EQUITY MADE REAL

Promising Strategies for Addressing College Student Basic Needs

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As gaps between the cost of college and available financial aid continue to soar, an increasing number of college students are struggling to cover the costs of basic necessities such as food, housing and transportation. National research has shown conclusively that a significant proportion of college students are basic needs insecure. When students are hungry and homeless, their ability to complete their educational goals diminishes substantially. Local studies have made it plain that these challenges are particularly acute in California and that basic needs insecurity and issues of equity are inextricably intertwined. California's community colleges, which offer the opportunity for post-secondary education to all who seek it, experience this challenge most severely. Adding to the urgency of this issue is the COVID-19 public health crisis, which has exacerbated an already dire situation, as students attempt to manage mass unemployment, housing insecurity, hunger, increased family obligations and health concerns, while maintaining their studies.

While the State of California, and the community college system in particular, have been ground zero for students challenged by basic needs insecurity, both have also been at the vanguard of innovative solutions to this challenge. The state legislature has invested $69.4 million in Hunger-Free Campus initiatives over the past four years, improved access to CalFresh, leveraged federal dollars through the Fresh Success employment and training program, and invested in housing solutions for students experiencing homelessness. Individual campuses have also shown tremendous innovation, with the development of "one-stop-shop" basic needs centers at the forefront of these efforts. Challenges remain, however, including: (1) how to address basic needs in the context of the shift to distance learning resulting from the pandemic, (2) ensuring that efforts are reaching the most economically vulnerable students, (3) the pace of the cultural shift towards embracing basic needs practices on college campuses, and most crucially, (4) insufficient funding to address the need.

Through a series of interviews with staff from ten community college basic needs centers and other stakeholders, this report outlines a series of promising practices that can be replicated by other institutions to strengthen support as well as policy changes that are likely to help reduce student basic needs insecurity in California. The page that follows provides an overview of these practice and policy recommendations.

Campus Practice Recommendations

1. Promote collaboration between students and leadership in the design of programming.

2. Create a basic needs task force.

3. Engage with students during the application and matriculation processes to identify needs.

4. Dedicate a physical space for the basic needs center and develop a strong remote presence.

5. Leverage food pantries as a gateway to other basic needs services and as a tool for data collection.

6. Mitigate stigma by offering a safe and welcoming space open to the entire community.

7. Utilize stigma-reducing and broad-reaching outreach strategies.

8. Embrace a peer-to-peer model by involving student workers.

9. Integrate seamlessly with other campus departments and develop a holistic approach to financial aid determinations.

10. Collaborate with outside partners.

11. Invest in robust data collection and analysis.

Policy Recommendations

1. Create a permanent state-funding source for student basic needs centers.

2. Further develop campus strategies to address college student homelessness.

3. Expand Fresh Success.

4. Invest in data collection and evaluation.

On campuses across the nation, colleges and universities are undergoing a rapid culture change. In recent years, there has been an increasing awareness of basic needs insecurity among college students, as homeless and food insecure students have become increasingly visible. This recognition resulted in a proliferation of services housed at and staffed by colleges and universities, centralized through service hubs known as basic needs centers that had been established on California college campuses.

A basic needs center is a place on campus where students can go to address basic human needs such as food, housing, clothing, diapers, period products and transportation. As the availability of financial aid diminishes relative to the full cost of college, an inability to meet basic needs is becoming increasingly prevalent among college students. Such lack of access to these basic resources interferes with students' ability to be successful in college, leading to a growing recognition that colleges may have a role in supporting students to meet these needs. In some cases, basic needs centers are the outgrowth of a food pantry, but these centers have grown to offer additional services beyond food distribution. The partnerships between students, faculty, staff and college chancellor's offices, along with an investment of state funding, supported the growth of these basic needs centers over the past several years.

The COVID-19 public health crisis further exacerbated an already dire situation, as students attempt to manage mass unemployment, housing insecurity, hunger, increased family obligations and health concerns, alongside their studies. The pandemic, and the ensuing economic, racial and social upheavals have only served to further catapult college student basic needs into the center of discussions of equity, access, inclusion, emergency planning and the student experience. Campuses were already confronting the realization that when students' basic needs are not met, students cannot meaningfully pursue higher education. The pandemic brought this reality to bear even more prominently, with campuses being forced to put the conversation about basic needs deprivation front and center.

