higher
learning
ADVOCATES

BACK TO BASICS: SOLVING TODAY'S STUDENTS' FOOD, HOUSING, AND BASIC NEEDS INSECURITIES

A BASIC NEEDS POLICY TOOLKIT FOR TODAY'S STUDENTS TO SUCCEED

Table of Contents

higher learning
ADVOCATES

Introduction

THE BASIC FACTS ON UNMET ESSENTIAL NEEDS

A recent study found that three in five college students experienced insecurity in meeting their basic needs, such as housing and food.[1] However, many federal safety net policies designed to support Americans in need were not created with today's postsecondary students in mind.

Many of today's students work while they are enrolled in higher education and face challenges outside of the classroom that can affect their ability to dedicate enough time and resources to completing coursework. But because of how our higher education system is structured, today's students are too often stumbling through a postsecondary pipeline ridden with cracks and widening fault lines.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated and shined a light on these challenges, as its economic impacts resulted in job and wage loss for hundreds of thousands of Americans. Over a half million students relied on on-campus Federal Work-Study jobs to make ends meet, and many more struggled with unmet basic needs owing to unexpected costs like medical bills, transportation, or moving expenses.[2] The financial uncertainty negatively impacted student well-being and hampered student success.

In response to the pandemic, Congress temporarily created a series of supports to help students—including direct emergency aid, expanded benefits eligibility, and emergency broadband support. As supports that emerged during the pandemic dwindle away, it's clear that policy change can improve students' lives, but permanent, not temporary, solutions are necessary.[3]

Higher Learning Advocates' toolkit identifies critical barriers to student success and proposes federal policy changes to better serve all students from all backgrounds and walks of life. Changing students' stories from struggle to success is key to improving student outcomes in higher education. Federal policy can empower students through access to support for meeting their basic needs by:

- Creating and funding a permanent emergency aid structure for students with unexpected financial challenges;

- Expanding eligibility and streamlining Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits for students pursuing higher learning;

- Increasing funding for campus mental health programs;

- Making broadband subsidies permanent and expanding rural broadband access;

- Incentivizing collaboration between public transit providers and higher education institutions;

- Expanding eligibility for the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) program to full-time students experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity; and

- Providing incentives to encourage non-expansion states to expand Medicaid coverage and extend temporary affordable care subsidies for marketplace insurance plans.

higher learning
ADVOCATES

Using Data More Efficiently to Improve Public Benefits Access for Students

"Data sharing" is the exchange of information about a student's circumstance or receipt of public benefits, while "data matching" often refers to the use of shared databases to verify circumstances for application or renewal of public benefits.

Data sharing and matching can be useful tools in certifying or verifying eligibility criteria for students who receive federal public benefits. Federal and state policymakers have an imperative to improve data sharing and matching between the Free Application for Student Financial Aid (FAFSA) and federal public benefits programs, such as SNAP and Medicaid. In doing so, we can ensure that more of today's students are able to meet their basic needs while pursuing a postsecondary education.

FAFSA

Medicaid

SNAP
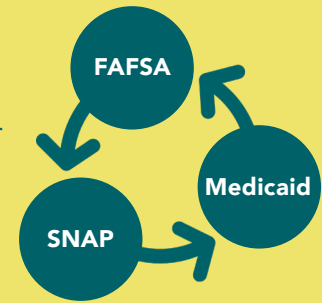
Student Supports

EMERGENCY AID

UTILIZE EMERGENCY AID TO INCREASE POSTSECONDARY COMPLETION

Many students continue to enroll in postsecondary education, but only 45% of students complete their degree or credential.[4] Some students drop out of college just credits shy of graduation because they are a few hundred dollars short of paying college fees. Others might experience unexpected financial emergencies in the middle of a semester that force them to make a difficult choice: paying to remedy a crisis or misfortune, like a broken down car, or paying college costs. When institutional balances go unpaid, the outstanding debt stands in between some students and their ability to complete their postsecondary degree or credential — Ithaka S+R found about 8.3 million students nationwide have unpaid institutional balances, with average balances ranging between $2,300 (across all institutional sectors) to just $631 for students attending community colleges.[5]

WHAT IS EMERGENCY AID?

Emergency aid is direct monetary support to students meant to help them deal with unexpected costs that arise during their education. While some institutions such as the University of North Carolina at Charlotte (UNC-Charlotte) and Georgia State University (GSU) have been pioneering emergency aid grants for years, for most institutions, the need for emergency aid is often greater than the resources they have available. And many schools that serve a disproportionate number of low-income students with the fewest resources, such as community colleges and minority-serving institutions, do not have the funds to establish an independent emergency grant program.

