



REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE

2SHB 1559

Postsecondary Student Basic Needs Act

DECEMBER 1, 2025

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Executive Summary

This report will focus on the navigational services provided by community and technical colleges, including outreach efforts, students served, and referrals made by benefits navigators to help students meet their basic needs. Basic needs include food, housing, childcare, transportation, etc. that hinder students' ability to begin or continue their educational pathway. Additionally, this report will provide a high-level review of the community and technical colleges' Hunger-Free and Basic Needs Strategic Plans.

Below are highlights of the navigational services provided across the 34 community and technical colleges.

- **Benefits Navigators serve as a single point of contact for students.** Colleges provided navigational services which included intake/assessment, funding and FAFSA application assistance, public benefits access, and referrals to 94,176 students during the 2024-2025 academic year.
- **Targeted outreach works.** The top types of outreach efforts included email and phone communications, in-person events such as classroom visits, resource fairs, and campus events.
- **Navigational services have a positive impact on marginalized populations.** Of the colleges who collected student demographic data, nearly half of students served during the 2024-2025 academic year were either first generation college students, low-income, or a mix of both.
- **A variety of needs resulted in campus and community referrals.** Benefits navigators made over 5,500 referrals to on-campus resources and over 4,200 to community-based organizations.

Statewide, postsecondary students are under an immense amount of pressure to meet their basic needs while trying to focus on earning a college degree. Data from the WA Postsecondary Student Basic Needs Survey administered in the fall of 2024 show that of the students who responded, 54% are housing or food insecure and 31% are both housing and food insecure. Survey responses also show 72% of student parents reported struggle to afford childcare while trying to meet their basic needs. The survey results highlighted that overall insecurity rates for Basic Education for Adults (BEdA) students were 4% higher than non-BEdA students.

The three most requested referrals based on needs were food, housing, and emergency assistance.

1. Food was the most requested support referral for students. Food referrals represent public benefits such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) with 8,222 referrals, on-campus food pantry with 15,689 referrals, and community food banks with 14,221 referrals.
2. Housing was the second most requested support referral for students. Housing referrals represent campus and community programs such as the Supporting Students Experiencing Homelessness program (SSEH) with 3,627 referrals, community housing programs with 4,806 referrals, along with broad referrals made to Basic Food Employment and Training (BFET) programs and Emergency Assistance programs for housing supports.
3. Emergency assistance was the third most requested support referral for students. Emergency assistance referrals represent campus programs such as Student Emergency

Assistance Grants (SEAG) and foundation emergency grants with 5,910 referrals. Emergency assistance referrals include food, housing, transportation, utilities, childcare, and technology that were not disaggregated from each other and regardless of the type of request counted as an emergency need.

Washington's community and technical college students continue to experience significant need of food, housing, and emergency support. Having benefits navigators available to help students navigate the multiple eligibility requirements and complex systems not only supports more equitable access to resources, but it also enables colleges to prioritize meeting students' basic needs in order to keep them enrolled and earn a credential. However, with continuing increased need, many students are left with unfunded basic needs that prevent them from focusing on continuing their education.

Washington Community and Technical College Students

The community and technical college system served 317,602 students in the 2024-2025 academic year. Of these, 116,824 were transfer students, 94,179 were professional/technical students, 48,284 were basic education for adults (BEdA) students, and 69,918 were designated in the college system as other (precollege, continuing education, etc.). Of the students served, 37% of students served received need-based aid and 47% of students were students of color¹.

According to the SBCTC enrollment data, a total of 36,006 students were enrolled in one of the following student support programs: Basic Food Employment and Training (BFET), Opportunity Grant (OG), Student Emergency Assistance Grants Program (SEAG), Supporting Students Experiencing Homelessness Program (SSEH), WorkFirst, or Worker Retraining (WRT).

WA Student Basic Needs

In fall of 2024, the WA Student Achievement Council (WSAC) administered the Washington Student Experience Survey (WSES) focused on basic needs. WSAC published the [Reassessing Basic Needs Security Among Washington College Students report](#) in January 2025 as the second administration findings report building upon the previous [Basic Needs Among Washington College Students report](#) from 2023.

The WSES report presents new findings and provides a detailed comparison of the previous report's findings to offer insight into the trends Washington students face in basic needs insecurity. In total, 11,320 students at 46 colleges and universities across Washington State participated in the 2024 survey, representing a 16 percent increase in responses from the previous administration of the survey in 2023.

