

Expanding Access to Housing Support Resources for Postsecondary Students Experiencing Homelessness in Washington

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Executive Summary

Housing insecurity, instability, and homelessness are substantial barriers for many postsecondary students that can deter the pursuit and completion of postsecondary degrees in Washington. The housing and homelessness crises are driven by limited housing supply, housing cost burden, and housing support systems that are often stretched thin. For example, in early 2020, the number of single adults and unaccompanied youth under 18 experiencing homelessness was more than double the number of available temporary beds. Moreover, students, particularly those with low incomes, can be at greater risk for housing insecurity because they more often lack rental history, stable incomes, or family support (Sackett, 2015).

Recent investments to curtail the housing crisis raise questions about how these resources could potentially support postsecondary students who are experiencing housing insecurity or homelessness. Improving access to and utilization of housing assistance resources is critical to combating the significant need among Washington's students. Yet, even with substantial new investments, **there simply are not enough resources to assist all those in need of housing supports in the state, and postsecondary students often face barriers to accessing supports.**

We uncovered numerous challenges postsecondary students experiencing housing insecurity or homelessness might face in accessing and obtaining housing supports:

- Limited ability to identify those in need of support
- Supports are not centralized or easily visible to students
- Support systems and housing markets are complicated and difficult to navigate
- Institutions and housing assistance systems lack sufficient resources or capacity to serve all those in need
- Policies explicitly or implicitly hinder student access to supports.

Through research and discussions with college and university staff as well as Department of Commerce staff that support the state's homelessness crisis systems, we identified numerous strategies that can potentially increase capacity and alleviate these barriers. Our research suggests that reducing housing insecurity or homelessness among postsecondary students requires strategies that target existing and future resources toward students and simplify a complex system. These strategies will often occur at, or in coordination with, institutions of higher education rather than solely through providers in the community. Institutions are typically in a unique position to assist postsecondary students. Faculty and

staff can more easily identify students in need, and institutions can provide targeted student support that recognizes the specific needs and circumstances that students might face. Broad strategies include the following:

- Improve data collection and availability about students in need of housing assistance
- Improve outreach and awareness of existing and future supports
- Increase housing supply for postsecondary students
- Increase capacity of postsecondary institutions and housing assistance providers through expanded funding
- Streamline processes for obtaining support
- Evaluate program implementation and effectiveness

This brief describes the barriers postsecondary students might face in navigating housing services and offers detailed strategies to address these challenges. Overall, **our research suggests that policies and resources that allow postsecondary institutions to provide housing support directly and to assist students in navigating the public benefits system will offer the best opportunity to improve housing security for postsecondary students.**

Introduction

Given the exorbitant cost of housing in Washington and the significant increase in the number of individuals without a safe, stable place to live, it is no surprise that many postsecondary students experience homelessness or housing insecurity during their academic careers. Comprehensive data on housing insecurity and homelessness among Washington’s postsecondary students does not currently exist;¹ however, a 2019 survey of 28 of the state’s 34 community and technical colleges found that 51% of respondents experienced housing insecurity during the previous year and 19% experienced homelessness (The Hope Center, 2020).²

Lack of secure housing can hinder academic achievement and degree completion (Kornbluh et al., 2022). It can exacerbate disparities in student outcomes as students of color, LGBTQ students, students exiting foster care, and other marginalized student groups are shown to have higher rates of housing insecurity (The Hope Center, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic further demonstrated the tenuous housing situation many students face and how housing insecurity can increase without the supports that postsecondary institutions provide (The Hope Center, 2021). Addressing housing insecurity can help students meet a critical basic need, improve postsecondary attainment, and advance equitable college outcomes.

The Washington State Legislature and Washington’s postsecondary institutions have taken some initial steps to address housing stability needs among postsecondary students such

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Housing insecurity is an umbrella term that encompasses a lack of housing in addition to housing that is unaffordable, unstable, or unsafe housing; poor quality housing; and housing that lacks access to transportation or other critical amenities (Leopold, et al., 2016).

Homelessness, as defined by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, includes an individual who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence; shares housing due to lack of housing or economic hardship; lives in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or campgrounds; or lives in spaces not normally used for housing including substandard housing.

¹ The Washington Student Achievement Council will be supporting administration of a survey regarding basic needs across Washington’s higher education institutions in Fall 2022. For more information about this survey, see

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1AeVuxIHvierfz6aoYlWdYnHRIWC70sKo/edit?usp=sharing&oid=102786115036359363560&rtpof=true&sd=true>.