THE IMPACT OF THE HEERF EMERGENCY AID GRANTS

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act passed by Congress in March 2020, as well as subsequent relief packages, authorized more than $76 billion dollars for HEERF (the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund). HEERF funding was provided directly to institutions and a portion of those funds were required to be given to students in the form of emergency aid grants. As institutions of higher education (IHEs) analyze how students used the grants provided during the COVID-19 pandemic, many note the aid's impact in meeting the basic needs of today's students (see "How Students Used Their HEERF Emergency Aid,").

higher learning ADVOCATES

WASHINGTON STATE'S STUDENT EMERGENCY AID GRANT (SEAG)

Since 2019, Washington has implemented a state emergency aid program to support students in community and technical colleges who demonstrate financial need. The program has distributed $1.4 million to students in its first 18 months. Notably, approximately half of the approved aid claims were related to housing emergencies. A significant aspect of the SEAG program is it does not require students to complete the FAFSA to receive funds meaning students can access emergency aid faster, without going through the FAFSA application process.[7] Federal policymakers should consider adopting this feature of the SEAG program to streamline the application process and remove potential barriers such as FAFSA completion requirements.

How Students Used Their HEERF Emergency Aid[6]

FOOD

61%

BOOKS

57%

HOUSING

50%

TRANSPORTATION

40%

COMPTON COLLEGE EMERGENCY AID

Compton College, a community college in Los Angeles, provided $250 emergency completion grants to students in the spring of 2020. The institution distributed the aid to 141 students.[8] Six months later, results showed emergency aid recipients were more than twice as likely to have graduated or persisted despite the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic when compared to their peers who did not receive emergency aid.[9] The results further indicated that the program increased graduation by 12% for students who received emergency aid.[10]

higher learning ADVOCATES

GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY

Even before HEERF, emergency aid has had a long track-record of sustained impact for today's students. In 2018, more than 72% of students at Georgia State University (GSU) had unmet financial need.[11] Because of GSU's Panther Retention grant program—which provides emergency funding to students who are on track for graduation with unmet financial need—over 11,000 students have been able to continue their postsecondary education.[12] Sixty-one percent of seniors who received the grant graduated within two semesters, and 82% were either still enrolled after one year or graduated.[13] The average grant awarded was $900,[14] with a maximum grant of $2,000.[15] Grant recipients also have been found to accumulate $3,700 less student debt on average.[16]

⭐ POLICY RECOMMENDATION

Create a permanent emergency aid program for all students in need

Institutions have already made use of HEERF funding to set up programs that offer emergency aid to students who need it. In an effort to continue to boost credential attainment for today's students, Congress should create a permanent emergency aid program to provide grants to institutions. A permanent program would ensure unforeseen financial hardships don't derail students' academic plans while pursuing higher learning.

Georgia State University Panther Retention Grant Program

61%
of grant recipients graduated within **two** semesters

82%
still enrolled or graduated after **one** year

$900
average grant awarded

> **The fact that emergency [aid] grants are going to end soon... am I supposed to now choose between school and all these expenses?**
>
> 2023 DC STUDENT SUMMIT

higher learning
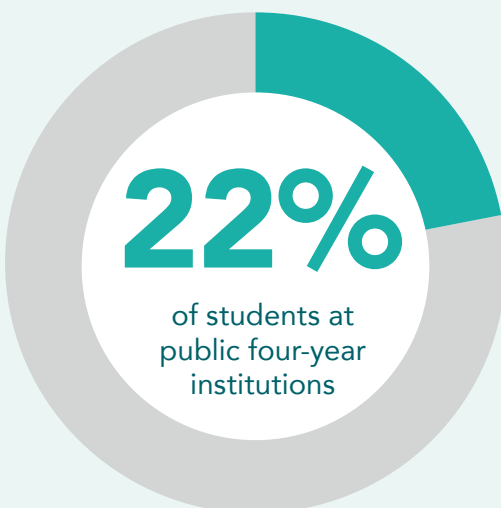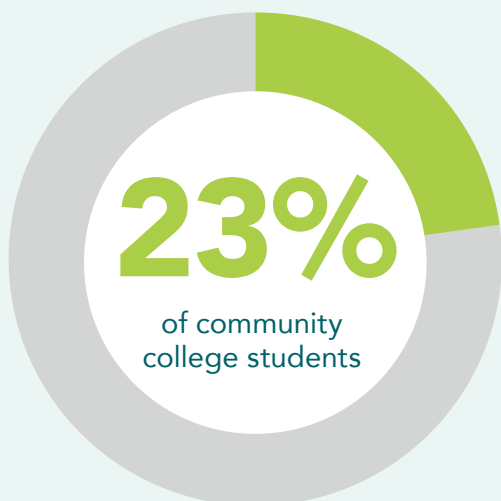ADVOCATES

