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Lessons Learned: Basic Need Programs During the Time of COVID-19

The **Center for Equitable Higher Education (CEHE)** at California State University, Long Beach (CSULB) works to advance equitable postsecondary education through research and evaluation for economic, food, and housing justice at all levels. Acknowledging that the burden of basic needs insecurity is not equally distributed across all student populations in race, socio-economic status, and other social indicators, CEHE investigates equity gaps through research and evaluation. CEHE aims to ensure that students are met with evidence-based programs, services, and policies that meet students' basic needs for financial stability, and physical and emotional health while pursuing higher education.

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Introduction

College affordability has been featured prominently in higher education for decades; however, student basic needs — the conditions that students need to survive and thrive — and what role college and university campuses should play in helping students meet those needs, is a relatively new conversation.¹ As there has been increased recognition of the significant role of housing and food insecurity in educational equity gaps, there have been tremendous efforts to address student basic needs in practice, programs, and policies on campuses in the three segments of California public higher education. The State of California has invested nearly \$590 million in student basic needs related efforts in the CCC, CSU and UC systems since 2019 via 21 investments designed to build the state's basic needs infrastructure and support students in the areas of housing, food, mental health and access to emergency aid.²

As the largest public higher education system in the country that educates almost 480,000 students a year, the CSU is a focal point of basic needs program development and implementation. In 2016, the [CSU Basic Need Initiative](#) began to develop infrastructure for coordinated efforts across its 23 campuses. Since then, all campuses have developed a variety of models to support

food and housing security; however, the details and broad effectiveness of these approaches remains unexamined. As a result, this study was developed to examine the effectiveness of basic needs programs on six CSU campuses and identify promising practices for university campus programming and support.

However, this study did not unfold as originally planned. The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic at the onset of the study had a dramatic impact on the CSU campuses, students and basic needs services. During the study period, participating CSU campuses transitioned to remote learning. Most students returned home or relocated to locations off-campus sometimes out of the surrounding area. In-person basic needs services shut down and program staff were forced to develop new ways to meet student needs. As a result, the original study design became impossible to implement and, at the same time, the opportunity emerged to examine findings from four campuses, exploring how the COVID-19 pandemic affected students' needs.

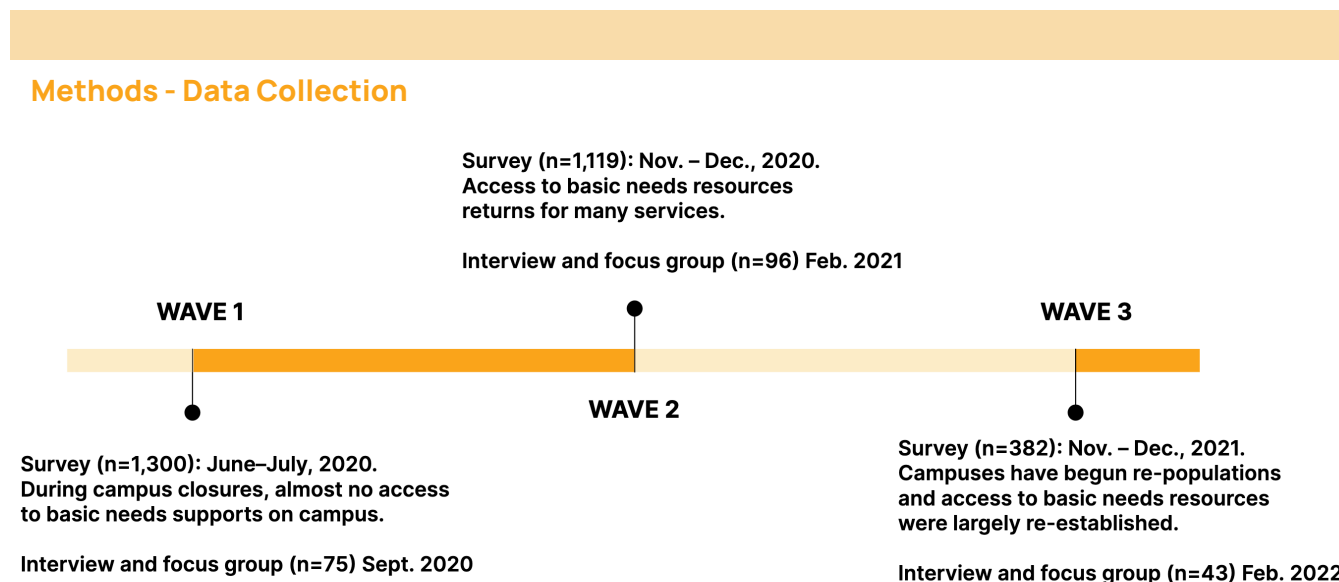


Study Overview

This report is intended to inform stakeholders of the California higher education ecosystem about how the COVID-19 pandemic influenced campus basic needs services and the students who access them. This study examines how the COVID-19 pandemic shaped students' needs for housing and food supports and how the interruption of campus basic needs services affected students' wellbeing when campuses closed. The findings and recommendations are intended to inform the legislature and campuses in their work to support and strengthen basic needs infrastructure and services across public higher education in California.

FIGURE 1

Data Collection Timeline



Research Aims

- How did the COVID pandemic change the experience of students who access basic needs services, including examination of impacts on particularly vulnerable students?
- How did students engage basic needs programs and services during and after the height of the COVID pandemic?

Methods

This report is based on three waves of quantitative and qualitative data collected between June 2020 and February 2022. Each wave and data collection type are illustrated in the Figure 1, Data Collection Timeline. Data were collected via surveys, interviews, and focus groups during initial campus closures and at two points as campuses began to return to full capacity, from students who had previously accessed basic needs services on

their campuses. Participants were recruited from CSU Dominguez Hills, CSU Long Beach, Cal Poly Humboldt, and CSU Monterey Bay.

Quantitative Methodology

Quantitative data were collected through electronic surveys which were sent to study participants via campus email addresses. A point person at each participating campus, identified by a campus administrator, worked with the research team to recruit students (n=16,727) who had accessed basic needs services at least one time in the past 12 months to administer the survey electronically via campus email addresses. For all three waves of survey data collection, the research team utilized only completed surveys for analysis, which provided indicators of program access, program use indicators, food security and homelessness, and health and wellbeing. The average completion rate across all three waves was approximately 76%. The surveys were open for approximately

three weeks, with one email invitation and up to four reminders sent out. Students received gift cards as incentives for survey participation.

The research team analyzed the data using SPSS 28 to identify the prevalence and severity of student basic needs issues along with indicators of academic performance, health, mental health and wellbeing, and level of basic needs service access. Researchers describe student interaction with a range of services including: basic need program campus access hubs, campus food pantries, CalFresh application assistance, meal swipes or vouchers, emergency housing, and emergency grants. Subscales of the Presenting Problems Scale were utilized to measure academic and personal concerns.³ Questions to measure and understand access to basic needs services were developed to help describe program benefits. Student demographic information data were collected [[see Appendix A](#)].