Through a series of interviews with ten community college basic needs center staff and other stakeholders, as well as a review of current literature and research, this report seeks to understand how these basic needs centers work as well as highlight innovative campus interventions and additional support needed to better serve students in California's Community College (CCC) system. This report seeks to uplift success stories, provide concrete guidance and inspire both individual campuses and the state as a whole to scale up basic needs work to meet the demands of this challenging time.

A NEED RECOGNIZED

The concept of human basic needs is well established. Basic needs include any resource deemed necessary for persons or households to achieve and maintain physical well-being, including food, water, shelter and hygiene.[1] Maslow famously asserted that these physical survival needs must be met before an individual can engage in higher level tasks, such as learning or working.[2] However, the direct application of basic needs as a prerequisite to college success is a relatively novel concept. Traditionally, institutions of higher education have seen themselves largely as academic institutions, with limited responsibility to address needs outside the academic sphere.

In recent years, however, increased enrollment in higher education of students from diverse backgrounds, including the historically marginalized and a greater number of financial aid recipients, has challenged the stereotypical notion of college students as uniformly well-to-do. Colleges and universities have had to not only look closely at who their students are, they have also had to look at their practices and priorities related to supporting these students. Simultaneously, the value of available financial aid has declined relative to the cost of attending college.[3] Financial aid, even when supported by wages from work, is insufficient to prevent students from going hungry or becoming homeless. National studies have found that at least half of the food and housing insecure students received Pell Grants and/or were employed.[4] To ensure true equity and inclusion of students from all walks of life, colleges and universities have had to (or will have to) embrace strategies to address student basic needs insecurity as a core institutional value and practice.

A higher education degree is associated with long-term economic stability, asset growth and debt management.[5] In fact, higher education has never been more important, as nationwide, over the decade prior to the recent economic collapse, the economy gained 11 million jobs that require a post-secondary credential while simultaneously losing 5 million jobs that can be secured with a high school diploma or less.[6] At the same time, however, an increasing number of students are experiencing barriers to meeting their basic needs as they strive to earn a higher education degree. More than one third of college students in the United States lack enough to eat and close to half lack stable housing.[7]

Meanwhile, while some college students received direct payments to ease the financial impact of the COVID-19 public health crisis through the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, this aid was insufficient to the need. What's more, college students were locked out of other types of government COVID-19 relief. They were denied a temporary exemption to the SNAP Student Rule, as proposed by the Emergency EATS Act and locked out of the CARES Act stimulus payments.

The California Community College system has been ground zero for students challenged by basic needs insecurity, but it is also a symbol of progress. The California community colleges, the largest system of higher education in the nation, serve approximately 2.1 million students through 116 colleges. However, these students experience high rates of hunger and housing instability that undermine their college success. Research conducted in 2019 found that 50 percent of student respondents reported being food insecure sometime within the previous 30 days and 19 percent experienced homelessness.[8] A fall 2017 survey of primarily student services and categorical program campus staff found that 56.8 percent of respondents had direct contact with students experiencing basic needs insecurity multiple times per week or every day.[9]

½
of community college students report being food insecure and
19%
experience homelessness.

African American and American Indian students are up to
40%
more likely than white and Asian students to experience basic needs insecurity.

Basic needs insecurity and issues of equity are inextricably intertwined. Research has been clear that this insecurity impacts certain subpopulations more severely than others. At California's community colleges, African American and American Indian students are up to 40 percent more likely than white and Asian students to experience this issue. Latinx students, while less likely to experience basic needs insecurity than African Americans, do so at rates greater than white students.[10] While there are many strategies that serve the goal of greater equity in education, a targeted focus on addressing basic needs insecurity is an important element of addressing larger educational and economic equity goals.

EVIDENCE FOR THE BASIC NEEDS CENTER MODEL

While the availability of data regarding the impact of the basic needs center model is limited, the data that do exist support the notion that basic needs interventions encourage student persistence. A handful of studies have looked specifically at programs that focus exclusively on food security. For example, a Hope Center study of a meal voucher program (MVP) at Bunker Hill Community College in Boston found that students with access to the meal vouchers were less likely to experience depression and anxiety than a control group that did not participate in the program. Over the 2017-18 academic year, MVP students also attempted and completed an average 1.5 and 2.3 more credits, respectively, compared to students in the control group. MVP students also had a 3.56 percentage point higher fall-to-spring persistence rate compared to peers in the control group (81% MVP vs. 77% control). The impact of the program appears to be especially important during students' first semester in college. Interviews also found, at least for some students, that the program improved students' connection to the college and strengthened their confidence and motivation to continue to pursue their educational goals.[11]

A basic needs center model known as the Advocacy and Resource Center (ARC) that was linked with an emergency fund program known as the No Excuses Fund at Amarillo College in Texas was described in a 2018

publication. While the program was too new to undergo a rigorous evaluation, descriptive data found that fall-to-spring retention was 67.5 percent for all Amarillo College students versus 73 percent for students receiving services from either the ARC or the No Excuses Fund.