FOOD INSECURITY

ADDRESS FOOD INSECURITY FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS

According to the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, 23% of community college students and 22% of students at public four-year institutions reported low or very low food security in the last 30 days. Both of these rates were more than double the food insecurity rate among all U.S. households.[17]
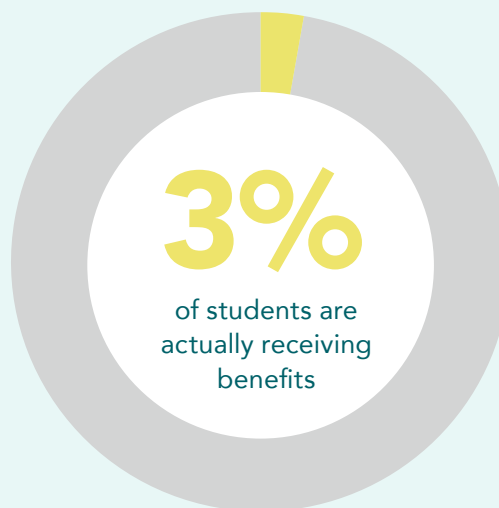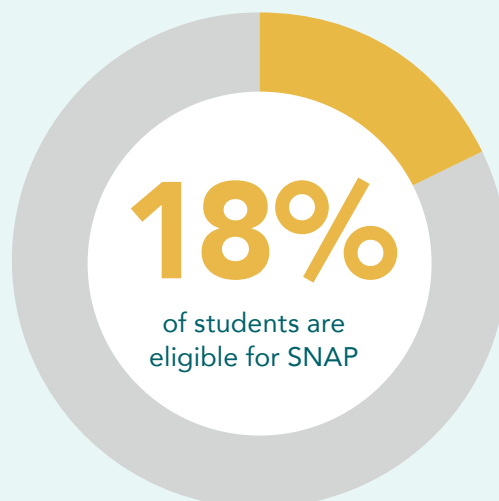
WHAT IS SNAP?

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is a federal program that offers nutrition assistance to eligible low-income individuals and families; however, many students struggle to access these benefits due to complicated eligibility rules and insufficient outreach.[18] Statistics show of the 18% of college students who are likely eligible for SNAP, only 3% of the country's college-going population actually receive benefits.[19]

Experienced low or very low food security

23%
of community college students

22%
of students at public four-year institutions

The SNAP gap in higher education

18%
of students are eligible for SNAP

3%
of students are actually receiving benefits

higher learning
ADVOCATES

HOW DOES SNAP IMPACT TODAY'S STUDENTS?

Students who are enrolled more than half time at an institution of higher education (IHE) are eligible to receive SNAP benefits if they meet the SNAP income and asset rules combined with at least one of the following criteria:

- Under age 18 or age 50 or older;

- Parent caring for a child under age 6;

- Parent caring for a child 6-11 years old who is unable to obtain child care to attend school and work;

- Single parent caring for a child under 12 years old and enrolled full-time;

- Working for pay at least 20 hours per week;

- Participating in any federal or state work-study program;

- Receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) assistance;

- Unable to work because of a mental or physical disability; or

- Attending higher education through an employment-focused program that is:

  - A SNAP Employment and Training (SNAP E&T) program

  - Operated by a state or local government

  - A program under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014

  - A Trade Adjustment Assistance Program under Section 236 of the Trade Act of 1974.[20]

CONNECTING MORE STUDENTS TO SNAP

Despite SNAP benefits being a vital resource for college students, a 2021 survey found that of the 34% of students who reported experiencing food insecurity overall, only 24% at two-year institutions and 10% at four-year institutions utilized SNAP.[21] However, some states are leading the way in making SNAP benefits more accessible for students facing basic needs insecurity.[22] For instance, Virginia enacted legislation requiring public colleges to ensure that all students have access to information about SNAP through orientation materials and a campus-wide email. California also took this a step further by requiring higher education institutions to use FAFSA data to identify and notify students who meet certain requirements for the state's SNAP program.

THE IMPACT OF SNAP FLEXIBILITIES DURING THE PANDEMIC

The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021, passed by Congress in December 2020, contained provisions that temporarily expanded SNAP eligibility for many low-income college students due to the ongoing COVID-19 emergency. Importantly, the bill waived work and other eligibility requirements for students attending college more than half-time with a zero expected family contribution (EFC) and for students who were eligible to participate in a state or federally financed work-study program. This expanded eligibility enabled as many as three million low-income college students to access benefits to help feed themselves and their families.[23] These eligibility rules expired due to the end of the COVID-19 national emergency.

higher learning
ADVOCATES

⭐ POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Streamline SNAP benefits for today's students

Many of today's students balance work, parenting, their education, and other responsibilities—food insecurity should not be an additional barrier to completing a degree or credential. Without SNAP, many students would not be able to succeed in postsecondary education. Permanently removing unnecessary barriers for students' SNAP eligibility, specifically independent students, parenting students with children younger than 18 years old, students receiving means-tested benefits, and students with an expected financial contribution (EFC) of zero, would enable students to better meet their needs.

