2023 Executive Summary: Supporting Students Experiencing Homelessness (SSEH) Report

Washington college students experience homelessness; support keeps them enrolled

Basic needs insecurity is a critical barrier to college students' access[1] and success, undermining persistence and completion rates for postsecondary students.[2] In Washington, college students face significant challenges in meeting their housing and other basic needs while completing their credentials. Gaps in covering critical costs such as housing and food are pervasive among students in both two-year and four-year institutions. Students of color and students who experience marginalization based on their identities and circumstances — such as former foster youth, LGBTQI+ students, and students with dependents — are disproportionately impacted.[3]

> "[SSEH] has been instrumental in me getting out of the shelter and finding my own place to live. Without them and their help I would not have been able to continue school. — Student, Highline College
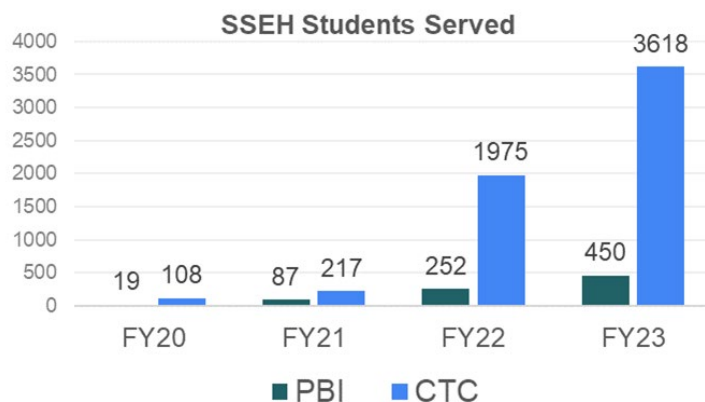
To address this need, the Washington state Legislature enacted the Supporting Students Experiencing Homelessness (SSEH) pilot program with 2SSB 5800 (2019). The Legislature expanded the pilot program twice — first by passing SHB 1166 (2021) and again through a proviso in the 2022 supplemental budget. The Legislature made the SSEH pilot permanent through the passage of ESSB 5702 (2023).

SSEH provides grants for colleges to build systems to identify and support students facing homelessness and students who aged out of the foster care system. The Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) and the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) administered the four-year SSEH pilot program, which consisted of 33 programs across six public baccalaureate institutions (PBIs) and 27 in the community and technical college system (CTCs).

What were the cumulative outcomes of the pilot program?

The SSEH pilot served a total of 6,726 students over a four-year period. The number of students served increased each year as the pilot grew from six programs in fiscal years 2020 and 2021, to 12 programs in fiscal year 2022, to 33 in fiscal year 2023.

SSEH Students Served

	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23
PBI	19	87	252	450
CTC	108	217	1975	3618

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[1] [Path to 70 Update: Why Washingtonians Value Credentials but Aren't Completing Them](#). December 2022. Washington Roundtable, Partnership for Learning, & Kinetic West

[2] The Hope Center Survey 2021: Basic Needs Insecurity During the Ongoing Pandemic. (2021) https://hope.temple.edu/sites/hope/files/media/document/HopeSurveyReport2021.pdf

[3] Basic Needs Security Among Washington College Students (2023) https://wsac.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2023.BasicNeedsReport.pdf

Who did the SSEH pilot program serve?

- **Students of color represented half of the students served.** Fifty-one percent of the students served in the SSEH pilot program were students of color. This data point echoes national and state data showing that Black/African American, Native American/Alaska Native, and Hispanic/Latinx students are disproportionately experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity.

- **Food insecurity was common.** Eighty percent of the students served were experiencing food insecurity, yet only 47% were known to be receiving Basic Food (SNAP) benefits.

- **A majority of students served were female.** Of the students served by the SSEH pilot, 68% of community and technical college students and 60% of university students identified as female.

- **The average age differed depending on the institution.** Community and technical college students tended to be older, with 69% 25 or older, while most university students were under 25 years old (65%).