Overall rates of housing and homelessness remain high at 34%, while food insecurity has increased by 14% to nearly 44% of students reporting they are food insecure. Additionally, the report found that students who were homeless or in foster care in high school experienced the highest rates of basic needs insecurity among all subpopulations of students regardless of program pathway.

"Pursuing higher education is challenging enough, but dealing with food insecurity and housing instability makes the journey even tougher. These basic needs become constant distractions, making it hard to focus on school. I often find myself sitting in class thinking about how I'm going to make ends meet, whether I'll have enough money for food, or how I'll pay rent."² - Student

Of the 18% of students who reported having dependents, 75% reported being unable to afford childcare without worrying about basic needs or debt.

¹ Wa State Board for Community and Technical Colleges Data Warehouse/Enrollment Dashboard: <https://www.sbctc.edu/colleges-staff/research/data-public/enrollment-data-dashboard>

² Washington Student Achievement Council: Reassessing Basic Needs Among Washington College Students Report, January 2025: <https://wsac.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2025.BasicNeedsReport.pdf>

"I have a job, a child, and go to school and have to pay for childcare. I'm not making enough to be able to get by like I should. Just because I have a job I don't qualify for resources. I make too much for help but not enough to survive."³ – Student

Half of students experiencing some level of basic needs insecurity reported they are not accessing available resources, citing reasons such as being ineligible, lack of awareness, or being unsure how to access resources.

Postsecondary Student Basic Needs Act

The Washington state Legislature established the Postsecondary Student Basic Needs Act through passage of [2SHB 1559](#) during the 2023 legislative session. The Legislature funded \$1,658,000 for each community and technical college to implement a 0.75 full-time equivalent rate (FTE) Benefits Navigator for the 2023-25 biennium. During the 2023-25 biennial period, the Legislature approved an additional \$553,000 to meet the minimum costs of the required 0.75 FTE. Beginning in fiscal year 2025, the total appropriation was \$2,211,000 per year with each community and technical college receiving \$65,029, and Pierce and Spokane districts receiving \$130,058.

The Postsecondary Student Basic Needs Act (PSBNA), administered by the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC), allows community and technical colleges to provide navigational support and assistance to students in accessing public benefits, existing emergency assistance and college programs, and other community resources to meet their basic needs and stay enrolled in classes. The delivery model requires colleges to focus on integrated efforts both on and off campus to help students navigate systems that meet their immediate, short-term, and long-term needs.

Basic Needs Navigational Services for Community and Technical College Students

Navigation Model

The benefits navigation model connects students enrolled in one of the 34 community and technical colleges with basic needs resources focusing on three main areas 1) student support, 2) collaboration enhancement, and 3) resource expansion. Benefits navigators are a single point of contact for students to access on and off campus resources such as financial aid, emergency grants, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, working connections childcare, housing supports, food pantry/banks, and more.

The model also includes some key strategic integrated efforts:

- Alignment with Washington's Basic Food Employment and Training (BFET) program at the community and technical colleges. This integrated effort increases the direct connection from SNAP application to the colleges' BFET program enrollment and increases the college's federal drawdown for reimbursement of BFET related services.

³ Washington Student Achievement Council: Basic Needs Among Washington College Students Report, January 2025: <https://wsac.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2025.BasicNeedsReport.pdf>

- Targeted outreach to student populations that are likely eligible for public assistance or student support services. This integrated effort focuses on the modality, timing, and frequency of targeted messaging to students such as financial aid application messaging as the new academic year approaches, SNAP eligibility messaging based on Washington College Grant eligibility, tax information messaging in alignment with the tax season, etc.
- State-wide cohort that includes benefits navigators at the community technical colleges and universities. This integrated effort led by SBCTC and WSAC features a partnership with the United Way of King County to provide onboarding and training to new benefits navigators, quarterly communities of practice, regional connections, and ongoing learning sessions.