Qualitative Methodology

All students who indicated via surveys that they were willing to be contacted (n=1,258) were invited to participate in interviews, and focus groups (n=155). Students were recruited to participate in interviews and focus groups at three timepoints and, at each data collection point, were asked to describe their experience with basic need security and their experiences accessing basic need support services. The research team analyzed these data using Dedoose and exemplified themes that emerged consistently in this report. Qualitative data analysis, utilizing the constant comparative method, took place throughout the data collection process before formalization toward the conclusion of the study.⁴ Student demographic information data were collected [[see Appendix A](#)].

Document Review: Campus Basic Needs Services

Information about all participating CSU basic need programs in this study were gathered to create Program Profiles. The research team gathered information about campus programs from publicly available sources, as well as directly from campus basic needs staff. Profiles can be found in [Appendix B](#). These campus profiles provide important context, including size and scope of each campus and their available basic need resources.

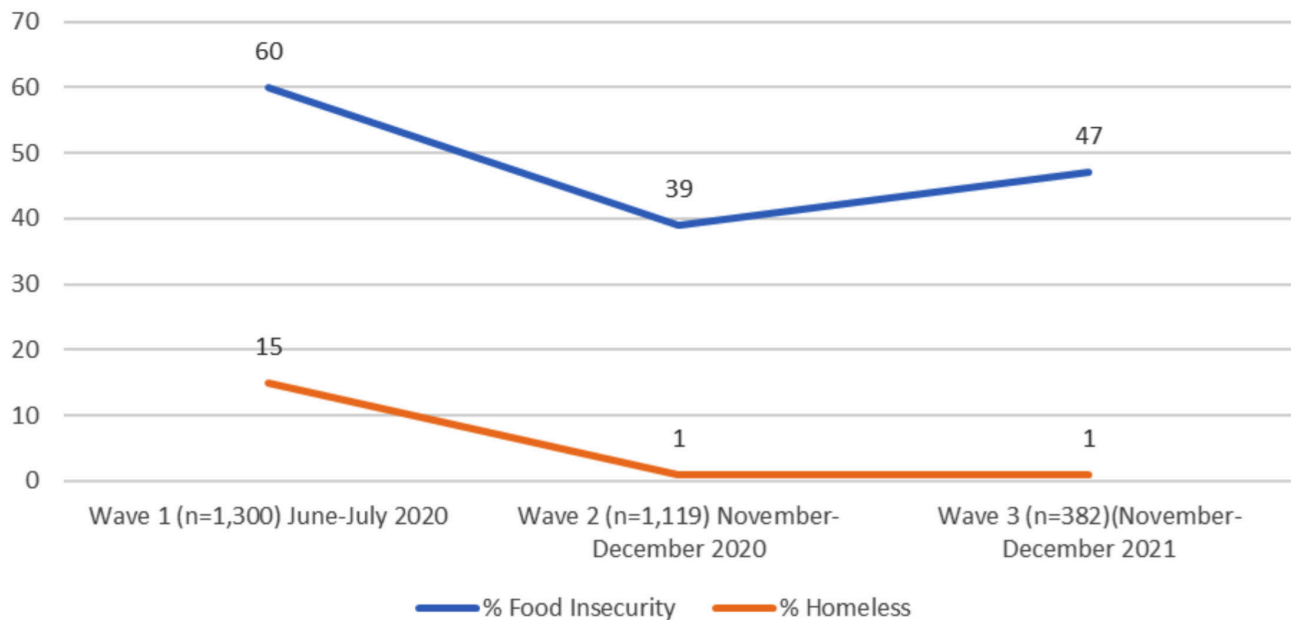


Key Findings

This study provided a unique circumstance to understand what occurs when campus basic need support services are interrupted completely and then slowly re-established over time. These key findings paint a compelling picture of how students with basic needs insecurity experienced this dynamic change and point to opportunities to strengthen basic needs programming.

FIGURE 2

Percentage of students experiencing food insecurity or homelessness



FINDING 1

Students' indicators for homelessness, food insecurity, and mental health challenges were severe after campus shut-downs occurred.

Food and Housing Insecurity

Indicators for food insecurity (60%) and homelessness (15%) were highest at wave 1 (June-July 2020) when the campus shutdowns had recently occurred and access to programs were nearly impossible (Figure 2). During wave 2 data collection (November-December 2020), when campuses began to re-open and services re-engaged, indicators of food insecurity (39%) and homelessness (1%) decreased. In wave 3 (November-December 2021) indicators for

homelessness (1%) remained stable and risk of food insecurity (47%) rose.

In wave 3, students who identified as Native American and Latinx reported the highest levels of risk of food insecurity when compared with other student ethnic groups (Figure 3). Moreover, students across race and ethnic groups continued to report food insecurity (29-63%), demonstrating a continued need for ongoing food support.

During wave 2 data collection, students who identify as Native American and Black had the highest levels of homelessness (Figure 4). As campuses and associated basic needs programs and services re-opened, homelessness decreased. Even though equity gaps narrowed, Black students still had the highest level homelessness in wave 3.

