fall 2023, [71% of students](#) admitted to experiencing mental health issues such as stress, anxiety, and/or depression.



While students of color have been found to exhibit higher rates of mental health challenges in comparison to their white peers, they're less likely to seek out mental health treatment.



As states and institutions grapple with the increased demand for services, several have partnered with third-party providers, including

[BetterMynd](#), [Uwill](#), and [TBH](#), to offer students low or no-cost virtual counseling. The infusion of Federal HEERF dollars allowed several higher education systems, including the **Wisconsin** Community and Technical College System, the [Virginia Community College System](#), and the **New Jersey** Office of the Secretary of Higher Education to start these partnerships.

States have also leveraged interagency funding and partnerships and unfunded legislative mandates as frameworks to build upon when addressing the mental health needs of their students and campus communities. Other states, including **Oregon** and **Utah**, have focused on coordinating effective crisis response, while **Maryland** is addressing the financial challenge facing students who drop out due to an acute mental health crisis. Several states, including **Texas**, are also working to increase the supply of health care workers, including behavioral health care workers. **Georgia** passed bipartisan legislation in 2024 to increase its behavioral health workforce by [expediting the licensing process](#) for relocating therapists and offering [loan forgiveness](#) for mental health workers in underserved or hard-hit areas.

### Further Analysis



Federal funding to address mental health needs among postsecondary students is sparse when considering the scale of need, which places all the more pressure on state funding. The Garrett Lee Smith Campus Suicide Prevention Grants—federal grants to IHEs for suicide prevention and to bolster their mental health and substance use disorder services on campus—are the only federal funds specifically supporting the mental health needs of students in higher education. Congress authorized only \$8.5 million in FY 2023.





### *Funding to Fill in the Gaps*

In 2019, following efforts from advocates, the **Illinois** General Assembly passed the [Mental Health Early Action on Campus Act](#) into law.

The law was intended to address gaps in mental health services on college campuses across Illinois through training, peer support, and community-campus partnerships. Though the bill was passed the same year it was introduced, no funding was appropriated to drive its efforts. Instead, the state sent out a survey to Illinois' higher education institutions requesting information on how well their current mental health programs at each institution meet the eleven mental health goals identified in the Act and how much additional funding would be necessary to implement the law comprehensively. While [the state found](#) that schools would need between \$18 million to \$19 million per year, the Illinois General Assembly [appropriated \\$6.6 million and over \\$9 million](#) toward its implementation in FY 2023 and FY 2024, respectively.

### *Leveraging State Interagency Funding and Partnerships*

In 2022, the **Louisiana** Department of Health provided a one-time investment to the Louisiana Board of Regents to supplement campus mental health services for their students. The funding allocations were based on enrollment at each public institution. The money allows schools to expand third-party telehealth agreements, create awareness campaigns to reduce mental health stigma, and partner with local providers to ease counseling center caseloads at institutions.

Like many states, **Massachusetts** was able to direct financial resources to mental health with federal ARP funding. Unlike many states, the Commonwealth replaced some federal pandemic dollars with its funding, appropriating \$4.2 million for mental health services in the FY 2024 budget. Campuses can use the money to address student behavioral and mental health needs, including but not limited to crisis services,

therapy, the assessment of learning disorders, responses to sexual assault, substance use disorder services, and assistance to students struggling with stress, anxiety, or other mental health needs. State officials noted that the funding mainly goes to mental health staff, telehealth, and professional development for staff, faculty, and students, like mental health first aid, trauma-informed care, and peer mentoring.

### *Utilizing Third-Party Providers to Offer Telehealth Services*

In May 2023, the **New Jersey** Office of the Secretary of Higher Education established a [partnership](#) with mental health and wellness solutions provider Uwill to provide college students in New Jersey with free, 24/7 access to virtual mental health services. Funded through the ARP, these services include 24/7/365 teletherapy, crisis connection, and wellness programming, as well as access to a diverse network of licensed and qualified mental health providers who have received multicultural competency training. As of January 2024, 44 colleges and universities are participating in the Uwill partnership to provide these services to their students. More than 7,600 students are registered on the platform, and nearly 20,000 total sessions have been scheduled. The partnership supplements the state's ARP-funded [\\$16 million investment](#) in mental health community provider partnerships and professional development grants.

