The Opportunity to Strengthen Basic Needs Supports for California's Post-Secondary Students through Partnership and Shared Accountability:

Recommendations from the Intersegmental Working Group on Student Basic Needs

BRIEF

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Executive Summary

The California Intersegmental Working Group on Student Basic Needs (Working Group) was established in August 2021 to develop for the Governor's Council for Post-Secondary Education a set of recommendations that identify opportunities to better support student basic needs, and hence student success. This brief features 20 recommendations proposed by the Working Group that focus on streamlining supports, reducing barriers, and maximizing uptake of publicly available resources and services. The recommendations are organized by opportunities to strengthen basic needs support through intersegmental, regional, and state-level partnerships.

California Intersegmental Working Group on Student Basic Needs

The California Intersegmental Working Group on Student Basic Needs (Working Group) consisted of ten higher education leaders, experts, practitioners and student representatives from the University of California, California State University, California Community Colleges, the Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities, and each of the respective statewide student organizations. The group met on a bi-weekly basis for four months and heard from both campus and systems level leaders and researchers working on the issue of student basic needs throughout California. The Working Group was facilitated by Tanya Moore, PhD and supported by Shree Jennifer Ram and Caroline Siegel Singh.

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Overview

For generations, California's world-class higher education system has provided opportunity and socioeconomic mobility, driven research and innovation, and powered economic growth throughout the state.

Today, California's massive higher education system educates nearly 3 million students annually. Most attend a public university (either the University of California, California State University, and California Community Colleges), while a substantial minority attend private non-profit colleges and universities (represented by the Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities). In addition to its premier institutions, California has one of the most generous state financial aid programs in the nation, which allows most low-income undergraduates at public institutions to pay no tuition out of pocket.

However, the years long rise in cost of living poses an affordability crisis for all Californians - which, in turn, impacts students' ability to meet their basic needs. This is most commonly understood as food security and housing stability, both critical for academic success. In a study conducted by the California Student Aid Commission prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, 35 percent of participants reported low or very low food security and 35 percent experienced one or more conditions of housing insecurity. Basic needs also includes other factors, such as healthcare, mental health supports, transportation, and access to technology, that are likewise critical to students' ability to succeed in the classroom. These challenges are especially acute for underrepresented and underserved students – including students of color, low-income students, undocumented students, parenting students, LGBTQ+ students, and justice-involved students.

Since March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated basic needs insecurity by further destabilizing the lives of those with unmet basic needs and increasing the number of students experiencing multiple instabilities for the first time. Many colleges and universities responded decisively, establishing emergency contracts and intersegmental agreements, expanding access to resources and services, and developing partnerships with community-based organizations to address the increased need. These innovative practices illustrate the higher education sector's ability to adapt to support students when the moment demands.

The Working Group on Basic Needs was tasked with building upon these innovative practices by developing an intersegmental, cost-effective statewide and/or regionalized approach–supported by concrete policy recommendations–to assist students in meeting their basic needs. The Working Group developed a set of 20 priority recommendations, divided into three categories and unified by a working definition of

basic needs and a set of guiding principles. These recommendations are closely aligned with other efforts in the basic needs space, including CSAC's report on CalFresh access and uptake, the California Higher Education Basic Needs Alliance's advocacy, and the UC, CSU, and CCC's work to better understand and address basic needs challenges. It is also aligned with state efforts to meet students' basic needs and make college affordable – including Governor Newsom's multi-year agreements with the UC, CSU, and CCC, investments in basic needs resources and services, and expansion of Cal Grant – and the federal "Dear Colleague" letters aimed at streamlining delivery of services.

Basic Needs Working Definition & Guiding Principles

Basic Needs are fundamental to students' dignity and success throughout their higher education experience. They include, but are not limited to:

- Food security;
- Housing security;
- Financial stability;
- Health and wellness;
- Child/dependent care;
- Transportation; and
- Technology and broadband.

Higher education leaders, policymakers, practitioners, and advocates have defined basic needs differently over the years, and definitions of basic needs can evolve as we strive to better understand the diversity of the student experience.