² In the survey, housing insecurity refers to barriers that limit access to a “safe, affordable, and consistent place to live.” Barriers could include unaffordable rent, mortgage, or utilities; being delinquent or defaulting on an account; moving in with others due to financial hardship; doubling or tripling up beyond the housing capacity; moving multiple times; moving due to safety; or appearing in housing court.

as implementing an emergency aid program in the community and technical colleges ([2SHB 1893](#)) and a pilot program for postsecondary institutions to develop housing supports ([2SSB 5800](#), [SHB 1166](#)).³ Despite these efforts, many students, particularly those with low incomes, continue to face challenges covering tuition costs and living expenses due to persistent gaps between the full cost of college attendance and available college financial supports (Duke-Benfield & Sponsler, 2019).⁴

Many experts suggest that meeting postsecondary students' basic needs requires a multipronged approach that includes establishing and bolstering on-campus supports while also developing procedures to assist students in leveraging public and community supports (e.g., see Sackett, Goldrick-Rab, & Broton, 2016; Duke-Benfield & Saunders, 2017; Goldrick-Rab, Richardson, and Hernandez, 2017; Duke-Benfield & Sponsler, 2019). Indeed, recent investments by the Washington State Legislature offer the opportunity to deepen college supports and strengthen the public housing support system. The Legislature recently allocated more than \$800 million to address its housing and homelessness crises and \$2.9 million to expand funding for the Supporting Students Experiencing Homelessness (SSEH) pilot that funds services, housing, financial assistance, and other accommodations for students at colleges and universities. These investments, if utilized, can likely increase capacity and availability of both institutional and community supports to address the needs of many postsecondary students.

This brief highlights potential opportunities to improve access to housing supports for postsecondary students experiencing housing insecurity as gleaned through conversations with college staff and staff at the Offices of Homeless Youth and Adult and Family Homelessness as well as a review of program guidelines and prior research. Our discussions and research focused on the following questions:

- Do postsecondary students, particularly those with low incomes or who are otherwise marginalized, have adequate access to housing supports and resources? If not, what barriers exist to accessing housing supports and resources?
- Can colleges and students leverage existing and future public housing resources and investments to alleviate housing insecurity?
- Where can policymakers target current and future investments to improve housing security for postsecondary students?

We also outline factors that contribute to homelessness or housing insecurity among postsecondary students in Washington and the process by which students can receive

³ Additionally, the Washington Student Achievement Council also plays an integral role in meeting the basic needs of postsecondary students. WSAC supports the Supporting Students Experiencing Homelessness pilot, , and developed learning communities and advisory groups around postsecondary student basic needs (<https://wsac.wa.gov/student-supports>).

⁴ In addition to tuition and fees, costs of attending college include housing, food, child care, transportation, and other similar living expenses.

assistance. We then describe the multitude of barriers students might face when navigating the process to receive support, as well as strategies to overcome these barriers.

Factors contributing to student housing insecurity and homelessness

College staff at both 2-year and 4-year institutions consistently emphasized the substantial challenges many students face in obtaining secure, affordable housing. Staff highlighted several factors that contribute to student housing insecurity, most notably a lack of accessible, available, and affordable housing. When students can find housing, landlords might impose requirements that students cannot satisfy such as hefty deposits, minimum monthly incomes, or financial or personal background checks. This can lead students to obtain unsafe or poor-quality housing or

housing that is far from campus or with limited internet access that postsecondary students likely rely on for coursework. Staff noted that many students can be forced to move because of cost, eviction, deeply distressed or substandard housing, safety concerns, or other unwanted reason (e.g. burst pipes). On-campus housing did not necessarily mitigate this lack of supply. Staff at colleges with on-campus housing noted that this housing is often unable to accommodate students who experience housing insecurity because it is full and can be closed during school breaks.

Staff emphasized that some students face unique barriers that can exacerbate limited housing supply issues. Students with low incomes, current and former foster youth, and first-generation college students might not have access to resources or guidance from their families to help them navigate complicated financial aid and rental markets. For example, staff indicated that many students might not know how to look for housing or how to assess housing quality. Moreover, married students and parenting students are often excluded from certain housing options including on-campus residential halls, and they might also prefer noncommunal living situations. Staff also noted that students of all ages experience homelessness and housing insecurity but indicated that returning adult learners tend to be particularly vulnerable.

Survey data largely reflects staff experiences. As noted above, one survey found that 51% of community and technical colleges students experienced housing insecurity in the previous year (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2019), while 10-15% of University of Washington students experienced housing insecurity in the previous 12 months (Fyall, Stevens, and &

We conducted seven interviews with college staff who work with students experiencing basic needs insecurity. These interviews included staff at 4-year and 2-year institutions representing rural and urban communities across the state. We also held discussions with staff from the Department of Commerce's Offices of Homeless Youth and Adult and Family Homelessness as well as staff at a housing authority in the state.

Manzo, 2019). Furthermore, the survey of community and technical college students finds that parenting students, those in foster care, underrepresented students of color, and students who identify as LGBTQ tended to have higher rates of housing insecurity. A national basic needs survey shows that older students, particularly those older than 25, experience substantially higher rates of housing insecurity and homelessness than students aged 25 and younger (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2019). Thus, both macro-level housing supply factors and individual-level factors impact one's access to secure, affordable housing.