Simplify access to SNAP

Data provided by students on the FAFSA can provide the Office of Federal Student Aid as well as institutional financial aid administrators with a snapshot of a student's and/or their family's ability to contribute to their education. Procedures should be put in place so that students are automatically informed by the U.S. Department of Education (ED) about their potential eligibility for benefits when they complete their FAFSA or by the institution upon notification of the individual's financial aid package. Alternatively, students who fill out the FAFSA should be able to check a box to explicitly notify their higher education institution and ED of their interest in receiving more information about SNAP.

higher learning
ADVOCATES

MENTAL HEALTH

IMPROVE ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES FOR TODAY'S STUDENTS

Today's students' need for mental health services has increased over the past decade, and more of them are seeking counseling than ever before. However, campus counseling centers lack the means to keep up with the demand. A recent study examined two large national data sets, the National College Health Assessment and the Healthy Minds Study, to better understand the trends in college student mental health challenges between 2007-2018.[24] The study found that the rate of self-harm and depression doubled over that time period, and reports of anxiety and moderate depression also increased.[25]

The pandemic only exacerbated the problem. A recent study found that during the 2020-2021 academic year, more than 60% of college students met the criteria for at least one mental health problem.[26]

HOW DOES MENTAL HEALTH IMPACT STUDENT OUTCOMES?

Despite the uptick in students accessing services, two-thirds of students with anxiety or depression don't seek treatment.[27] Studies have found that untreated mental illness can lead to lower GPAs and a higher probability of dropping out, and this negative impact is amplified if the mental illness is undiagnosed because students are unable to seek treatment.[28] Another study found that 64% of students who dropped out did not return to school because of their mental health challenges.[29] In addition, students of color are less likely to receive treatment for mental health disorders than white students, meaning that insufficient access to care could compound existing inequities in the higher education system.[30]

⭐ POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Increase funding for campus mental health programs

Though there are more K-12 schools than higher education institutions, the severity of the mental health crisis among today's students has resulted in an increased demand for mental health services that postsecondary schools are struggling to meet, due to disparities in funding between the two sectors. For instance, the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act provides $200 million annually for K-12 school-based mental health providers, while only $8.5 million is dedicated to postsecondary mental health via the Garrett Lee Smith program.

Congress authorized $8.5 million to the Garrett Lee Smith Campus Suicide Prevention Grant program in FY2023 to support IHEs for suicide prevention and to bolster their mental health and substance use disorder services on campus. It is imperative to increase appropriations to the Garrett Lee Smith Grant program, which provides funding for evidence-based mental health services to college students and helped to prevent 79,000 youth suicide attempts between 2007–2010.[31]

The Basic Needs for Postsecondary Students program, administered by the U.S. Department of Education's Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE), provides discretionary grants to IHEs to support the basic needs of students, including mental health services. While these grants provide support to a handful of colleges and universities annually, the funding for this program also falls well short of the demand for services needed by today's students.[32]

higher learning
ADVOCATES

> **"Suicide prevention grants and money into emergency services directly saves lives. If it wasn't for suicide prevention at my university, I don't think I would have made it past my first year. In order to create space for students to be the changemakers of our next generation, we have to create avenues in which mental health and financial health are not separate, but equal in the eyes of Congress.**
>
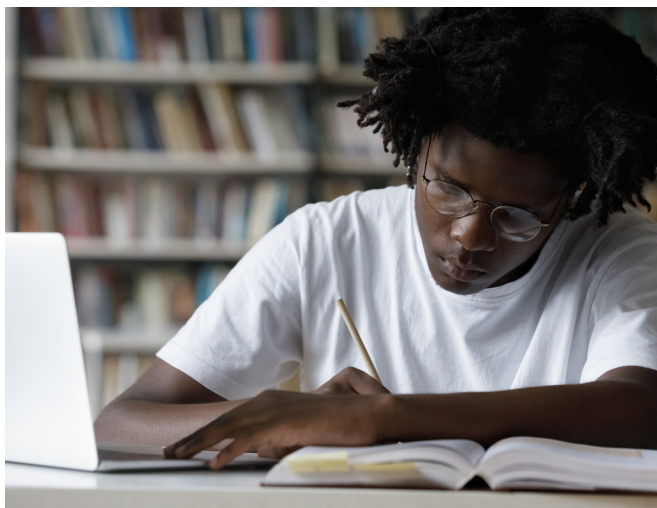> CELIA, STUDENT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MAINE AT FARMINGTON

BROADBAND

EXPAND BROADBAND CONNECTIVITY FOR TODAY'S STUDENTS

In 2020, colleges made necessary shifts to online learning to protect the health and safety of students and employees. But the unexpected shift to remote instruction due to the COVID-19 pandemic left many students behind, including those without an affordable and reliable high-speed internet connection who may have relied on campus Wi-Fi or devices to complete coursework.

HOW DOES BROADBAND ACCESS IMPACT TODAY'S STUDENTS?

Sixty-five percent of colleges started the fall semester of 2020 either entirely or primarily online.[33] As more students have signaled a willingness to continue learning at least partially online, a stable connection to high-speed internet is essential for today's students' success. Millions of Americans lack access to broadband internet and this digital divide in higher education poses an additional hurdle to degree completion. The most common reason given for not having high-speed access is the cost of services—over 22% of students reported using mobile data plans to engage in course work, with Black and Hispanic students being more likely than their white peers to rely solely on mobile data, according to data from a 2020 HLA survey.[34] These plans can be unreliable and often have bandwidth caps that limit students' ability to connect to live and recorded video lectures.[35]

To increase broadband access during the pandemic, Congress created the Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB), which transitioned into the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) upon enactment of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. The ACP provides a monthly $30 subsidy to eligible households to pay for broadband services and up to $100 for connected devices. Students who receive a Pell Grant qualify for the ACP.