FIGURE 3

Percentage of food insecurity by race/ethnicity

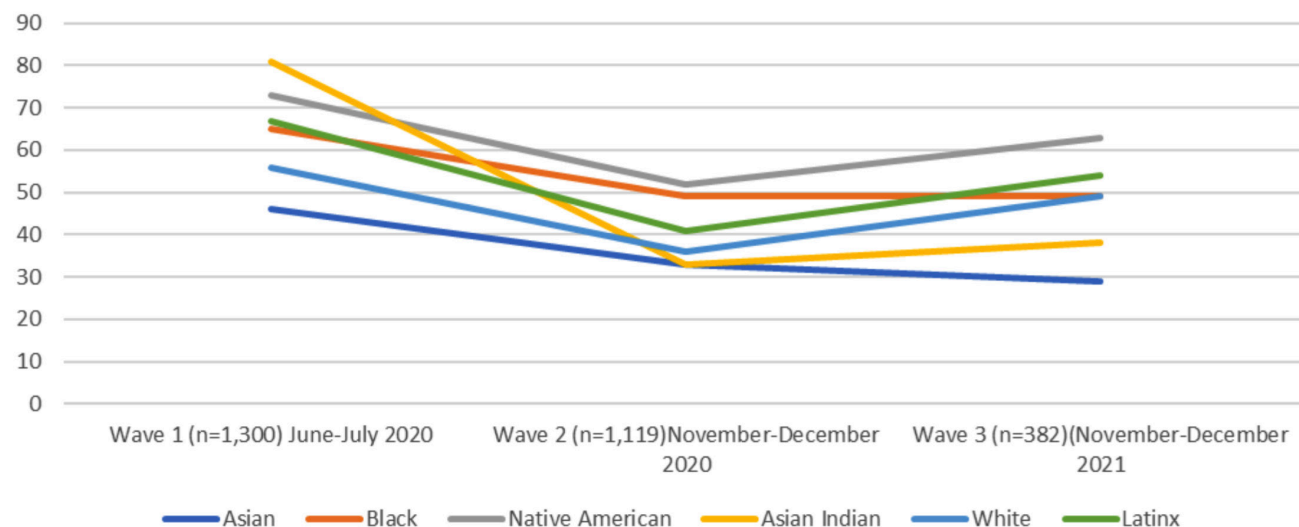
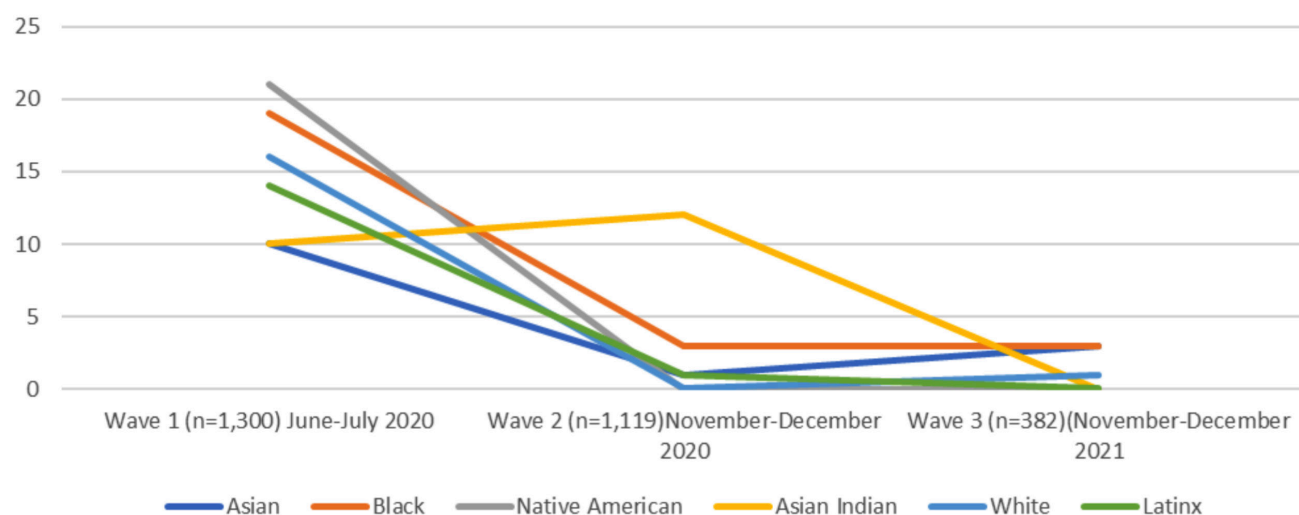


FIGURE 4

Percentage of students experiencing homelessness by race/ethnicity



“...I know that my mom and dad, they’re all working hard trying to sustain themselves as well. I really didn’t know what to do, but I was waiting.”

KAMEKO (CSU DOMINGUEZ HILLS)

In interviews and focus groups, student participants reported a range of experiences with COVID related campus closures. Some participants returned home to family when possible or gathered in living arrangements with others, either locally or further away from their campuses. In some cases, this allowed them to pool their resources with family members or roommates, which enabled some stability. Others went back into housing that was not necessarily safe, like back to parents, partners, or roommates who may have kicked them out due to family conflict, previous interactions with child protective services for abuse or neglect, or discrimination related to their sexual or gender identities. In some cases, students were able to access emergency housing on-campus, which provided some stability and linkage to resources. The housing situation was further complicated at this time because all communities were unstable and unsure of the consequences of the pandemic.

Like many students, Kameko (CSU Dominguez Hills) and her family struggled financially during the pandemic. Further, it was not uncommon to hear stories during interviews where students shared that their families had been depending on them to help with financial stability, even though the students were themselves financially stressed. Kameko described her experience: “...I was really stressed out because I am living alone. All my family is in Sacramento [and] asking for financial support. Basically, [it] wasn’t in my thought process...I know that my mom and dad, they’re all working hard trying to sustain themselves, as well. I really didn’t know what to do, but I was waiting. For me, it was a waiting game to see how things will turn out. If I was going to be able to find a job before the month ended because of rent.”

Though all communities experienced heavy tolls as a result of the pandemic, for many students, the intersection of marginalization compounded the impact of COVID-19. Kate’s (CSU Monterey Bay)

husband was deported prior to the pandemic, and her family was still coping with the repercussions when shut downs began. She said: “For me, because of what I went through in my life, yes, I shared with you that my husband was deported, and we had to deal with that, but I’ve also growing up, I’ve also overcome a lot of things. I was a teen mom. I had my daughter when I was 14...Being able to go to school while dealing with this traumatic experience of having my husband gone, dealing with my kids by myself and even the pandemic, to being able to hold this degree...”

Mental Health Challenges

Students reported the cumulative stressors of navigating daily living and academics, which were illustrated in high scores on presenting problems on the mental health scale. Students were asked about academic concerns such as time management, study-skills problems, and career and major decisions as well as questions related to relationships and adjustment issues such as problems making friends, being ill at ease with others, and relationships with roommates. Students were also asked questions related to mental health and feelings of depression. Relative to wave one, students reported more problems in waves two and three, illustrating the ongoing stress students faced over time (Figure 5). These data were mirrored in interviews and focus groups.

In particular, quantitative data showed that Latinx and Native American students reported higher scores on the presenting problems scale, illustrating equity gaps for student mental health (Figure 6).

Across all groups, students described stress, anxiety, panic, and depression during and after COVID-19 closures. Many described having these symptoms prior to COVID-19, which were exacerbated by the ongoing risk and uncertainty of the pandemic. By the time of qualitative data collection in February 2021, some students were still experiencing heightened mental health concerns. Some were trying to determine if they could stay in school. Others found returning back to classes online as a stabilizing tool.

