



Supporting Students Experiencing Homeless (SSEH) Program

Annual Report to the Legislature

December 1, 2025

Introduction

Basic needs insecurity is a major barrier for college students. When students don't have stable housing, enough food, or other essentials, it becomes harder for them to stay in school and finish their programs. In Washington, college students face challenges in meeting these basic needs while completing their credentials. Gaps in covering key costs such as housing and food are common among students in both two-year and four-year colleges. Students of color and students who are marginalized based on their identities and circumstances — such as former foster youth and students with dependents — are affected at higher rates.

How common is housing insecurity and homelessness among Washington college students? One in three college students reported housing insecurity (34 percent), and one in ten reported experiencing homelessness in the prior year (11 percent). Across all colleges, half of students reported either food insecurity or housing insecurity (52 percent). Students who experienced foster care or homelessness in high school had the highest rates of housing insecurity and homelessness among all demographic groups in a 2024 survey.¹

To address these needs, the Washington State Legislature created the Supporting Students Experiencing Homelessness (SSEH) pilot program in 2019² and made it permanent in 2023.³ SSEH provides grants for public colleges to build systems to identify and support students facing homelessness or who aged out of foster care. The Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) and the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) administer the SSEH program. In fiscal year 2025, SSEH included programs across six public baccalaureate institutions (PBIs) and 32 colleges in the community and technical college system (CTCs). In 2025, the program was expanded by legislation to include

¹ Washington Student Achievement Council, Western Washington University. (2025). *Reassessing Basic Needs Security Among Washington College Students*. <https://wsac.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2025.BasicNeedsReport.pdf>

² Homeless College Students—Pilot Program, Second Substitute SB 5800, 66th Legislature. (2019). <https://lawfilesexternal.wa.gov/biennium/2019-20/Pdf/Bills/Session%20Laws/Senate/5800-S2.SL.pdf?q=20251121171746>

³ Higher Education—Students Experiencing Homelessness and Foster Youth Program—Expansion, Engrossed Substitute SB 5702, 68th Legislature. (2023). <https://lawfilesexternal.wa.gov/biennium/2023-24/Pdf/Bills/Session%20Laws/Senate/5702-S.SL.pdf?q=20241107105917>

Washington's accredited tribal college.⁴ A comprehensive report on the four pilot years of the program was submitted to the Legislature in December 2023.⁵

This report provides a statewide update on the program for fiscal year 2025. All CTC sector data and information in this report is from SBCTC's sector SSEH report.⁶ Recommendations were developed jointly.

"I cannot tell you enough how much it means to me with housing and food and everything. I think I would have given up on school had it not been for the help I have received." - SSEH student, The Evergreen State College

Who are the Students Served?

The six public baccalaureate institutions (PBIs) and 32 participating community and technical colleges (CTCs) have supported **17,438** students since the SSEH program began in 2020. In fiscal year 2025 alone, **5,752** students facing homelessness and former foster youth were served (Figure 1).⁷ Students received case management and referrals to resources, and many received housing support, financial assistance, and other basic needs support.

"Receiving this grant honestly means everything to me right now and could transform whether I graduate on time. More than anything, it reminds me that I'm not invisible and that someone believes in what I'm trying to do." – SSEH student, Bellevue College

2024-25 SSEH Student Demographics

Gender: Over half of all students supported by SSEH in fiscal year 2024-25 were female: at CTCs female students made up 67 percent of SSEH students⁸, and at PBIs they made up 58 percent.

This aligns with Washington survey findings that female students reported higher rates of basic needs insecurity (54 percent) compared to male students (49 percent). Students who identified as not exclusively male or female reported basic needs insecurity at 50 percent.⁹

⁴ Expanding eligibility for the students experiencing homelessness and foster youth program to an accredited tribal college, House Bill 1540, 69th Legislature. (2025). <https://lawfilesexternal.wa.gov/biennium/2025-26/Pdf/Bills/House%20Passed%20Legislature/1540.PL.pdf?q=20251117203323>

⁵ Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC), Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC). (December 2023). *Supporting Students Experiencing Homelessness (SSEH) Pilot Program: Report to the Legislature*. <https://wsac.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2023-Supporting-Students-Experiencing-Homelessness-Pilot-Project-Report.pdf>