Because of this, the Working Group does not seek to establish a narrow, overly-prescriptive definition of basic needs. Instead, the Working Group established aspirational principles that frame the above broad definition and guide the recommendations:

1. **Meeting students' basic needs is foundational to affordability, accessibility, and student success throughout higher education.** At the core of basic needs are food security, housing security, and financial stability. Basic needs can also be expanded to include other student supports — described above — that are also key to upholding students' dignity, belonging, academic achievement, and professional success.

2. **Students' challenges with basic needs reflect long-standing struggles with inequality, inequity, and systemic racism.** In addressing basic needs, institutional leaders, policymakers, faculty, and staff should center equity, accessibility, sustainability, and justice, and work to affirm and support students with disproportionate basic needs experiences.

3. **Meeting students' basic needs is a shared responsibility. Higher education institutions cannot solve these issues on their own.** Therefore, higher education entities should collaborate intersegmentally and regionally — with each other, with local and state government, and with philanthropic and community organizations — to more effectively support students along the full spectrum of basic needs.

Intersegmental Basic Needs Working Group Recommendations: Offering Stronger Student Supports through Partnership and Shared Accountability

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Campuses and segments can increase access to basic needs and reduce student burden by centering students' experiences and perspectives in the promotion, administration, and delivery of basic needs services and supports.

A. Encourage campuses to adopt a set of guiding principles that allows for maximum flexibility in the utilization of existing basic needs resources.

B. Use data from the (i) admissions application and (ii) financial aid application and disbursement process to identify potentially eligible students and to work towards the goal of releasing qualified non-FAFSA benefits (e.g., CalFresh) directly during regular financial aid disbursements in order to proactively facilitate student access of state- and federally-funded resources and services. Include in students' financial aid offer letter contact information to discuss possible re-evaluation of financial aid package if basic needs are not covered, as well as a list of publicly-funded resources with information on how to apply to or use them.

C. Leverage current reciprocity agreements to maximize existing resources (e.g. staff, contracts and publicly funded resources) during times of emergencies (e.g., natural disasters) to support students' basic needs.

D. Ensure that emergency assistance does not negatively impact students' financial aid package. Have campus financial aid offices proactively make temporary adjustments to Cost of Attendance through the "professional judgment" process.

E. Identify alternative resources and provide wraparound basic needs support for students who do not meet eligibility requirements for publicly-funded services and have a demonstrated need (for example, undocumented or international students). Work towards institutionalizing these practices.

F. Provide staff, faculty, and administrators with ongoing professional development and training focused on healing/trauma-informed care, self-care, and available basic needs supports to deepen their understanding of, and therefore encourage students' access to and use of, basic needs services and supports.

G. Share current practices and develop campus level equity assessments that are used to identify gaps in resources and service access and lead to system-level action to remove barriers. Regularly share effective institutional practices and marketing strategies through workshops and summits.

H. Work toward developing debt-free pathways for students, with priority for students facing disproportionately higher rates of basic needs challenges.

2. Campuses and segments can partner with one another, with city or county government agencies, and with community-based organizations to expand students' access to a full continuum of support.

A. Build regional partnerships between campus basic needs practitioners, city and/or county government staff, and community-based organization representatives to develop and implement strategies for strengthening and streamlining support for students' basic needs. These partnerships should identify data driven goals, monitor progress towards those goals, and collectively share accountability by evaluating outcomes.

Specifically, this partnership could facilitate the following:

B. Increase support for current unhoused students (including through rapid-rehousing support and other housing stability programs) and leverage local/state partnerships and resources to build more affordable student housing for students and their families.

C. Ensure that college students are able to access and are served equitably by Prevention and Early Interventions and direct services under the Mental Health Services Act funding (Prop 63 funds).

D. Increase access to subsidized transit passes for California College students through the convening of regional college systems and their local transit authorities.

E. Identify barriers that prevent students from applying to and qualifying for CalFresh and opportunities to increase and track uptake.

F. Expand access to EBT on all campuses. Pilot a partnership between county and higher education institutions with and without CalFresh Restaurant Meal Program (RMP) that extends the program to every dining hall on campus for unhoused students.

G. Partner with the private sector – including CBOs, philanthropy, and businesses – to ensure students have access to devices and the Internet.

3. Segments and the state can work with one another to streamline deployment and maximize uptake of available publicly-funded resources.

A. Build relationships between segment and state leaders to identify and address the gaps in uptake of publicly available basic needs supports and services. This partnership can identify clear goals and related impact metrics based on implementation data across the segments and relevant state agencies.