FIGURE 5

Average presenting problems scores on mental health scale

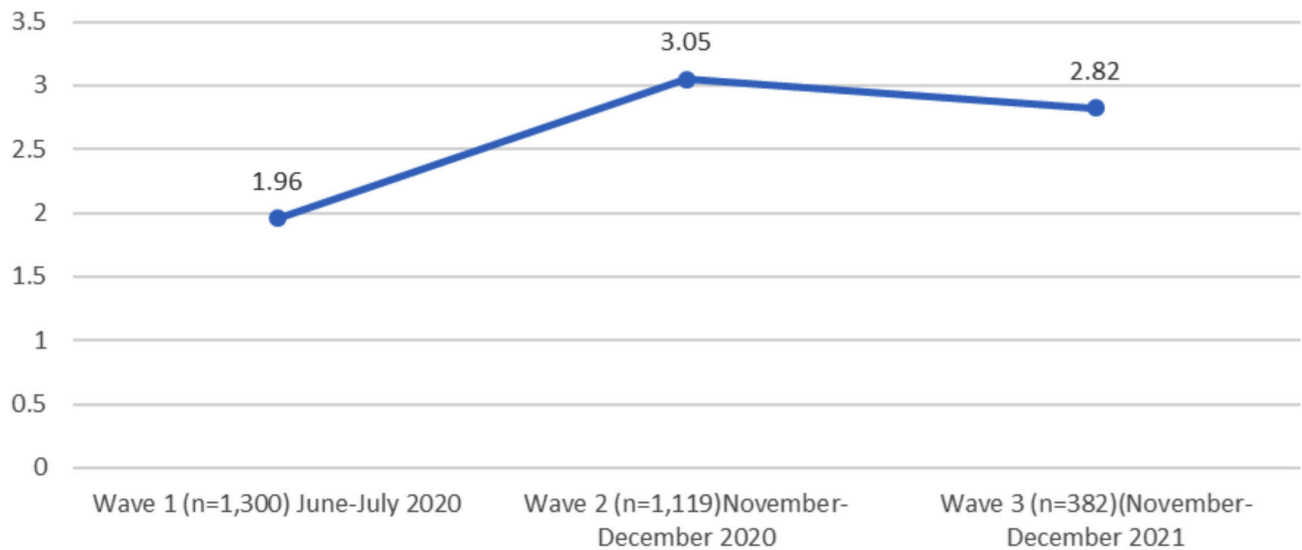
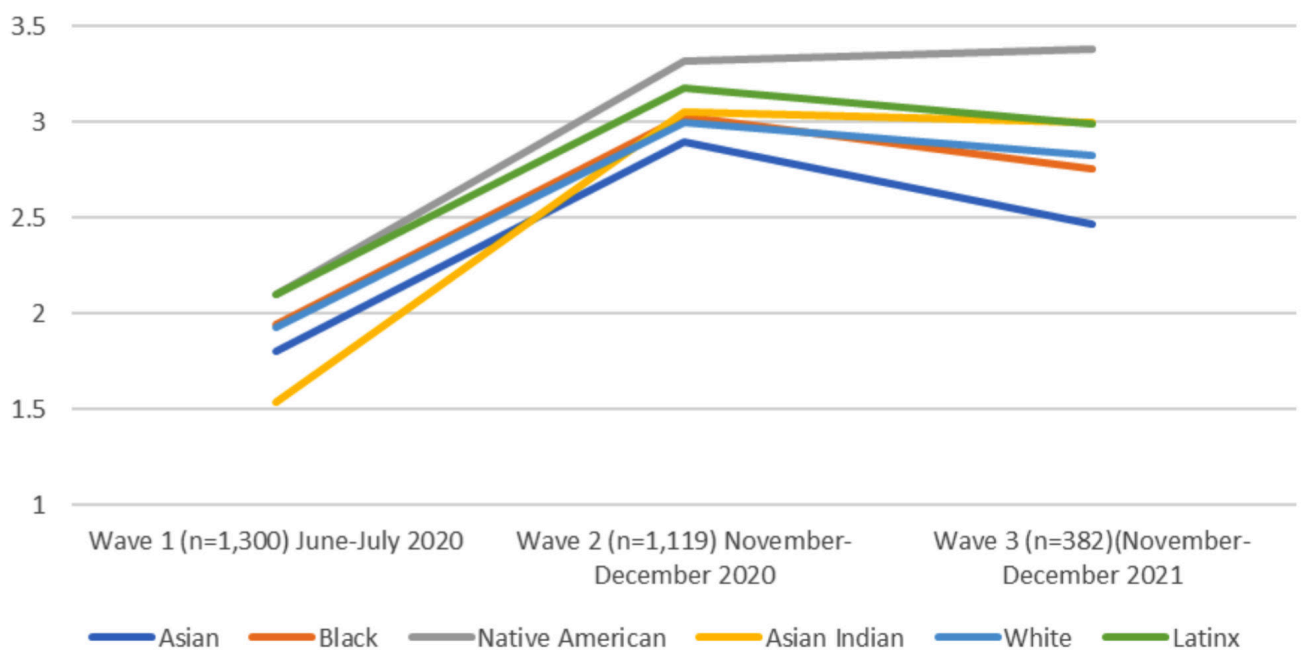


FIGURE 6

Average presenting problems scores on mental health race/ethnicity



Some students were very isolated and left to fend for themselves and their own mental health. Ishita (CSU Long Beach), who was sheltered in place alone for long periods of time said, “When I am alone...I am constantly worried about my future.... What if I don’t do this, what if I don’t do that? It’s like the constant-- These are the things that constantly keep on coming in my mind.”

Students who had responsibilities to support a variety of people in their lives felt persistent symptoms of stress, anxiety, and panic for their wellbeing, the wellbeing of others, and their educational standing. Some students were able to stabilize over time; however, many continued to face the repercussions of the crisis. Diamond (CSU Dominguez Hills), like many others, suffered many traumas during the pandemic. She said: “I was exhausted from trying to help with my parents, trying to help with my niece on top of doing the homework and having to find a reasonable job to keep me afloat to pay my bills and my rent because unemployment was taking forever. In the midst of all that my-- when was it? Spring of 2021, my father passed away...and two days later from my dad’s death, my grandpa passed away...It was a very surprising moment for us...I failed two classes because there was just too much going on to even say, I was able to carry on making papers and trying to find the time around it...I pushed myself to really finish through those classes. As hard as it was, I was still going through therapy and trying to cope with grieving and a lot of stuff.”

FINDING 2

COVID-19 relief funds provided critical support to students. Other basic need programs were difficult to access during the COVID-19 lockdowns and use of programs was markedly low until campuses reopened.

After campus closures, students who had relied on campus programs struggled to find the resources they needed. In some cases, critically important programs were completely unavailable. This helped demonstrate the place-based dependency of many basic needs programs. Both Garrett (Cal Poly Humboldt) and Jasmine (CSU Dominguez Hills) had both regularly depended on campus pantries and other services, shared their experiences once

those resources were no longer available.

