

## Connecting students to basic needs benefits and resources: How can Washington scale impact?

Washington students report struggling to meet basic needs, such as food and housing, creating barriers to their ability to persist and complete a postsecondary credential. Yet students' awareness and access to public benefits and other resources show serious gaps:

- Over half of Washington students reported food and/or housing insecurity in 2024 – 6 percent higher than in 2022. About half of those students experiencing basic needs insecurity were not accessing available benefits and resources.<sup>1</sup>
- The top barriers students reported were a lack of awareness of public benefits and campus resources, not knowing how to access them, or assuming they weren't eligible.<sup>2</sup>
- About 80 percent of Washington students at the lowest income levels – students receiving full WA Grant – are not receiving DSHS-administered benefits like SNAP food benefits.<sup>3</sup>

As we heard from Grays Harbor College in the November Council meeting, campuses, agencies, and advocates are working to address students' basic needs. The next challenge is scaling impact. **How can Washington better align efforts and inspire sustained action to move the needle on student access to benefits and resources?**

### Washington is well-positioned to expand outreach and access

Washington has created strong building blocks to outreach and connect students with basic needs benefits and resources:

- **Basic Needs Navigators:** With the Student Basic Needs Act,<sup>4</sup> Washington public campuses now have navigators who help connect struggling students with the support they need. Last year, staff connected over 95,000 students with nearly 100,000 referrals to [public benefits and campus and community resources](#).

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

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 16

<sup>3</sup> WSAC analysis of data from the 2025 Postsecondary Basic Needs Pilot.

<sup>4</sup> SSHB 1559, 68th Legislature Session, 2023 Reg. Sess. (Wash. 2023).  
<https://lawfilesext.leg.wa.gov/biennium/2023-24/Pdf/Bills/Session%20Laws/House/1559-S2.SL.pdf?q=20240322103652>

- **Basic Needs Outreach:** Early and targeted communications to populations with disproportionately high rates of basic needs insecurity can increase students' resource awareness and connect them with campus support. In the [2025 Postsecondary Benefits Promotion Pilot](#), 15 campuses tested targeted outreach strategies. Pilot learning informed a new [Enhancing Outreach Toolkit](#) and training to help all colleges with outreach.
- **Data:** WSAC and DSHS have a data-sharing agreement to identify WA Grant awardees who are not receiving DSHS benefits. This data creates new opportunities: colleges can target basic needs outreach and support to these students. In addition, this data can serve as an important indicator of change over time at the campus, sector, and state levels.
- **Partnerships:** DSHS and community organizations are partnering with colleges on student referrals and on-campus support to connect students with benefits and resources. For example, many campuses have the DSHS mobile unit regularly on campus for streamlined benefits application and screening, and others host [community resource fairs](#).

Leveraging these building blocks, Washington partners now have the opportunity to scale impact in connecting students to basic needs support. Developing a compelling vision, as well as solutions-oriented metrics and goals, can drive sustained, aligned action at the local and state levels.

### ***For Council Discussion:***

How might WSAC work with partners to develop a compelling vision for students' basic needs, with goals and metrics to advance measurable change over time?