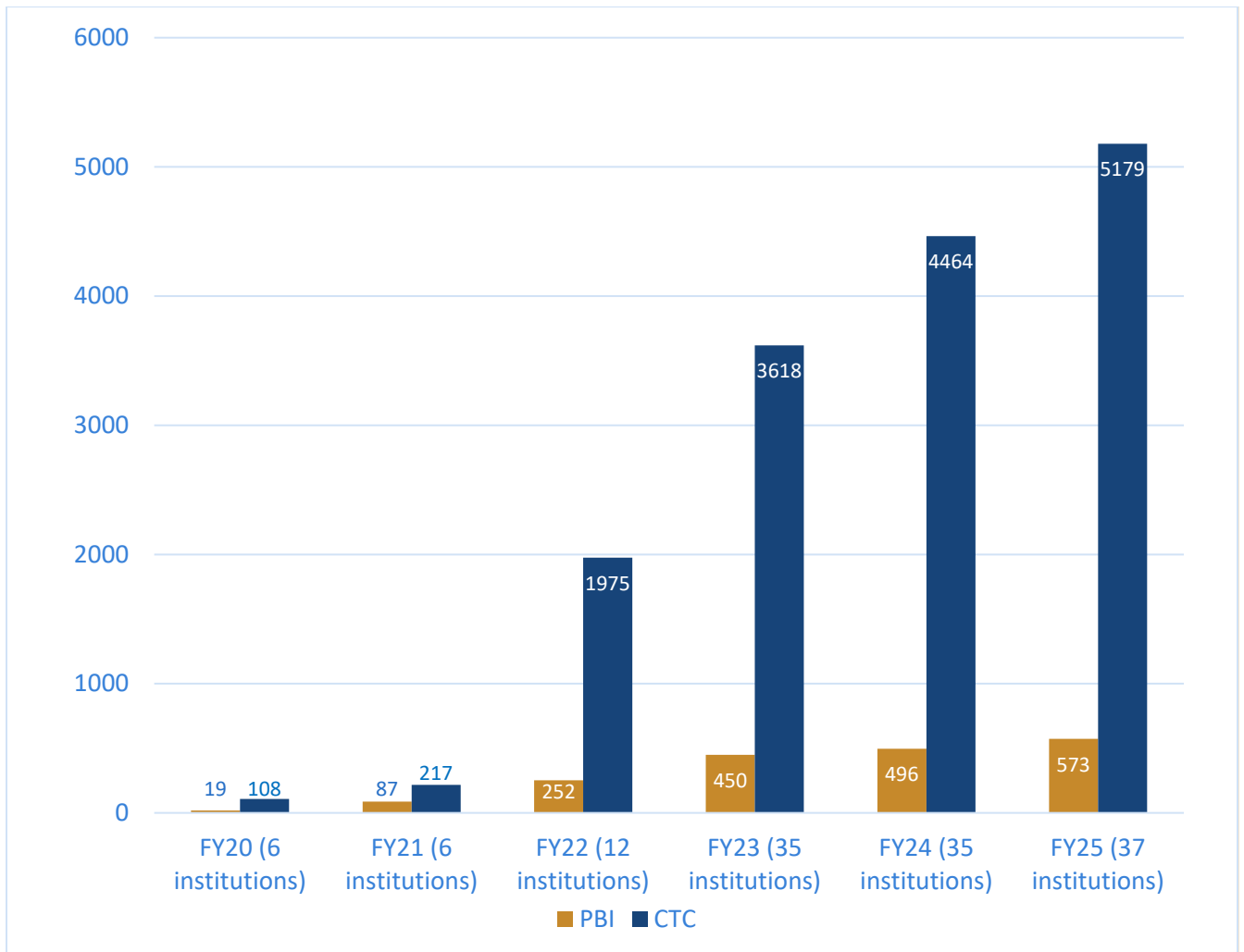
⁶ SBCTC. (December 2025). *Supporting Students Experiencing Homelessness (SSEH) Program: Annual Report*.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ WSAC, WWU. (January 2025). *Reassessing Basic Needs Security Among Washington College Students: Washington Student Experience Survey*. <https://wsac.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2025.BasicNeedsReport.pdf>

Figure 1: Total Washington students served by SSEH each year.