### *Unfunded Mandates as Frameworks and Catalysts for Change*

In 2021, the **Connecticut** General Assembly enacted [House Bill 6402](#), which among several provisions, directs each IHE to establish a campus mental health coalition composed of individuals appointed by the president and reflective of the school's student body. Schools were given autonomy to tailor the specific functions of the coalition to fit the needs of their respective student body. While the legislature did not provide any funding to support these



efforts, [schools have leaned into the framework](#) determined to learn how to best support the mental health and well-being of their students, and address them given the limited institutional resources they currently have available.

### **Addressing Acute Mental Health Needs**

**Utah** launched its Mental Health First Responder (MH1) program at the University of Utah in 2020. MH1 provides students living in the institutions' residence halls with mental health support services after hours, delivered by licensed mental health workers. The program is a partnership of the Huntsman Mental Health Institute at the University of Utah, the university's hospital system, residence halls, and counseling center. MH1's purpose is to provide support to students experiencing an acute need for mental health services after regular business hours when other campus services may be closed or unavailable. While a student's mental health needs do not have to reach crisis level to use MH1 services, the program is a crucial tool for responding to mental health emergencies and aiding in suicide prevention on campus. During the 2022 general session, the Utah legislature allocated new, ongoing appropriations at \$1.5 million to support MH1 operations at the University of Utah, Southern Utah University, and Utah State University.

The Cameron Carden Act of 2024, signed into law by **Maryland's** governor, mandates that all 14 public universities in the state establish formal withdrawal policies that recognize mental health as a valid reason for student withdrawal. This legislation, inspired by the challenges of a former college student, guarantees students who withdraw for mental or physical health reasons will receive a refund for the remainder of the term. The act aims to remove the financial dilemma students face when prioritizing their mental health over educational costs, ensuring they can step away from their studies without the added burden of losing tuition money.

## **Child Care and Other Reforms for Parenting Students**

**States Highlighted: California, Georgia, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Vermont**

According to recent federal data, more than [4.1 million parenting students](#) are pursuing a postsecondary education in the U.S. That's around 20% of all higher education students balancing classes, homework, jobs, and caregiving as they work to better their lives and that of their families by earning a credential to further their career opportunities and increase their earnings.

Unfortunately, finding quality, affordable child care is challenging for nearly all parents of young children. By some estimates, [over half of the country](#) lives in child care deserts, with more than three times as many children as licensed child care spots. The average cost of licensed care means single parents—like the [more than 2 million student-parents who are single—sometimes spend up to one-third of their income](#) on care for just one child. Child care costs regularly surpass tuition fees at many public institutions.

- The out-of-pocket cost of attending a public college is [2 to 5 times higher](#) for student parents than for their other low-income peers without children.
- A student parent would need to work [52 hours per week](#), on average, to cover child care and tuition costs at a four-year public college or university in the U.S.

States are taking different approaches to addressing the child care needs of parenting students. Some states directly fund campus-based child care centers, while others provide funding directly to college students through





postsecondary child care grant programs. Nearly all states encourage parenting students to apply for child care subsidies funded through the federal and state governments, although there is insufficient funding to meet the child care demand.

**2-5X**

higher out-of-pocket costs for student parents



**52 hours/week**

of work needed to cover child care and tuition costs

### Further Analysis



While there is a federal funding stream to help address child care needs for parenting students, the program is underfunded, leaving hundreds of thousands of parenting students without access to high-quality, affordable child care. The [funding allocation for the 2023-2024](#) Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) program academic year was nearly \$84 million, with the awards going to 264 grantees and the average award of over \$317,000.

### Child Care Subsidies

Child care subsidies help parents with low incomes cover all or part of the cost of child care so they can go to school. The primary federal funding stream for child care is the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG). States receive a set amount of funding, covering only

some families who need or are eligible for child care assistance. Because states set policies in the context of available funding, they must make difficult trade-offs that can limit access to child care subsidies for postsecondary students. Just 10 years ago in 2014, many states limited child care subsidies to working families, leaving student parents responsible for paying their child care. It wasn't until 2021 that [Oregon](#) eliminated its requirement that students work to receive child care subsidies. Over time, states have broadened eligibility to include students pursuing full-time education (not in combination with work) and allow hours for homework. In 2022, [Georgia](#) added student parents as a priority group for its child care subsidy program.