Students Served

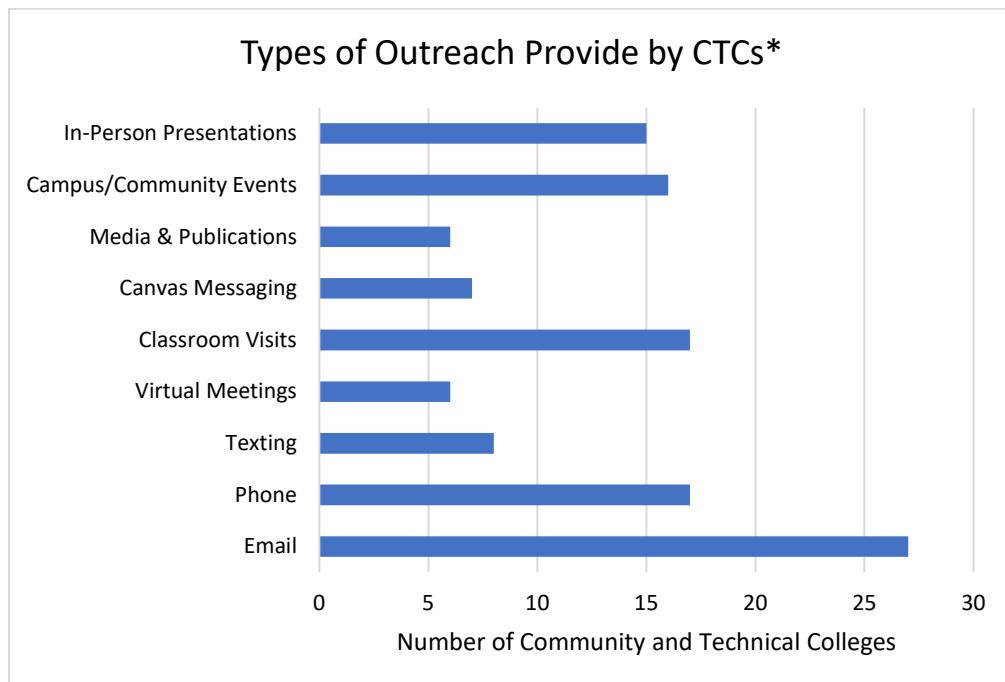
In the 2024-25 academic year, community and technical colleges served approximately 94,176 students with navigational services. For the colleges that collected student demographic data of those students served, 24% were first generation college students and 25% were low-income students.

Types of Navigational Outreach

Colleges used a variety of targeted outreach approaches in the 2024-25 academic year, including social media, Canvas, email, phone, and a variety of in-person presentations, meetings, and events. Table 1 shows the total number of colleges using each type of outreach.

Outreach messaging consists of information on available resources at the college campus and in the community that may be available to support students.

Table 1: Types of navigational outreach conducted by colleges in 2024-2025.



**Data was not available from Olympic College*

"Thank you for reaching out and for providing such comprehensive information on available resources. I really appreciate your support and the detailed options you've shared." - Student