⭐ POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Make broadband subsidies permanent

The ACP is a temporary program with limited dedicated funding expected to be exhausted by 2024, even with the additional funding that was allocated for broadband through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. Permanent funding would enable low-income students to pay for high-speed internet service.

Expand rural broadband access

While supporting low-income students to cover the cost of broadband is essential, expanding access to communities where broadband is not available is just as critical. This is a particular challenge for today's students living in rural parts of the country. USDA's ReConnect Loan and Grant Program extends loans and grants for the costs associated with providing broadband service in rural areas. To improve access for the rural population, federal policymakers should remove unnecessary barriers for more types of broadband providers and ensure that funding through this program is targeted to those areas in most need (i.e., where at least 90% of households lack access to broadband).

higher learning
ADVOCATES

TRANSPORTATION

ADDRESS TRANSPORTATION BARRIERS FOR TODAY'S STUDENTS

Transportation is a critical component of our higher education system, especially for today's students who commute to campus. While some postsecondary institutions offer on-campus shuttles, students who live off-campus need other options. Public transportation is a potential option for students without a vehicle, but barriers to accessing affordable, reliable, and quality options prevent transit from being a widespread solution, without policy change. An especially important issue for the 99% of community college students who live off campus, only 57% of primary community college campuses are within a half-mile of a public transit stop.[36]

HOW DOES TRANSPORTATION IMPACT STUDENTS?

One recent study found there are four key ways transportation can pose a barrier for today's students including the cost, proximity of transit stops to where they work or live, irregular routes and times that don't align with school schedules, and overall unreliability.[37] If a commuter student cannot reliably get to their respective campus, they can fall behind in their studies or even drop out of school. Likewise, a student who lives on campus, but does not own a vehicle may not have the resources to gain reliable access to a part-time job to support themselves while in school.

⭐ **POLICY RECOMMENDATION**

Incentivize collaboration between public transit providers and higher education institutions

The creation of competitive federal grants to help increase access to affordable and reliable public transportation at community colleges, historically Black colleges and universities, Tribal colleges, and other minority serving institutions. Increasing the number of public transportation stops within walking distance of colleges and universities, boosting the frequency of service to better align with class schedules, and assisting low-income students with paying for the cost of public transportation, will ease students' access to college.

higher learning
ADVOCATES

HOUSING

ENSURE HOUSING ACCESS AND AFFORDABILITY FOR TODAY'S STUDENTS

Housing is often the largest cost associated with pursuing higher education, in most cases exceeding the cost of tuition. Data shows that housing costs account for 53% of the budget for the average off-campus student.[38] Compounding the housing issue is the reality of a shortage in student housing. For some students who expect to live on campus and have the means to do so, student housing isn't necessarily always available.[39] Lack of housing access can lead to students experiencing homelessness, which, according to data from the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, impacted 8% of undergraduate students and 4.6% of graduate students in the past 30 days.[40]

THE IMPACT OF HOUSING INSECURITY

Housing insecurity describes a variety of housing challenges, including trouble paying for rent and utility expenses, overcrowding, moving frequently, or spending a significant portion of income on housing.[41] Research has demonstrated that students who face housing insecurity tend to have poorer health outcomes, higher rates of mental health issues such as depression and anxiety, as well as lower academic performance in comparison to their peers.[42] A recent survey also found that students of color, parenting students, and students who identify as LGBTQ+ were more likely to be housing insecure than their peers.[43]

higher learning
ADVOCATES

TACOMA COMMUNITY COLLEGE HOUSING ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (CHAP)

In Washington state, a temporary partnership between the Tacoma Housing Authority, Tacoma Community College, and the University of Washington at Tacoma provided rental assistance to homeless and near homeless students. By providing financial assistance to help students pay rent, purchasing apartments near campus, and signing agreements to reserve apartments for these students, many students were positively impacted. An evaluation of the initial 45-student cohort found that 60% of CHAP students graduated or remained enrolled, compared to 14% of unassisted homeless students, and the CHAP students achieved an average GPA of 3.05, which was higher than the schoolwide average.[44]

60%	vs.	**14%**	**3.05**
of CHAP students graduated or remained enrolled		of unassisted homeless students	average GPA, higher than the schoolwide average.

⭐ POLICY RECOMMENDATION

Expand LIHTC eligibility to full-time students experiencing homelessness

The Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) helps increase the availability of affordable housing by reducing the tax liability for developers that build affordable renting units. However, under current law, full-time students pursuing higher education are prohibited from living in LIHTC-funded properties. By creating a limited exception to this law to allow homeless or recently-homeless individuals who are full-time students to live in LIHTC units, more of today's students can access affordable housing as they pursue a full-time education.