Processes to obtain housing assistance

Postsecondary students in need of housing assistance might find support through college resources or through public benefits available in the community. Appendix A provides detail on college programs and public resources that postsecondary students might access. Importantly, research and conversations indicated **there are not enough resources to address the level of need, and postsecondary students are often unable to access needed resources both on campus and in the community.**

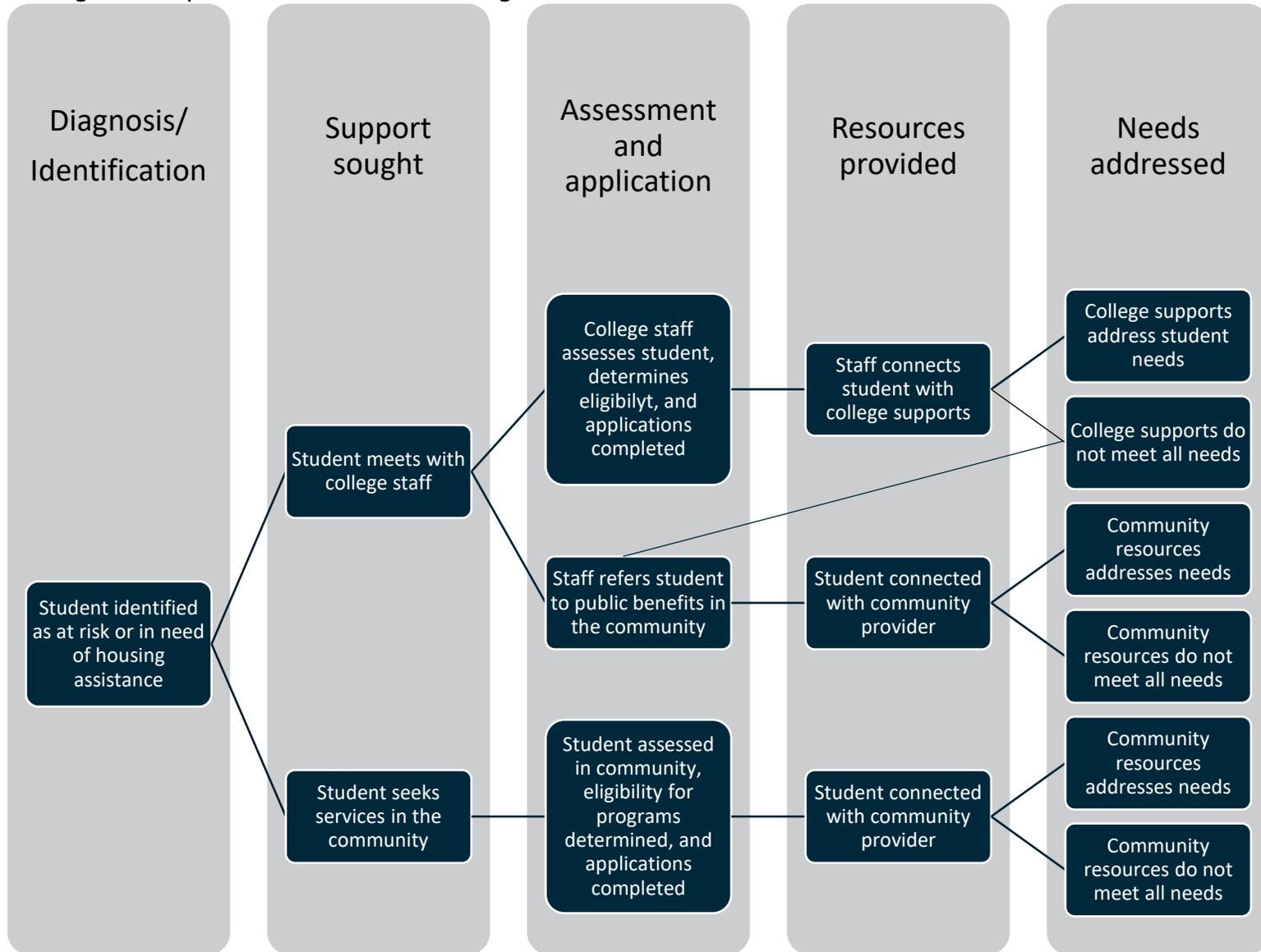
Each college, university, and community offers different supports and processes for accessing services. In general, however, for students to receive housing assistance, several activities must occur (see Exhibit 1).