Locally in California, the most robust data comes from the SparkPoint basic needs model, which exemplifies what is possible with adequate monetary and technical assistance support. Largely regarded as one of the most robust and well-established basic needs programs, the SparkPoint Centers at many of California's community colleges are models of success. Based on the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Center for Working Families, in partnership with the United Way of the Bay Area, SparkPoint Centers were developed to work with low-income individuals and families long-term, looking at all aspects of their financial health, with the goal of achieving financial prosperity. In 2009, SparkPoint Centers were placed for the first time on community college campuses, and today, the model has expanded throughout eight Bay Area counties at 21 locations, including nine community college campuses (see Appendix B for a list of campuses).

Data collected by the original SparkPoint Campus, Skyline College in San Mateo County, revealed that students who were SparkPoint clients had a higher rate of persisting to the next term (83 percent of SparkPoint clients persisted from fall-to-spring 2014-15, compared with just 64 percent of students college-wide).[12] An evaluation across all SparkPoint Centers found that on average, clients who have been with SparkPoint consistently for two or more years increased their monthly income by $807, improved their credit scores by 39 points, and decreased their debt by $10,586.[13] Although the centers look different on each campus, the core model is focused on financial empowerment centered around one-on-one financial coaching, tax preparation, wealth accumulation and/or credit counseling. SparkPoint Centers see financial empowerment as the foundation, or the root of the tree, from which other basic needs services stem. SparkPoint Centers also offer food assistance (CalFresh application support, free snacks and food pantries) and emergency aid. In the future, the centers hope to add housing support to their offerings.

The centers are collaborations between nonprofit and government entities, featuring partnerships with local credit unions to promote student entrance into formal banking relationships and establishing savings and investment targets. SparkPoint client success is measured on four long-term measures: self-sufficient income, credit score of 700 or above, savings equal to three months of living expenses and no revolving debt.[14] Coaches view the student as a part of a family unit, looking not only at a family unit's present and future financial goals, but also at the next generation, embracing a "two generation" approach to financial wellbeing.

SparkPoint Centers provide evidence for the efficacy of a one-stop-shop model and are also instructive when evaluating best practices. The unique monetary support and technical assistance from the United Way of the Bay Area allows SparkPoint Centers to provide individualized, professional services to participants. This support also allows for robust program management, along with data collection and analysis through Salesforce. Staff are trained in both supporting financial literacy, as well as data collection, drawing upon financial professionals for guidance. While most college campuses lack the necessary funding and infrastructure to provide students with this level of support, valuable lessons can be learned from this model.

SparkPoint Center Model

Multi-Generation Financial Empowerment → Food Security and Public Benefits → Next Step: Housing
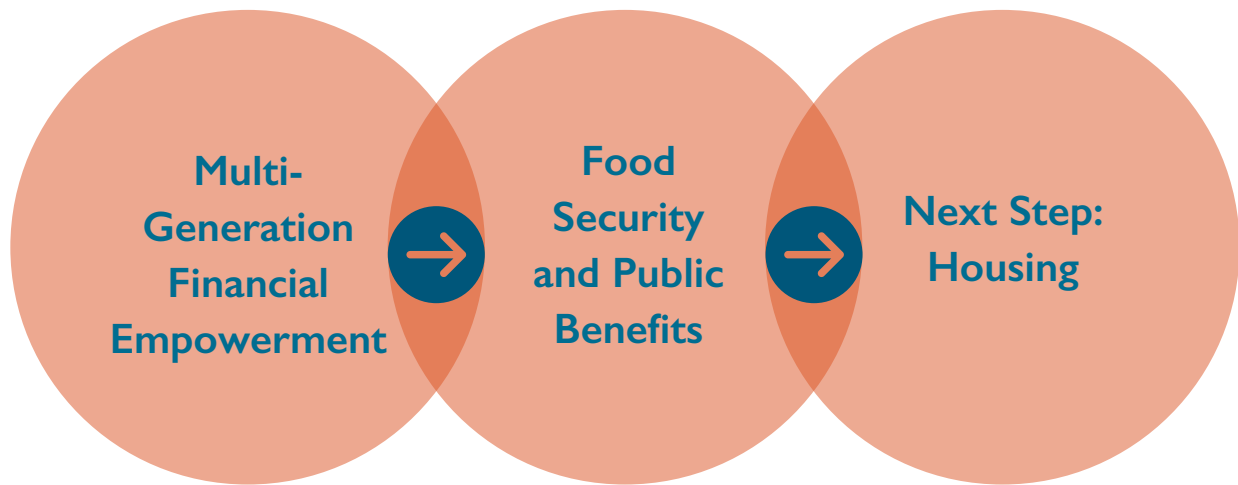
LEGISLATIVE INITIATIVES