HEALTH CARE

EXPAND HEALTH CARE COVERAGE FOR TODAY'S STUDENTS

While navigating higher education is challenging for today's students, ensuring that individuals have access to health care is another complicating factor. While the Affordable Care Act has expanded coverage for younger adults under the age of 26 and some low-income individuals through Medicaid expansion, many individuals living in America are still locked out of health care coverage. According to recent data, approximately 27.5 million people living in the U.S. do not have health insurance, with the majority being nonelderly adults, in working families, and in families with low-incomes, some of whom include students pursuing higher learning.[45]

THE CATCH-22 WITH HIGHER EDUCATION AND HEALTH INSURANCE ACCESS

Today, an overwhelming majority of the U.S. population (54.7%) receive private health insurance through their employer.[46] Moreover, full-time workers (83.2%) are more likely to be covered by an employer-sponsored health insurance plan than part-time workers (64.1%).[47] That said, many of today's students are enrolled in higher education with a goal toward reaching full-time employment and all of the benefits that come with it, including health care coverage. As these students progress in their programs, policymakers should work to ensure these individuals can access the health care they need in the meantime.

BARRIERS TO MEDICAID ACCESS FOR LOW-INCOME STUDENTS

While Medicaid is viewed as one of the most affordable options for low-income students who aren't eligible to remain on a family's plan to obtain health care coverage on their own,

there are roadblocks that stand in the way for many of today's students. For instance, 10 states have yet to expand Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act (ACA). This means there are approximately 3.5 million uninsured adults who are locked out of health care coverage who would otherwise be eligible with the expansion. As a result of the states that have expanded Medicaid however, the share of students enrolled in Medicaid has increased from 8% to 13% since the passage of the ACA, demonstrating that increased access to Medicaid benefits today's students.[48]

⭐ POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Expand access to health insurance coverage for low-income students

Although Medicaid expansion is ultimately a state decision, incentivizing non-expansion states to opt-in to the expanded coverage and expanding the Inflation Reduction Act's temporary affordable care subsidies to offer financial assistance to students interested in purchasing temporary health care coverage through the health insurance marketplace will ensure today's students can access the health care they need while pursuing higher learning.[49]

Inform Medicaid recipients of their potential eligibility for Pell Grants

Just as low-income college students should be informed about their potential eligibility for ACA subsidies and Medicaid, Medicaid recipients should be informed about their potential eligibility for Pell Grants. Many Medicaid recipients do not realize they are highly likely to receive Pell Grants to pursue higher education. ED and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services should engage in joint outreach to Medicaid recipients, making clear that affordability hurdles are dramatically decreased by access to federal financial aid.

CHILD CARE

About one in five students today is also a parent. They are a particularly diverse group of students—about half of student parents are students of color, who face additional systemic barriers to higher education, and nearly half are single mothers.[50] But today's student parents face additional barriers to credential completion compared to their peers without dependents, such as securing adequate and affordable child care. Parenting students succeed academically when supported and earn higher GPAs than their non-parenting peers, but also face high dropout rates because our higher education system does not offer much support for their needs.[51]

When student parents are supported to complete their degree or credential, the increased income a parenting student can expect when they graduate and join the workforce has a multi-generational impact, as it affects both parents and children. In fact, even a small boost in a student parent's income can result in a 17% increase in their children's lifetime earnings.[52]

One of the biggest challenges faced by parenting students is balancing the cost of their education with the cost of child care. The average annual cost of child care expenses in 2020 was $10,174.[53] This figure represents more than 10% of the average income for a married couple, and more than 35% of the average

income for a single parent. While child care costs have been rising, on-campus child care options have been declining. The presence of on-campus child care at community colleges declined from 53% in 2004 to 44% in 2015; at public four-year institutions, on-campus child care facilities decreased from 54% to 49% from 2002 to 2015.[54]

> **You cannot assume what a student parent needs without asking them. Student parents are not looking for a handout, we are looking for a hand up.**
>
> YOSLIN, GRADUATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

higher learning
ADVOCATES

⭐ POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Increase funding for the Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) program

IHEs can use federal CCAMPIS grant funding to establish and expand on-campus child care services. Since FY2018, CCAMPIS funding has incrementally increased from $33 million to $82 million in FY2022.[55] However, these funding increases are a recent trend, as CCAMPIS funding prior to FY2018 remained relatively flat. The stagnant funding had a significant impact — in 2015, 49% of four-year public colleges provided on-campus child care services, down from 54% in 2002.[56]

CCAMPIS funding must continue to grow to better support our nearly 4 million college students with dependent children, especially low-income parenting students. An annual allocation of $500 million would scale up the program, allowing CCAMPIS to reach 100,000 more Pell-eligible students with young children, greatly improving their chances of postsecondary success.

Increase funding for the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG)

The Child Care and Development Block Grant provides funding for states that allows them to support low-income, working families to afford child care, while supporting their children's learning and development. While the CCDBG has historically received bipartisan support and funding, before the pandemic, only 15% of eligible children received subsidies, which varied significantly by race.[57] CCDBG subsidies also do not cover the full cost of child care for families, which usually requires families to pay an unaffordable copay.

To support student parents, federal policymakers should increase annual funding for the CCDBG to $7.7 billion, allowing states to continue addressing unmet needs and persistent gaps in the affordability, availability, and quality of child care.

Enhance the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit (CDCTC)

The Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit is a non-refundable tax credit created to allow an individual with a qualifying dependent to maintain gainful employment while simultaneously providing care for their qualifying dependent. In practice, this means individuals with children or other qualifying dependents can claim the credit for expenses such as daycare or household costs they incur to care for their dependents while working or in some circumstances attending postsecondary education full-time.

To better serve today's students, federal policymakers should extend the CDCTC to student parents who are enrolled on a part-time basis, and make the credit refundable as was done during the pandemic, which would put thousands of dollars in the pockets of families to help offset the cost of child and dependent care.

Incentivize partnerships between colleges and local child care providers

IHEs can partner with local child care providers to better serve student parents. Even on campuses where regularly scheduled child care is offered, parenting students may still face instances where emergency or drop-in child care is required to attend class.

To support student parents, federal policymakers should expand access to child care providers through Supplemental Education Opportunity Grant (SEOG), which provides grants to support higher education completion. IHEs should be allowed to allocate a portion of funds under the SEOG program to form relationships to provide care for student parents through local child care providers.

higher learning
ADVOCATES

Conclusion

GETTING BACK TO THE BASICS

Today's students are more diverse in age, race, and income level than any previous generation of college students. They're more mobile and may not live on campus. Most participate in the workforce, either full-time or part-time. Work and family responsibilities beyond the classroom—whether learning on-campus or online—often influence students' educational goals. Competing priorities and added responsibilities also mean many students struggle to meet their basic needs.

For today's students—and the nation—to succeed, we must create and sustain a system of higher education that enables students with the greatest need to access funding and support that fit their life circumstances and goals.

Federal policy should encourage easier, more seamless transitions for students enrolling in and returning to postsecondary education, and should provide support to meet students' basic needs. Higher learning must be within reach, financially and otherwise, for all communities of students, with particular attention to those who have been historically underserved by higher education, such as Black, Hispanic, and Indigenous students.

Creating a new system of higher learning is possible, but it's critical that policymakers and leaders in higher education understand the growing disconnect between today's students' needs, current federal policy, and potential solutions recommended in this toolkit.

Acknowledgments

Higher Learning Advocates is the leading nonprofit higher education policy research and advocacy organization dedicated to advancing bipartisan solutions that support today's students, connect opportunity, and drive value in postsecondary education. To learn more about HLA, visit www.higherlearningadvocates.org.

Richard Davis Jr., policy associate, and Amy Ellen Duke-Benfield, managing director, policy and research, are the lead authors of this toolkit.

HLA would also like to acknowledge the dedication and determination of those at the heart of all our work — today's students.

higher learning
ADVOCATES

Endnotes

[1] The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice. "The Hope Center Survey 2021: Basic Needs Insecurity During the Ongoing Pandemic." March 2021.

[2] National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators. "National Student Aid Profile: Overview of 2022 Federal Programs. October 2022.

[3] Burt, C. "Report: Emergency funds saved college students from stopping out." University Business. October 2022.

[4] Itzkowitz, Michael. "New Data Further Cements Completion Crisis in Higher Education." Third Way. February 2018.

[5] Karon, J., Ward, J. D., Hill, C. B., & Kurzweil, M. "Solving Stranded Credits: Assessing the Scope and Effects of Transcript Withholding on Students, States, and Institutions." October 2020.

[6] National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators, National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, & HCM Strategists. "Evaluating Student and Institutional Experiences With HEERF." September 2022.

[7] The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice. "States Leading the Way in Emergency Aid for College Students." June 2022.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Anderson, Drew M. Edquity. "Edquity grantees cross the finish line at Compton College." February 2021.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Georgia State University Office of Institutional Research. "Panther Retention Grants."

[12] Rossman, Daniel. "Do Emergency Micro-Grants Help Financially-Disadvantaged Students Succeed?" Ithaka S+R. October 2019.

[13] Georgia State University Office of Institutional Research. "Panther Retention Grants."

[14] Ibid

[15] Lee, Jennifer. "Completion Grants Help Students Persist and Graduate." Georgia Budget and Policy Institute. February 2022.

[16] Rossman, Daniel, Karon, Julia, and Alamuddin, Rayane. "The Impacts of Emergency Micro-Grants on Student Success: Evaluation Study of Georgia State University's Panther Retention Grant Program." Ithaka S+R. March 2022.

[17] The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice. "New Federal Data Confirm that College Students Face Significant—and Unacceptable—Basic Needs Insecurity." August 2023.

[18] US Government Accountability Office. "Food Insecurity: Better Information Could Help Eligible College Students Access Federal Food Assistance Benefits." December 21, 2018.