Specifically, this partnership could facilitate the following:

B. Name college students as a priority population in eligibility requirements for publicly-funded basic needs related services and supports.

C. Ensure early identification of high-need students through partnerships, data sharing, and provision of campus resources between K-12 and higher education, and between higher education institutions, so that students receive pre-matriculation access to a bridge of support to and through college. For example, support data sharing agreements so that Free and Reduced Lunch eligibility data from K-12 can be used to proactively identify students that may be eligible for services such as CalFresh.

D. Identify strategies for bridging data from the segments and state agencies to track eligibility rates, approval/denial rates, reasons for denial, retention rates, as well as experiences, outcomes, and trends of state investments and efforts with specific attention to sub-populations with unique eligibility criteria (for example, student parents, undocumented students, and international students).

E. Advocate for the creation of a centralized navigation system of federal and state services for students which identifies the full suite of supports for which they qualify (e.g., financial aid, CalFresh, housing programs, healthcare, mental healthcare, subsidized childcare, transportation, internet/technology access support, etc.). This would be introduced to high school seniors and upon college matriculation, all college financial aid counselors and basic needs coordinators would continue to facilitate and actively promote use of the platform through the student's higher education experience. This platform would also include a FAFSA landing page with links and resources for assistance.

Conclusion

Providing equitable access to basic needs resources and services – and doing so effectively with dignity for all recipients – will depend on active, equal partnerships between higher education institutions, cities and counties, the state, and the private sector. California's colleges and universities have developed innovative programming to address students' basic needs and have adapted services to support students amid the COVID-19 pandemic, but more can be done through intentional relationship-building throughout the state to support student success and degree completion. Instead of placing the burden on students to navigate a complicated web of resources, benefits, and services, we must work together to redesign our systems to proactively provide students and families with a full suite of supports. That is what our students need to thrive, and that is what they deserve.

Appendix: List of Basic Needs Resources

Basic Needs Model Programs

Category	Organization	Program Description
Food Security	**California Community Colleges Health & Wellness**	**EBT GuideBook** A How-To for implementing EBT system on campus • Includes SNAP application & Stable Food Guidelines
	CSU Chico	**Basic Needs Project** The Hungry Wildcat Food Pantry: any enrolled college student can access
	CSU Monterey Bay	**The Hub** • 1:1 case management • CalFresh application assistance • Local partnerships and use of technology to increase food access • Otter Eats text enrollment for campus events offering food • Partnerships with local farmers & farmers' markets to supply food pantry
	Center for Healthy Communities co-located at CSU Chico	**CalFresh Outreach Contract** • Holds 30 grants/contracts throughout state • Established 10 programs using innovative practices • Outreach/Application support • Extensive, intersegmental & community collaborations • Collaborate with Financial Aid Directors • Partners with Benefits Cal
	Mount Saint Mary's University	**Eat Green Initiative** Partnership with local food bank (Westside Food Bank) to provide food to students in farmers' market platform • Trained Peer Wellness Mentors supporting peers to complete CalFresh application • Students receive frequently updated online resource list of local foodbanks & food pantries; this is linked to highly visited college portals

	UC San Diego	CalFresh partnership with County, CBOs, & Financial Aid Director. Includes: • CalFresh Assistance Form • CalFresh clinics; embedded CalFresh staffer on campus • Intersegmental collaboration with County, Food Bank, Hunger Coalition • YES Food Program for undocumented students • ITable Food Program for international students • CalFresh Restaurant Meals program
	UC San Francisco	State and national model of CalFresh/SNAP enrollment for graduate/professional school students.
	UC Santa Barbara	CalFresh program • Outreach and application numbers are largest among the UC system
	UC Santa Cruz	CalFresh enrollment efforts • Tracking student uptake and impact on academic success: positive outcomes on academic success
	Ventura Community College	• Hosts weekly drive-through food pantry • Supports CalFresh application completion
Housing Security	**California State University Rapid Re-Housing Program**	Supports provided to secure housing, pay deposit; wrap around support to facilitate students' move towards independence • 8 campus pilot; received $6.5 million • Supported 1,200 students in FY20/21
	Cerritos College	Jovenes at Cerritos Housing is a partnership between the Cerritos College and Jovenes, Inc to provide housing assistance for unhoused students or those who are at risk of being unhoused.
	Compton College	Residential Housing Implementation Work Group to develop residential housing. Group includes CCC Chancellor's office, R. Crutchfield, Jovenes, Inc, construction & architecture firms, county agency, and private entities.
	East Los Angeles College	Interim housing program through partnership between LA Community College District and local CBOs
	Imperial Valley	Lotus Living Community: partnership between the City

