



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

College Focused Rapid Rehousing Evaluation



Center for Equitable Higher Education
To study and promote economic, food, and housing justice

APRIL 2025

Executive Summary

In 2019, the State of California provided ongoing funds to the California State Universities (CSU), California Community Colleges (CCC), and University of California (UC) campuses to undertake the country's largest campus-community approach to address the crisis of student homelessness on California public higher education campuses. As of 2025, the State spends \$31 million annually on campus "rapid rehousing programs." This funding includes both short-term housing assistance for housing insecure students and a new strategy to address the needs of students experiencing homelessness—College Focused Rapid Rehousing (CFRR).

CFRR is a new approach and evidence of its impact is needed to inform future investment and refinement of the model. CFRR programs were launched in the CSU and CCC in the summer of 2020. With support from private philanthropy and in partnership with CSU and CCC staff, a team of CSU researchers conducted a three-year, mixed-methods evaluation to examine the processes and outcomes of 8 CSU and 2 CCC campus CFRR programs. This final report describes the evaluation and brings together its key findings with implications for students, practitioners, campus leaders, policymakers and funders.

Key Findings

This report provides extensive findings, exploring the CFRR program, academic, and financial and personal well-being outcomes, student participants of the program, and program development and structure. Following are critical key findings.

CFRR Outcomes

- **CFRR participants experienced substantial housing stability during program participation with an average of nine consecutive months of housing, the equivalent of two semesters of college. The majority of students exited the program due to graduation or transition into permanent housing.** Program data available on students who had left their subsidized housing suggested that the majority of these students had a successful exit from the program.
- **The overwhelming majority of CFRR participants were living in stable housing a year after leaving the CFRR program. However, participants experienced significant challenges securing and maintaining stable housing.** Most students reported experiencing a rent increase that was difficult to pay in the year after exiting CFRR (62%), and a quarter (25%) reported underpaying or missing at least one rent payment during this time.
- **CSU CFRR participants had a significantly higher probability of staying in school or graduating than students who received short-term housing assistance. CSU CFRR participants graduated at a slightly higher rate than the broader CSU population.** Both CFRR and short-term housing assistance helped CSU students' academic progress stabilize over several semesters. However, results

indicate that the higher predicted probability of retention for CFRR students, compared to those who received a short-term grant, persisted even after controlling for various background factors. 12 months after receiving assistance, CFRR students were significantly less likely to stop out of school compared to students who just received a short-term housing subsidy (with the biggest differences in risk occurring between the third and fourth semester after students received assistance).

- **Participation in CFRR mitigated strain and distraction due to housing insecurity and resulted in higher levels of confidence in CSU participants' ability to manage work and life. However, the need to work was an ongoing challenge to academic engagement of CSU program participants who also felt less connected to campus than their peers.** CSU CFRR participants reported that they averaged 22 hours a week engaged in school activities including 10 hours going to classes and 12 hours studying. Participants who worked (about 70% of participants) spent even less time at school (20 hours per week) and reported an average of 25 hours a week at work. Most CFRR participants worked more than they went to school in any given week which is not the experience of most CSU students – 10% of students in the CSU general population who responded to the National

College Health Assessment survey reported working over 20 hours a week.

- **CFRR participants experienced marked improvement in key mental health measures and moderate improvements in their diet.** Forty eight percent of CFRR participants reported experiencing severe psychological distress at baseline which is more than double the rate of distress reported in the most recent NCHA National 2024 sample of undergraduate students (20% vs. 48%). By the 6 month follow-up survey, this proportion had decreased to 37% of respondents. Despite this decrease, the proportion of CFRR participants who reported severe psychological distress was still markedly higher at both time points than the proportion of students who reported psychological distress in the NCHA CSU sample (20%).

CFRR Student Participants

- **CFRR participants had significant, complex lived experiences of housing insecurity and homelessness and experienced difficult financial situations prior to CFRR enrollment.** Most CFRR participants (67%) also reported at least one episode of literal homelessness while being in college — they lacked a safe, regular, and adequate place to sleep for at least one night — and the average was 4 incidents while enrolled in college. Nine out of ten participants (91%) reported experiencing at least one housing insecurity incident during their time as students.
- **Black/African American students and former foster youth were heavily overrepresented in CFRR across the CSU and CCC relative to the general student populations in these segments. First generation, transfer, and returning students were overrepresented as CSU CFRR program participants as well.** Though the percentages of Hispanic/Latino students in CFRR are less than or comparable to the Hispanic/Latino populations in the CSU and CCC student populations (48.3% and 48% respectively), Black/African American students are heavily overrepresented in CFRR across the CSU and CCC relative to the general student populations in these segments (4% in the CSU and 5% in the CCC). First-generation and transfer students were also overrepresented as CSU CFRR program participants. Nearly half (46%) of CSU CFRR participants were transfer students, and 17% of CFRR participants reported being a current or former foster youth, a dramatic overrepresentation of this group, and 37% reported having at least one disability. CFRR participants were older than the typical CSU student, and survey data indicated that older participants described notably worse prior housing conditions than younger participants.
- **CFRR programs across the 8 CSU and 2 CCC campuses housed 639 students between Summer 2020 and Spring 2024,¹ and 3,949 students received short-term assistance.²** The 10 CFRR programs could validate that they housed 639 students between the program's inception and Spring 2024. It is critical to acknowledge data presented in this evaluation may differ from other reports of program participation due to differences in reporting criteria or missing data. In some cases students enrolled in CFRR had first accessed short-term assistance. Short-term assistance reached many more students than CFRR due to the fact that it was most often one-time assistance with a much lower cost (e.g., three weeks of on campus emergency housing, hotel vouchers worth several hundred dollars or small financial awards to cover the cost of a housing deposit). In contrast, CFRR provided students with months of rent subsidy and significant staff support.