From allocating state general funds to developing innovative ways to leverage federal dollars, the State of California has been at the forefront of national efforts to address basic needs insecurity among college students. The description below traces the various legislative initiatives at the state level to address this issue.

The Hunger Free Campus Initiative
In recent years, a series of legislative initiatives has provided seed funding to launch basic needs work on campuses throughout the state. The one-time funding that had been allocated to support much of the basic needs work on California Community College campuses over the previous three years was not renewed for the 2020-21 budget cycle, however, leaving the future of these efforts uncertain.

In 2017, Governor Brown and the California State Legislature made a groundbreaking move to address basic needs on college campuses, allocating $7.5 million of state funding in support of Hunger-Free College Campuses, an initiative to provide incentives to public colleges in California to address college student hunger. This budget investment provided the University of California (UC), California State University (CSU) and California Community

College (CCC) systems each a one-time $2.5 million award to incentivize the development of (1) programs that allow students to donate their extra dining hall meal credits to students in crisis; (2) food pantries, including on-campus pantries or partnerships with a local food bank that provides regular on-campus food distributions; and (3) CalFresh enrollment, where a designated person on campus works to ensure that students have access to accurate information about CalFresh eligibility and how to apply.[15]

In 2018, the budget again included a Hunger Free Campus Initiative single-year allocation of funding across all three systems to address basic needs. The community college system received $10 million, the CSU system received $1.5 million and the UC system received $1.5 million. In 2019, the allocation dropped to $3.9 million for the CCCs. The UC system received an ongoing allocation of $15 million and the CSUs received a one-time allocation of $15 million. The disparities between the amount of funding made available across each system is not reflective of the need across the systems. In fact, the community colleges have substantially greater need and yet have received significantly less funding than the other two systems. (see Table 1).

	CCC	CSU	UC
2017/2018	$2.5 million	$2.5 million	$2.5 million
2018/2019	$10 million	$1.5 million	$1.5 million
2019/2020	$3.9 million	$15 million	$15 million (ongoing)
2020/2021	none	none	$15 million
Students served	2.1 million	481,929	285,216

Table 1: Basic Needs Allocation by System

This disparity is due in part to the funding mechanisms across the three systems. Funding to address basic needs at the CSU and UC systems was allocated from state general funds and was in addition to the base funding for these systems. Community colleges, in contrast, fall under the funding formula imposed by Proposition 98. While Proposition 98 was intended to set a floor for how much of the state budget is allocated for K-14 expenditures, in recent budget years where the budget included a surplus, the Proposition 98 guarantee also served as a ceiling for K-14 funding and therefore basic needs funding for the CCCs required a reduction in another area of the CCC budget, creating a strong disincentive for funding.

In March 2019, the California Community College Chancellor's Office (CCCCO) released an evaluation of this initiative across their campuses statewide for the first two years of its existence. The report found that 109 of 115 CCCs (95 percent) reported hosting a food pantry and/or food distribution on campus. In addition, 113 colleges reported having staff available to provide information about CalFresh benefits and 111 have developed food partnerships. Campus food pantries "are one of the fastest growing movements to address hunger on college campuses."[16] As will be discussed further in this report, partially as a result of this history, food pantries are foundational to basic needs centers.