	College	of El Centro, Imperial Valley College, and Imperial Valley College Foundation • 26 tiny homes for IVC students; priority for foster youth and approximately 210 unhoused students • Funding sources from State of CA Homekey Program funds, Homeless Emergency Aid Program through County's Continuum of Care Council, plus local non-profit donation.
	CSU San Diego	Partnership with San Diego Housing Commission to provide year-round housing for CSU San Diego *Guardian Scholars,* enrolled students in foster care Partnership with Home Start, Inc to provide transitional housing for unhoused students
	UC Davis	On and off-campus housing support ecosystem for students including: • Legal services, emergency support, and organizing spaces dedicated to improving college student housing
	UC San Diego	National l League of Cities Partnership with CBOs and municipal agencies • Temporary Housing & Emergency Meal Assistance
Mental Health	California Community Colleges	CCC Health & Wellness Programs • 8 campuses partner w/County Mental Health • Served 60k individual users 20/21 • School provides space/clients; County provides clinicians & assumes responsibility for billing • Local Education Agency (LEA) Medi-Cal Billing Option Program (BOP) program governed by CA HealthCare Services • 20 CC campuses participate + UC Davis • Crisis TextLine • National organization that provides text based supports • 24/7 services; no fee; Spanish language services also provided • Promotional materials placed throughout campus including Financial Aid office • Uptake significant; creates confidential niche for mental health services

		Wellness Central: free, virtual resource with hyperlinks to student videos + learning information designed by mental health professionals across CCC system • Colleges can populate in Canvas platform • Students can access "At Your Pace in Your Space"
	San Francisco State University	**Staff Training and Development** • Partnering with Freedom Community Clinic to provide healing for staff and students • ACE Aware Care in Higher Ed and Healing Centered engagement (building on trauma informed care).
	UC Irvine & UC Santa Cruz	Accessible, comprehensive Psychological Services provided by Case Managers and Counselors • UC Irvine Basic Needs Social Worker Consultations • UC Santa Cruz Immediate Crisis Support Center
	UC System	Equity in Mental Health Funding Plan 2021-2025
Emergency Aid & Direct Basic Needs Assistance	**California Community College**	**Pandemic crisis support (EDSource)** • Identifying ways to effectively distribute resources by giving directly to students with greatest need • Single or multiple distribution points and times • FAFSA recipients automatically eligible; Application required for those without FAFSA • Reducing student financial burden by waiving overdue campus fees (ex: parking fees)
	Santa Ana College	**Pandemic crisis support** Allocated Higher Ed Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF) monies to: • Create a campaign to re-engage students that stopped out or didn't enroll. • Staff called students and offered help with registration; connected students to support services including academic counseling and broadband support; provided emergency aid.

	UC Berkeley & UC Los Angeles	These models are used for all California Higher Education systems: • UC Berkeley Holistic Fund • UCLA Economic Response Team

Data Tracking	**California Community Colleges**	Data sharing agreements with Cal Policy Lab that provides snapshot/real time CalFresh uptake. Working with UC and CCC segments
		• Department of Social Services partnership potential; DSS wants to improve data sharing
		• Identifying students who are accessing Basic Needs
		• Models for this data sharing partnership:
		    ○ State of Virginia SNAP participation+retention data dashboard
		    ○ State of New Jersey building Basic Needs webpage and playbook for all counties & regions

	UC Berkeley	Basic Needs Center Data Dashboard
	UC San Diego	Use of UCUES data to drive program development and evaluation
Prevention Efforts	**CSU Chico**	**Budgeting & Long Term planning** • Financial Wellness Program is collaboration between the Rapid Re-Housing Program and College of Business to connect students who apply for the Rapid Re-Housing program or emergency grants for help with budgeting and long term planning.
	Los Rios College	**Financial Aid** • District's Financial Aid Offer Letter includes accessible and explicit language to describe each component of student's financial aid
	Various campuses	**Student Services and Support Hubs** • Cerritos College Falcon's Nest • Mira Costa College CARE • Humboldt State University • Reedley College (using Starfish platform to coordinate student services)