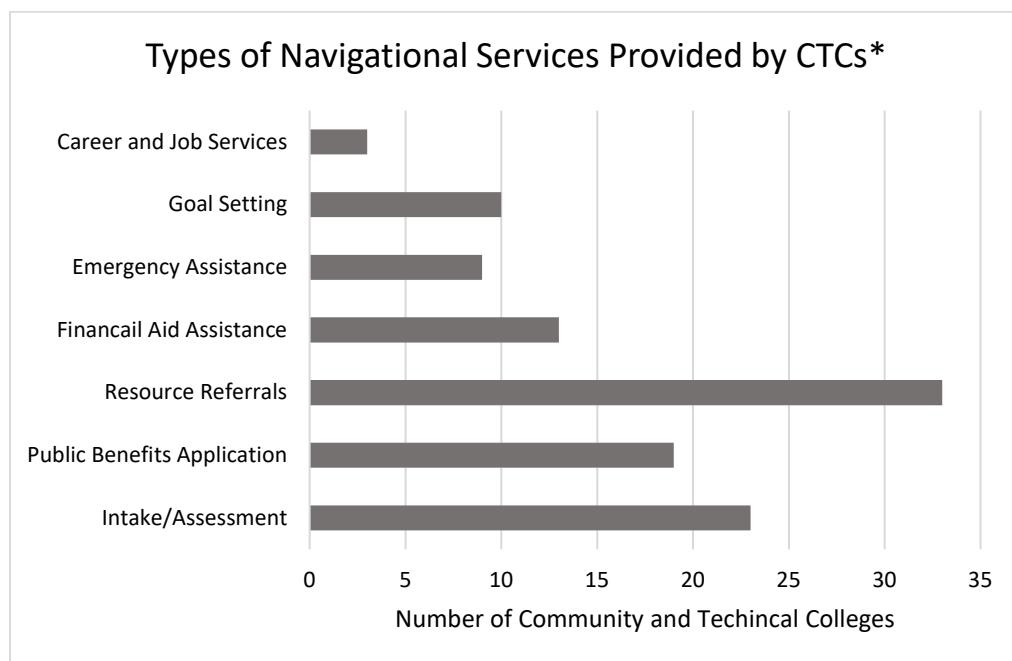
Types of Navigational Services

Colleges use a low-barrier approach to intake and assessment to help determine students' potential eligibility for college and public benefits programs, make referrals to college services, and community-based organizations. College benefits navigators have built well-developed relationships with staff on campus and community members, ensuring that referrals are meaningful, connected, and align with students' immediate, short-term, and long-term needs.

"The support significantly helped me stay focused on my studies this quarter. I will reach out to the Benefits Hub if I need any additional services." - Student

Benefits navigators held 9,443 navigational meetings with college students helping them to navigate a myriad of programs, eligibility, and applications. Some colleges provided goal setting, career and job support, as well as other services as needed by the individual student providing a more in-depth structure to holistic supports available.

Table 2: Types of navigational services provided by colleges in 2024-2025.



**Data was not available from Olympic College*

Referrals to Campus and Community Resources

Based on intake and assessment with students, college benefit navigators determine what resources may be available to support the students' basic needs. Resources may be on campus, off campus, or a mix of both. Basic needs insecurities are multi-level and often compounding which require stacked supports across a variety of services or programs to holistically support the student.

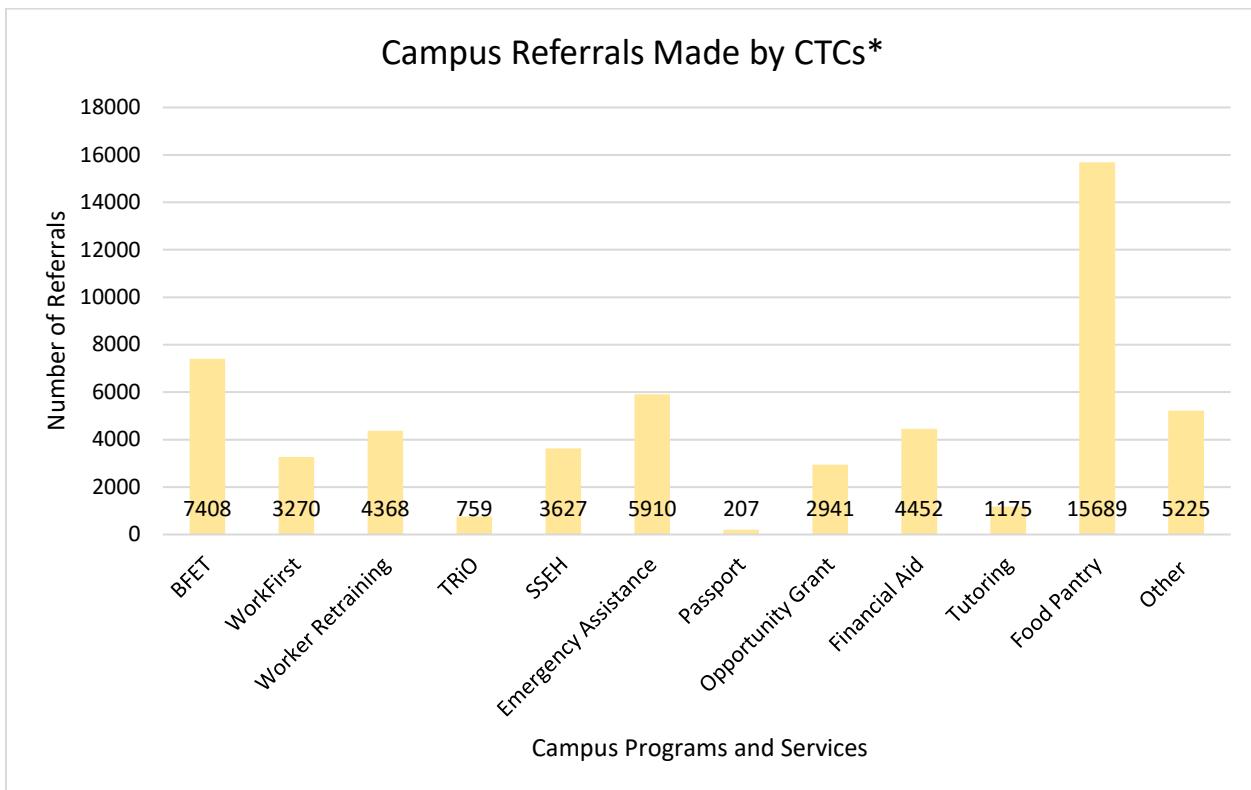
Benefits navigators work with students to assess what needs are immediate and need to be taken care of right now (emergency housing, utilities shutoff, etc.), what needs are short-term or