“I just started surviving on the hamburger helper stuff, which you can buy for a dollar at the Grocery Outlet. It was really bad. It’s not good food for you. I kind of didn’t eat that much anymore at that point because some nights I would only eat like once or twice a day...Even though that’s really unhealthy, I guess it was just the fact that I didn’t really have that much money for food.” - Garrett

“It was just me looking for jobs and trying to see how I was going to pay for rent, my phone bill, just food. It was stressful. I tried not to think about it while doing finals, studying for finals...just because I wanted to take it day by day. Although it was very hard, obviously, but my end goal is to finish my undergrad fast.” - Jasmine

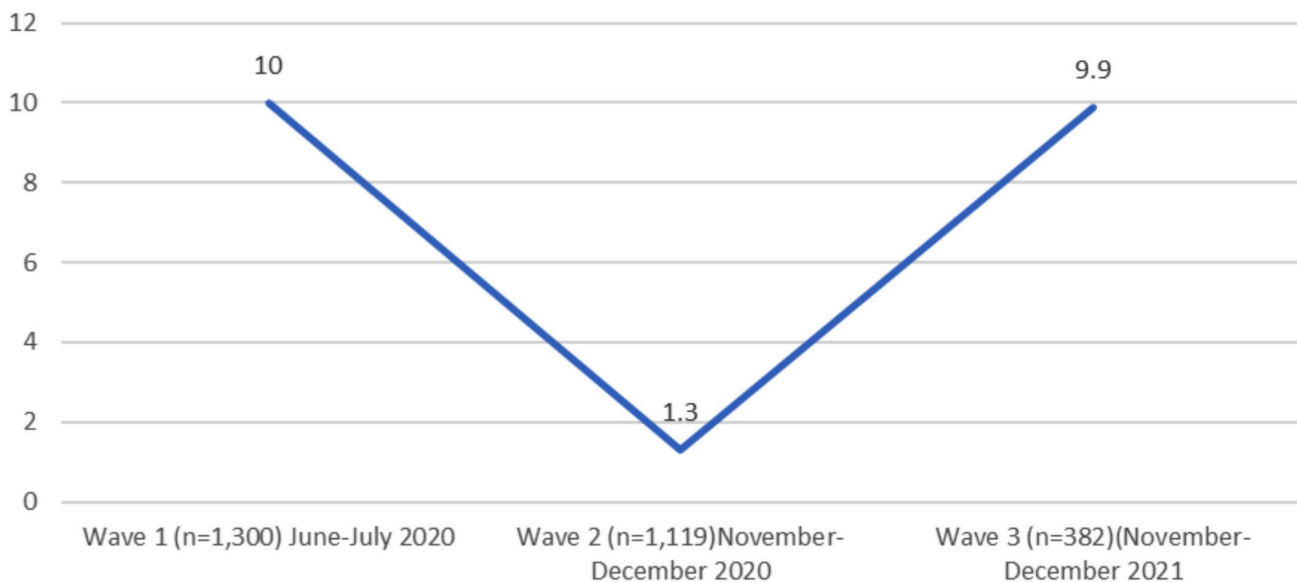
Sudden campus closures also presented challenges to housing security for many. Some students, like Gwenyth and Soledad, both from CSU Monterey Bay, were experiencing homelessness prior to the pandemic and were in emergency housing on-campus when COVID closures began. Like many students, Soledad experienced panic as dorm closures were announced. She struggled to get direction on what to do after receiving numerous messages that she had to vacate housing with nowhere to go. She said, “It was just like major anxiety, ‘What’s gonna happen?’ I just tried calling multiple times, and they didn’t really tell me much. They were like, ‘You have to wait....They can’t really do much about it. And then they sent me that through an email.’”

Gwenyth had also been placed in emergency housing and opted to remain there during the campus closure because she did not feel safe returning home and found the campus to have many vital resources. She said, “I did not want to move out ‘cause living in Monterey, I have more access to resources. I’ve been in a more better environment, where I could thrive better. Where academically, socially it’s really helpful because back home, I don’t have access to those resources and it’s gonna be very hard, especially when you live in an environment where people you live with kinda don’t really see the same thing that you do, and they don’t really respect what you’re trying to do.”

When basic need programming began to re-emerge, student basic needs programs were no

FIGURE 7

Percentage of students accessing emergency grants



“Food pantry, food is fuel, food is life quite literally. That’s literally kept me alive and able to go to school and all that....You can be perfectly physically healthy but if [support services are] not coming up here, you’re really going to struggle, you can’t focus, you can’t sleep. You’re already anxious.”

ROSALIE (CSU MONTEREY BAY)

longer as readily accessible to students. Instead of walking into a basic needs center to speak with staff, students needed to navigate websites, social media feeds and other channels to get the support that they needed. These necessary accommodations in a time of stay at home orders provided new access points for students, and interviews and focus group data showed that this shift could be challenging for students. Campus reopenings helped students reconnect with essential supports. Many of the students who

participated in data collection in wave 2 (Feb 2021) and wave 3 (Feb 2022) discussed how the availability of services made a difference in their health and academic success. Rosalie (CSU Monterey Bay) spoke to the importance of the campus food support services. She said, “Food pantry, food is fuel, food is life quite literally. That’s literally kept me alive and able to go to school and all that....You can be perfectly physically healthy but if [support services are] not coming up here, you’re really going to struggle, you can’t focus, you can’t sleep. You’re already anxious. Anxiety about tests and stuff like that is just tenfold. If you let it go on long enough, it’s also going to make you physically ill. It’s all connected. All of it is connected.”

Though campus closures presented challenges to accessing basic needs services, cash transfers in the form of emergency grants provided an important buoy for student wellbeing. Students received COVID-19 related funds ([CARES Act](#) and COVID-19 related emergency funds) close to the wave 1 (June-July 2020) and wave 3 (November-December 2021) data collections (Figure 7). These funds were provided directly to students via their

campus financial aid offices and did not need to be paid back or applied for.

Quantitative and qualitative data suggested that these grants helped address emergency needs for many students. Both Quentin (CSU Dominguez Hills) and Lucky (CSU Long Beach) spoke about how access to extra funds allowed them relief from stress and work hours during the height of the pandemic.

"I think [the CARES Act grant] gave me a little bit more opportunity to be financially stable. Definitely, took away all the stress that you get with being short on funds and it kinda made me a little bit more comfortable finishing my semester off, having enough money, not worrying about, "Hey, I need to second guess if I do want to purchase this item." It definitely did help as a student continuing and finishing my classes." - Quentin

"Almost 99.99% of my problems can be solved with money, cause I'd have less of a worry to try to survive. Where like, I'm just strictly focused on obtaining a grade GPA so I could get that degree ...Lack of money, in the form of working two jobs. And I'm taking five classes...Money solves a lot of problems." - Lucky

"It was really hard, but at least I got through the semester and I was able to finish that. I feel a lot better knowing that I still did it..."

