SUPPORTING STUDENTS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS (SSEH) PROGRAM

Annual Report to the Legislature, December 1, 2024

Introduction

Basic needs insecurity is a critical barrier to college students' access and success, which adversely impacts persistence and completion rates for postsecondary students. In Washington, college students face significant challenges in meeting their housing and other basic needs while completing their credentials. Gaps in covering critical costs such as housing and food are pervasive among students in both 2-year and 4-year institutions. Students of color and students who experience marginalization based on their identities and circumstances — such as former foster youth, LGBTQI+ students, and students with dependents — are disproportionately impacted.

How common is housing insecurity and homelessness among Washington postsecondary students? One in three postsecondary students reported housing insecurity and one in 10 reported experiencing homelessness in the prior year. Across both 2-year and 4-year institutions, 50% of students reported experiencing either food insecurity or housing insecurity. Former foster care students had the highest rates of housing insecurity and homelessness among all demographic groups analyzed in a 2022 survey.[1]

To address this need, the Washington state Legislature enacted the Supporting Students Experiencing Homelessness (SSEH) pilot program with [2SSB 5800](2019) and made it permanent in 2023 ([ESSB 5702](2023))[2]. SSEH provides grants for colleges to build systems to identify and support students facing homelessness and students who aged out of the foster care system. The Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) and the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) administer the SSEH program. In fiscal year 2024, SSEH included six programs across six public baccalaureate institutions (PBIs) and 28 colleges in the community and technical college system (CTCs).[3]

A comprehensive report on the four pilot years of the program was submitted to the Legislature in December 2023.[4] The following report provides an annual update on the program for fiscal year 2023-24 as required by ESSB 5702.

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[1] [Basic Needs Security Among Washington College Students: Washington Student Experience Survey: Findings Report (January 2023)](#) WA public and tribal institutions will field a similar survey in fall 2024, and the CTCs plan to continue surveying on a biennial cycle.
[2] [Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 5702: Higher Education – Students Experiencing Homelessness and Foster Youth Program - Expansion (2023)](#)
[3] Four additional CTCs completed SSEH plans in Fiscal year 2023-24 that will begin serving students in Fiscal year 2024-25.
[4] [Supporting Student Experiencing Homelessness (SSEH) Pilot Program: Report to the Legislature (December 2023)](#)

Who are the Students Served?

The six public baccalaureate institutions (PBIs) and 28 participating community and technical colleges (CTCs) have supported 11,686 students since the program began in 2020. In fiscal year 2024 alone, 6,726 students facing homelessness and former foster youth were served. Students received case management and referral to resources, and many received housing supports, financial assistance, and other basic needs supports.

SSEH Students Served

|	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24
PBI	19	87	252	450	496
CTC	108	217	1975	3618	4464
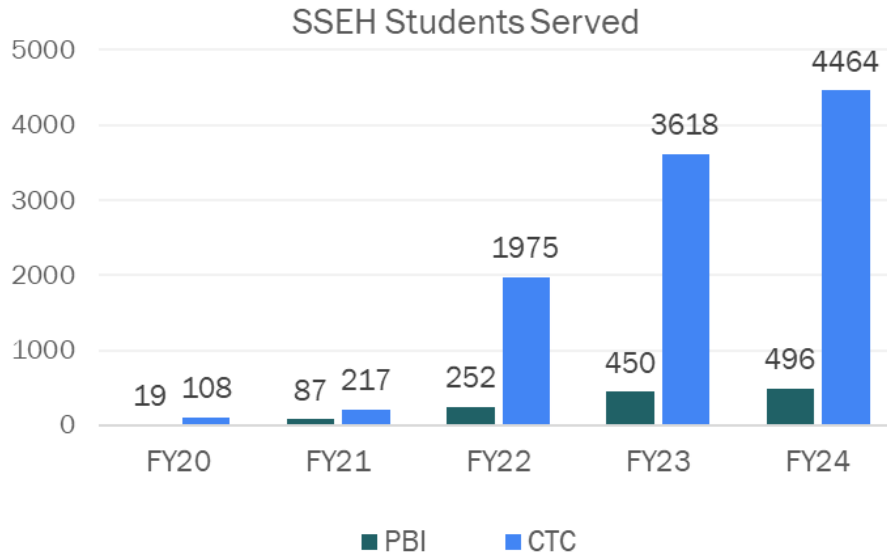
2023-24 SSEH Student Demographics

- Approximately two-thirds of students supported by SSEH in fiscal year 2023-24 were female. In context of statewide college enrollment, about 56% of students are female[5]. Female students reported higher rates of basic needs insecurity in the most recent statewide survey at 51%, compared to male students at 46%; and students who identified as not exclusively male or female reported basic needs insecurity rates of 56%.[6]

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[5] Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges Community & Technical College total headcount enrollment 2023-24; Education Research and Data Center Public Four-year Dashboard Annual Enrollment 2022-23 (note: Four-year institution enrollment for 2023-24 is not yet released)