transitional and need a little more support structure and connection to address (a month of rental assistance, transportation, setting up childcare, etc.), and what needs are long-term and need more in-depth supports to address (long-term housing, disability services, mental health, public benefits, etc.).

Altogether, 97,118 referrals were made in the 2024-2025 academic year. Campus referrals totaled 55,031 with the top three areas of referrals going to college food pantries (15,689 referrals), BFET programs (7,408 referrals), and emergency assistance (5,910 referrals). Community referrals totaled 42,087 with the top three areas of referrals going to local food banks (14,221 referrals), public assistance programs for food benefits (8,222 referrals), and housing assistance (4,806 referrals).

"Relieved to be able to come to school. Better management of resources available to students." - Student

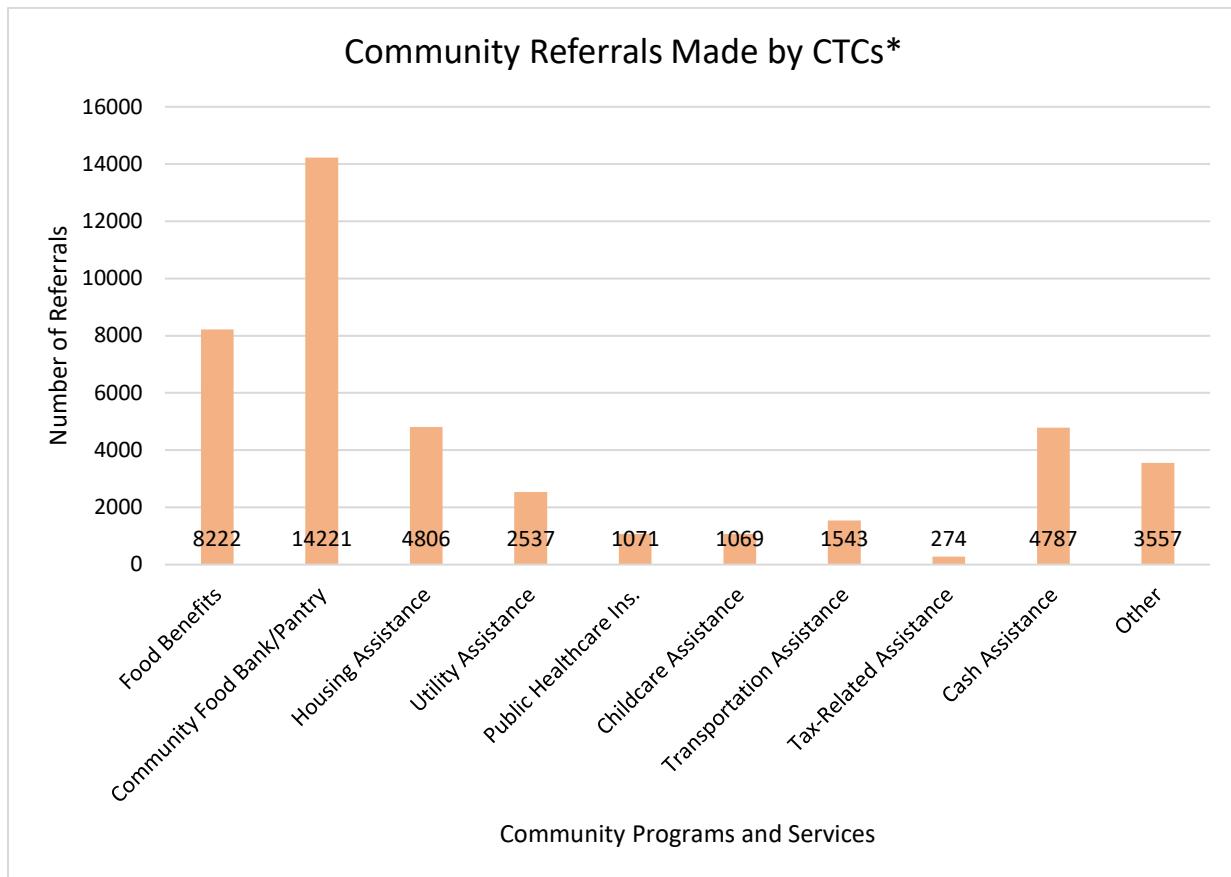
Table 3: Referrals made to campus programs and services in 2024-2025.