MARLIN (CSU DOMINGUEZ HILLS)

A combination of the availability of grant aid and the return of services as campuses reopened helped to ease financial burdens and affirm students' confidence and ability to persist. Like many students, Kate's (CSU Monterey Bay) resilience was clear. She was able to access services and saw her survival of many obstacles as achievements. She said, "I just felt like I was on top of the world. It was so amazing. I did what people said I couldn't, and that was so fulfilling." Similarly, Marlin (CSU Dominguez Hills) felt accomplished for getting through the semester despite many challenges. He said, "I remember just one day realizing like, 'I feel like I'm depressed because

I just feel like I'm always in this funk of feeling hopeless'... It was really bizarre...I think it was just the whole stress of being like, 'Oh, I just want something to be perfect because everything else has been so hard.' It was really hard, but at least I got through the semester and I was able to finish that. I feel a lot better knowing that I still did it..."

"Almost 99.99% of my problems can be solved with money, cause I'd have less of a worry to try to survive."

LUCKY (CSU LONG BEACH)

FINDING 3

Short-term basic needs services and strategies are critical for many students; however, they did not address long-term challenges.

When asked how basic needs programming — basic needs program center, food pantry, CalFresh, meal swipes or vouchers, emergency housing, and emergency grants — influenced their experiences, students often reported positively on indicators related to health and wellbeing. For many students, CalFresh was a support that was highly valuable. Among other positive indicators, 92% of students who accessed CalFresh reported that they were able to purchase more food and 72% reported having more money to pay bills (Table 2). This is particularly notable given that many exemptions for CalFresh that allowed students to enroll will sunset in June 2023.

Once closures occurred and campuses began to reconstitute basic need resources, some began curbside or take away options for their food pantries. CSU Dominguez Hills, CSU Long Beach, Cal Poly Humboldt had a variety of curbside, delivery, or walk through options. These became critical resources during the pandemic for students who would not have otherwise had regular access to food. Mary spoke about the importance of the CSULB Beach Pantry. She said: "I was less worried about, you know, where I could get a meal. So, I think it really did, like this kind of freezes up or like makes me have a little less anxiety about where

TABLE 2

Students who used CalFresh reported positive impacts on health and wellbeing

<i>Accessing CalFresh in the last 30 days in wave 3 (n=382)</i>	<i>#</i>	<i>%</i>
Able to purchase more food	65	92
More money to pay bills	51	72
My stress level decreased	45	63

Note. This table shows responses from students (n=70) who accessed CalFresh in the last 30 days during wave 3

I'm gonna find a meal...it was cool because I didn't have to worry...I'm not taking this much from the household because I can reach out, you know, and go get meals on-campus."

Though food pantries, emergency grants, and other short-term supports proved helpful for many students in the study, it is important to emphasize that short-term supports did not address the bigger structural issues that students contended with. This study revealed several examples of how well-meaning short-term supports could not adequately unravel systemic challenges. At the time of this study, Cal Poly Humboldt was unique in that a housing liaison supported students in accessing local available housing and housing resources. In many ways, this facilitated housing access; however, navigating students to housing is difficult when there is very little local, affordable, available housing. Hasana (Humboldt) said she and her family contacted the housing liaison.

"I contacted her, and she gave me a list of property management places, which was really helpful. But it's the same issue with here where there's seven places [there is a fee] just to apply...That's just for a background check and everything. It's \$30 to \$50. That was really hard because it was everywhere...You have to apply before they even get to know you or anything, so a lot of times, we applied and then we got turned down and stuff and it was really frustrating....The list [from the housing liaison] was probably the most helpful thing...but again, it's not like she can apply for us. There's not a ton she can do."

Short-term support efforts could also have unintended negative consequences for students if they were not thoughtfully designed and deployed. In some cases, emergency grant funding that students received were counted as income, which can lead to negative impacts on student financial aid awards. For others, like Cosmo (CSU Monterey Bay), access to ongoing grant support was contingent on defining their needs as a "crisis" as defined by the agency administering the funds. Although students like Cosmo were continuously under-resourced, they were no longer viewed as eligible for support defined as "crisis" intervention. Cosmo said, "I do need the money, but technically I don't know if I would be eligible for it anymore. Just because there isn't any one specific crisis going on. It's more like just hard to get enough money to live right now, because everything is so hard."

For students who had access to long-term support, evidence emerged that sustainable programs could be beneficial. Heather (CSU Long Beach) was able to access transitional living through to graduation. She said: "I actually had a caseworker from Cal State Long Beach, and along the way she was very helpful with me...[she] actually referred me into that program, which got me into affordable transitional home; housing for me and my daughter. During the rest of my course of my study, I believe it was my last year of grad school, I was living there and because of that I was able to save and get into my own place later. As soon as I graduated, months after that, I was able to apply and work full-time...I could focus on full-time employment, and from there on I was able to go from transitional housing to regular apartment."

The long-term and sustainable nature of this housing program served Heather and her daughter as a student, and continued to serve them after graduation.

Recommendations

Meeting students' basic needs is not a simple task. It will require the sustained engagement of a diverse group of stakeholders who are committed to student wellbeing and engaged in iterative cycles of planning, experimentation, study and policy/practice refinement. In the spirit of continuous improvement, the research team offers the following recommendations.

RECOMMENDATION 1

Ensure basic needs support services have a robust presence, both on-campus and online, so that students can access them.

COVID-19 closures caused many challenges, but one silver lining has been the advancement of online presence of academic and student support services. Many students who participated in this study shared that they found programs and services to meet their basic needs via faculty and staff referrals as well as websites and social media. Campus-based administrators can help ensure student access to basic needs support services by providing clear access points via program websites, call centers, and social media accounts. Leaders must ensure that online resources contain more than simply referral phone numbers and email addresses. Staff must regularly monitor online

applications and open office hours to ensure that students receive the support that they need in a timely manner.

Students, often navigating an active crisis, want to know the steps required to access services and what tradeoffs might come with participation in a given program. Incorporation of visual aids like a decision making tree can help students understand who they will speak with and what, and if any, documentation they'll be required to present. Coupling financial aid expertise in particular can ensure that students have support if and when questions arise at the intersection of basic needs funding, financial aid, [satisfactory academic progress](#) and other requirements needed.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Student success and enrollment strategies must be integrated with basic needs strategies.

Like institutions across the country, the CSU system is contending with [unprecedented enrollment declines](#) and is developing strategies to ensure that students have access to public higher education. Though academic affairs and student affairs can work in tandem, the bifurcation of these entities serves as an obstacle to addressing challenges of enrollment and retention. Developing consistent communication between academic and student affairs for student success and enrollment strategies is one way to build awareness of students' lived experiences. Collaborations should include working together to meet students' basic needs throughout their degree pathway, from recruitment to degree completion.

Data presented in this report amplify the critical need for short- and long-term basic need services to ensure student retention. However, notably, critical resources like CARES Act grants are no longer available and CalFresh is becoming more limited for college students. With the sunset of these supports, many students will be losing benefits. Starting on June 10, 2023, California's food benefits program will end two temporary rules that allowed a greater number of college students to qualify: those eligible for federal or state work-study and those whose families cannot contribute financially to their education. Enrollment and retention strategies must include planning with academic and student affairs to integrate approaches that address resource gaps across the institution and retain students whose basic needs are not met independently.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Invest in training to ensure faculty, academic advisors, equity program staff, and financial aid staff are able to help students access basic needs services.