Expanding Eligibility for CalFresh for Students

Federal laws limit eligibility for students who would otherwise qualify for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), known as CalFresh in California. Most notably, students enrolled in college half-time or more are ineligible for CalFresh, unless they have dependent children under 12, are working an average of 20 hours per week or are eligible for one of the other exemptions listed in federal law and the federal code of regulations. In 2014, the state legislature adopted Assembly Bill (AB) 1930, by then-Assembly Member Nancy Skinner, which mandated that the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), in consultation with educational stakeholders, establish a protocol to identify and verify all potential exemptions to the federal student eligibility rule.

Following a two-year workgroup convened by the Department of Social Services CalFresh Bureau and co-chaired by the Western Center on Law and Poverty, [All County Letter 17-05](#) was issued in February 2017, implementing federal exemptions to the student rule. These exemptions included students receiving a Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF) financial award as part of their CalGrant, those participating in various categorical programs deemed by the state to improve employability, including those targeting foster youth, and those eligible and anticipating participation in State or Federal Work Study. In 2018, Assembly Bill 214 by Assembly Member Dr. Shirley Weber codified many of the exemptions identified by the AB 1930 workgroup and required the California Student Aid Commission to help students identify and verify their receipt of a TANF funded CalGrant.

In 2020, the CDSS responded to a 2019 Budget Report by including language in the Budget Trailer Bill (SB 77) requiring a workgroup to develop a report on how many college students were eligible but not participating in CalFresh. The workgroup identified the annualized average number of students receiving CalFresh food benefits for the 2018-19 academic year to be 127,360, and the total number of students likely eligible for CalFresh statewide to be between 416,471 and 689,233. This was the first such study and so there is no data that offers clarity on how much the changes made by these years of reform have increased participation in CalFresh by college students. The workgroup also made a series of recommendations to increase CalFresh usage among college students. Key among these was investing in basic needs centers, which are essential to outreach efforts.[17]

Restaurant Meal Program (RMP)

CalFresh benefits generally cannot be used to buy prepared foods, such as those sold in dining halls on college campuses. However, a federal option exists that allows states to permit SNAP purchases at restaurants for recipients who are homeless, disabled or elderly, recognizing that they may not be able to prepare their own meals. Historically, California has left it up to counties to decide whether or not eligible recipients could make restaurant purchases through the SNAP Restaurant Meal Program (RMP). Counties that have chosen to participate have included Alameda, Los Angeles, Sacramento, San Diego, San Francisco, San Luis Obispo, Santa

Clara and Santa Cruz counties. Various legislation, including AB 1747 (2016), AB 1894 (2018) and AB 612 (2019) has allowed CDSS to enter into agreements with the CSU and Community College Chancellor's Offices to allow colleges and universities in eligible counties with food facilities to accept CalFresh for eligible students. AB 942, adopted in 2019, will expand the availability of the RMP statewide. Despite enthusiasm for the program at CDSS, progress on approvals for the MOUs and other paperwork necessary to create RMP across the state and on college campuses has been moving very slowly, in part due to the COVID-19 public health crisis but also due to lack of support for the RMP at the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

Fresh Success

In another significant attempt to address basic needs, the Foundation for California Community Colleges (FCCC), with funding from several philanthropic foundations, recently launched Fresh Success, an intervention that enables colleges and community-based organizations to access CalFresh Employment & Training funding available through the federal government. This was the second such attempt in a decade, after a similar effort, Cal Success, was launched, but then had its approval removed by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

Through the Fresh Success Program, colleges provide funding for services that increase employability through programs such as Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS), Student Equity and Achievement (SEA) and Strong Workforce and receive a match from the federal government. For every $1.80 spent by the college, the federal government provides $0.80 in additional funding. Leveraging this federal funding helps participating colleges and their partners to fill gaps in existing services and expand support for low-income participants. This program is currently operational at Gavilan College, Diablo Valley College, Southwestern College, Fresno City College and Reedley College, as well as through several other community partners, with campuses receiving an average of $1,300 per participating student annually.

College Focused Rapid Rehousing

In July 2019, California allocated new funding—the first of its kind—to address homelessness among college students through the 2019-20 State Budget bill (AB 74). The state allocated $19 million annually to the state's three public post-secondary institutions. The University of California system receives an annual $3.5 million allocation, the California State University system receives $6.5 million and the California Community College system receives $9 million. The funding must be used to support rapid rehousing efforts that assist homeless and housing-insecure college students. Campuses must establish partnerships with community-based housing providers to provide wrap-around services and rental subsidies for eligible students. Funds may also be used to connect students with community case managers, establish ongoing emergency housing procedures and to provide emergency grants necessary to secure housing or prevent the imminent loss of housing. In the community college system, this program was named the Homeless and Housing Insecure Pilot (HHIP).