- **Diagnosis/identification:** First, a housing need must be diagnosed and students must be identified. This can occur through referral from faculty or staff, case management, financial aid or registration applications, or self-identification.
- **Seeking support:** Once students are identified, they might seek support from or be referred to college staff in student services, financial aid, or a dedicated space that addresses basic needs. Students might also seek support from providers in the community.
- **Assessment:** After students connect with the relevant provider or support staff, they might go through some form of assessment to determine their specific housing needs. This assessment might be a formal needs assessment if conducted through a Coordinated Entry access point or other provider in the community. College staff with capacity and resources might also provide a more formal needs assessment. Less formal assessments might also occur, particularly if no staff or office on campus has access to formal needs assessment or training in how to conduct them.
- **Resources provided:** Next, students might be provided on-campus resources if available. College staff might prioritize students with the greatest need, those most at risk if of homelessness, or students who are least likely to receive support elsewhere. If on-campus resources are unavailable or limited, staff might refer students to resources in the community. Students might also receive support through community resources from the various publicly funded providers.

- **Needs addressed:** In the last step, student either obtain the assistance they needed to maintain or secure housing or the resources provided in the previous step failed to meet their needs. In this case, colleges might again refer students to resources in the community. If community resources initially fail to meet student needs, students might seek out other providers, return to college staff for support, pursue family or friend support, or fail to obtain secure housing.

Exhibit 1 illustrates an integrative process that leverages college supports and public benefits available in the community in an effort maximize both resources. For example, college staff might assist students with urgent needs who cannot wait for public benefits to be available and connect students who might benefit from public resources to appropriate providers. Several barriers exist, however, that hinder successful integration of these resources and prevent students from accessing support

Exhibit 1: Stages in Sample Process to Receive Housing Assistance



Barriers to accessing housing assistance resources

This section describes barriers that hinder students from navigating the process described in Exhibit 1. Discussions with both college and housing staff emphasized that capacity and funding are insufficient to address student needs. Staff at institutions that are part of the SSEH pilot praised the program for expanding funding and supports for college students, while also recognizing that more funds would be needed to serve all those in need. Staff at non-pilot institutions reported that students face dire housing situations, and community and college resources are unable to meet these needs.

Housing staff also indicated that the current system cannot support all those who need services, even with the legislature's recent expanded investments. Discussions with college staff reinforced this as many students who staff referred to community providers could not obtain resources after several attempts. Some staff stopped referring students to community resources for this reason.

As long as the need for housing supports outweighs the available resources, some people will be unable to obtain needed assistance. Postsecondary students might be at a unique disadvantage when seeking housing assistance from public sources because program eligibility rules might exclude many students or they might have unique needs that cannot be addressed adequately through the public benefits system. Furthermore, policies that determine how to allocate limited resources might implicitly deprioritize postsecondary students.

Challenges to Obtaining Public Housing Assistance for Postsecondary Students

Exclusion: Some programs exclude or place additional requirements on students. For example, many full-time students are not eligible to live in Low-Income Housing Tax Credit units, while students and parents must meet income eligibility requirements for a student to receive Section 8 vouchers (Sackett, 2015).

Unique needs: Younger postsecondary students likely require assistance when navigating a complex public benefits system including youth-specific assessments and providers. Moreover, postsecondary students must consider housing factors like proximity to campus, transportation, or internet access. These needs can add complexity to obtaining assistance. For example, staff reported that some students had to choose between using financial aid to obtain housing or to take additional credits, while others chose between housing far from campus or living in their car near campus.

Priority policies: The Coordinated Entry System (CES) centralizes intake and assessment and prioritizes resources for those who are most at risk or with greatest barriers to obtaining housing. This system might be less likely to prioritize students in many circumstances. For example, postsecondary students might experience transitory periods of homelessness during school breaks when residential halls close and might be deprioritized according to CE guidelines that require prioritization policies to consider length of time a person is unhoused ([2021 Coordinated Entry Guidelines](#)).

Exhibit 2 details barriers related to each activity depicted in Exhibit 1. Importantly, the process illustrated in Exhibit 1 occurs after a student is at risk for, or currently experiences, housing insecurity or homelessness. Policy and local market conditions drive housing costs, access, and quality. As a result, a substantial gap can exist between what individuals can afford and what is available. Barriers might show up at more than one point in the process. For example, long wait times can delay student access to providers in their search for support and can also inhibit aid receipt after contact is made. Exhibit 2 also highlights where barriers might occur; that is, whether the barrier is driven by policies or structures at postsecondary institutions or among housing providers and assistance program administrators; by decisions of students or policymakers; or a combination. This classification can help identify where strategies should be targeted to be most effective.