1 This is the number of students program staff could validate as having been housed through CFRR with information such as the date placed in housing.

2 Students who received short-term housing assistance could not be validated in the same manner as the CFRR participants and is therefore a less certain calculation.

CFRR Implementation

- **Program leaders and staff struggled with inconsistency in directives, limited information and sought guidance and centralized leadership. Positive relationships with Chancellor Office staff were critical to CFRR success.**

The State investment in this program was referred to as “rapid rehousing” but the policy included ambiguity, allowing for investment in both the CFRR model and short-term housing assistance. Flexibility in the policy allowed programs to be innovative and allowed eligibility requirements to be developed with a focus on the specific needs of students and campus climate. CSU and CCC Chancellors’ Offices had to determine the funding allocation and implementation strategy, allowed for freedom but also created confusion and tension in planning of program goals, design, implementation, and reporting of outcomes. Positive relationships with CSU and CCC Chancellor Office staff were critical to CFRR’s success. However, campus and community organization staff and administrators struggled with inconsistency in directives, limited information and sought guidance and centralized leadership while developing CFRR. Well-developed campus-community partnerships that included a Memorandum of Understanding, open communication and coordination of staff were critical to the effective implementation of CFRR.

- **The housing affordability crisis across California imposed significant constraints on CFRR and the goal of long-term housing stability for students beyond graduation. Community partners’ expertise in placing individuals in stable, permanent housing options was essential to meaningfully address student homelessness.** Many staff described how the high cost of housing and low inventory made it extremely difficult to secure permanent housing for students.



- **Eligibility criteria across campuses centered on student homelessness as defined as an inadequate, unsafe, untenable, or temporary housing situation. Broad, undefined system-wide parameters for eligibility criteria provided programs flexibility to address unique student situations. In some cases, this also enabled enforcement of criteria that overly restricted student enrollment in CFRR programs.** CFRR was designed as a program to address the needs of students experiencing or at imminent risk of homelessness. Campuses and community partners developed eligibility criteria that reflected this purpose and tried to direct program resources to students with the most significant housing challenges. Programs were not designed to meet the needs of student parents despite significant housing insecurity amongst this population.

- **CFRR programs were not well known to students prior to enrollment. Effective outreach to students was required to educate campus communities about CFRR program eligibility criteria, to ensure access to students the program intended to serve, and to direct ineligible students to appropriate resources. However, when campuses had limited capacity or were not sure about the stability of the program, they were reluctant to actively recruit students who may have acute needs.** Students who participated in CFRR felt that one major area for improvement was the importance of publicizing the CFRR program to ensure that more students knew about and could access the program.
- **Timely enrollment, smoothly coordinated by campus and community partners was essential to student engagement and trust building. Students who self-referred to the CFRR program through community partners faced barriers to enrollment as campus staff were the required point of entry.** In many cases collaboration between campus and community partners streamlined the link between students experiencing homelessness and permanent housing.
- **Case management provided as part of CFRR, was an essential source of support for many students.** Regular contact between CFRR participants and program staff laid the foundation for a supportive relationship. A significant majority (69%) of CFRR participants agreed or strongly agreed that they met with their case managers regularly. Students emphasized the constant support, reliability, non-judgemental approach and helpfulness of the program staff. While students generally appreciated the resources provided by the CFRR program, a few pointed out areas for improvement. However, for some students the requirement to participate in case management was a disincentive to enrollment and engagement. Furthermore, confusion about roles and turnover in case management staff challenged program implementation and stability.
- **Housing subsidies varied considerably across programs. CFRR participants were most often placed in individual housing or in a single room in shared housing. Shared housing was challenging for some students and some did not enroll or remain in the program when it was the only option.** Monthly subsidies provided to students varied widely across program participants, largely depending on the city location. Monthly subsidy data was provided for a total of 433 program participants across all of the program locations except Sacramento. While the median monthly subsidy was \$990 across all of the CFRR programs there was significant variation of monthly subsidies by location.