Based on a review of a subset of campus basic needs centers, there are elements that were identified as consistent across campuses as well as those that differ. Basic needs centers were found to generally have similar development trajectories, revolve around food pantries and operate with staffing and funding inadequate to meet the need. Notable differences included where the centers were located on campus, the degree to which services beyond food pantries are available and funding structures. In most cases, the basic needs centers were relatively new, having been created within just the past couple of years, and it will be important to continue to track the evolution of this intervention.

The Organizational Location of a Basic Needs Center Hinges Largely on Where Champions Exist

The organizational location of basic needs centers varies in terms of the department in which they are housed. Where the original champions found campus allies is where the basic needs center likely found its departmental home. Sometimes the home designation is a mere matter of semantics. Other times, the designation is more indicative of a philosophy of that department. If a basic needs center has a focus on financial empowerment, for instance, it is no surprise that it would be located within the financial aid office. If the center's philosophy is related to social justice, a logical departmental home is Student Equity. Other departments that house programs include student services and student affairs.

While Food Pantries Are Universal, Offshoot Services Differ

Basic needs work on California's college campuses commonly begins with a food pantry. A survey conducted by the CCCCO found that food pantries are one of the most common sources of support provided to students who may be food insecure.[18] Food pantries are a logical starting point for basic needs centers, as they are tangible and address immediately the most basic need: hunger. Food pantries are also compelling and receive wide community support, as they are understandable and serve a clear need. Many campus food pantries are stocked with food completely donated from a local food bank or food pantry.
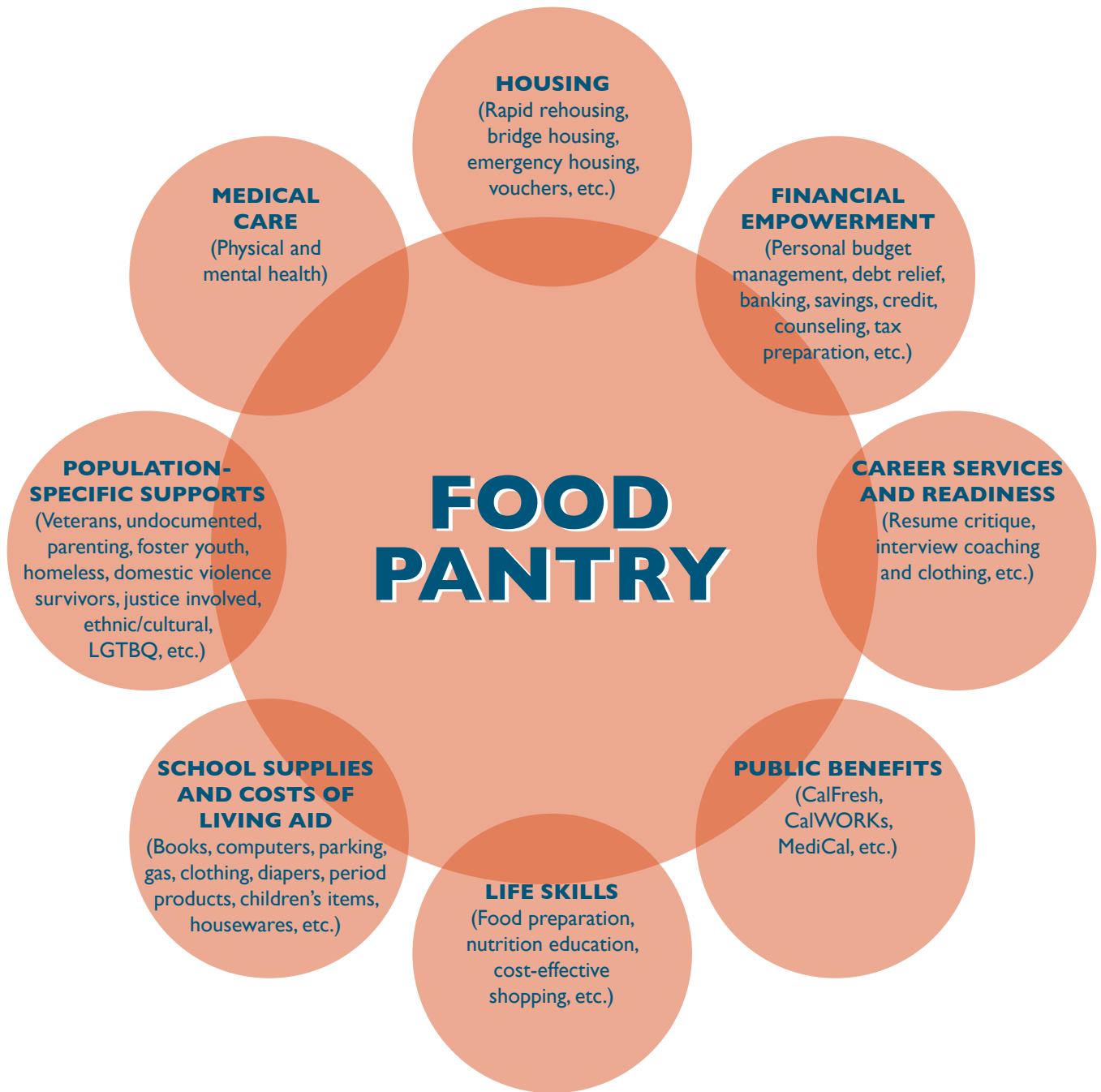
However, while seemingly simple, food pantries actually serve more sophisticated purposes. They are sites at which students first encounter basic needs resources and engage in conversations with staff and fellow students. For instance, while students pick up food, basic needs staff can assess for further needs and connect students to resources. They can also engage in conversation and encourage students to make a case management appointment to provide more tailored support. In this way, food pantries can function as both intake and holistic service centers, where students can not only address immediate food needs but also begin to address more complex needs, like housing, connecting to CalFresh, mental health and academic counseling, or financial coaching. They are also a place where students struggling to meet basic needs can meet their peers who share the same struggle, which can serve as an informal peer-support network.

