



Connecting students with support: Student Basic Needs Act 2SHB 1559 | January 2026

How common is basic needs insecurity among Washington college students?

Washington college students are experiencing high levels of basic needs insecurity, which can negatively impact academic success.¹ In a [2024 Washington State survey](#) of over 11,300 students across 46 public institutions, 52 percent of four- and two-year college students reported experiencing either food and/or housing insecurity. This rate is 6 percent higher than the 2022 administration of the survey.²

One critical insight from the survey is that students face barriers to accessing existing resources and benefits. **Of the 1 in 2 students who reported basic needs insecurity, only half had accessed campus or community resources.** They reported a lack of awareness, belief they were ineligible, and uncertainty about how to access resources.

Colleges are reducing basic needs insecurity by connecting students to resources

In 2023, Washington passed the **Student Basic Needs Act** ([2SHB 1559](#)) to address these challenges. The legislation requires public institutions to provide **basic needs navigation** connecting students to existing resources, including public benefits and community and campus resources. Colleges are also required to implement **campus strategic plans to address basic needs insecurity issues**. Data from 2024-25 provides valuable insights on how navigation is connecting students to basic needs resources:³

Navigators connected 95,111 Washington students to basic needs resources:

- 932 university students and 94,179 CTC students.
- Among students served, over half were first-generation or low-income.

Navigators provided 99,928 referrals to community and campus resources:

- Campus resources: 1,698 (universities) and 55,031 (CTCs).
- Community resources and benefits: 1,112 (universities) and 42,087 (CTCs).

Most common resource needs included:

- Food assistance and benefits application support.
- Homelessness services or prevention and utilities assistance.
- Financial aid and emergency assistance.
- Childcare, health services, transportation.

¹ Broton, K. M. (2021). Poverty in American higher education. *Journal of Postsecondary Student Success*, 1(2), 18–45

² Reassessing Basic Needs Security Among Washington College Students (2025) Executive Summary: <https://wsac.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2024-WSES-Executive.Summary.pdf>

³ WSAC analysis of data reported in [Council of Presidents](#) and [SBCTC HB 1559](#) legislative reports.

Outreach strategies connect students to public benefits and resources

Outreach is essential for increasing resource awareness and reducing stigma. To ensure that all students know there are resources and help to address their needs and keep them in school, **campus navigators are reaching students in multiple ways:**

- Email, text, phone, and social media campaigns.
- Student portal messaging.
- Classroom presentations and resource fairs.
- Engaging faculty, staff, and student leaders as awareness campaign partners and messengers.

Highlight: In the [Washington Benefits Promotion Pilot](#), 15 campuses partnered with WSAC and Education Northwest to test enhanced outreach strategies. Campus-targeted messaging campaigns connected thousands of likely-eligible students with benefits and navigation. Going forward, learning from a pilot and a [new toolkit](#) are equipping all navigators to more effectively outreach to students about benefits and resources.

“I was able to restructure my available resources to continue my learning plan. Without the assistance, my family would have been (potentially) losing the ability to stay in our home.” - CTC Student

Community partnerships and public benefits help close the resource gaps

All campuses have developed strategic plans for addressing basic needs that facilitate campus collaboration and expand partnerships with community-based organizations for housing, food, childcare, financial assistance, and public benefits. Many colleges coordinate with Department of Social and Health Services mobile units to bring public benefits screening and application assistance directly to campuses. Other colleges partner with local nonprofits, city and county agencies, and faith-based organizations for emergency support, housing, and long-term stability resources. Building collaborations across campus, community, and public benefits has been central to addressing the resource needs of students.

“I would have never graduated without help from the Basic Needs Hub.” - WWU Student

Support for students' basic needs is needed more than ever

Reducing the barriers to postsecondary attainment through basic needs support for students is a core approach of Washington's [Strategic Action Plan](#). **With basic needs insecurity on the rise statewide, Washington's investment in students' access to basic needs support is more important than ever.** Outreach, navigation, and community partnerships help students to piece together essentials like food, housing, and other needs – a foundation for postsecondary and workforce success.

For more information about Washington Postsecondary Basic Needs:

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