Due to federal child care subsidies falling far short of meeting the demand of families with low incomes, states have developed alternative ways to support students with children. These include standalone child care programs for postsecondary students and campus-based child care centers. At the individual college level, Head Start programs and community colleges are partnering to provide more child care options for parenting students with low incomes.

### State-Funded Child Care Programs for Postsecondary Students

[Minnesota](#) has a long-standing [Postsecondary Child Care Program](#) that provides eligible students up to \$6,500 per year per child and can be used with most providers, including family and neighbors. The award was previously based on the applicant's Expected Family Contribution (EFC: the amount that the government determined families had to contribute toward college costs), the number of eligible children within the family who need child care, and the applicant's enrollment level. Going forward the award will be based on the applicant's Student Aid Index (SAI), instead of EFC, reflecting the federal change from EFC to SAI. Funds are allocated to eligible postsecondary institutions



based on the number of students who report children on the financial aid application. For 2024, the state appropriated nearly \$7 million for the program. The program is at capacity and unable to meet the requested support. Students with unmet need are encouraged to apply for CCDBG subsidies and Head Start.

The **North Carolina** state legislature allocates [over \\$3 million](#) to the community college system for its child care grant program. The community college grant program allocated a base of \$20,000 to each college in 2022-23, plus an additional \$3.88 for each college's students enrolled full-time in a curriculum program. Community college leaders note that this fails to address demand. Community college grants have relatively few statewide requirements for administration and eligibility. The community college system instructs colleges to coordinate with other local agencies to determine need. Students apply through their financial aid offices, and colleges reimburse providers after the services are provided. The amount the grants reimburse depends on the college. Like the Minnesota child care grant, community college grants can be used for unlicensed providers, including family members. Community college leaders note that the funding is inadequate. Some colleges see more demand for care than their allotment provides, and others do not spend their entire allotment.

### **Campus Child Care Centers**

**The State University of New York (SUNY) system** provides CCDBG-subsidized slots for income-qualified students at 46 of its 64 campuses that have on-campus child care centers. [During the 2022-23 school year](#), SUNY campuses invested about \$6 million annually to provide child care services to 4,500 students, faculty, and staff, with 795 of those slots going to parenting students. The centers are separate 501(c)(3) nonprofits and function as an auxiliary service on community college campuses. The

campus usually gives the child care center the site rent-free. About one-third of the enrollment at centers is from student parents, one-third from faculty and staff, and one-third from community members. Last year, the state legislature allocated \$10.8 million to the SUNY system to address child care deserts, fund improvements, and expand capacity by 200 slots. Demand for child care spots has risen significantly over the past few years, and on some campuses, as many as 80% of students with dependents report they have trouble meeting their child care needs. The system plans to build more child care centers.

### **Streamlining Data Collection to Inform Policy**

State policymakers have passed legislation requiring improvements and streamlined data collection on student parents to understand this population's unique needs better. While these bills vary in scope, they aim to identify barriers and target resources that parenting students need to succeed in higher education.

**Michigan** lawmakers adopted [legislation](#) in 2020 that requires public universities to collect demographic information from students with dependent children, including:

- The number of students with dependent children enrolled per semester
- The number of students with dependent children living in university residence halls, dormitories, and apartments
- The names of programs/resources available to students with dependent children
- Identifying barriers to certificates or degree completion for students with dependent children

**Oregon** adopted a [measure](#) in 2021 that requires a question allowing students to identify whether they are a parent or guardian on annual forms used to collect demographic data at public IHEs. Once the data is collected,



institutions are obligated to share it with the state, and the data is reported publicly. Parenting students actively advocated for the data collection and are working in other states to adopt similar requirements.

**Maryland** introduced similar [legislation](#) in 2024 requiring the Maryland Higher Education Commission to collect specific data regarding parenting students. Unfortunately, that bill did not pass, but it demonstrates growing support for better understanding and addressing the needs of this growing population.