Basic needs centers can vary greatly, however, in their supplementary offerings, depending on the student population and its particular needs as well as the funding available. More sophisticated basic needs centers have expanded in-house offerings beyond food pantries, or forged connections with outside organizations to make appropriate referrals. As is discussed in the recommendations section of this report, strengthening internal capacity and forging strong partnerships with outside agencies (such as housing providers, legal services, substance-use disorder treatment, etc.) is key to providing holistic, wraparound care for the complex and concurrent needs of students.

The ways in which basic needs offerings have evolved are driven by the needs of the student body and the articulation of those needs. At College of the Redwoods, for example, in response to students' expressed needs and the unique obstacles of a rural campus located far away from shopping centers, the basic needs center provides interview clothing, housewares and children's toys. At East Los Angeles College, in response to student answers to periodic surveys, the center focuses on financial empowerment, through one-on-one financial coaching. Based on a survey of basic needs offerings at peer institutions, Cerritos College has decided to form its basic needs center around the following eight goals: Physical wellness, safety, mental wellbeing, food stability, housing, financial support, sense of belonging and quality education. These examples show how student demand and the local environment shape offerings.

On the next page is a visual representation of the universe of basic needs offerings that have branched off from the food pantry trunk.

FOOD PANTRY

HOUSING (Rapid rehousing, bridge housing, emergency housing, vouchers, etc.)

FINANCIAL EMPOWERMENT (Personal budget management, debt relief, banking, savings, credit, counseling, tax preparation, etc.)

MEDICAL CARE (Physical and mental health)

CAREER SERVICES AND READINESS (Resume critique, interview coaching and clothing, etc.)

POPULATION-SPECIFIC SUPPORTS (Veterans, undocumented, parenting, foster youth, homeless, domestic violence survivors, justice involved, ethnic/cultural, LGTBQ, etc.)

PUBLIC BENEFITS (CalFresh, CalWORKs, MediCal, etc.)

SCHOOL SUPPLIES AND COSTS OF LIVING AID (Books, computers, parking, gas, clothing, diapers, period products, children's items, housewares, etc.)

LIFE SKILLS (Food preparation, nutrition education, cost-effective shopping, etc.)

Of note, given its unique history and funding structure, the SparkPoint model differs slightly, in that financial empowerment is the cornerstone of its basic needs work, from which food security came next and housing security will follow in the future.

Funding Structures Differ Substantially

Another major similarity across basic needs centers is the challenge of being operated by very minimal staff, sometimes by just a single person. The COVID-19 public health crisis has made staffing even more thin, with many colleges facing hiring freezes and both volunteers and student workers banned from closed campuses. Also, the increased demand for food and housing resulting from the COVID-19 crisis has pushed staff to their maximum capacity, operating at an unsustainable rate that makes daily survival, not strategic growth, the priority.

