

# HOLISTIC SUPPORT TO ADDRESS STUDENT BASIC NEEDS

Studies across the nation show that U.S. college students are not receiving sufficient financial aid and are struggling with meeting their basic needs, which includes consistent access to nutritious food in addition to stable and safe housing.<sup>1</sup> These core aspects are essential to the mental and physical well-being of college students. All three of California's public higher education systems and stakeholders are committed to addressing student basic needs in a holistic manner to ensure that all students have the opportunity to be successful. As higher education populations, policies and practices continue to evolve, providing access to resources to help alleviate barriers related to basic needs are critical to academic success.

## What is cost of attendance?

The total cost of attending college includes tuition and fees, housing,<sup>2</sup> food,<sup>3</sup> transportation, books, childcare and supplies. Although California state and institutional aid programs cover full tuition and fees for about half of students attending a California State University, University of California and California Community College, students struggle to pay for the total cost of attendance.<sup>4</sup>

## What is food insecurity?

Food insecurity is when individuals report multiple indications of disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake.<sup>5</sup>

Food security exists on a continuum, with low and very-low food security counted as "food-insecure."

## What is housing insecurity?

Housing insecurity is a broad term that includes inability to pay rent, having to move often, poor housing quality, unstable neighborhood and housing structures, overcrowding or homelessness. Homelessness is defined by the McKinney-Vento Act as individuals who lack fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence.<sup>6</sup>



### Concerns Over College Affordability

- Each year over 300,000 eligible applicants don't get a state Cal Grant because not enough are available.<sup>7</sup>
- The portion of the state grant that helps cover non-tuition expenses is worth less than \$1,700 today, while non-tuition college costs can exceed \$20K annually.
- Low-income students spend about half their family income on out-of-pocket costs after grant aid.<sup>8</sup>



### Who's Affected by Food Insecurity?

- 50% of CCC students experience food insecurity
- 41.6% of CSU students experience food insecurity
- 44% of UC<sup>9</sup> Undergraduates experience food insecurity
- 26% of UC Graduate Students experience food insecurity



### Who's Affected by Housing Insecurity?

- 19% of CCC students have experienced homelessness within the past 12 months
- 60% of CCC students experience housing insecurity
- 10.9% of CSU students are homeless
- 5% of UC students are homeless



## Research and Data

CA public higher education systems must conduct research and evaluate the impact of student basic needs efforts on physical and mental health, social well-being, and academic outcomes while exploring new mechanisms for sharing data and collecting data across our systems. It is critical to identify and estimate the college student population in need, and collectively produce state-level strategic plans to improve the basic needs of college students.

**Sample strategy:** Establish evaluation teams per system for longitudinal data analysis of student basic needs that are comparable and consistent across systems.

## Financial Aid

To ensure all Californians have the opportunity to attend college full time, be successful students and complete a meaningful degree, California must strengthen its need-based financial aid programs to account for total college costs, including basic needs, and target this aid to those students who can least afford the total cost of attendance. The state can immediately address students' basic needs and critical college costs (including housing, food, books, transportation and child care) by:

- Increasing the number of financial aid grants that support all low-income students attending public institutions, including students more than one year out of high school, as hundreds of thousands of low-income students currently go unserved.
- Increasing the size of the Cal Grant access award, whose value has stagnated and is currently worth just one quarter its original value.

## Basic Needs Centers/Hubs

The public higher education systems have developed the California Higher Education Basic Needs Alliance (CHEBNA) to develop approaches for targeting students' basic needs. The CHEBNA has identified Basic Needs Centers/Hubs as one of the most consistent and transformative strategies to align resources for the economic, food, housing, and health experiences of college students. Students should have access to a safe and reliable centralized location for resources, receive support for their basic needs and have meaningful opportunities to contribute to the basic needs of others.

**Sample strategies:** A full-time professional staff serving as Basic Needs Manager, a full-time Case Manager for supporting basic needs efforts on each campus, and innovative strategies that allow campuses to have a dedicated facility as their Basic Needs Center/Hub to provide needed supports.

## CalFresh

The federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), known in California as CalFresh, is an existing and sustainable intervention for student food insecurity. Recipients of CalFresh can purchase food with monthly benefits on an Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card. Since the expansion of student eligibility (AB 1930, 2015), more students are now eligible for CalFresh, but CalFresh access for college students should be further expanded.

### Strategies and Opportunities:

- Prioritize sustainable funding within colleges for targeted CalFresh outreach, including education and enrollment activities on college campuses with an emphasis on student populations most at-risk who are most likely to be eligible.
- Increase the number of college campuses that accept CalFresh EBT cards in campus stores and cafeterias, and increase participation in the CalFresh Restaurant Meals Programs.

## Housing Resources

Burdened by rising tuition and living costs that have outpaced increases in financial aid,<sup>10</sup> our public college students have little financial leverage to compete in California's expensive, crowded rental markets. While student housing offers some reprieve, it is in short supply and can be more expensive than living off-campus. In addition, students may experience homelessness because of poverty, domestic violence, abuse, neglect, and/or system involvement such as foster care. Investments in Rapid Rehousing programs, emergency shelters, and transitional housing programs, specifically for college students are encouraged strategies.

<sup>1</sup> Martinez 2018 J Health Psych, <sup>2</sup> McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, <sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, <sup>4</sup> Legislative Analyst's Office, <sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, <sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Sec. 725 of the McKinney-Vento Act, <sup>7</sup> California Student Aid Commission memos: September 2018 and April 2018, <sup>8</sup> The Institute for College Access & Success, <sup>9</sup> UC Housing & Food information from the UC Global Food Initiative: Food and Housing Security at the University of California 2017 report, <sup>10</sup> Center on Budget and Policy Priorities and Californians for College Affordability