### *Improving Campus-Based Supports Through State Funding and Policy*

Some states have also moved legislation to incentivize or require IHEs to provide campus-based support and services to parenting students. In recent years, there have also been renewed state investments in institutional grants to find innovative ways to serve more student parents.

Both **California** and **Texas** have passed laws requiring their public colleges and universities to grant priority registration for parenting students during enrollment periods. California's law also goes a step further in that it mandates that institutions notify student parents of critical state and federal resources, such as the California Earned Income Tax Credit (CalEITC), the Young Child Tax Credit (YCTC), and WIC.

**Minnesota** and **Pennsylvania** have passed funding to distribute grants to colleges and universities that can be used to support the success of student parents through increased services or direct assistance. Minnesota's \$3 million [Student Parent Support Initiative](#) focuses on campus-based initiatives prioritizing on-campus child care, scholarships, and direct aid to students. Pennsylvania's \$1.6 million [Parent Pathways Grant Program](#) offers competitive grant funding to institutions for expansion of wrap-around services for students, expansion of child

care facilities, staffing salary support for parent navigators, transportation supports, scholarships, and the use of stipends or emergency aid up to a maximum amount determined by the school.

### *Building Comprehensive Programs for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Parents*

The federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant can also support parenting students with low incomes attend postsecondary education and training. Roughly 10% of TANF parents have completed any education beyond high school. TANF has a range of complex rules, including work requirements and time limits for participants, though postsecondary attendance can count toward the work requirement for up to one year. Some states, including **Minnesota, Nebraska, and Virginia**, have made it easier for parenting students receiving TANF to access postsecondary education and training, by extending time limits and allowing students to pursue two- and four-year degrees in place of shorter-term training. For instance, Nebraska allows parents to pursue two years of postsecondary to meet work requirements, while Minnesota allows students to pursue four-year degree programs. A handful of states have gone further and operate comprehensive programs that provide meaningful support for TANF or former TANF participants in pursuing two- and four-year degrees. **California** ([California Community Colleges, CalWORKS program](#)), **Kentucky** ([Ready to Work](#)), **Maine** ([Parents as Scholars](#)), **Pennsylvania** ([Keystone Education Yields Success](#)), and **Vermont** ([Post-Secondary Education and Training](#)) address student basic needs insecurity by providing not only cash assistance for TANF participants pursuing postsecondary, but also child care, transportation, academic advising, counseling, books and supplies and in some cases, tuition support and work-study positions tailored to their education needs. All programs also have dedicated case management staff.



## Emergency Aid

**States Highlighted: Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, North Carolina, Texas, Virginia, and Washington**

Encountering an unexpected expense as a student can often disrupt their education and force them to pause or end their academic journey altogether. Emergency aid is a critical and proven tool that can support students through these temporary, unanticipated expenses and enable them to complete their education—among community college students at institutions participating in the [Ascendium Education Group's Dash Emergency Grant program](#), 88% re-enrolled, graduated, or transferred in the term following their award, well above the nationwide community college persistence rate of 62%.

Since 2019, **Washington** has provided the [State Emergency Aid Grant](#) to support students in community and technical colleges who demonstrate financial need. The program mandates that institutions ensure students have low-barrier access to these emergency funds and award the aid within four days of the student's request. As with many basic needs programs, demand far outpaces supply. In 2023 alone, Washington colleges [received 16,685 student requests for emergency assistance](#) and either fully or partially funded 4,654. The program is funded at \$9 million over two years. The average award was \$848; the most requested needs were housing, transportation, and food.

**Virginia** is the newest state in the country to fund an emergency aid program. The state budget included language to allow each public college and university to use 1% of their financial aid allotment on emergency aid. This could lead to institutions spending up to \$4 million annually on emergency aid. Reflecting that Virginia has a decentralized higher education system, institutions will have the flexibility to design their aid programs.

In 2017, **Minnesota** created the [Emergency Assistance for Postsecondary Students \(EAPS\) program](#) focused on supporting higher education institutions with a demonstrable homeless student population. The Minnesota Legislature funnels \$175,000 of state funding into the program annually. These funds are provided directly to institutions that can administer grants (up to \$1,000) to their students based on a set of principles, including trusting students, being timely, and leveraging available institutional and community supports.