Exhibit 2: Barriers to Accessing Housing Supports

Stage	Barriers	Barrier location
Diagnosis/ Identification	Lack of data on student housing needs or lack of data on student status for those in housing system	College, housing
	Faculty or staff are unaware of signs of housing insecurity or what to look for	College
	Student does not feel that they need assistance	Student
Support sought	Student does not want to seek support due to stigma, others in greater need than them	Student
	Student is unaware of resources	College, housing
	No single point of contact or clear space for student to go	College
	Lack of funding limits amount of outreach staff are willing and able to do out of concern about having to turn down students	College
	Coordinated Entry access points are not available near college	Housing
	Student must contact multiple providers or experiences long wait times to connect with provider	Housing
Assessment and application	Staff do not have adequate training to assess student needs	College
	Lack of clarity about which office or staff member is responsible for assessing needs	College
	Long wait times to access provider to obtain assessment	Housing
	Provider hours for completing an assessment are limited and do not accommodate course schedules	Housing

Stage	Barriers	Barrier location
	Staff identify additional needs that must be addressed prior or in addition to housing needs such as child care, mental health supports, substance use, undocumented status	College, housing
	Student is ineligible for some programs because of age or student status (e.g. some federal housing assistance is not accessible to many full-time students or eligibility is based on student and parent income)	Housing, policymakers
	Some grant aid can be counted as income in determining eligibility	Housing, policymakers
	Application process is complicated or requires substantial documentation of need	College, housing
Resources provided	On- and off-campus housing unavailable generally or to specific student types	College
	Financial aid does not cover costs of tuition and living expenses leaving a gap in aid resources	College
	Financial aid offices do not or inconsistently increase cost of attendance (increasing cost of attendance can be necessary to allow for additional financial aid to cover housing costs)	College
	On-campus options are not available to married or parenting students	College
	College lacks funds to support student needs	College
	College staff are unaware of resources in the community	College
	Staff have few connections to providers or landlords in community	College
	Demand far outstrips supply of housing supports	College, housing
	Student must contact multiple providers to obtain needed help (e.g., one provider for utility assistance, a different provider for rental assistance)	Housing
	Coordinated Entry access points are not available near college	Housing
	Long wait times for Coordinated Entry appointments	Housing
	Student has difficulty navigating the processes and connecting with providers	College, housing
	Available housing is not located near campus or is in unsafe areas	Housing
	Coordinated Entry System do not necessarily understand the needs of young adults or have knowledge of programs available to those under 25	Housing
Students might not be prioritized through CE prioritization system	Housing	

Stage	Barriers	Barrier location
Needs addressed	Lack of data on who receives services both within and outside of the college system	College, housing
	Lack of follow up to see if student needs were met	College

Strategies to alleviate barriers

Exhibit 2 demonstrates that challenges exist at each step in the process to obtain resources. Without specific strategies and investments aimed at supporting postsecondary students, they likely will continue to face barriers in obtaining needed supports. Importantly, while postsecondary students can seek support from their institution, providers in the community, or both, **our research suggests that investments that build capacity at postsecondary institutions to provide supports directly and to assist students in navigating and leveraging the public benefits system offers a significant opportunity to improve housing security for postsecondary students.** Postsecondary students can interact with and navigate the college system regularly making institutions a natural access point for students seeking support.⁵ Furthermore, students who are experiencing housing insecurity or homelessness could be more easily identified within the normal course of business within the college system (e.g., through financial aid discussions or meetings with advisors).

Policymakers, postsecondary institutions, housing providers and assistance program administrators can improve access to resources for postsecondary students through several broad strategies:

- **Improve data collection and availability:** Identifying students who need assistance and the level of support required can aid policymakers and staff in understanding the extent of the issue and in targeting resources. However, data are not shared across housing and postsecondary institution data systems.
- **Improve outreach, information availability, and awareness of existing and future supports:** Staff reported that lack of knowledge of available programs and student eligibility for these programs could limit student access. Sharing information about available resources between housing assistance programs and staff at postsecondary institutions can improve information availability for both staff and students, and ultimately increase student take-up of these programs.

⁵ Some noted a critical caveat that older students, part-time students, parenting students, and some other student types might have less regular engagement with postsecondary institutions.

- **Increase housing supply for postsecondary students:** Limited housing supply throughout the year and during breaks was consistently cited as a factor in student housing insecurity. This lack of supply included both on-campus housing supply and housing in the neighboring community. Increasing this supply is integral to improving student access to safe, secure housing.
- **Increase capacity through expanded or targeted funding for student housing assistance:** College and housing staff both cited a lack of financial resources, emergency housing, and other housing assistance resources along with substantial waiting periods in limiting student access to obtaining housing supports.
- **Streamline processes for obtaining support:** Administrative burdens (paperwork, application processes, eligibility rules) can limit access, particularly for those with low incomes (McKibben & Qarni, 2022; Schweitzer, 2022). Staff who can assist students in completing required steps and streamlining or reducing required documentation can alleviate these burdens potential barriers.
- **Evaluate program implementation and effectiveness:** Further information is needed to determine what interventions work to reduce housing insecurity, how best to implement strategies, and whether interventions have equitable impacts.

This section describes specific steps that policymakers, postsecondary institutions, and housing providers and programs can take to support these strategies.