Clear linkage between academic and student services is needed to address basic needs across

campuses. Ensuring that students who experience basic need insecurity are met with dignity and support requires cross-campus coordination, community partnerships, and interdisciplinary collaboration. Faculty, who typically have the highest level of contact with students, must be knowledgeable about basic need insecurity and prepared to make supportive, trauma-informed referrals to available resources.

Staff at all levels of engagement must also be trained in this way. When an academic advisor meets with a student, they must be knowledgeable of the signs and symptoms of basic need insecurity in order to assess whether academic issues may be more related to issues outside of the classroom. It is also important that financial aid staff are well equipped in resources or knowledge of basic needs. For example, campus leaders should ensure that they are adopting [recommendations](#) recently made by John Burton Advocates for Youth (JBAY) for addressing some of the challenges incurred with the intersection of emergency grants and financial aid.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Campus and state level leaders must link campus-based basic needs infrastructure across multiple campuses and to community-based organizations to ensure seamless support for students in times of crisis.

Campuses are not equipped to meet all students' essential resources, but can be a vital link to community-based agencies that have infrastructure for public social services. Many students are eligible for, but not receiving public benefits that can help them be retained in higher education. For instance, each year nearly [2 million students](#) who are eligible for CalFresh do not participate. In March 2023, [Benefits Data Trust](#) released a [toolkit](#) to build institutional capacity to facilitate student access to CalFresh and other public benefits that increase food access, improve health outcomes, achieve academic goals and complete college.

By intentionally linking with benefits programs available through county, state and federal

agencies colleges reduce the risk that students will experience a disruption in service when disconnected from campus.

The COVID-19 campus closures also made apparent the need for service agreements across higher education segments. This is especially important for students who attend an institution in one part of the state, but define their “home” in a different area. In this study, students who chose to head home after campus closure were forced to walk away from critical supportive services like food pantries. Institutional support for cross-segment mutual reliance agreements to support access to programs across campuses must be explored.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Campus-based leaders should ensure emergency and long-term planning efforts at their campus include consideration of student basic needs programming.

COVID-19 illustrated the essential nature of student basic needs services as well as the challenges that students face when these services are suddenly brought to a halt. College administrators who are responsible for basic needs services can prepare for the next crisis by ensuring that their university emergency planning includes consideration of basic needs programming and how these services will be maintained for students.

It is imperative that campus leaders balance student short-term needs with the expectation to build infrastructure that will ensure the sustainability of programs and services to support students long-term needs. The California Intersegmental Working Group on Student Basic Needs developed [a set of recommendations](#) that identify opportunities to better support student success. These recommendations provide guidance on streamlining supports, reducing barriers, and expanding access to publicly available resources. The processes of organized implementation of these recommendations continue to strengthen basic needs support through intersegmental, regional, and state-level partnerships.

RECOMMENDATION 6

Campus, segment, and legislative leaders must ensure research-based programming includes leadership and involvement with students at all levels.

Students continue to provide the most important leadership, informing the field of how they experience basic need insecurity and how programs and services best meet their needs. Campus, segment, and legislative leadership must create and maintain pathways and partnerships with students to ensure that their voices and perspectives are central in decision making. Building a community of power in this work must include the students most impacted by basic need insecurity to develop, sustain, and grow an organized base of diverse stakeholders who act together to set agendas, shift narratives, influence decisions, and cultivate ongoing relationships.

This must be true at all levels. Research is needed to measure the effectiveness of programs, and students must be partners in these processes. Integrated approaches to positioning students, particularly those with lived experience, as leadership across all levels of program and policy development and implementation is necessary to ensure that all approaches ensure education with dignity.

Conclusion

California students, staff, administrators, and legislators have invested significant time, effort, and resources to develop models to address the basic needs of students in the CSU. This report gives stakeholders a preliminary sense of strengths and challenges of providing these resources, particularly in the face of and in the aftermath of a health crisis.

The study describes the fragility and resilience of the basic needs programming in the CSU. Students described their mental health challenges and experiences with homelessness and food insecurity. Data reflecting how basic needs programming was beneficial for the short-term and also inadequate are compelling. Across all recommendations, there must be an acknowledgement that disproportionate harm is impacting marginalized students. Since disproportionate harm is created, higher education has to create opportunities to address this disproportionality.

Linking students to appropriate basic needs support requires strategic structural implementation strategies. Qualitative and quantitative data provided important insights on how to best meet student basic needs. This included considerable exploration of long-term strategies to address chronic conditions, developing direct outreach to students who are most likely to require available programs, and incorporating clear indications of who is eligible for available services and how to best access them.

Recovery from campus closures has presented progressive changes to program structures and has continued to be challenging. This study helped unpack how campus resources supporting students' basic needs will be impacted by the drastic change in the context of the economic stability of the state and country.



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Appendix A

Wave 1 study demographics

Total Number (Sample)	Wave 1 (n=75)		Wave 1 (n=1,300)		Survey Participants Originally Invited, Wave 1 (n=16,727)
Number Per School	FG and I Number of Participants	FG and I Percentage of Participants	Survey Number of Participants	Survey Percentage of Participants	Survey Participants Originally Invited
Humboldt	21	28	427	32.8	4663
CSULB	17	23	438	33.7	7547
CSUMB	24	32	308	23.8	2291
CSUDH	13	17	125	9.6	2226
na	na	na	2	0.15	
Gender					
Female	56	75	782	69.8	
Male	15	20	255	22.8	
Nonbinary	2	3	na	na	
Transgender Female	1	1	na	na	
Transgender Male	1	1			
na	na	na	26	2.3	
Race/Ethnicity					
African American/Black	11	15	89	6.8	
Asian American	7	9	217	15.9	
Bi/Multi-racial	7	9	na	na	
Latinx	33	44	644	49.5	
Native American/Alaska Native	1	1	106	8.2	
Other	2	3	347	26.7	
Pacific Islander/Polynesian	1	1	11	0.8	
White	13	17	514	39.5	
Asian Indian	na	na	16	1.4	
			1944		
First Generation College Students	na	na	391	30.1	
Age					
18-24	45	60			
25-34	19	25	na	na	
35-44	6	8	na	na	
45-54	4	5	na	na	
55-64	1	1	na	na	
65 and over	0	0	na	na	
mean age	na	na	25.15	na	