**North Carolina's** governor announced the [Finish Line Grant program](#) in 2018, which is designed to support community college students in completing their education and training when facing unexpected challenges and expenses, such as health care costs, child and dependent care expenses, or transportation emergencies that may prevent them from finishing their coursework. Students are eligible to receive grants of up to \$1,000. The program transitioned from the Department of Commerce to the North Carolina Community College System four years after its creation. Since its inception, [funding for the program](#) has been made available through federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funds.



**A temporary financial emergency shouldn't stop a student's momentum toward graduation and a brighter future."**

— Peter Hans, former president of the North Carolina Community College System



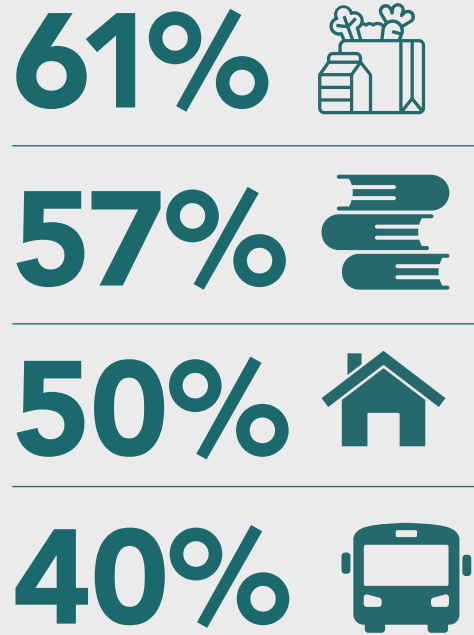
## The Role of COVID-19 Federal Funding in Addressing Basic Needs and Seeding State Innovation

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the federal government provided funding to support higher education institutions and students through [three pieces of legislation](#) focused on meeting students' basic needs. The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act included a Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF) that provided more than \$14 billion in emergency funding to higher education, with \$6 billion going directly to students in the form of emergency aid grants. Subsequent relief funding was included in the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRSSA) and the American Rescue Plan (ARP), which included \$23 billion and \$40 billion for higher education institutions and students. Institutions could distribute student grants for more flexible uses than the CARES Act, such as any component of their cost of attendance and emergency costs, including tuition, food, housing, health care, mental health care, technology, and child care. Another critical component of education-related stimulus funding was the Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) Fund, which provided states considerably more discretion over uses.

Federal reporting shows that more than 8 million students received emergency aid from the CARES Act. The [top needs](#) were food, followed by books and housing. Four in 10 used funds for transportation. Many states and institutions have [learned lessons](#) from the HEERF emergency grants to create their own programs.

Higher education [research](#) and state officials noted the importance of HEERF, GEER, and ARP dollars to seed programs, including new statewide scholarships and grant opportunities. **Michigan** developed its [Future for Frontliners](#) free college program for essential workers with federal funding. **New Jersey** used some of its federal funding for Hunger-Free Campus grants

### How Students Used Their HEERF Emergency Aid:



to support basic needs insecurity. Both states subsequently provided state revenue to expand on this work, with Michigan funding its [Michigan Reconnect](#) program that offers free college for adults and New Jersey expanding its [Hunger-Free Campus funding](#). **Texas** used some of its federal dollars to support implementation grants for the [Student Success Acceleration Program](#). The program aimed to support student persistence and completion by providing funding for Texas institutions and systems to develop services focused on advising, basic needs/wrap-around services, mental health and wellness, among others. The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) provided 76 planning and 59 implementation grants. The HECB hopes to fund another round with state dollars.

The HEERF and GEER funds provided a massive influx of resources to institutions and students in dire need, allowing states to roll out robust student support strategies. Unfortunately, many institutional and state strategies were unsustainable once federal funding expired.