[6] Basic Needs Security Among Washington College Students: Washington Student Experience Survey: Findings Report (January 2023
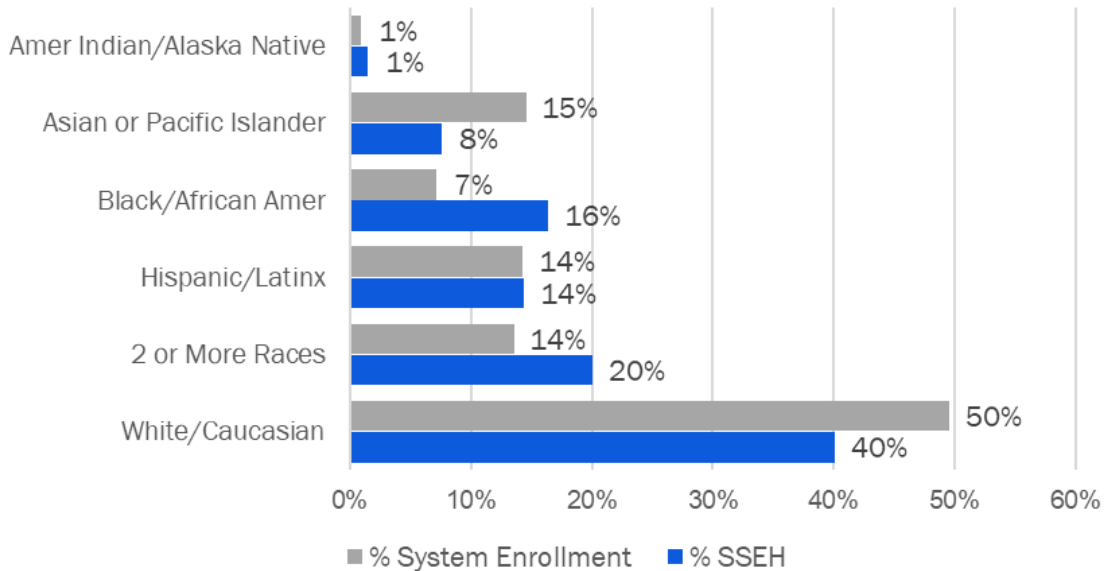
SSEH Students FY24

System Enrollment by Sex

Another Sex 1%
Male 33%
Female 66%

Another Sex 1%
Male 43%
Female 56%
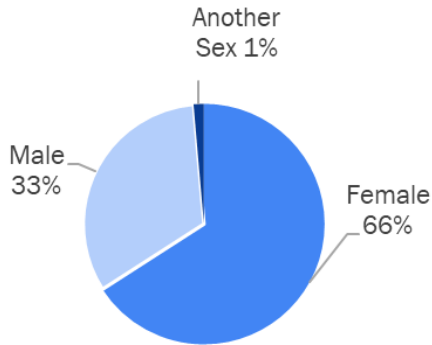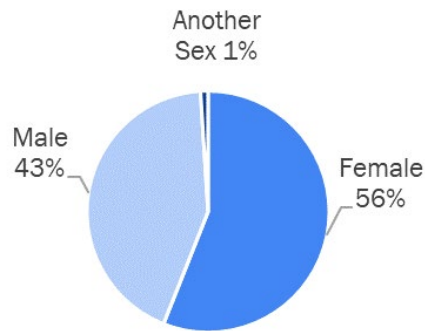
- 59% of SSEH students served in fiscal year 2023-24 were students of color, which compares to approximately 50% of all students enrolled across the public college sector according to the most recent available data.[7]

SSEH Students by Race/Ethnicity Compared to System Enrollment

Race/Ethnicity	% System Enrollment	% SSEH
Amer Indian/Alaska Native	1%	1%
Asian or Pacific Islander	15%	8%
Black/African Amer	7%	16%
Hispanic/Latinx	14%	14%
2 or More Races	14%	20%
White/Caucasian	50%	40%

■ % System Enrollment   ■ % SSEH

When exploring housing and/or food insecurity among college students by race/ethnicity subgroups, the Washington Student Experience Survey (2022) found the highest rates among American Indian/Alaska Native students (68%) and Black/African American students (67%), and Hispanic/Latinx students (59%).

Only two race/ethnicity subgroups reported basic needs insecurity at rates lower than the statewide rate: white students at 47% and Asian students at 41%.

- 25% of PBI and 70% of CTC students served by SSEH were 25 years old or older. The considerable difference in the age of SSEH students served by sector is reflective of the difference in age of students enrolled in each sector. In the CTC sector, 50% of all enrolled students were 25 years old or older, compared to just 28% in this age group in the public baccalaureate sector.[8]

- SSEH served 314 former foster youth in fiscal year 2023-24.

What are the Students' Outcomes?

Supporting students' basic needs with housing, case management, and other accommodations helped them stay enrolled. 94% of students in the PBI sector completed the term in which they received SSEH support; and in the CTC sector, 86% completed the term in which they were served by SSEH. Most of those students persisted to the next term at their colleges (or had completed a credential by the following term). 93% were retained to the next term at the PBIs, and 82% at the CTCs.

"Working with the basic needs program made all the difference whether I would graduate. If not for them I would of been forced to drop my schooling to be able to survive, they helped me more than they could ever know and I will be forever grateful for their support in my time of need." – Student, The Evergreen State College

Fiscal year 2023-24	PBI	CTC
Percent of students who completed academic term in which they received SSEH support	94%	86%
Percent who stayed in college or completed a credential the following term	93%	82%

"A student recently shared the positive impact he felt after receiving laundry cards, personal hygiene items, along with deposit funds to help him get secure housing for he and his sister who were abandoned by their mother last year. The transformation in this young person was beyond awesome! He is heading off in a week to complete his bachelor's degree at a college he never thought possible." – SSEH staff, Spokane Falls Community College

How are Students Served?

Services /Accommodations

All colleges provide SSEH-eligible students with case management, housing accommodations, and food access in some form. The programs vary in terms of other accommodations based on institutional and community needs and resources and individual student circumstances. Many programs provide additional accommodations for other intersecting basic needs, such as shower access/hygiene supplies, transportation, clothing, utilities, technology, books/class supplies, laundry access/supplies, child-related support, health-related support, storage, mailstop, and other essentials. A program inventory that shows which accommodations are available at each participating college was updated in August 2024.[9]

"What I liked about the assistance, is the fact that if you apply yourself, and put forth the effort of finding a place to live, they will help you with pretty much anything that is within their power or reach. They also put me in a motel for a couple weeks during a time when I was really struggling and felt like quitting school altogether because it was becoming too challenging, while homeless with no income." – Student, Tacoma Community College
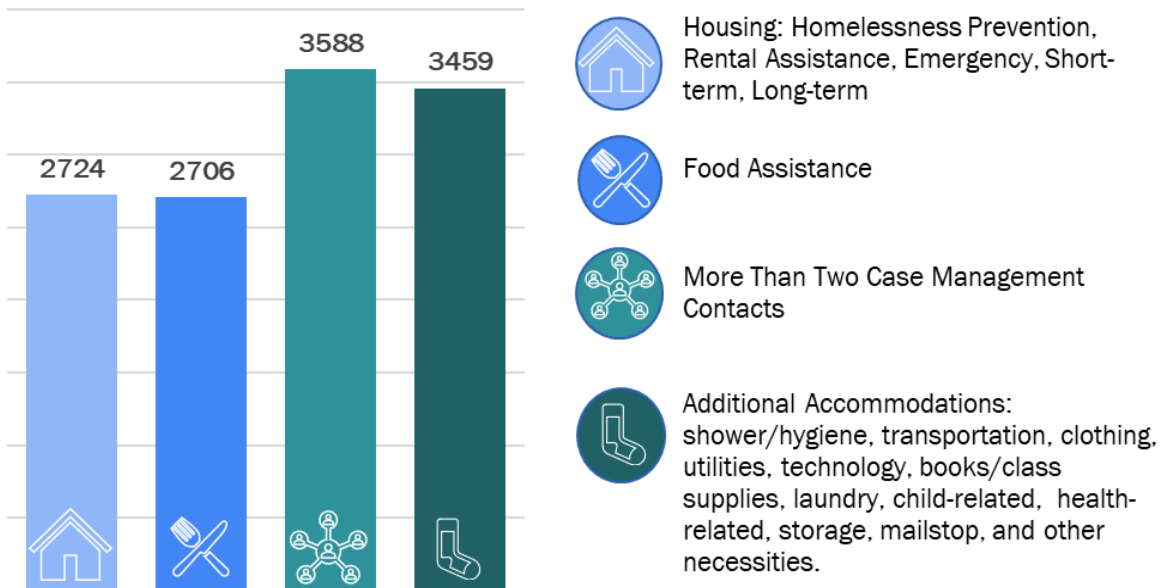
SSEH housing accommodations include prevention of imminent homelessness, assistance to find and establish new rental accommodation (e.g. application fees, 1st/last/deposit), emergency housing or shelter, short-term (3-6 months) and long-term housing (6 or more months).

Case management is a key component of SSEH. Case management includes any individual connection with a student, and many students received more than two case management contacts (e.g., outreach, intake, triage, assessments, coaching, planning, referrals, follow-up, etc.).

"I wanted to take a moment to express my heartfelt gratitude for your incredible support during my recent financial struggles. Our candid conversation on Teams was a turning point for me, as your endless kindness and understanding not only eased my stress and anxiety but also helped me refocus on my education. The resources you provided were invaluable, and the financial aid for my rent and food made a tremendous difference." – Student, Lake Washington Institute of Technology

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[9] SSEH Program Services Inventory (August 2024)

FY24 Number of Accommodations provided by SSEH Programs

Bar chart values: 2724, 2706, 3588, 3459

- 🏠 Housing: Homelessness Prevention, Rental Assistance, Emergency, Short-term, Long-term
- 🍴 Food Assistance
- More Than Two Case Management Contacts
- 🧦 Additional Accommodations: shower/hygiene, transportation, clothing, utilities, technology, books/class supplies, laundry, child-related, health-related, storage, mailstop, and other necessities.
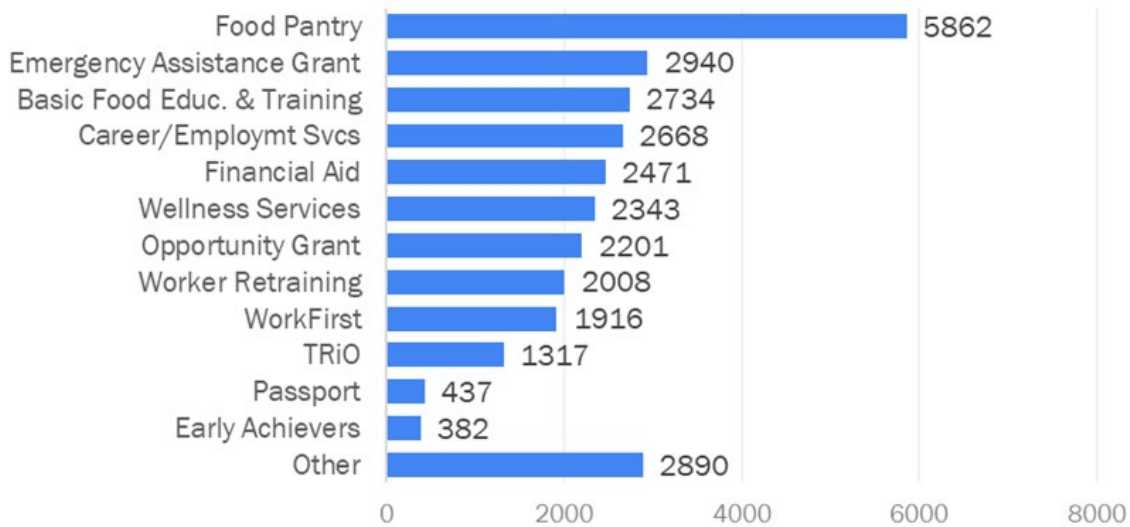
Referrals to Other Programs and Resources

SSEH program staff develop and maintain relationships and cross-referral systems across programs and resources both within their institutions and with community providers and public benefit programs.

In the community and technical college sector, SSEH case managers made more than 30,000 referrals on behalf of SSEH-eligible students to other campus and college resources and programs. Campus food pantries were the most referred resource. Students were also referred to other funding and holistic support options, such as other workforce funding programs, Passport to Careers, TRiO, emergency grants, other financial aid options, wellness services, career/employment opportunities, and a wide range of other student specific resources and programs.

"Thank you so much for everything you have done for me and my son. I feel like thank you will never be enough. I am so incredibly grateful." – SSEH Student, Highline College

CTC SSEH: Student Referrals to College Resources

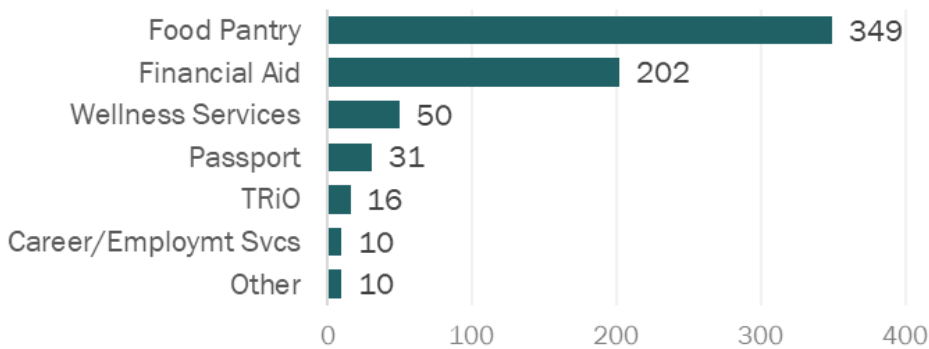| Resource	Referrals
Food Pantry	5862
Emergency Assistance Grant	2940
Basic Food Educ. & Training	2734
Career/Employmt Svcs	2668
Financial Aid	2471
Wellness Services	2343
Opportunity Grant	2201
Worker Retraining	2008
WorkFirst	1916
TRiO	1317
Passport	437
Early Achievers	382
Other	2890

"Other" CTC-sector college referrals included basic needs/one-stop centers, mental health/counseling, childcare resources, disability/accessibility services, benefit navigators, academic advising, international student office, tutoring, study spaces/labs, veteran services, student life, equity and inclusion centers, college foundation emergency funds, college housing, tuition payment plans, clothes closets, auto repair programs, migrant assistance program, re-entry programs, IT/computer resources, book vouchers, financial literacy course, CARE team, Title IX, I-BEST, and essential skills center.

> "The SSEH funding has had a tremendous impact on both the students we are able to serve with this funding, but also on the ways in which some of our college departments collaborate. In an effort to avoid student confusion around funding, departments like the Center for Transformational Wellness and Benefits Hub, TRiO, Passport, Emergency Funding, Financial Aid, and Student Housing are in constant communication. While these departments worked together previously, we were often working in silos, supporting students individually, but not checking in to see how other departments were engaging. These changes mean that students do not have to go from office to office to get support or translate what one office is telling them to a different office." – SSEH staff, Green River College

In the public baccalaureate sector, SSEH case managers made 668 referrals to other university programs and resources. Again, campus food pantries were the most common intersecting campus resource. The 4-year institutions do not have the same workforce funding support programs, (such as BFET, WorkFirst, or Opportunity Grant), nor state-funded Student Emergency Assistance Grants as the CTC sector does. They do refer SSEH students to Passport to College and TRiO programs at their institutions, as well as other programs such as wellness services, foundation emergency funds, scholarships, financial aid support, career and employment resources, and other institution-specific programs and grants. One college referred students to a food fund program through their college dining provider.

"This has been one of the things that has made my college career possible. I had a very tough time last winter and the food pantry was one of the staples for me!" – Student, Eastern Washington University
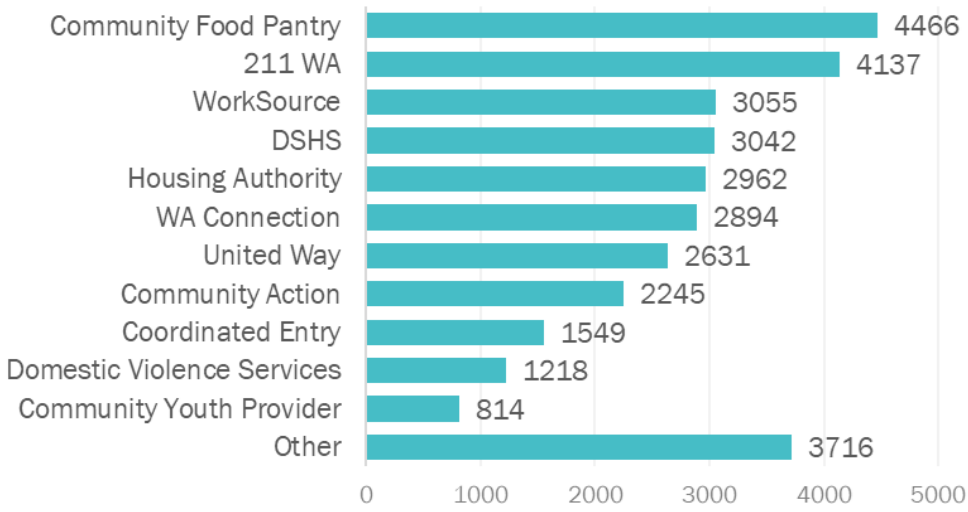
PBI: Student Referrals to other University Resources

Resource	Referrals
Food Pantry	349
Financial Aid	202
Wellness Services	50
Passport	31
TRiO	16
Career/Employmt Svcs	10
Other	10

For both CTCs and PBIs, community providers, partners, and public agencies and benefit programs are integral to the support of SSEH students. Students receive regular referrals to community food pantries and centralized resource hubs, such as 211 Washington, Community Action agencies and councils, United Way, and coordinated entry providers. A wide range of other community partners, programs, and providers related to housing/shelter, domestic violence, youth services, utilities, legal aid, immigrant services, employment support, financial assistance, childcare, transportation, healthcare, and other basic needs contribute to the support network associated with SSEH.[10]

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[10] SSEH 2023-24 Community Providers and Partnership Programs

Student Referrals to Community Resources

Resource	Referrals
Community Food Pantry	4466
211 WA	4137
WorkSource	3055
DSHS	3042
Housing Authority	2962
WA Connection	2894
United Way	2631
Community Action	2245
Coordinated Entry	1549
Domestic Violence Services	1218
Community Youth Provider	814
Other	3716

Strategy Highlights

From the beginning, the SSEH program developed with full cross-sector collaboration between 2-year and 4-year institutions, SBCTC, and WSAC. We've aligned data collection, fostered a statewide learning community to share promising strategies, and co-developed program reports and recommendations. Our common goal has been to create a clear statewide view of the scope of students' housing and food insecurity, effective strategies and practices to support those students, and student outcomes experienced across all participating institutions.

Members of the expanding SSEH learning community gathered in two practice-sharing convenings and a month of topical workgroup discussions this year. A selection of the promising approaches the workgroups highlighted at the August 2024 convening to support students experiencing homelessness and food insecurity and students who aged out of the foster care system are presented below.[11]

Institutional Strategy Highlights

- Braid emergency funding resources into a single application process for students.

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[11] SSEH 2024 Workgroup Highlight Slides, presentation excerpt from SSEH Learning Community Convening, August 15,2024

- Develop emergency funding policies, triage, and prioritization practices using a team approach to help control for individual bias, collectively distribute the burden of determining how to allocate limited resources, and maximize leveraging of programs and funding sources.

- Engage students with lived experience into program and policy assessment and to inform campus basic needs strategic planning and raise awareness of potential advocates in the broader community.

- Meet with K-12 McKinney-Vento and foster care liaisons to introduce the college-level support available. Continue cross-sector meetings to sustain and develop ongoing relationships and facilitate warm handoffs for students entering college.

- Establish and sustain strong program cross-referrals between SSEH and Passport program staff, and other college support resources, such as advising, food pantry, admissions, BFET/SNAP, financial aid, Running Start, CARE network, and benefit/basic need navigators.

- Establish a shared system to track students served and cross-referred between multiple programs within the institution to improve coordination of case management and the experience of students.

- Identify potential champions, allies, and donors; collaborate with community partners and stakeholders to assist in identifying and securing housing for low-income students.

- Partner with campus housing providers to reserve units for SSEH-eligible students.

- Incorporate financial planning education into the financial aid enrollment process and/or for students experiencing ongoing challenges or recurring emergencies.

- Partner with Washington Department of Social and Health Services to come to campus for food benefit application support.

- Partner with local food banks, community gardens, grocery stores, on-campus food vendors, and other organizations to increase food access.

- Ensure culturally relevant food, perishable and fresh food, and food options for those with specific dietary needs or restrictions are available in pantries.

- Offer cooking demonstrations and recipe cards featuring pantry provisions; offer food preparation/kitchen spaces on campus to prepare food.

- The state's investment in adding Benefit/Basic Needs Navigators [12] has expanded SSEH capacity to support students, connect them with potential benefits and programs, and deepen partnerships. Many of the new navigators contributed to the statewide SSEH learning community workgroups and practice-sharing convenings.

- The requirement in 2SHB 1559 for colleges and universities to develop a hunger-free and basic needs campus strategic plan is broadening campus awareness of basic needs insecurity and dialogue on how addressing basic needs is linked to other strategic enrollment, equity, and workforce development goals.

"The SSEH advisory group transitioned to look more broadly at student needs and participated in the development of the Hunger Free and Basic Needs Campus Strategic Plan. The Student Resource Group, as it is named now, identified 3 starting priorities: (1) Improve data collection and sharing, (2) Develop a universal intake process, and (3) Explore the possibility of using one system to track interventions. The group will meet monthly. Group facilitation is managed by the SSEH lead at this time." -- SSEH faculty counselor, Yakima Valley College

- Collaboration deepened in fiscal year 2023-24 between postsecondary institutions, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), and K-12 staff working with intersecting student populations. SBCTC and WSAC administrators developed and published a College Homeless/Foster Youth Staff Contact List to help K-12 homeless student and foster care liaisons identify specific program contacts at each institution. Cross-sector professional development efforts included participation of OSPI staff from homeless and foster youth programs in the SSEH Foster Care/Unaccompanied Homeless Youth Transitions workgroup, and a collaborative statewide professional development webinar facilitated by WSAC, SBCTC, and OSPI. The webinar, titled "Building Bridges for Warm Hand-offs," drew more than 140 McKinney-Vento liaisons, college staff, and community providers across the state.

- Collaboration continues between SSEH college staff, state administrators and the Passport to Careers program since both programs focus on supporting former foster youth and unaccompanied homeless youth. Several college staff who intersect with both SSEH and Passport serve on the Passport leadership team, others engage in the Passport network development opportunities, and Passport designated support staff and the WSAC program director engaged in SSEH workgroup discussions.

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[12] 2SHB 1559 (2023) requires public postsecondary institutions to have at least one navigator position that supports students' access to benefits and resources for their basic needs.

WSAC and OSPI have established a data-sharing agreement to reduce the burden on unaccompanied homeless youth to demonstrate eligibility status for financial aid.

- SSEH administrators and staff continue to seek opportunities to deepen and sustain collaboration with partner agencies, programs, organizations, and state and regional coalitions with intersecting missions and service populations, including those engaged in anti-poverty efforts, food access, affordable housing development, homelessness prevention, and equitable access to education and training.

Recommendations

Legislative Action

SSEH participating institutions and administrators recommend the following areas of legislative action to address some of the gaps students experience and the sustainability of colleges' efforts:

- Increase affordable housing options for students (and staff) on and off college campuses and promote community and regional partnership approaches to address housing shortages.

- Expand SSEH legislation to include and fund an SSEH program at the state's Tribal College.[13]

- Advocate to restore and sustain Passport to Careers funding for students exiting foster care and unaccompanied homeless youth. Establish automatic eligibility for the Washington College Grant for Passport-eligible students.

- Expand the Free and Reduced-Price Meal Pilot enacted through the Basic Needs Act to include more colleges.[14] Evaluate the varied pilot approaches.

- Increase and ensure funding for SSEH case managers to preserve more of the legislative appropriation for student housing and basic needs accommodations. As enrollment increases and inflation of basic necessities increases, so does student need for the program resources. At the current legislative appropriation rate of $108,676 per CTC and $102,000 per PBI for their SSEH program, the reach of the program will decrease as colleges attempt to stretch funding to cover both critical program staffing and student accommodations.

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[13] Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 5702: Higher Education – Students Experiencing Homelessness and Foster Youth Program - Expansion (2023)
[14] Student Basic Needs – Public Postsecondary Institutions, 2SHB 1559, 2023

- Increase funding associated with the [Basic Needs Act](#) to make benefit/basic needs navigators full-time 1.0 FTE staff positions.

- Advocate at the federal level to remove student barriers to Low Income Tax Credit (LITC) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) access.

Conclusion

As a result of Washington's powerful SSEH investment in students who are experiencing homelessness or who aged out of foster care, last year 6,726 students received tailored support for their foundational needs through existing resources and SSEH services. This led to students' increased housing and food security, and remarkably high levels of postsecondary persistence and completion. With the permanence of the SSEH program, colleges, universities and administrators are strengthening systems to identify and better support students facing these challenges, as well as increasing collaboration and facilitated pathways for K-12 students experiencing homelessness coming into postsecondary education. Looking forward, Washington's continued support of the Basic Needs Act and the Students Experiencing Homelessness and Foster Youth Program would continue to address students' core housing needs and support postsecondary persistence.

> "You make my experience here so precious and one of the first positive educational and work experiences that I feel valued and accepted for who I am. Thank you for always finding time to help me and to be so kind to me, especially when faced with challenges that honestly surprise me that they didn't take me out. Well, I know why they didn't, it's because of the kindness and support I received from people like you. I literally have no clue what's ahead. But I can tell you with confidence, I am not terrified in my soul about not knowing. That is huge! And you are to thank for that. I feel like I am getting stronger and feeling more stable than I have since I can remember. I could seriously go on with how you have impacted my life but I will start crying (good tears) and I am in the Learning lab at the moment so that might get weird. Lol" – Student, Lake Washington Institute of Technology

Contacts for more information about the SSEH program and this report:

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APPENDIX A: SSEH PROGRAM 2024 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Washington Supporting Students Experiencing Homelessness (SSEH)

Washington students face growing housing insecurity and homelessness

Basic needs insecurity is a critical barrier to student access[1] and success, undermining persistence and completion rates for postsecondary students.[2] In Washington, college students face significant challenges to meeting their basic needs while completing their credentials. The gaps in covering critical costs such as housing and food are pervasive among students in both community and technical colleges (CTCs) and public baccalaureate institutions (PBIs).[3] Students of color and students who experience marginalization based on their identities and circumstances—such as former foster youth, LGBTQ+ students, and students with dependents—are disproportionately impacted. [4]

To address this need, the Washington Legislature enacted **Supporting Students Experiencing Homelessness (SSEH)** pilot in 2019 (2SSB 5800) and then made it permanent for all public postsecondary institutions in 2023 (ESSB 5702). SSEH provides grants to colleges to build systems to identify and support students facing homelessness and students who aged out of foster care. The Washington Student Achievement Council and the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges have administered SSEH, initially with six public colleges and universities, and now with 34 institutions.

How common is food and housing insecurity for Washington students?

Students participating in a 2022 state-level survey reported high levels of unmet basic needs:
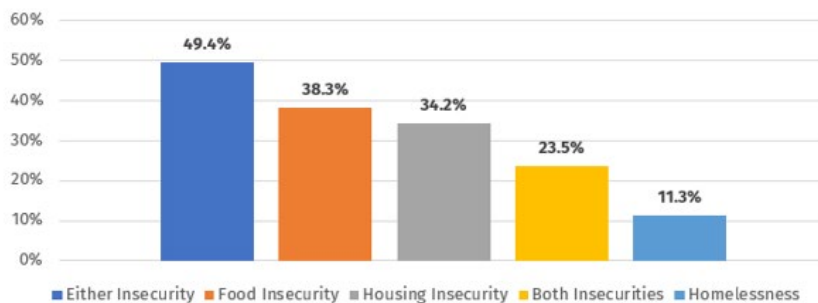
> "Working with the program made all the difference whether I would graduate. If not for them I would have been forced to drop my schooling to be able to survive."– Student, The Evergreen State College
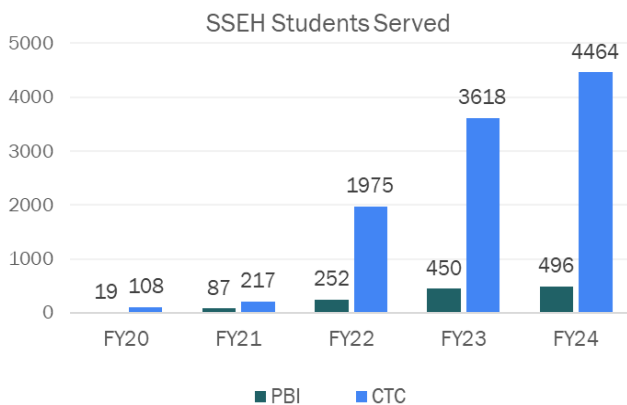
Who has been served in SSEH?

SSEH has served 11,686 students in 5 years.
In FY 2024 alone, 6,726 students were served.

- **59% of students served were students of color** which echoes national and state data that Black, Native American, and Hispanic/Latinx students are disproportionately experiencing these barriers.
- **66% of students identified as female.**
- **70% of CTC students were age 25 or older,** and 25% of PBI students served were in that age range.
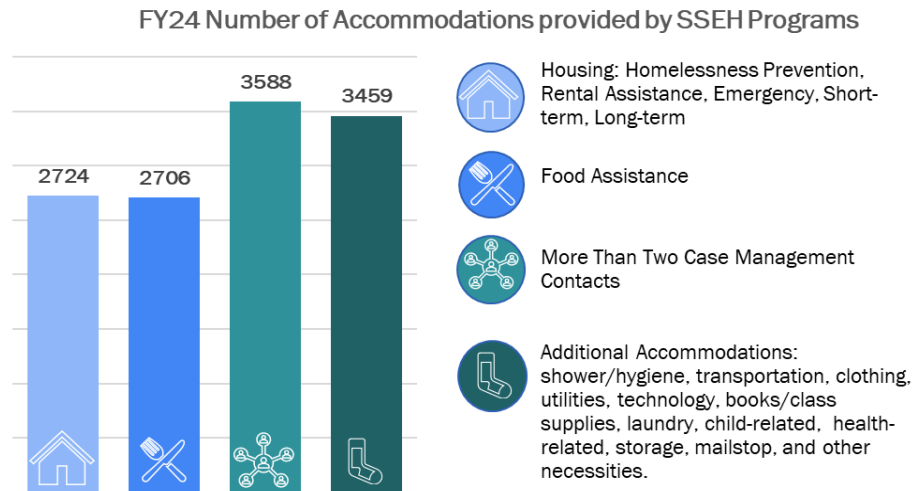- **314 were former foster youth.**

Have students served by SSEH stayed enrolled or completed their credential?

During Fiscal Year 2024:	PBIs	CTC
Percent of students who completed academic term in which they received SSEH support	94%	86%
Percent who stayed in college or completed a credential by the following term	93%	82%

> "It allowed me space and time to search for housing and to keep on track with my studies." – Student, Tacoma Community College

What kinds of support are SSEH institutions providing?

> "Without [SSEH] I would still be on the streets and end up failing my classes. I'm going to continue going to school because I need to make more money to support my family."– Student, Edmonds College

FY24 Number of Accommodations provided by SSEH Programs

Bar chart values: 2724, 2706, 3588, 3459

Housing: Homelessness Prevention, Rental Assistance, Emergency, Short-term, Long-term

Food Assistance

More Than Two Case Management Contacts

Additional Accommodations: shower/hygiene, transportation, clothing, utilities, technology, books/class supplies, laundry, child-related, health-related, storage, mailstop, and other necessities.

Relationships and partnerships with other college programs and community organizations are integral in SSEH. SSEH case managers have made **more than 32,000 referrals to external agencies and programs**, such as community food pantries, 211 Washington, WA Connection, Community Action Councils, housing authorities, WorkSource, United Way, and an array of other housing, domestic violence, youth, health, and service providers. SSEH case managers made **more than 30,000 referrals to other college programs and resources**, such as campus food pantries, financial aid, college workforce grant programs, career services, health services, and student support services.

> "Your endless kindness and understanding not only eased my stress and anxiety but also helped me refocus on my education. The resources you provided were invaluable." – Student, Lake Washington Institute of Technology

How can Washington increase support for students experiencing homelessness?

SSEH institutions have developed a variety of recommendations for policy and practice. Highlights include:

- Increase affordable housing options for students on and off college campuses and promote community and regional partnerships to address housing shortages.
- Increase funding for SSEH to ensure funding for case management and to provide additional housing support for students given increases in cost of living. Include Washington's accredited tribal institution.
- Fund further research regarding effective interventions to support students experiencing homelessness.
- Fully fund full-time benefits navigators associated with the Washington Postsecondary Basic Needs Act (2SHB 1559 2023).

For more information about Washington Supporting Students Experiencing Homelessness:

Ami Magisos, Associate Policy Director, Amim@wsac.wa.gov and Laura Coghlan, Program Administrator, Lcoghlan@sbctc.edu

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[1] Path to 70 Update: Why Washingtonians Value Credentials but Aren't Completing Them. December 2022. Washington Roundtable, Partnership for Learning, & Kinetic West

[2] Ortagus, J., Skinner, B.T., & Tanner, M. (2020). Investigating why academically successful community college students leave college without a degree.

[3] The Myth of "Full-Ride" Financial Aid (2023) COA Gap Myth of Full Ride Financial Aid (03.20.23).pdf (wa.gov)

[4] Basic Needs Security Among Washington College Students (2023) https://wsac.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2023.BasicNeedsReport.pdf