- **The SSEH program served 304 foster youth.** Students who were in the foster care system when they graduated from high school were automatically eligible for the pilot program.
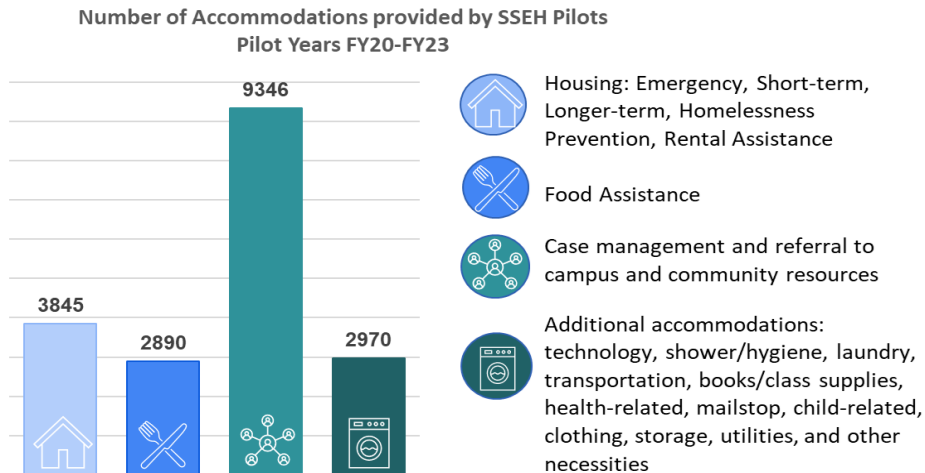
Did supporting students' basic needs help them stay enrolled?

Weighted average all pilot years (FY20-FY23)	PBI	CTC
Percent of students who completed academic term in which they received SSEH support	93%	87%
Percent who stayed in college or completed a credential the following term*	90%	77%

*Includes only students who completed the term in which they were served.

"This support was a saving grace. I was on the verge of homelessness, these funds helped me to keep a roof over my head, provide food and basic needs that I had as a student." — Student, The Evergreen State College

What kinds of support did institutions provide?

Number of Accommodations provided by SSEH Pilots
Pilot Years FY20-FY23

Housing: Emergency, Short-term, Longer-term, Homelessness Prevention, Rental Assistance

Food Assistance

Case management and referral to campus and community resources

Additional accommodations: technology, shower/hygiene, laundry, transportation, books/class supplies, health-related, mailstop, child-related, clothing, storage, utilities, and other necessities

"The people who were there to help me did so with compassion and allowed me to be relieved for that month." — Student, WSU

Relationships and partnerships between college programs and community organizations were vital to the success of the pilot program. Over the course of the pilot, SSEH case managers made 29,173 referrals to external agencies and programs. Students were referred to food pantries, 211 Washington, WA Connection, community action councils, housing authorities, Worksource, United Way, and an array of other housing, domestic violence, youth, health, and service providers.

SSEH case managers also made 28,348 referrals to other college-based programs and resources, such as campus food pantries, financial aid, college workforce grant programs, career services, health services, and student support services.

"The assistance — and consistent and considerate follow-up and communication, expertise and resources — literally saved my life." — Student, South Puget Sound Community College

How can Washington increase support for students experiencing homelessness?

SSEH institutions developed a variety of recommendations for policy and practice, including:

- Explore opportunities for colleges and universities to develop affordable and subsidized housing for students experiencing homelessness.

- Increase SSEH funding to respond to cost-of-living increases and ensure ongoing case management support.

- Eliminate or raise age limits for Passport to Careers program eligibility. Through Passport to Careers, former foster youth can get scholarships and support services from college staff. Funds can be used for tuition, fees, books, housing, transportation, and personal needs.

- Fully fund benefit navigators associated with Postsecondary Basic Needs Act (2SHB 1559).

- Fund a study of interventions to support students experiencing homelessness.

Read the Full Report: Supporting Students Experiencing Homelessness (SSEH) Pilot Program

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