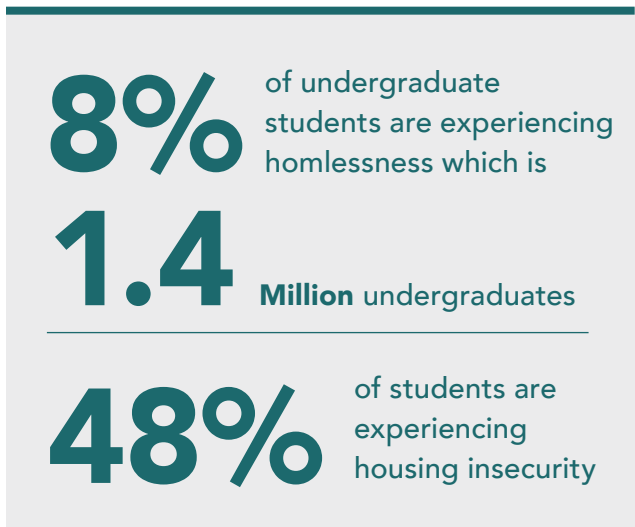
## Housing

**States Highlighted: Arkansas, California, Florida, Illinois, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Nevada, Oregon, and Tennessee**

Housing is often the most considerable cost associated with pursuing higher education, in most cases exceeding the cost of tuition. [Data show](#) that housing costs account for 53% of the budget for the average off-campus student. One study found that 36% of all college students and 46% of community college students were housing insecure. Compounding the housing issue is the reality of a shortage in student housing. Student housing is only sometimes available for some students who expect to live on campus and have the means to do so. And many colleges do not offer [student housing](#), which is oftentimes unaffordable when it is available. Only one-quarter of eligible households in the U.S. receive federal housing assistance, with about 14 million households in potentially unstable housing situations. College students and their families are subject to additional rules to reside in public or assisted housing, which makes accessing these supports difficult. Lack of housing access can lead to students experiencing homelessness, which, according to data from the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS:20), impacted 8% of undergraduate students in the past 30 days.

States have adopted a range of policies to address student housing needs. The most popular policy is establishing [liaisons for homeless students](#), which has tended to be a bipartisan approach. A few states have developed housing funds, but these tend to be limited. More recently, states have established public-private partnerships to increase the housing supply for students with low incomes.

- [8% of undergraduate students](#) report experiencing homelessness in the previous 30 days. This translates to approximately 1.4 million undergraduates experiencing homelessness nationwide.
- A [Fall 2020 HOPE Center survey](#) found that nearly half of students — 48%—were experiencing housing insecurity, a broader indicator that measures barriers that fall outside the parameters of the statutory definition of homelessness.



### Addressing Student Homelessness

[Several states have passed legislation](#) to develop on-campus liaison positions for homeless students. Many of these liaisons, considered a best practice, provide services to foster youth. These states include [Arkansas](#), [California](#), [Florida](#), [Louisiana](#), [Maine](#), [Maryland](#), and [Nevada](#).

Many housing liaison programs are similar to **Illinois'** Housing and Opportunities that are Useful for Students' Excellence ([HOUSE](#)) bill. Passed in 2022, it requires liaisons at Illinois colleges and universities to provide support and resources to students experiencing homelessness. Institutions with on-campus housing must also prioritize placement for homeless students, including during school



breaks. To support the work of HOUSE liaisons, in 2023 the Illinois Board of Higher Education offered \$1.7 million in one-time grants to 10 public and private nonprofit institutions of higher education through the [End Student Housing Insecurity](#) (ESHI) grant program. This funding came from the Illinois Department of Human Services' Office to Prevent and End Homelessness. [ESHI grants](#) were intended to assist with the implementation of the HOUSE bill and address the root or systemic causes of homelessness and basic needs insecurity among students. The FY 2024 budget included \$2 million for ESHI grants.

Other states have prioritized student housing for formerly homeless youth and foster youth, such as **California** and **Tennessee**. Others provide tuition, grants, and fee waivers to homeless youth. A handful of states, including **Louisiana**, **Maine**, and **Tennessee**, encourage or require institutions to develop plans to provide students experiencing homelessness access to housing resources during and between academic terms.

### **Housing Grants**

The [Housing Scholarship Program](#) in **Massachusetts** is a partnership between the Executive Office of Health and Human Services and the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education. It provides funding for housing and community-based case management for homeless students at campuses in six regions of the state. Each of the participating four-year institutions, in partnership with a local community college, has made up to five beds available to students identified by campus staff as experiencing homelessness (defined as lacking an appropriate place to live, often residing in a shelter, automobile, abandoned building or outside). The state reimburses campuses for the dorm bed occupancy cost for a full calendar year, including all summer and semester breaks. Campuses

have agreed to cover meals and snacks for students. Community service providers, receiving additional grant funding from the Massachusetts Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth, work with participants in each region to provide counseling, financial literacy, and support for the search for permanent affordable housing after graduation.

**California**, with some of the highest housing costs in the country, has been a leader in developing programs to address student housing insecurity and homelessness. [Housing accounts for](#) 43% of University of California (UC), 57% of California State University (CSU), and 68% of California Community College (CCC) students' anticipated cost of attendance. In 2021, the legislature approved a \$2.25 billion Higher Education Student Housing Grant Program to increase the affordable housing options for public postsecondary students in California, a state in which [53% of students](#) report being housing insecure. The program provided one-time grants mainly for the construction of student housing and the acquisition and renovation of commercial properties into student housing. [Over 2022-23](#), 35 projects were funded before revenue shortfalls led the state to dramatically change the program to bonds instead of state general funds, making the future of 19 community college projects less certain. If the California budget includes a state bond solution and all projects move forward under the new model, it is expected that 11,200 new beds will be available based on the projects already in process. In fact, one project is already occupied by students, another is taking applications for the fall 2024 term, and several have held groundbreaking ceremonies.

Beginning with the FY 2019-20 state budget, **California** has allocated \$19 million annually to public institutions to support [Rapid Rehousing](#) efforts to address student homelessness.



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Campuses must use this funding to establish partnerships with community-based housing providers with a history of helping populations experiencing homelessness to provide wrap-around services and rental subsidies for housing-insecure or homeless students. Allowable uses include connecting students to community case managers and emergency grants to secure housing or prevent the immediate loss of housing. The original funding included \$3.5 million for the UC system, \$6.5 million for the CSU system, and \$9 million for the CCC system. The allocation to the CCC system was increased to \$19 million in 2022.

### *Public Private Partnerships*

**Oregon** is addressing student housing affordability by supporting the development of public-private partnerships with state dollars. [College Housing Northwest](#) (CHNW) is a nonprofit organization in Portland — a city with some of the most expensive housing costs in the country — that develops below-market housing for students. Unlike many landlords, CHNW doesn't require first or last

month deposits or guarantors and provides students with employment opportunities and eviction prevention. In 2020, CHNW launched [Affordable Rents for College Students](#) (ARCS), offering low-income, housing insecure, or unhoused college students in Portland subsidized rent, covering 50-100% of their housing payments while providing wrap-around supports. CHNW has received substantial support from the state government to buy and develop property and offer support services to student residents. It received \$3.5 million in FY 2022 from the Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) Youth Experiencing Homelessness Division, with \$3 million going toward capital and \$500,000 for program support. In FY 2023, CHNW received \$300,000 for program support from ODHS in the state's biennium budget. [HB 2879](#), passed in 2023, requires ODHS to provide \$4 million in financial support to nonprofits to provide affordable housing for college students during the biennium. CHNW received \$4 million for capital and program services as a result of the legislation.





# Conclusion

Postsecondary education offers the opportunity for individuals to earn a degree that allows them to advance in the labor market and better support themselves and their families. Yet the opportunity is often derailed by expenses beyond tuition, including housing, child care, and food. State postsecondary policymakers rightfully focus on addressing the rising cost of tuition, but they would be remiss to neglect pursuing policies that help students with low incomes cover their basic needs. This landscape analysis shows states are actively engaging in basic needs program endeavors, while also providing the blueprint for states that want to do more.

One challenge in the area of state basic needs policy is that we do not adequately evaluate the impact of these policies. While some programs supported by basic needs policies have been monitored and reviewed, many of these policies are driven by hope alone, established on the basis of related research or knowledge derived from addressing college affordability. Even though state funding for the basic needs services themselves can be scarce, we recommend states seek ways to evaluate their intervention programs so legislatures and policymakers have proven research about what works and what programs could perform better for the people they serve.

**This paper was written by Amy Ellen Duke-Benfield and Richard Davis, Jr.**



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To learn more about TSC’s work, visit [www.todaysstudents.org](http://www.todaysstudents.org).

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