Race and Ethnicity: Over half of students served in SSEH in 2024-25 were students of color: 61 percent in the CTC system,¹⁰ and 58 percent across the PBI sector. This is higher than the proportion of students of color enrolled at CTCs (55 percent)¹¹ and in PBI enrollment (38 percent median).

This reflects findings in the Washington Student Experience Survey (2024), which found disproportionately high rates of basic needs insecurity among students of color. Statewide, the highest rates were among American Indian or Alaska Native students (85 percent), Pacific Islander or Native Hawaiian students (73 percent), and Black or African American students (66 percent). Only two race or ethnicity subgroups reported basic needs insecurity at rates lower than the statewide rate: white students at 50 percent and Asian students at 43 percent.⁵

¹⁰ SBCTC. (December 2025). *Supporting Students Experiencing Homelessness (SSEH) Program: Annual Report*.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 3.

“[SSEH] stopped me from being homeless and starving. It has given me the opportunity to continue my education even with all the instability I've been facing.” - SSEH student, Western Washington University

Age: The proportion of students served by SSEH age 25 or older was 43 percent at PBIs and 64 percent at CTCs.¹² These are higher proportions compared to enrollment.¹³

Former Foster Youth: SSEH served 346 former foster youth in fiscal year 2024-25: 9 in the PBI sector and 337 in the CTC system.¹⁴ These total numbers represent 6 percent of all SSEH students served.

“I was kicked out of my house the same day as my high school graduation and was thus left homeless with only the help being from a few of my friends who offered their couches to sleep on and the occasional meal.... With solving these issues, I was truly able to get back on my feet and feel as though I can now consider myself a true independent adult ready to face the challenges ahead of me.” – SSEH student, Centralia College

What are the students’ persistence outcomes?

Supporting students’ basic needs with housing, case management, and other accommodations helped them stay enrolled. Persistence data show that 90 percent of students in the PBI sector and 87 percent of students in the CTC sector completed the term in which they received SSEH support. Most of those students served by SSEH persisted to the next term at their colleges or completed a credential by the following term: 98 percent among PBI students, and 81 percent among CTC students.

Figure 2: Persistence rates for students served by SSEH

Fiscal year 2024-25	PBI	CTC
Percent of students who completed academic term in which they received SSEH support	90%	87%
Percent who stayed in college or completed a credential the following term	98%	81%

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid, p. 4. PBI data reported as part of PBI SSEH annual data collection.

¹⁴ Ibid.

For national context, the Hope Center reports that basic needs insecurity is commonly cited by students as a cause for stopping out. Their 2024 survey report, including 91 colleges, notes that “79 percent of student respondents who had previously stopped out of college [and subsequently re-enrolled] or were considering stopping out of college, [said that] it was due to basic needs insecurity or financial reasons.”¹⁵

“One student who received a combination of emergency aid, case management, and on-campus resource referrals also reported moving on a survey from ‘extremely likely’ to ‘extremely unlikely’ to leave school and noted that the support made them feel seen and supported in a meaningful way.” - Associate Dean, Washington State University - Vancouver

How do SSEH programs serve students?

Services and Accommodations

All colleges provide SSEH-eligible students with case management, housing accommodations, and food access in some form. The programs vary in terms of other services and support based on campus and community resources, and individual student circumstances and needs. Many programs provide additional support for basic needs such as shower access, hygiene supplies, transportation, clothing, utilities, technology, books, class supplies, laundry access and supplies, child-related support, health-related support, storage, mailstop, and other essentials. (See summary of FY 2025 accommodations Figure 3)

SSEH housing accommodations include prevention of imminent homelessness, assistance to find and establish new rental accommodation (e.g. application fees, deposits), emergency housing or shelter, short-term (3-6 months) and long-term housing (6 or more months). Across PBIs and CTCs, colleges use many strategies to meet emergency needs and to develop longer-term stability, such as:

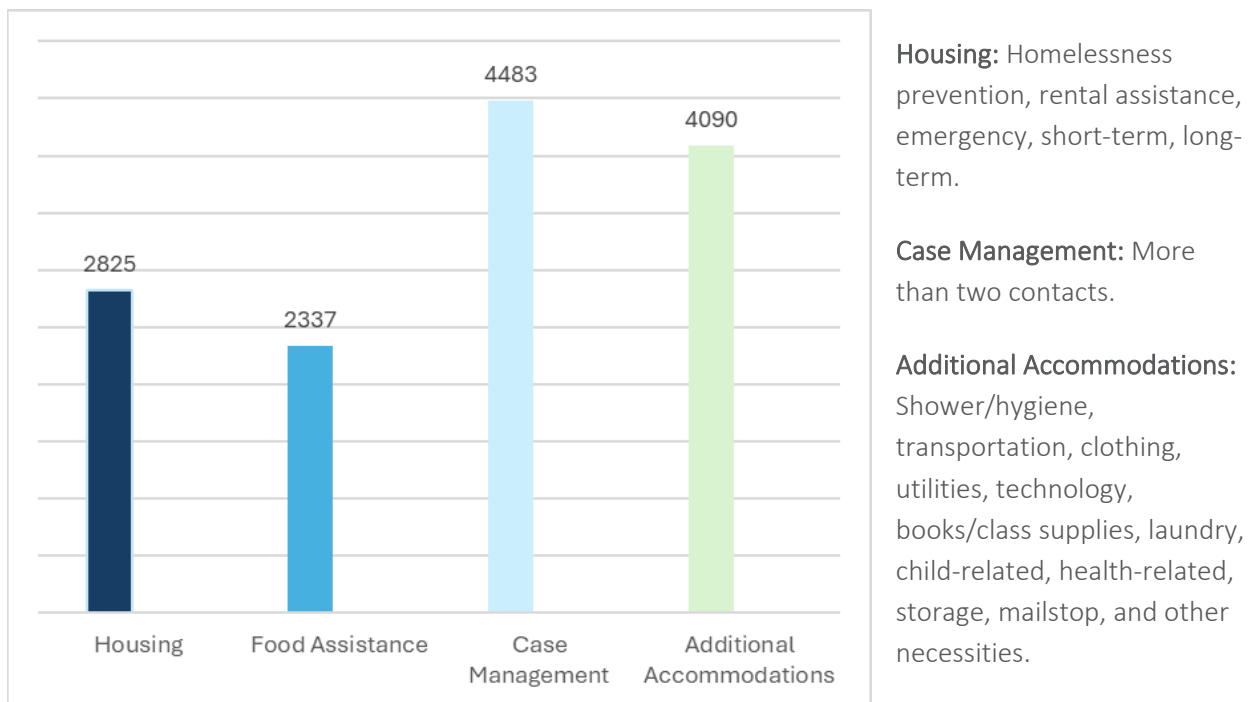
- Reserving college housing units for emergency or short-term needs, including during summer and college breaks.
- Providing direct funding to students or landlords to prevent eviction.
- Connecting students to coordinated entry to community shelters.
- Negotiating master lease arrangements with private apartments.
- Developing partnerships for student referrals to local housing with non-profit organizations and private landlords.

¹⁵ The Hope Center for Basic Needs at Temple University. (February 2025, p. 32-33). *The Hope Center 2023-2024 Student Basic Needs Survey Report*. <https://hope.temple.edu/sites/hope/files/media/document/Hope%20Student%20Basic%20Needs%20Survey%20Report%20202324.pdf>

“In December 2024, two SSEH students were placed into campus housing. This was the first time that on-campus housing had been made available to students who were not collegiate athletes or international students.” – SSEH Director, Lower Columbia College

Case management is a key component of SSEH. Case management includes any individual connection with a student, including outreach, intake, triage, assessments, coaching, planning, referrals, follow-up, etc. All students received case management and many SSEH students received more than two case management contacts.

Figure 3: FY 2025 Number of Accommodations provided by SSEH programs



“[SSEH staff] provided me with incredible assistance during a difficult time when I was on the verge of homelessness. They helped me with move-in costs and gave me a room in emergency housing for three months. While staying there, I had a dedicated case manager who met with me on Zoom every day, checking in and helping me find a permanent place to live. Her support was truly life-changing, it gave me the stability I needed to focus on my education without the overwhelming stress of housing insecurity. I am extremely grateful for their help, and I appreciate the care and dedication they show to students in need.” - Student, University of Washington - Tacoma

Referrals to Other Programs and Resources

SSEH program staff develop and maintain relationships and cross-referral systems across programs and resources both within their institutions and with community providers and public benefit programs.

Campus referrals

SSEH case managers made over 33,845 referrals on behalf of SSEH-eligible students to other campus and college resources and programs (809 for PBIs and 33,036 for CTCs). Campus food pantries were the most referred resource, with 6,249 referrals.¹⁶ Students were also referred to other funding and holistic support options, such as financial aid, Wellness services, emergency aid grants, career and employment services, TRiO and Passport to Careers, and a variety of other programs.

“Students reflected that the support between SSEH and our CWU Wildcat Pantry is what retained them to graduation or to finish the quarter. Students were grateful for the help to the finish line!” - Chief of Staff, Central Washington University

Referrals to community and public benefits and services

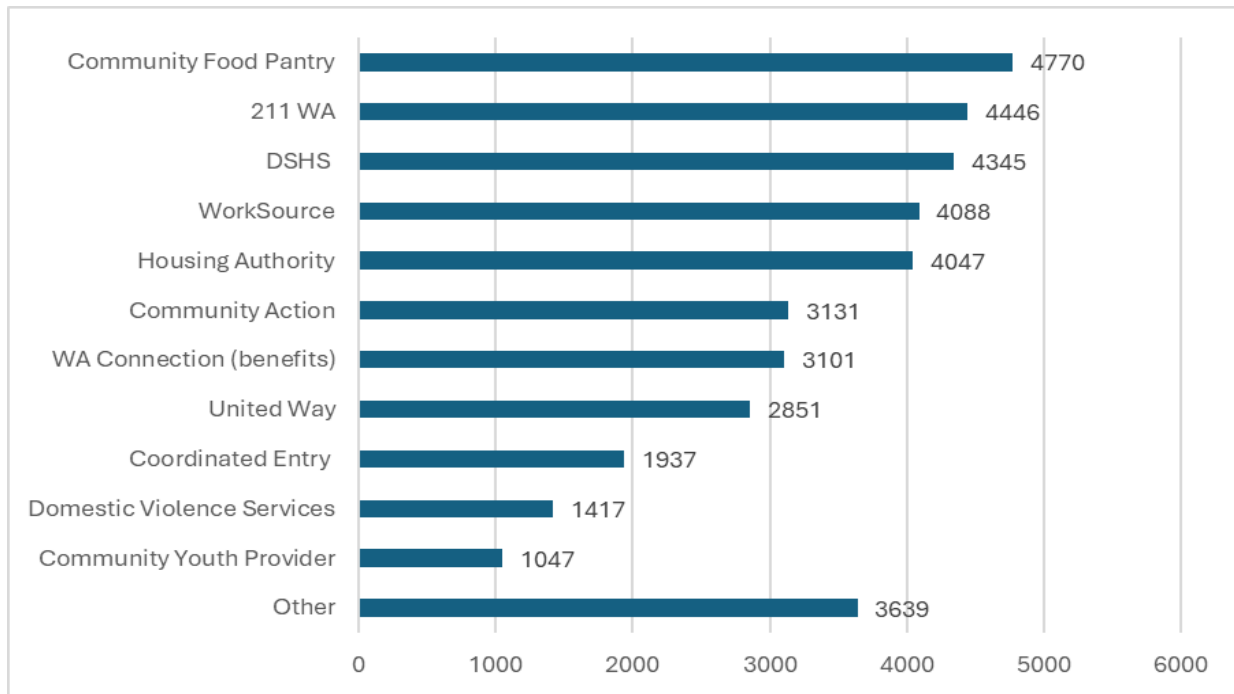
For both CTCs and PBIs, referrals to community providers, partners, public agencies, and benefit programs are integral to the support of SSEH students. SSEH case managers made over **38,827 referrals** in fiscal year 2025 to community resources and public assistance programs (Figure 4).¹⁷ Top referrals were to community food pantries, 211 Washington, DSHS, WorkSource, Housing Authorities, and Community Action. A wide range of additional community partners, programs, and providers helped meet students’ needs related to housing/shelter, domestic violence, youth services, utilities, legal aid, immigrant services, employment support, financial assistance, childcare, transportation, healthcare, and other basic needs.

