

Supporting Community College Students In Meeting Basic Needs

More and more colleges are recognizing the impact of unmet basic needs on student retention, success, and mental health and wellness.



What Are Basic Needs?

Basic needs are things people need to survive and be mentally and physically healthy. Some examples are secure housing or shelter, nutritious food, clean water, utilities, transportation, and clothing. Basic needs can also include a sense of safety, belonging, and love. When researchers discuss “basic needs,” they often focus on food insecurity and homelessness or housing insecurity.



Key Terms

Food insecurity: going hungry, not having enough money to buy food, having to skip or limit meals due to money, etc.

Housing insecurity: not having enough money to pay rent or utilities, moving in with other people due to financial problems, doubling up, moving multiple times a year, etc.

Homelessness: not having a home, being evicted or thrown out, sleeping in cars or abandoned buildings, staying in a shelter, not knowing where you will sleep at night, etc.

How Many Students Have Trouble Meeting Basic Needs?

Food and housing insecurity are more common among college students than we used to think. Community college students are at especially high risk of not being able to meet their basic needs. A study of 33,000 community college students in 24 states found that in the last year¹:



What Happens When Students Can't Meet Their Basic Needs?

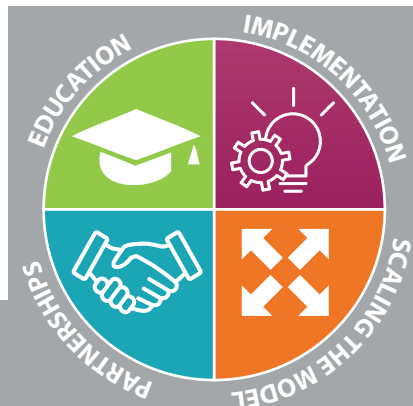
Financial stress is a barrier to student achievement and is associated with a lower GPA. When students can't meet their basic needs, they may cope by not buying textbooks or other essentials, dropping classes, working more hours at low-quality jobs, skipping semesters, and even dropping out.²

Basic needs insecurity can also severely impact health and wellness³:

- Depression, severe anxiety, eating disorders, and suicidal ideation
- Poor health, delayed visits to the doctor, inability to pay for medical care
- Physical health problems such as obesity, hypertension, and cardiovascular risk factors

Why Is It Important For Colleges To Address Basic Needs?

Students are more likely to be engaged and successful in school when they can meet their basic needs. Food and housing insecurity can even affect how students view school. A study of more than 3,600 California Community College (CCC) students found that students with food insecurity were **less likely** to perceive a sense of belonging from faculty, feel confident in their academic abilities, be focused in school, be interested in class, or view college as worthwhile.³



How Can Community Colleges Support Student Basic Needs?

Prevention

Education + Partnerships + Implementation + Scaling the Model

Awareness and Education

Faculty and staff training to reduce stigma
Faculty-to-faculty peer training
Promote awareness of need and of free or low-cost resources
Accessible and up-to-date information on campus website
Incorporate language into all job descriptions on campus

Partnerships

Student groups: Student Senate, Alpha Gamma, etc.
Campus departments: Foster Youth Services, Veterans Services, etc.
McKinney-Vento Liaisons at local high schools
Dentists and dental groups
Mental health service providers
Hotels and motels
Child care providers (e.g., Head Start, campus center)
Legal and financial services
Local Independent Living Centers
Community-based organizations

Food and Essentials

Food pantry: funded by donations, Associated Students set-aside, etc.
Snacks at offices and areas throughout campus
Mobile food pantries or "farmers markets"
SwipeOut Hunger / Meal donation program
CalFresh enrollment assistance on campus
Textbook checkouts
Toiletries, clothing
Medical supplies (e.g., cold medicine)

Housing, Transportation, and Other Resources

Centralized homelessness services
Accelerated referral to college services
Access to showers
Emergency loans
Referrals to shelters or alumni housing
Shelters for students, by students
Free bus passes



What Are Outreach And Engagement Strategies To Reach Students?

Effective outreach helps reduce stigma and ensures that students who need supports are accessing them.

- Empower student voice. Meaningfully involve students in marketing, outreach, and committees.
- Language is key! Students may not recognize they have a need or problem; some don't respond to terms like "need," "help," or "free." GetCalFresh.org is an example of student-centered marketing.
- Anchor your communications with statistics (e.g., "50% are hungry").
- Include language about basic needs and available resources on course syllabi.
- Help students feel comfortable accessing resources by incorporating your college mascot.
- Make services inviting. Create food pantries that are open to the public, like grocery shopping.
- Extend offers of resources and events to students' families to create a sense of community.
- Ensure basic need resource information is available on digital/online platforms including social media outlets, the Canvas online education platform, mobile applications and college websites.



Visit www.cccstudentmentalhealth.org to find more strategies and resources for supporting CCC students' basic needs!

This infographic includes strategies and information shared by various presenters during the 2018 California Community Colleges Basic Needs Summit.

1. <http://wihopelab.com/publications/hungry-and-homeless-in-college-report.pdf>
2. <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/HousingInsecurityInHigherEd.pdf>
3. <http://cceal.org/food-housing-report/>