[19] Community Commons. "Reexamining SNAP Policies for College Students." September 2020.

[20] USDA Food and Nutrition Service, "Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP): Students)," July 2023, https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/students

[21] The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice. "#RealCollege 2021: Basic Needs Insecurity During the Ongoing Pandemic." March 2021.

[22] The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice. "States Leading the Way in SNAP Eligibility and SNAP Outreach To Students." June 2022.

[23] Granville, Peter. The Century Foundation. "Congress Made 3 Million College Students Newly Eligible for SNAP Food Aid. Here's What Must Come Next." February 2021.

[24] Duffy, Mary E., Twenge, Jean M., and Joiner, Thomas E. Journal of Adolescent Health. "Trends in Mood and Anxiety Symptoms and Suicide-Related Outcomes Among U.S. Undergraduates, 2007–2018: Evidence From Two National Surveys." July 2019.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Lipson SK, Zhou S, Abelson S, Heinze J, Jirsa M, Morigney J, Patterson A, Singh M, Eisenberg D. "Trends in college student mental health and help-seeking by race/ethnicity: Findings from the national healthy minds study, 2013-2021." June 2022

[27] Ibid.

[28] Linh Pham, Katie. ECMC Foundation. "Why College Student Mental Health Can No Longer Be Sidelined." May 2019.

[29] National Alliance on Mental Health. "College Students Speak: A Survey Report on Mental Health." 2012.

higher learning
ADVOCATES

30 Carrasco, Maria. "Students of Color Less Likely to Get Mental Health Treatment." Inside Higher Education. April 2022.

31 ICF. "Capturing the Impact of Suicide Prevention Efforts."

32 U.S. Department of Education, "Basic Needs for Postsecondary Students Program: Awards," January 2023.

33 The Chronicle of Higher Education, "Here's Our List of Colleges' Reopening Models," October 2020.

34 Clark, Ashley, Higher Learning Advocates, "Survey Reveals Higher Ed Students Have Inequitable Access to Reliable Broadband." May 2020.

35 Bouck West, Emily and Whistle, Wesley, The Hill, "Congress should help college students bridge the digital divide." September 2020.

36 Sedin Harding-Smith Foundation. "Waiting for the Bus? Transit Infrastructure at America's Community and Technical Colleges." 2021.

37 Curtis, Drew and Price, Derek V., "Overcoming Transportation Barriers to Improve Postsecondary Success, DVP-PRAXIS", February 2018.

38 College Board. "Low and moderate budgets for developing student expense budgets." 2023.

39 Tobias, Manuela. "How California's housing crisis hurts college students." Cal Matters. November 2022.

40 The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice. "New Federal Data Confirm that College Students Face Significant—and Unacceptable—Basic Needs Insecurity." August 2023.

41 U.S. Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. "Housing Instability." February 2022.

42 Mariah Kornbluh, Jennfier Wilking, Susan Roll & Robin Donatello. "Exploring housing insecurity in relation to student success." Journal of American College Health. 2022.

43 The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice. "#RealCollege 2021: Basic Needs Insecurity during the Ongoing Pandemic." March 2021.

44 Tacoma Community College. "TCC Wins Excellence in Affordable Housing Award for Innovation." 2019.

45 Tolbert, Jennifer, Drake, Patrick, and Damico, Anthony. "Key Facts about the Uninsured Population." Kaiser Family Foundation, December 2022.

46 Congressional Research Service. "U.S. Health Care Coverage and Spending." February 2023.

47 Carroll, William A. and Miller, G. Edward. "Differences in Health Insurance Coverage between Part-Time and Full-Time Private-Sector Workers, 2005 and 2015." Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. April 2018.

48 Mishory, J., Chan, O., and Granville, P. "The ACA's Impact on College Students." The Century Foundation. July 2020.

49 Rudowitz, R. and Corallo, B. "New Incentive for States to Adopt the ACA Medicaid Expansion: Implications for State Spending." Kaiser Family Foundation. March 2021.

50 Institute for Women's Policy Research. "Parents in College By the Numbers." April 2019.

51 Ibid.

52 Davis, Venice and Hau, Isabelle. "A Two Generation Approach to Early Childhood." Ascend at the Aspen Institute. November 2018.

53 Child Care Aware for America. "Demanding Change: Repairing our Child Care System. The US and the High Price of Child Care," February 2022.

54 Institute for Women's Policy Research. "Student Parents' Access to Campus Child Care Continued to Decline in 2015." July 2016.

55 U.S. Department of Education, "CCAMPIS: Funding Status," January 2023.

56 Institute for Women's Policy Research. "Student Parents' Access to Campus Child Care Continued to Decline in 2015." July 2016

57 Schmit, Stephanie. "CCDBG: Helping Working Families Afford Child Care." Center for Law and Social Policy. February 2019.

For more information about **Higher Learning Advocates**, please contact Julie Peller, executive director, at **jpeller@higherlearningadvocates.org**.