Transportation	CSU Fullerton , UC Irvine, & Chapman College	Partnership with Orange County Transportation Authority to provide reduced fare transit passes to enrolled & eligible students (*UPass*)
	Santa Rosa Junior College	Partnership with Sonoma County Transit, Santa Rosa CityBus, and Petaluma Transit enables enrolled students to ride free
	UC Berkeley	Partnership with AC Transit and 20 other Bay Area transit agencies • All enrolled students eligible for EasyPass Clipper card; automatically renews each semester; card valid during Summer for Spring enrolled students
	Ventura Community College	Partnership with Ventura County Transportation Commission enables enrolled students to ride free
Other	Evergreen Valley College	CalWorks partnership working as a bridge between Higher Ed, counties, and CBOs • EVC partnership with Santa Clara County • EVD dedicated CalWorks Program Director, Educational Counselor, Community Engagement Specialist, and Program Assistant • Students receive direct support for their school to work transition

Basic Needs Related Legislation

Passed	Description
American Rescue Plan for College Students	• Allocates $198 million to support college students' basic needs particularly those enrolled in community colleges and rural institutions • Focus on student retention and persistence (i.e. declining enrollment), forgiveness of institutional debts • DOE Dear Colleague Letters sent to all higher ed institutions allowing sharing of FAFSA data to communicate to students their eligibility for Federal/State programs • LA City College & Rio Hondo College receive additional grant monies to develop new basic needs initiatives
AB74	• Funds CSU campuses to form Basic Needs partnerships ○ Funding from State to Chancellor's office to campuses ○ 1 time allocation to support current Basic Needs programming and external partnership

AB74 RRH	• Funds CSU development of rapid re-housing programs • Funding from State to Chancellor's office to campuses to community partners
AB132	• Funds Cradle to Career Project • Provide BN Coordinator & Center on each CCC campus as single point of contact: leverage benefits o 59 CC's have BN Center on campus • CCC: Must provide info to students re: BN services/supports available on/off campus
SB 169	• Increased funding for affordable/low cost student housing • Funding distributed equitably: most to CCC; least to UC
AB 214	• Expanded access to CalFresh for CA College Students & created list of work requirement exemptions
AB288	• California Ban on Scholarship Displacement Act of 2021
AB 396	• Increase access/eligibility to CalFresh

AB 641
CalFresh for College Students Act
	• Increase access to CalFresh through:
	    o Expanded student eligibility education for CalFresh staffers
	    o Collect real time data on submitted applications to improve college student participation rates and program access

AB 1326	• Establish Human Services Agency liaison for each segment campus
AB 1746	• Cal Grant Reform Act of 2022
H.R. 1919 **EATS Act**	• Increase access/eligibility to SNAP (i.e. CalFresh)
Prop 63 **Mental Health Svcs Act**	• Increased funding/expanded services for mental health. Funded growth of MH services on college campuses over past 10+ years.
Pending	
BASIC Act	• Basic Needs Act (Introduced 6/2021)
SB 20	• Require students be notified of CalFresh eligibility

Basic Needs Data Resources

- CA Policy Lab: Study on CalFresh Outreach & Enrollment
- #Real College Survey from the Hope Center
- UC's Next Phase of Improving Basic Needs
- UC BN Dashboard: food/housing security & student retention/graduation
- A Helping Hand: How the California Community Colleges Are Addressing Insecurity (Community College Equity Assessment Lab report)
- SEARS Survey (through CSAC)
- CSU Basic Needs Initiative – Research Center
  - Research page
  - Phase 3: Comprehensive Study of College Student Basic Needs or their itself
- 2015 HUD Insights Issue
  - Barriers to Success: Housing Insecurity for U.S. College Students
- 2018 GAO
  - Food Insecurity: Better Information Could Help Eligible College Students Access Federal Food Assistance Benefits
- 2021 NASFAA, NASPA, and MDRC
  - An Evaluation of Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act Funding for Postsecondary Institutions
- 2022 Department of Education, *Dear Colleague* Letter
  - Use of FAFSA Data to Administer Federal Programs