*Data was not available from Olympic College, Highline, or Tacoma Community College.

"The assistance provided relieved such a huge stress. I am able to get school supplies, buy groceries, and pay for gas. It has been such a big help!" - Student

Table 4: Referrals made to community programs and services by colleges in 2024-2025.



*Data was not available from Olympic College, Highline, or Tacoma Community College.

Many college benefit navigators provide follow-up contacts with students at different intersections and intervals to ensure their needs were met. These interactions help to identify when additional referrals to campus and/or community resources may be needed to further support students.

"I was able to restructure my available resources to continue my learning plan. Without the assistance we (my family) would have been facing some very unfavorable conditions and likely would have led to losing the ability to stay in our home." - Student

Basic Needs and Hunger-Free Campus Strategic Plan

Each community and technical college was responsible for developing and implementing a Hunger-Free and Basic Needs Campus Strategic Plan by April 1, 2024. Each strategic plan must:

- Identify campus food pantry policies that, in practice, create barriers to access and reduce or remove those barriers in the implementation;
- Review and update methods to identify likely low-income and food-insecure students and conduct communications and outreach methods by the institution to promote opportunities for benefits assistance (such as basic food enrollment; working connections childcare

enrollment; referrals to the special supplemental nutrition program for women, infants, and children; affordable housing assistance; and emergency financial resources;

- Assess the needs and advantages of the benefits navigators;
- Identify opportunities for the institution and partnerships with community-based organizations to holistically support students' basic needs, access to benefits and community resources;
- Facilitate discussions and generate recommendations amongst community stakeholders on the basic needs of the institution's geographic postsecondary student population; and
- Assess the distribution of state funds for basic needs support provided to institutions of higher education and the tribal college.

While all community and technical colleges have created a variety of supports to increase student's basic needs security over the past several years, 2SHB 1559 was the first time a requirement for a long-term strategic plan and basic needs activities at the institutional level was mandated.

Since the beginning, SBCTC and WSAC have partnered together offering dedicated support to the community and technical college system in the development and implementation of their campus strategic plans with the goal of assisting colleges in having their plans developed by April 2024.

Additionally, WSAC led a basic needs strategic plan learning community across both public two-year and four-year postsecondary institutions that provided a unique opportunity to engage in a strategic analysis and planning process that focused and aligned basic needs goals and efforts with broader institutional goals. This learning community shared an evidenced-based framework, resources, and technical assistance support for strategic plan development.

Implementation and Evaluation

Colleges spent the 2024–2025 academic year transitioning from planning to full implementation of their Hunger-Free and Basic Needs Campus Strategic Plans. This work required institutions to establish new internal processes, strengthen cross-campus partnerships, deepen community collaborations, and develop more coordinated approaches to meeting students' immediate and long-term basic needs. Although colleges entered this year with varying levels of existing infrastructure, all institutions made measurable progress toward integrating basic needs support into their campuswide operations.

Strengthening campuswide infrastructure

A key focus across colleges was building internal systems that could sustain basic needs navigation beyond a single staff position. Colleges invested time in establishing shared referral processes, strengthening intake and assessment workflows, and developing consistent communication channels across departments. Many institutions also worked to increase visibility of benefits navigation by collaborating with advising, financial aid, student services, faculty, and workforce education programs.

Several colleges used this year to upgrade food pantry operations by expanding hours, improving inventory management, developing partnerships with local food banks, or assisting pantries to become more accessible, stigma-free spaces. Others incorporated basic needs messaging into new

student orientations, advising sessions, and early alert processes, ensuring that students encountering basic needs barriers were connected with supports earlier and more consistently.

Deepening community partnerships

As student needs have become more complex, colleges are expanding their partnerships with community-based organizations to help fill gaps in housing, food, childcare, financial assistance, and public benefits. Many colleges reported that establishing warm hand-off processes—rather than simply providing referrals—was essential for supporting students navigating complex systems such as housing assistance, SNAP, childcare subsidies, and Medicaid.