Key Recommendations

Findings from this evaluation have many implications for the future of CFRR. Highlighted recommendations include focus on participant outcomes and direction for program development and structure.

- **The State of California and segment leaders should expand their investment in CFRR as part of a larger strategy to increase student success and address equity gaps. Specifically, leaders should prioritize existing and new funding for long-term models such as CFRR over short-term assistance to support student who experience housing instability and homelessness.** California public higher education segments have articulated the need to close equity gaps. CFRR, though not directly intended to primarily focus on Black and/or first generation students, does respond to the needs of these students. Given that CSU CFRR participants have a significantly higher probability of staying in school or graduating than students receiving short-term housing assistance, investment for in-depth programmatic response is necessary to address the needs of “new traditional students” who are likely to be Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), older than 25, have greater familial and employment responsibilities, and have been financially under resourced. These students were disproportionately represented amongst students who accessed CFRR.
- **The State of California, segment leaders, and campus administration should fund CFRR at sufficient levels to ensure students can stay in school, graduate, and transition into long-term stable housing. Transition supports into stable, long-term housing are needed to ensure students do not return to homelessness and housing instability.** As it is currently being implemented, CFRR is designed to end at graduation, not at the point a student experiences stable housing on their own. If the focus of the program is to ensure students remain enrolled, higher subsidies for longer durations are required to allow participants to concentrate on their academic progress. Some CFRR participants received transition services in advance of program exit like assistance with searching for housing and/or meeting with potential landlords, completing rental applications and other documentation, and receiving financial assistance with a deposit and/or the first month’s rent. If there is hope to address this cliff, there must be expanded transition support for students graduating or exiting into permanent housing, including post-graduation case management and referrals to long-term housing resources that can last beyond graduation.
- **Ensure students who experience homelessness and housing instability have easy access to CFRR programs with few barriers to participation and efficient entry into stable housing.** Programs must include strategies for effective and smooth access to students who are mostly likely to experience homelessness and housing stability, inclusive of Black students, first-generation students, students with disabilities, students with experience in foster care, and students who are caregivers. One clear avenue is to have close partnerships with equity-based, on-campus programs that reach

students likely to enroll in CFRR. Students, faculty, staff, and administrators must have readily available information that clearly defines eligibility and enrollment criteria and available services that bridge the gap between students most likely to experience homelessness and CFRR. Furthermore, students must have access points to the program that are fluid and without burdensome requirements that discourage participation when they need support the most. Most participants of CFRR sought the program when their circumstances were at their worst. Adding layers of requirements, particularly those linked to expending all grants and loans or rigid expectations regarding GPA, dissuade student participation.

- **Training and support for case managers on campus and CBO staff must be provided. Further, the roles for case managers for each partner must be clearly defined and when possible, staff with experience working with homeless households should be employed as part of the campus team.** Effective program development must recognize the essential nature of the case management role and be able to determine the level of cases management engagement that is needed for each student. Clearer communication regarding roles and responsibilities to both staff and students can avoid confusion and promote retention and program continuation. Weekly joint case management meetings for students who need it can facilitate problem-solving and difficult conversations, and can prove essential for managing the program. Further, diminishing case management requirements over time, which is consistent with best practice in community-based RRH, can also lower demands on case managers who must respond to students with higher needs.
- **Individual or single room housing options should be considered best practice for CFRR.** CFRR participants were most often placed in individual housing or in a single room in shared housing and most participants indicated

satisfaction with their housing options. For some students, shared room housing situations were challenging, and they did not enroll or remain in the program if it was the only option. The experience of homelessness and the instability that comes with it is traumatic, and this may result in ongoing discomfort or feelings of vulnerability. Contending with managing relationships, handling conflicts, or lacking the negotiation skills needed to navigate shared living situations effectively while developing housing stability can be counterproductive to stability. The ability to make individual choices for how one can build comfort and security, mentally and physically, is optimal. Expanded financial support and partnerships with local housing providers to increase access to housing options for individual apartments or single rooms can support meeting the diverse needs of students.

- **Prioritize students experiencing homelessness for campus employment and strengthen campus partnerships with community-based organizations, local employers, and local government agencies to leverage additional resources.** If employment is required for CFRR students, either to fill in remaining financial gaps or because it is a requirement of participation in the program, employment that is adaptable to the conditions of being a student and linked to student academic progress must be made available. CFRR took some pressure off of student mental and financial strain; however, the need to work was an ongoing challenge to academic engagement of program participants who also felt less connected to campus than their peers. Students must have priority for work study positions or effective links to paid work in conjunction with curricular efforts. There must be efforts to cultivate partnerships between campuses, community-based organizations, and local public agencies to expand employment opportunities for students.