Strategies for policymakers

Strategies included here focus on steps policymakers can take to support postsecondary institutions and housing programs in developing housing supports for students experiencing homelessness.⁶

Strategy categories	Proposed strategy
Improve data	Encourage and facilitate data sharing between housing and postsecondary institutions.
Improve data	Require postsecondary institutions to report on the number of students experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity. ⁷
Improve data, increase information	Direct colleges and universities to conduct a study detailing available state and federal programs and how to apply for them. ⁸

⁶ Legislators and municipalities can also implement policies that impact the broader housing market to increase supply, reduce costs, or both. This brief is focused on postsecondary students, specifically, and actions related to the broader housing market are not considered here.

⁷ Actions can model requirements in the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act and Washington’s [Homeless Student Stability and Opportunity Gap Act](#) and [SSB 6074](#) that require data collection, reporting, or both on students in the K-12 system experiencing homelessness.

⁸ [Oregon House Bill 4043](#) directed community colleges to identify best practices for helping students learn about and apply for federal and state benefits.

Increase housing supply	Require postsecondary institutions that maintain campus housing to create priority housing for students experiencing homelessness and offer housing during school breaks at little or no cost. ⁹
Increase capacity	Maintain and expand funding for institutions to implement housing assistance, financial assistance, and other accommodations for students experiencing homelessness. ¹⁰
Targeted funding	Provide tuition and/or fee waivers for students at public institutions who are experiencing homelessness.
Streamline process	Require institutions to designate a liaison or point of contact for students experiencing homeless. This liaison could increase awareness by informing students of available resources and improve resource access by assisting students in apply for resources.
Streamline process, increase information	Encourage coordination and collaboration between postsecondary institutions and housing partners. ¹¹
Evaluate program	Require and fund a study of interventions to support students experiencing homelessness.

Strategies for postsecondary institutional leadership

The strategies outlined below focus on steps that leadership can take to develop an institutional plan to increase access to resources for students experiencing homelessness. Many of these strategies could be implemented in coordination with local housing assistance providers (e.g., creating a centralized basic needs website for students with available resources). The strategies do not reflect actions that specific offices or staff at postsecondary institutions might take when implementing particular strategies or best practices.

Strategy categories	Proposed strategy
Improve data	Develop data use agreements to share program data between housing and homelessness providers (maintained in the Homelessness Management Information System) with institutions to identify students seeking housing resources.

⁹ [Some states](#) require postsecondary institutions to prioritize students who currently or previous experienced homelessness for housing resources during the school year and during breaks. The federal government also prioritizes youth exiting the foster care system for [housing choice vouchers](#).

¹⁰ For example, the Washington State Legislature currently funds the Students Experiencing Homelessness pilot and an emergency grant aid program for students at community and technical colleges. These programs could be made permanent and expanded and additional programs could be developed. [California](#) and Minnesota similarly funds housing and basic need support programs including rapid re-housing, case management, financial assistance, emergency housing, and other supports at postsecondary institutions.

¹¹ The [Homeless Student Stability Program](#) grant requires housing assistance provider grantees to partner with

Improve data	Utilize data in financial aid application and/or registrations to identify students who are potentially eligible for benefits services (e.g. Pell recipients). ¹²
Improve data and increase information	Add increased availability and access to housing supports to institutional strategic plan to improve salience of the problem and encourage further data collection and information sharing.
Increase information	Identify evidence-based programs, both on- and off-campus, that have demonstrated effectiveness
Increase information, streamline process	Develop advisory committees across stakeholder groups including staff from different offices such as financial aid and students services, faculty, and students to identify gaps in current system and recommend opportunities for improvement.
Increase housing supply, streamline process	Develop plan for publicizing and providing housing to students experiencing homelessness including priority and emergency housing, institution-maintained rental apartments, reduced housing deposits, etc.
Streamline process	Examine opportunities to simplify and standardize process for increasing cost of attendance for students experiencing homelessness to limit need to make difficult trade-offs between covering tuition and housing costs.
Streamline process	Integrate steps (outreach, referral, assessment, etc.) into existing processes such as financial aid or counseling or develop single stop.
Streamline process, improve information	Create dedicated staff positions and single points of contact to deliver services and assist students in navigating the process. ¹³
Increase awareness and outreach, streamline process	Create highly visible and well-known benefits hub that can assist students with determining eligibility and applying for public benefits.

¹² Colleges that were part of Benefits Access for College Completion initiative used financial aid data to identify students to reach out (e.g., students with an expected family contribution of \$0). Colleges also tracked when students needed the most help and targeted resources for those times. This initiative provides general lessons for developing systems that connect students to on-campus and public resources.

¹³ [Colorado](#) designates a staff member at each public 2-year institution and all public and private 4-year institutions. Staff members are most often in the financial aid office but also in student services, admissions, registrar office and others. Many [institutions](#), including those in Washington that are part of the [SSEH pilot](#), have successfully employed case management that assess student needs and eligibility and provide referrals to on-campus services as well as community resources.

Increase awareness and outreach, streamline process	Develop centralized basic needs website that is targeted toward students and describes how to access public benefits, secure emergency aid, apply for emergency housing, etc.
Increase awareness and outreach, streamline process	Develop partnerships and coordination between colleges, housing providers, and the Department of Commerce.
Evaluation	Formally and comprehensively assess and evaluate student use of institutional supports and public resources

Strategies for Housing Assistance Providers

The Department of Commerce provides resources and coordination to state, local, and nonprofit community housing programs and providers. The Department of Commerce houses the Office of Youth Homelessness for youth and young adults age 16-24 and the Office of Family and Adult Homelessness that support statewide housing programs (see Appendix A for more information on these resources). Programs serve all eligible individuals in the state. This section, therefore, focuses on strategies that can facilitate student access to housing assistance resources in their communities.

Strategy categories	Proposed strategy
Improve data	Collect detailed information on postsecondary program involvement (enrollment status, type of institution, degree type) for those entering the Coordinated Entry system and provide this information to postsecondary institutions and policymakers.
Increase outreach and information	Encourage Coordinated Entry access points to publicize programs funded by the Office for Homeless Youth for those under 25 and direct eligible clients to them.
Increase awareness and information	Assist staff at postsecondary institutions in building their knowledge and awareness of available programs in the community by providing training and educational materials such as case studies to staff at postsecondary institutions and.
Increase awareness and information, streamline process	Develop resource lists targeted at program or case managers and faculty and staff that outline available programs in the area and eligibility requirements to help clarify student eligibility.
Increase awareness and information, streamline process	Create cross-training opportunities where staff from housing assistance programs and staff from postsecondary institutions collaborate to develop best practices for addressing needs of students experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity.

Streamline process	Encourage youth- and young adult-specific assessments and prioritization policies for those under 25 ¹⁴
Increase housing supply, increase capacity	Expand the availability of programs (e.g., increase the number of counties with an Independent Homeless Youth Program)
Increase capacity	Ensure that each college and university has nearby housing programs such as Coordinated Entry access point (see Appendix A for relevant programs).
Increase capacity	Tailor processes to communities or areas with more vulnerable students (Note, this requires more data on where vulnerable students reside and are enrolled).
Evaluation	Track students who are referred to community resources to see if they were able to obtain needed resources.

¹⁴ The [2021 Coordinated Entry Guidelines](#) current allows communities to develop separate prioritization policies for youth and young adults. The guidelines require communities that develop such a prioritization policy for youth and young adults to coordinate with young people with lived experience, use an available assessment tool that can convert scores across assessments, or both.

Conclusion

The severity of basic needs insecurity among postsecondary students is a rising concern among educators and policymakers across the country. Housing insecurity, caused by rising costs of tuition and housing, can create a substantial barrier to completing a degree, particular for students with low incomes and other vulnerable or marginalized student populations. Postsecondary students at risk of homelessness or housing insecurity must make difficult trade-offs often between paying for, and continuing, their education and obtaining safe, affordable places to live. As the housing crisis continues in Washington, there are simply not enough resources to support all those who need assistance leaving many, including vulnerable postsecondary students, without access to resources. Moreover, when supports do exist, postsecondary students can face implicit and explicit barriers to accessing those resources.

The Washington State Legislature, recognizing the needs of postsecondary students, has taken initial steps to build capacity at postsecondary institutions to support students experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity. However, institutions require more resources to serve students who require housing resources. Policymakers, postsecondary institutions, and housing assistance programs can further support students experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity by investing in housing support programs at postsecondary institutions to develop on-campus supports and to assist students in navigating the public benefits systems. The strategies in this brief offer many steps that policymakers, institutions, and housing assistance programs and providers can implement to support postsecondary students experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity. Further research, including extensive staff and student interviews, can clarify which strategies would be most effective and how best to implement them.

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Appendix A: Existing Resources at Colleges and in Communities

College-based resources

The level of assistance can differ substantially across colleges and communities. Some colleges have dedicated staff who provide case management to assist students in addressing housing and other needs, referrals, emergency or longer-term housing on or off campus resources, emergency financial assistance, and increased financial aid. Other colleges might have more decentralized support systems with no single point of contact. These systems might also provide support for a subset of students such as those in certain workforce programs or might provide more limited assistance such as supplying students with housing resource lists rather than case management to help them navigate college or housing systems.

Colleges might also partner with community organizations to provide services on campus that connect students with college and community resources. For example, the United Way of King County (UWKC) operates Benefits Hubs at 10 community and technical colleges in the county. Staff at these work with students to address a range of needs and provide emergency aid when needed. Hubs are supported by a combination of funding and staff from UWKC and the colleges. Other examples include SingleStop, located at community colleges, that helps connect students to public benefit resources and other services, the Southern Scholarship Foundation that offers housing to students at partnering institutions, and Tacoma’s College Housing Assistance Program, which provides housing vouchers to students at Tacoma Community College and the University of Washington-Tacoma.

Community-based resources

A constellation of programs and providers funded by federal, state, and local governments as well as philanthropic organizations deliver housing supports throughout the state. These resources might include affordable housing solutions such as subsidized housing or housing vouchers; aid to those requiring financial supports to maintain housing such as rental assistance or emergency aid; and supports for those experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness such rapid re-housing and shelters.

The Office of Homeless Youth (OHY) and the Office of Family and Adult Homelessness within the Washington State Department of Commerce support statewide efforts to eliminate homelessness or housing insecurity. The Office of Homeless Youth funds numerous programs for youth and young adults between ages 12 and 25.¹⁵ Programs most relevant to postsecondary students include the following:

- *Anchor Community Initiative and Centralized Diversion Fund*: The Anchor Community Initiative operates in four counties and supports communities in developing capacity and

¹⁵ <https://www.commerce.wa.gov/serving-communities/homelessness/office-of-youth-homelessness/>

providing services to youth and young adults in those communities. The Centralized Diversion Fund is one critical component of the Anchor Community Initiative that provides financial assistance to help secure or maintain housing. This flexible fund can pay for housing needs directly such as rental deposits or pay for any expense that could result in loss of housing such as paying to automobile repairs to allow for transportation to work to maintain one's income.

- *Independent Youth Housing Program (IYHP)*: IYHP provides rental assistance and case management services for those who have aged out of foster care in five counties throughout the state.
- *Young Adult Housing Program*: Operated in nine counties, this program provides rental assistance, transitional housing, and case management services for those aged 18 through 24.
- *Young Adult Shelters*: Seven emergency, temporary shelters with approximately 150 beds throughout the state specifically for those aged 18 through 24. Young adults can also receive assessments and referrals at these locations.
- *Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program*: Funded with federal funds from the Department of Housing and Urban Development, this program supports providers in rural communities in Washington State.

In addition to the Office of Homeless Youth, the Office of Family Adult Homelessness supports Washington's Coordinated Entry System (CES), which is operated within communities and is intended to coordinate and manage the response across homelessness assistance providers through standardized assessment, prioritization, and referral processes for those experiencing or at risk of homelessness.¹⁶ Programs and providers supported by the Office of Family and Adult Homelessness serve those 18 and over with at least one access point per county.¹⁷ Any adult can access the CES, though prioritization rules that determine who receives services can differ across communities, and typically prioritize those most at risk or with the greatest barriers to obtaining housing. In addition, the Department of Commerce also funds the Homelessness Diversion Program that is intended to help people identify options within their own resources to avoid entry into the homelessness crisis system.¹⁸ This program also provides flexible financial assistance in certain circumstances.

¹⁶ Washington State Department of Commerce. (2021). Washington Balance of State Coordinated Entry Guidelines. Olympia, WA: Department of Commerce. Accessed from

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¹⁷ <https://deptofcommerce.app.box.com/v/CEAccessPoints>

¹⁸ Washington State Department of Commerce. (2022). Guidelines for the Washington State Homelessness Diversion Program. Olympia, WA: Department of Commerce. Accessed from <https://deptofcommerce.app.box.com/s/unith5fwx59usrr8m8uuadelzo28igm>.

Appendix B: Examples of Strategies to Improve Postsecondary Student Access to Housing Supports

Stage	Examples
Diagnosis/ Identification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Colleges that were part of Benefits Access for College Completion initiative used financial aid data to identify students to reach out (e.g., students with an expected family contribution of \$0). Colleges also tracked when students needed the most help and targeted resources for those times. This initiative provides general lessons for developing systems that connect students to on-campus and public resources. The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act requires school districts to submit data on the number, characteristics, and academic outcomes of students experiencing homelessness in the K-12 system. In 2014, the Washington State Legislature expanded these requirements for K-12 students (SSB 6074). A similar state requirement for colleges and universities could substantially increase knowledge about the scope and size of issues surrounding homelessness and housing insecurity for postsecondary students.
Support sought	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Colorado designates a staff member at each public 2-year institution and all public and private 4-year institutions. Staff members are most often in the financial aid office but also in student services, admissions, registrar office and others. University of Massachusetts-Boston created an office that is intended to help students meet their basic needs. The centralized website includes resources information, referral applications, and more for students. Institutions participating in Washington’s SSEH pilot offered case management services that assisted students in navigating on- and off-campus support systems. Oregon House Bill 4043 directed community colleges to identify best practices for helping students learn about and apply for federal and state benefits.
Assessment and application	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many institutions, including those in Washington that are part of the SSEH pilot, have successfully employed case management that assess student needs and eligibility and provide referrals to on-campus services as well as community resources.
Resources provided	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> California requires public universities that maintain housing prioritize housing for foster youth and current and former unhoused students. California requests the same priority housing system for community colleges. The Office of Homeless Youth developed recommendations for improving the CES to make it work better for youth and young adults. Some of these recommendations are included in this exhibit, but all recommendations can improve the experiences of youth and young adults engaging with the homelessness crisis system.

Stage	Examples
Needs addressed	

