

## Postsecondary Basic Needs Task Force: Vision and Action Agenda

Toward Washington’s state goal of 70% postsecondary attainment, Washington Student Achievement Council has identified students’ unmet basic needs as a rapidly growing barrier to postsecondary attainment, including food and housing security, childcare access, and mental/behavioral health care. [Recent research](#) shows pre-pandemic basic needs barriers have been exacerbated by our current economic and public health crises and are impacting an expanded population of students, particularly low-income students and students of color. And yet, siloes across educational sectors have limited awareness, consensus-building, and planning to advance a statewide agenda to address postsecondary basic needs.

In 2019, WSAC convened the Postsecondary Basic Needs Advisory Group to identify barriers as well as effective regional partnerships. Building on this foundation in spring 2021, WSAC convened a Basic Needs Task Force, co-designed and co-led by [student policy consultants](#). This [stakeholder group](#) included community-based partners and students, staff and administrators representative of diverse educational sectors and experiences. The Task Force has developed a state vision, values, and is in the process of preparing a multi-year action agenda to address postsecondary basic needs and to serve as a roadmap for unified state-level change.

### Vision and Values

The Task Force built consensus on the following statement and vision of a future Washington where all students have access to basic needs:

Postsecondary basic needs in Washington encompass but are not limited to food and housing security, access to quality, affordable childcare, and access to health care including mental/behavioral health care. Washington envisions a future where racial justice, economic justice and educational equity are centered in building basic needs security for all postsecondary students:

*As Washington eliminates barriers to basic needs for postsecondary students, pursues equitable outcomes and reduces disparate impacts, all students will have access to basic needs resources, leading to better academic outcomes, higher rates of persistence and completion, and greater stability to pursue their goals in the workforce and in further training and education.*

Within this vision, three values are highlighted:

- **Attainment:** Basic needs stability is foundational for students’ persistence and completion, and should be a priority toward our state’s attainment goal
- **Eliminating barriers:** Washington should identify and eliminate systemic and policy barriers for postsecondary students to access existing basic needs resources and support

- **Equity:** Washington should identify disparate impacts of basic needs security on student populations and focus solutions on those most impacted.

In addition, these values are integrated throughout the Action Agenda that the Task Force is developing:

- **Data-driven:** Data on postsecondary basic needs security and evidence-based solutions must be prioritized and drive actions.
- **Coordinated and holistic approaches:** Because basic needs are interconnected, solutions need to be holistic rather than separate and disconnected.
- **Proactive, student-centered systems:** Washington systems should proactively ensure basic needs stability toward persistence and completion, rather than react to basic needs instability and crisis. Washington should appropriately invest in proactive systems designed with students' experiences in mind.
- **Partnership:** Addressing postsecondary basic needs requires a collaborative and regionally customized approach. Higher education institutions, student leadership, public agencies, community-based organizations, and private sector entities all have a stake in postsecondary attainment, and thus have a critical role to play in basic needs stability toward attainment.

## Postsecondary Basic Needs Action Agenda

The Task Force built consensus that all students should have housing security, food insecurity, and access to childcare and mental/behavioral health care to reduce barriers to students' persistence and completion. They prioritized actions based on a topic-focused analysis of key information from research and subject matter experts, development of problem statements, and identification of promising models and opportunities.

### Housing insecurity and homelessness

#### Why is this important?

- Housing insecurity and homelessness affects [6 in 10 CTC students](#) and [some universities](#) reported a third to half of students facing homelessness or housing insecurity in 2019.
- Housing insecurity is often intertwined with other basic needs insecurity, including personal safety, [but due to stigma many students don't seek help and outreach can be challenging.](#)

#### What are some of the barriers?

- The restrictiveness of eligibility requirements for coordinated entry services for public homelessness support, such as requiring students to not have shelter for a period of time, can cause housing insecurity to be unaddressed until it becomes a crisis.
- Many students face stigma with sharing their unmet housing needs. Some students aren't aware that they're eligible for community or campus resources or programs.
- Colleges and universities may not be aware of opportunities to partner with municipal organizations, councils, and community organizations to address housing needs. Many organizations aren't aware of the extent of postsecondary housing insecurity and homelessness.
- Students on residential campuses may face gaps in safe, affordable housing during school breaks

and summers.

**Question for consideration:**

- How can Washington support regional and/or local efforts with institutions to address housing insecurity and homelessness for students?

**Food insecurity****Why is this important?**

- Food insecurity is reported by [37-47% of CTC students](#). [Similar prevalence is reported at universities assessing basic needs](#).
- Those with food insecurity [perform worse academically than those who are food secure](#).
- [Students of color, low-income students, and students with dependents have disproportionate impacts](#).

**What are the barriers?**

- Many eligible students aren't enrolled in SNAP. As well, food benefits restrict access to many postsecondary students who are otherwise income eligible.
- The Basic Food Employment & Training (BFET) program is only available to Associate-level students.
- While most campuses have volunteer/charity initiatives to support food insecurity, most do not have proactive systems to prevent food insecurity for all students.
- Lack of awareness of the prevalence of food security perpetuates misunderstanding about food insecurity and stigma in accessing resources.

**Questions for consideration**

- What role do you see for data on unmet basic needs to dismantle misperceptions about food insecurity and other basic needs insecurity?
- What potential do you see for proactive, equitable food security systems in Washington, particularly for student's ineligible for SNAP?

**Childcare access****Why is this important?**

- [Childcare is an equity issue](#): Women are more likely than men to be parenting while in school. 38% of student parents are students of color. About 41% of parenting students are raising their children as single parents while in school. 28% of financial aid-receiving students are parents, and among Pell grant recipients, student mothers graduate with more debt.
- Caregiving demands affect student parents' ability to devote the time needed to succeed in school. [Without affordable, accessible, quality care, student parents are twice as likely to drop out than students without children](#).

**What are the barriers?**

- Many students with dependents struggle to find and afford childcare. [Many WA campuses have childcare centers](#), but many typically only serve a fraction of student parents on campus. [Regions vary widely](#) in community-based available care for children of students, known as “childcare deserts.”
- The impact of the pandemic has [destabilized an already struggling system](#): 27% of WA parents quit their job or left school/training due to lack of childcare; 27% went from full- to part-time work/school/training.

**Questions for consideration**

- What would childcare access look like if it were supported across all postsecondary education sectors?
- What information do you think is important to respond to childcare access gaps?

**Mental/behavioral health care access****Why is this important?**

- [Depression, anxiety, and thoughts of suicide among students](#) were high pre-COVID and are now rising. Students of color and lower socio-economic background students are more strongly impacted.
- Without support, mental/behavioral health issues can negatively impact [persistence and academic performance](#).

**What are some of the barriers?**

- Many students are unaware of resources and services to support mental/behavioral health, both on campus and with community providers.
- Students who seek services can be stymied by the complexities of resource navigation, insurance eligibility, and additional costs.
- Students often lack health care services that are timely, culturally competent, and that allow access between terms and during summer quarter.
- There is a wide variety of care models across postsecondary sectors and regions, and campus and community resources to support students vary at each institution. This can lead to lack of access for some students, or inconsistencies in services.
- Campus and community providers are often intended to complement each other, but gaps remain, including a lack of coordination or a shared care plan between campus and community providers that can cause students to fall between the service cracks.

**Question for consideration**

- What do you see as missing in our state policy and investments that is making it hard for students to access care?