“We were able to move multiple students from unstable living situations (car, shelter, etc.) into our student housing using SSEH funding. For each of these students, we were able to cover three months of rent (one quarter) for them while they connected with supports like United Way, financial aid, and DSHS, to ensure enough income to continue to cover the expense after the first three months.... This would be unobtainable without access to SSEH funding. It leads to success for these students.” – SSEH Program Director, Green River College

¹⁶ SBCTC. (December 2025). *Supporting Students Experiencing Homelessness (SSEH) Program: Annual Report*.

¹⁷ Ibid.

Figure 4: Community resource referrals by SSEH case managers



SSEH Strategy Highlights

From its beginning, the SSEH program grew with full cross-sector collaboration between two-year and four-year institutions, SBCTC, and WSAC. We continue to collect aligned data, share promising strategies in a statewide learning community, and develop recommendations.

Members of the expanding SSEH Learning Community convened in Fall 2024 to share practices and approaches to addressing students' basic needs. They reflected on campus efforts during Postsecondary Basic Needs Awareness Week (November 2024), shared resources and community providers, and discussed common challenges and local partnerships. In addition, many SSEH staff engaged in relevant basic needs training and community of practice discussions throughout the year. PBI and CTC teams have highlighted the following strategies:

Develop effective administration strategies:

- Braid emergency funding resources into a single application process for students.
- Develop emergency funding policies, triage, and prioritization practices using a team approach to help control for individual bias. Work collectively to determine the allocation of limited resources. Maximize leveraging programs and funding sources.
- Engage students with lived experience to assess programs and policies, inform campus basic needs strategic planning, and raise awareness of potential advocates.

- Establish a shared system to refer students into SSEH. Track SSEH students served and cross-referred between multiple programs at colleges to improve case management coordination and student experiences.

"The Basic Needs Program... [addresses] critical issues like food insecurity and emergency housing. With these supports in place, first generation farm-working students who participate in CAMP are better able to focus on their academic goals and remain enrolled. The program has become a vital resource in improving retention and equity for this vulnerable student population." -College Assistance Migrant Program Coordinator, Eastern Washington University

Develop campus and community awareness, networks and partnerships:

- Partner with campus housing providers to reserve units for SSEH-eligible students.
- Establish and sustain strong program cross-referrals between SSEH and Passport program staff, and other support resources, such as advising, food pantry, admissions, BFET/SNAP, financial aid, Running Start, CARE network, and benefit or basic need navigators.
- Meet with K-12 McKinney-Vento and foster care liaisons to raise awareness of the college-level support available. Continue cross-sector meetings to sustain and develop relationships and warm-handoffs for students entering college.
- Identify potential champions, allies, and donors; collaborate with community partners and stakeholders to help identify and secure housing for low-income students.

"Thank you so much for your tremendous efforts in helping me find resources. I got approved for an apartment, and I'm signing the lease on Monday! I have a navigator from the YWCA who is helping me with move-in costs and I am going to increase my hours at work to cover it. I finally will move from homeless to housed! And, just in time to get settled in before the Fall quarter starts." – SSEH student, Lake Washington Institute of Technology

Support students' access to public benefits:

- Use enhanced outreach strategies to increase students' awareness of and support to apply for benefits.¹⁸ Partner with the Washington Department of Social and Health Services to come to campus for food benefit application support.

¹⁸ 15 institutions participated in WSAC's [Postsecondary Benefits Promotion Pilot](#) in FY25 to test enhanced outreach strategies to connect students to benefits and resources.

Incorporate financial planning education into the financial aid enrollment process, as well as for students experiencing ongoing challenges or recurring emergencies.

Increase support for students' food security:

- Partner with local food banks, community gardens, grocery stores, on-campus food vendors, and other organizations to increase food access.
- Ensure culturally relevant food, perishable and fresh food, and options for those with specific dietary needs or restrictions are available in pantries.
- Offer cooking demonstrations and recipe cards featuring pantry provisions; offer food preparation and kitchen spaces on campus to prepare food.
- Offer expanded food access through food distribution, resource lockers, prepared meals, cafeteria passes, and meal cards.

"The SFCC food pantry is closed during summer, and we know students need access... This was one of several factors that prompted us to create our Resource Cupboards across campus in partnership with Second Harvest." – SSEH program Director, Spokane Falls Community College

State agencies and systems partner with campuses to expand and increase support for Washington students facing homelessness and other basic needs insecurities. Highlights of Washington state and system strategies:

- The state's investment in adding Benefit or Basic Needs Navigators¹⁹ has expanded SSEH capacity to support students, connect them with potential benefits and programs, and deepen partnerships. Many Basic Needs Navigators are also SSEH staff and participate in quarterly Basic Needs Navigation Cohort workgroups and practice-sharing convenings.
- Colleges and universities are developing and reporting on Hunger-Free and Basic Needs Strategic Plans as part of the [Student Basic Needs Act](#). This is broadening campus awareness of basic needs insecurity and opening dialogue on how basic needs are linked to other strategic enrollment, equity, and workforce development goals.
- Collaboration deepened in fiscal year 2024 between colleges, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), and K-12 staff working with intersecting student populations. SBCTC and WSAC staff developed and published a [College Homeless/Foster Youth Staff Contact List](#) to help K-12

¹⁹ 2S HB 1559 (2023) requires public postsecondary institutions to have at least one navigator position that supports students' access to benefits and resources for their basic needs. It also requires campuses to complete and report on a campus basic needs strategic plan.

Homeless Student and Foster Care Liaisons identify specific program contacts at each college. Cross-sector professional development and networking events promote relationships between staff supporting high school students experiencing homelessness, benefit navigators, and SSEH case managers. These relationships enable earlier awareness of educational opportunities, support services, and smoother transition from high school to college.

- The Office of Homeless Youth and Building Changes have expanded their ongoing virtual community of practice to include SSEH and basic needs college staff. This has resulted in more awareness of programs, resources, and practice-sharing.
- SSEH and [Passport to Careers](#) share a focus on supporting former foster youth and unaccompanied homeless youth. Staff who intersect with both SSEH and Passport serve on the statewide Passport Leadership Team and many engage in the Passport Network learning opportunities. WSAC and OSPI have established data sharing to reduce the burden on unaccompanied homeless youth to demonstrate eligibility for financial aid.
- SSEH teams continue to seek opportunities to deepen and sustain collaboration with partner agencies, programs, organizations, and state and regional coalitions with intersecting missions and service populations. This includes those engaged in anti-poverty efforts, food access, affordable housing development, homelessness prevention, and equitable access to education and training.

“By helping me winterize my trailer, (SSEH) ensured that I had a warm and stable living environment, allowing me to focus on my studies without the added stress of unsafe living conditions. Since receiving the funds, I have utilized the college food pantry, counseling, and the library...it truly made a difference in my ability to continue my education.” – SSEH student, Bellingham Technical College

Recommendations

The following recommendations for legislative action will improve the stability and success of SSEH students and the sustainability of colleges’ efforts:

- Increase affordable housing options for students (and staff) on and off college campuses. Promote community and regional partnerships that create solutions inclusive of students to address housing shortages.
- Expand SSEH legislation to include SSEH program grant opportunities at the PBI campuses.²⁰
- Increase and ensure funding for SSEH Case Managers to preserve more of the legislative appropriation for student housing and basic needs accommodations. As enrollment increases and

²⁰ Higher Education—Students Experiencing Homelessness and Foster Youth Program—Expansion, Engrossed Substitute SB 5702, 68th Legislature. (2023). <https://lawfilesexternal.wa.gov/biennium/2023-24/Pdf/Bills/Session%20Laws/Senate/5702-S.SL.pdf?q=20241107105917>

inflation of basic necessities increases, so does student need for the program resources. At the current legislative appropriation, the reach of the program will decrease as colleges attempt to stretch funding to cover both critical program staffing and student accommodations.

- Establish automatic eligibility for the Washington College Grant for Passport-eligible students. Advocate to sustain Passport funding for students exiting foster care and unaccompanied homeless youth.
- Increase funding associated with the Student Basic Needs Act to make Benefit and Basic Needs Navigators full-time 1.0 FTE staff positions.
- Expand the Free and Reduced-Price Meal Pilot (Food Security Pilot) enacted through the Student Basic Needs Act to an additional year and include more colleges.²¹
- Extend the current funding level for the Homeless Student Stability Education Program (HSSEP) to be able to continue past the 2025-26 school year.²² Homelessness, housing insecurity, and food insecurity is reported by 68 percent of Washington college students with dependents.²³ Erosion of K-12 support for homeless children and families will impact support for parenting students experiencing homelessness who are striving to improve their education, skills, and economic situation.
- Establish incentives for affordable housing developers and operators to employ best practices related to how criminal background checks can limit access to housing for students with histories of justice-involvement.²⁴
- Advocate at the Federal level to remove student barriers to Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC)²⁵ and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) access²⁶.

²¹ SBCTC, WSAC. (2025). *Overview of the Washington Student Food Security Pilot (Free / Reduced-Price Food Pilot)*. [https://wsac.wa.gov/sites/default/files/WA-Free_Reduced-Price-Food-Security-Pilot-Overview-\(2SHB-1559\)-\(1\).pdf](https://wsac.wa.gov/sites/default/files/WA-Free_Reduced-Price-Food-Security-Pilot-Overview-(2SHB-1559)-(1).pdf)

²² [RCW 28A.300.542 Students experiencing homelessness](#) (HSSEP) provides grant funding to school districts to identify homeless students and provide educational and other basic needs supports to increase educational stability by promoting housing stability. The state operating budget eliminated funding effective in the 2026-27 school year.

²³ Deane, KC, and Kukreja, Arya. (September 2025). *Designing Postsecondary Education for Parenting Students*. <https://wsac.wa.gov/sites/default/files/Designing-Postsecondary-Education%20for-Parenting%20Students.pdf>

²⁴ For this and additional recommendations to address housing for low-income postsecondary students, see SBCTC's [Low Income Student Housing Opportunities Study](#) (June 2025).

²⁵ SBCTC. (June 2025, p. 5). *Low-Income Student Housing Opportunities Study*. <https://www.sbctc.edu/resources/documents/colleges-staff/programs-services/legislative-outreach/low-income-housing.pdf>

²⁶ The Hope Center notes that states have a policy role in interpreting federal student exemptions for SNAP, and some states have expanded student exemption rules and processes that could serve as a model for Washington: Closing the College SNAP Gap. <https://hope.temple.edu/policy-advocacy/closing-college-snap-gap>

Conclusion

As a result of Washington's powerful SSEH investment in students who are experiencing homelessness or who aged out of foster care, **5,752** students received tailored support through SSEH in fiscal year 2025. SSEH helped improve students' housing and food security and contributed to students' remarkable levels of college persistence and program completion.

Colleges are strengthening systems to identify and better support students facing these challenges. They are increasing collaboration and facilitated pathways for K-12 students experiencing homelessness coming into college education. They are developing new partnerships at the campus and community levels. Washington's continuing investment in the Supporting Students Experiencing Homelessness program and the Student Basic Needs Act will continue to provide critical support and reduce barriers for students to succeed in reaching their educational goals.

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About the Washington Student Achievement Council

The Washington Student Achievement Council is committed to increasing educational opportunities and attainment in Washington. The Council has three main functions:

- Lead statewide strategic planning to increase educational attainment.
- Administer programs that help people access and pay for college.
- Advocate for the economic, social, and civic benefits of higher education.

The Council has ten members. Four members represent each of Washington's major education sectors: four-year public baccalaureates, four-year private colleges, public community and technical colleges, and K-12 public schools. Six are citizen members, including two current students (one graduate student and one undergraduate student).

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