Wave 2 study demographics

Total Number (Sample)	Wave 2 (n=96)		Wave 2 (n=1,119)	
Number Per School	FG and I Number of Participants	FG and I Percentage of Participants	Survey Number of Participants	Survey Percentage of Participants
Humboldt	20	21	341	30.4
CSULB	22	23	397	35.4
CSUMB	17	18	221	19.7
CSUDH	13	14	150	13.5
na	na	na	10	1
Gender				
Female	59	61	782	69.8
Male	24	25	255	22.8
Nonbinary	13	14	56	5
Transgender Female	1	1	na	na
Transgender Male	1	1	na	na
na	na	na	26	2.3
Race/Ethnicity				
African American/Black	6	6	105	9.4
Asian American	17	18	184	16.4
Bi/Multi-racial			na	na
Indigenous Identity not listed	1	1	85	7.6
Latinx	32	33	517	46.2
Bi/Multi-racial	18	19	na	na
Other	1	1	na	na
White	20	21	480	42.9
Prefer not to answer	1	1	na	na
First Generation College Students	na	na	683	61
Age				
18-24	54	56	na	na
25-34	33	34	na	na
35-44	5	6	na	na
45-54	3	3	na	na
55-64	1	1	na	na
65 and over	0	0	na	na
mean age	na	na	25.95	na

Wave 3 study demographics

Total Number (Sample)	Wave 3 (n=43)		Wave 3 (n=382)	
Number Per School	FG and I Number of Participants	FG and I Percentage of Participants	Survey Number of Participants	Survey Percentage of Participants
HSU	11	26	89	23.3
CSULB	7	16	170	44.5
CSUMB	8	19	72	18.8
CSUDH	5	12	50	13.1
na	na	na	1	0.26
Gender				
Female	28	65	270	70.7
Male	11	26	91	23.8
Nonbinary	3	7	15	3.9
Prefer not to answer	1	2	6	1.6
Race/Ethnicity				
African American/Black	5	12	37	9.7
Asian American	7	16	8	2.1
Bi/Multi-racial	4	9	na	na
Latinx	17	40	157	41.1
Bi/Multi-racial	10	23	na	na
Other	na	na	na	na
White	10	23	216	56.5
Prefer not to answer	na	na	na	na
First Generation College Student	na	na	203	53.1
Age				
18-24	21	49		
25-34	16	37		
35-44	4	9		
45-54	2	5		
55-64	0	0		
65 and over	0	0		
mean age	na	na	25.93	na

Appendix B

Campus Basic Needs Programs Overview

Campus	CSULB	CSUDH	SFSU	Cal Poly SLO	Cal Poly Humboldt	CSUMB
Campus Scope & Basic Needs Program (BNP) Infrastructure						
Undergraduate Enrollment	28,979	13,816	21,868	20,812	5,199	6,201
Graduate Enrollment	3,711	1,714	3,178	725	540	845
BNP Staffing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Director • 2 Case Managers • Administrative Support Coordinator • CalFresh Outreach Coordinator 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manager of Student Support • Basic Needs Coordinator • CalFresh Coordinator • Food Access Coordinator 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Director • CalFresh Outreach Coordinator • Basic Needs Program Coordinator • Off-Campus Housing Coordinator • Student Housing Stability Coordinator • Communication Specialist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic Needs Coordinator • Campus Food Pantry Coordinator • California College Corps stationed at Campus Food Pantry (15 students) • Peer CalFresh Advocates (3 professional staff, 15 students) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CARE Services Coordinator • CARE Case Manager • CARE Basic Needs Coordinator • Oh SNAP! Staffing (9 students and 1 professional staff) • CalFresh Support for unique cases • Case manager at CAPS who helps navigate MediCal and Calfresh 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic Needs Program Coordinator • Care Manager • Collaborative Health and Humans Services Intern • MSW Intern • 7 Basic Needs Student Assistants
BNP Center	Dedicated Basic Needs Office spaces in central locations on campus	Basic Needs office located with Food Pantry	Basic Needs located in Health Promotion and Wellness Office	No dedicated space for Basic Needs programming	BNP space dedicated to the food pantry, dorms, and Dean of Students Office. Single point of contact and referral found in one place virtually on Humboldt Basic Needs webpage.	Basic Needs Hub located with Food Pantry

Campus Basic Needs Programs Overview

Campus	CSULB	CSUDH	SFSU	Cal Poly SLO	Cal Poly Hum	CSUMB
Food Security Programs						
Food Pantry	M-F: 10am - 2pm & 5 - 7 pm; Sat: 11am - 1pm	M-F: 9am - 6pm; Up to 10 items 2 times per week.	W-Th: 1-5 pm (reservations only); F: 12-2 pm (walk in)	M-F: 8:30am - 5pm; Also, 5 Food Cabinets across campus	M & Wed: 9:30am - 6:00pm; F-Sat: 10:30am - 5pm	M-F: 9am - 4pm
CalFresh	Application support and interview prep support by appointment	Outreach at farmers market and food pantry	Application support by appointment	Application support by appointment and drop-in	Application support at food pantry and by appointment	Application support by appointment
Meal Swipes or Vouchers	Swipes for 10 meals at a time for students, but able to request more	Students receive a \$50 gift card to EveryTable	Swipes for 10 meals and can request more; Grocery Card to pay for groceries	Vouchers for \$100 per quarter; Undocumented or AB540 students up to \$250 per quarter	Swipes provided for use at dining hall on campus and laundry money	Vouchers for farmers markets; No limit on free meal cards
Housing Security Programs						
Emergency Housing	On campus short-term housing for 2-3 weeks; 12 beds available	Up to 14 days off-campus emergency housing support at a hotel. Up to 30 days of on-campus emergency housing support	On campus short-term housing for 2-3 weeks	On campus short-term emergency housing	On campus short-term housing; financial aid provides stipends that can be used for housing	4 emergency beds for temporary housing available for up to 2 weeks
Rapid Rehousing	Partner with cbo to provide long term housing for students experiencing homelessness	Program not available	Partner with cbo to provide long term housing for students experiencing homelessness	Program not available	Program not available	Program not available
Financial Security Programs						
Emergency Grants	\$1500 per student per year	\$250-\$1,000 one time per year	One-time emergency funds and emergency rental support funds	Up to \$2,000	Financial aid provides emergency stipends	One time per year up to \$500; Up to \$2,000 for housing

Endnotes

- 1 The specific definition of student basic needs remains fluid. For CEHE, student basic needs encompass: housing security (safe, affordable, fixed, and habitable, inclusive of WiFi and study space); food security (acquire, prepare, and store nutritious food); mental and physical health; financial wellbeing to ensure those needs are met. Basic needs are also inclusive of hygiene supplies, transportation, and childcare sufficient to attend educational and employment responsibilities.
- 2 Estimate generated through a CEHE analysis of state spending reports compiled by the Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO). Investment total includes a mix of one time and ongoing investments. Note that this estimate does not include an additional \$2 billion invested in all three segments via the Higher Education Student Housing Grant Program.
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