Several institutions coordinated visits from the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) mobile units to bring public benefits screening and application assistance directly to campus. Other colleges collaborated with local nonprofits, tribal partners, city and county agencies, and faith-based organizations to broaden the availability of emergency supports and long-term stability resources.

Implementing strategic plan priorities

Throughout the academic year, colleges focused on implementing the priorities and action steps outlined in their strategic plans. For some institutions, this meant expanding outreach modalities, improving methods for identifying likely low-income or food-insecure students, or embedding basic needs assessments into standard student-facing workflows. Others established regular cross-department meetings, created basic needs awareness campaigns, or reorganized staffing to reduce bottlenecks in student support processes.

Several colleges emphasized reducing institutional barriers—such as restrictive food pantry eligibility policies, limited-service hours, or unclear communication about available supports. Many institutions reported reviewing and adjusting these policies to reduce stigma and improve accessibility.

Continuous evaluation and mid-course corrections

The first full cycle of strategic plan implementation also marked the beginning of colleges' formal evaluation processes. Colleges used formative and summative assessments to identify gaps, monitor progress, and make mid-course corrections. Common adjustments included refining intake processes, improving data collection, expanding outreach timing, and realigning staff responsibilities to better support high-demand services.

Benefits navigators and administrators emphasized that evaluation was not a one-time activity but an ongoing process essential to adapting to changing student needs, staffing levels, and community resource availability. Early evaluation results highlighted growing demand for basic needs support, limitations in available long-term housing and childcare resources, and challenges related to staffing stability and benefits navigator workloads.

Challenges and systemwide learnings

Colleges reported several consistent challenges, including increased student need, limited institutional funding for emergency supports, and shortages of affordable housing and childcare within local communities. Many navigators also experienced role expansion beyond their original scope, including assisting with food pantry operations, increased case management, and administrative support for programs like SEAG and SSEH. This contributed to concerns about burnout and the need for clearer role definitions and sustainable staffing structures.

Despite these challenges, colleges demonstrated strong commitment to refining their basic needs systems and strengthening coordination across campus and community partners. Colleges reported that the combination of proactive outreach, integrated navigation services, and consistent training opportunities—supported by SBCTC, WSAC, and statewide partners—enabled them to make meaningful progress during the first full year of implementation.

Impact and outlook

The work completed during the 2024–2025 academic year created a stronger, more cohesive foundation for basic needs support across the community and technical college system. Colleges are now better equipped to identify students in need, provide warm and coordinated referrals, track outcomes, and adjust their strategies based on real-time data and student feedback. As colleges continue to refine their plans in the coming years, these early efforts will serve as the groundwork for a more responsive, equitable basic needs ecosystem capable of supporting students through both immediate crises and long-term stability.

Conclusion

The implementation of the Postsecondary Student Basic Needs Act represents a milestone in Washington’s effort to remove barriers that prevent students from accessing and completing higher education. Colleges entered this work during a period marked by recovering enrollments, reduced institutional capacity, and heightened student need following the COVID-19 pandemic. In this environment, colleges were tasked with hiring new benefits navigator positions, establishing new cross-campus systems, and developing long-term strategic plans—all while continuing to respond to an unprecedented volume of food, housing, and emergency assistance requests.

Colleges achieved the goals and demonstrated extraordinary commitment and adaptability. Benefits navigators were hired systemwide; campuswide basic needs strategies were developed; and colleges rapidly strengthened collaboration with faculty, student services, community partners, and public benefit agencies. Many institutions also used their first year of implementation to make mid-course adjustments that enhanced outreach, improved referrals, reduced access barriers, and deepened holistic support for students.

Early outcomes illustrate the significant value of these efforts. More than 94,000 students received navigational support, and nearly 100,000 referrals were made to campus and community resources. Colleges report that students receiving navigation services are better able to stabilize their basic needs, remain enrolled, and make academic progress. Student narratives reinforce this impact, underscoring how access to food, housing supports, emergency resources, and caring guidance can determine whether a student continues their education.

As colleges move into continued implementation and ongoing evaluation of their strategic plans, these foundational efforts lay the groundwork for a more coordinated, equitable basic needs ecosystem statewide. Sustained investment and strengthened partnerships will be essential to ensure that every student can meet their basic needs and focus on achieving their educational and career goals.

*“I would not have been able to continue with my classes without the assistance I received.” –
Student*



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Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges