Washington Supporting Students Experiencing Homelessness (SSEH)
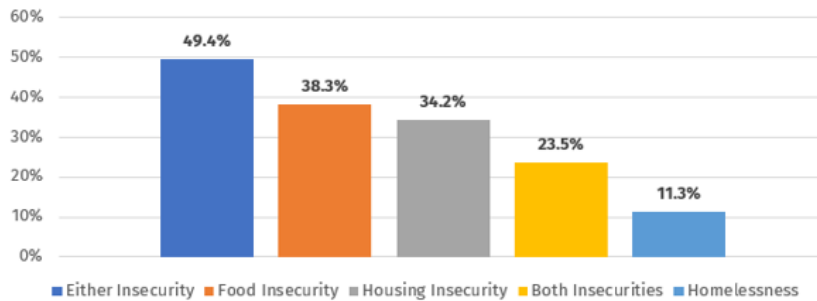
Washington students face growing housing insecurity and homelessness

Basic needs insecurity is a critical barrier to student access[1] and success, undermining persistence and completion rates for postsecondary students.[2] In Washington, college students face significant challenges to meeting their basic needs while completing their credentials. The gaps in covering critical costs such as housing and food are pervasive among students in both community and technical colleges (CTCs) and public baccalaureate institutions (PBIs).[3] Students of color and students who experience marginalization based on their identities and circumstances—such as former foster youth, LGBTQ+ students, and students with dependents—are disproportionately impacted. [4]

To address this need, the Washington Legislature enacted **Supporting Students Experiencing Homelessness (SSEH)** pilot in 2019 (2SSB 5800) and then made it permanent for all public postsecondary institutions in 2023 (ESSB 5702). SSEH provides grants to colleges to build systems to identify and support students facing homelessness and students who aged out of foster care. The Washington Student Achievement Council and the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges have administered SSEH, initially with six public colleges and universities, and now with 33 institutions.

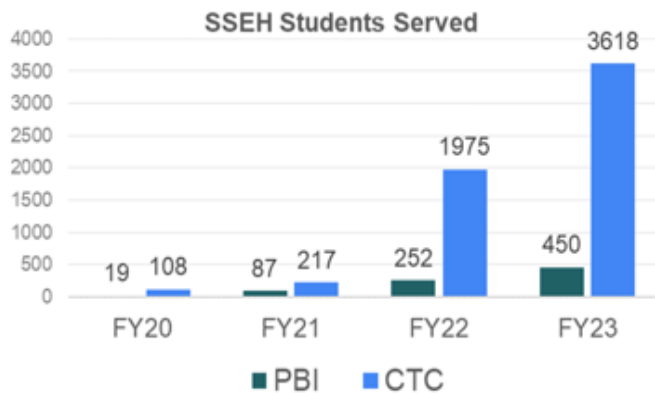## How common is food and housing insecurity for Washington students?

Students participating in a 2022 state-level survey reported high levels of unmet basic needs:

> "[SSEH] has been instrumental in me getting out of the shelter and finding my own place to live. Without this help I would not have been able to continue school."
>
> – Student, Highline College

Who has been served in SSEH?

SSEH has served 6,726 students in 4 years. Increases paralleled the growth of the pilot from six programs in the first year to 33 in academic year 2022-2023.

- **51% students of color,** which echoes national and state data that Black/African American, Native American/Alaska Native, and Hispanic/Latinx students are disproportionately experiencing these barriers.
- **68% of CTC students and 60% of university students identified as female.**
- Food insecurity has been common, with **80% experiencing food insecurity,** yet only 47% were known to be receiving SNAP benefits.

Have students served by SSEH stayed enrolled or completed their credential?

Weighted average of four years (2020-2023	PBIs	CTC
Percent of students who completed academic term in which they received SSEH support	**93%**	**87%**
Of students who completed term served, percent who were retained or completed credential the following term	**90%**	**77%**

> "Without the support to secure housing, I would still be homeless. I am now able to focus on classes."
>
> -Student, Walla Walla

 Read the full report on Washington Supporting Students Experiencing Homelessness:
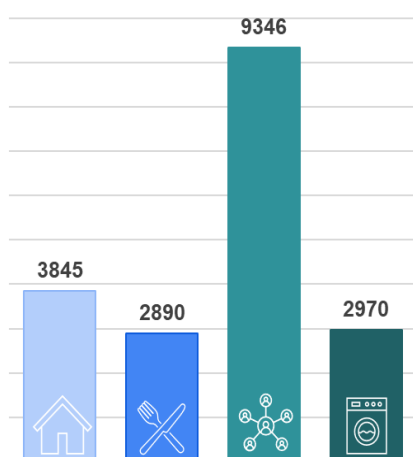https://wsac.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2023-Supporting-Students-Experiencing-Homelessness-Pilot-Project-Report.pdf

What kinds of support are SSEH institutions providing?

> "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, Evergreen State College

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

Chart values:
- 3845 (Housing)
- 2890 (Food Assistance)
- 9346 (Case management)
- 2970 (Additional accommodations)

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

Relationships and partnerships with other college programs and community organizations are integral in SSEH. SSEH Case managers have made **29,173 referrals to external agencies and programs**, such as community 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 made **28,348 referrals to other college 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 have developed a variety of recommendations for policy and practice. Highlights include:

- Explore structural, policy, and funding limitations and opportunities for institutions to develop affordable and subsidized housing for students experiencing homelessness
- Increase funding for SSEH to ensure funding for case management and to provide additional housing support for students given increases in cost of living
- Fund further research regarding effective interventions to support students experiencing homelessness
- Fully fund Benefits Navigators associated with the Washington Postsecondary Basic Needs Act (2SHB 1559 2023)

For more information about Washington Supporting Students Experiencing Homelessness:

Ami Magisos, Associate Policy Director, Amim@.wa.gov and Laura Coghlan, Program Administrator, Lcoghlan@sbctc.edu

---

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

[2] Ortagus, J., Skinner, B.T., & Tanner, M. (2020). Investigating why academically successful community college students leave college without a degree.

[3] The Myth of "Full-Ride" Financial Aid (2023) COA Gap Myth of Full Ride Financial Aid (03.20.23).pdf (wa.gov)

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