Some basic needs centers are completely funded by a single source, while others operate under a funding hybrid that includes support from private foundations; federal, state and local governments; strategic partnerships (where they are sub-grantees or receive in-kind donations); the campus foundation; the college itself; special events; and/or alumni donations. As is discussed in the recommendations and challenges parts of this report, a diversified funding structure allows basic needs centers to weather changing budget priorities, especially during crises like COVID-19.

At the same time, development and communications are a catch-22 for basic needs centers. In order to expand offerings to meet the needs of students, more staffing is required to write compelling grants, collect data and share student stories. However, with basic needs centers operating in survival mode, seeking out financial stability through diverse funding is a significant challenge.

Basic needs centers independently and uniformly reported the same set of challenges they face in serving students.

COVID-19 Public Health Crisis & Campus Closures

Basic needs centers almost uniformly noted that the COVID-19 public health crisis has been the biggest challenge affecting not only day-to-day operations, but also growth and expansion of basic needs work.

With very little notice, in March of 2020, basic needs centers had to shift to remote or socially distanced services. As noted, food pantries are foundational to basic needs centers, occupying and providing a physical space for students to receive direct services. With campuses closing in response to the pandemic, basic needs centers had to scramble to find ways to serve students remotely and with fewer staff, as a result of the loss of student workers. They also, like everyone else, had to design systems of distribution that were compliant with public health guidelines and that were responsive to students who were both on and off campus. Many food pantries modified services to allow drive-through pick-up or delivery of groceries; in-person consultations were converted to Zoom meetings; and word-of-mouth or classroom marketing of services transitioned largely to social media or text message.

For example, the three colleges with SparkPoint centers in San Mateo County (College of San Mateo, Skyline College, and Cañada College), in partnership with the Second Harvest Food Bank, quickly responded to social distancing norms to offer "drive-through" community markets. Open to the entire community, both within and outside of campus, these drive-through markets allow families to get groceries placed into their cars in a safe, contactless manner. Gavilan College has also partnered with Second Harvest Food Bank, and Cerritos College has partnered with the LA Regional Food Bank to host similar contactless food drives, open to the entire community.

While many basic needs centers have been very nimble and have changed service delivery methods in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis, a few associated issues have been insurmountable to date: (1) how to reach the most

vulnerable students who lack the technological capacity, in terms of laptops, phones, internet, or a safe place in which to access these technologies with requisite privacy to stay in contact with basic needs centers; (2) how to forge the same level of trust and connection with students, when interactions are no longer in-person; (3) how to effectively market services, with the loss of physical space and visibility; (4) how to manage the loss of work-study student workers, who are not allowed to be on campus during closures; and (5) how to meet increased demand for services with limited supply and staffing.

Basic needs centers interviewed reported that the COVID-19 public health crisis has put them into "survival mode," and they have not had the luxury to plan strategically, as they are more concerned with surviving the week than they are with a five-year sustainability plan. As noted, with skeleton crew staffing, often limited to a basic needs director and one other staffer or a volunteer, centers are limited in terms of what can be accomplished on a day-to-day basis. Presently, there is capacity to address only the most dire needs, such as emergency food, housing or equipment for distance learning. For example, at Butte College, the entire center is operated by just one program assistant, with help from a single part-time worker. At East LA College, a single staff member provides financial counseling for the whole campus. The campuses interviewed for this report represent the more robust offerings and many other campuses are staffed even more leanly. Adding to their challenges, as referenced previously, they have had to do this while also losing funding for future efforts in the state budget.

Despite these challenges and the limits in capacity, California can be proud that these basic needs centers were in place to support this work during this unprecedented moment in global history and it is certain that students, staff and faculty have been better protected against the short- and long-term harms of this crisis as a result.

CAMPUS SPOTLIGHT

Butte College, a rural college where students often live far away from campus, has creatively deployed a

"doorbell delivery program"

through which students and faculty volunteer to deliver groceries directly to homes.

In addition, they have organized pre-made bags of food for students to pick up in a socially distant manner.

Limited Funding for Basic Needs Centers
As noted earlier in this report, without the support of sector leaders to continue the funding, the California Legislature and the Governor chose not to renew the Hunger Free Campus funding for community colleges in the 2020-21 budget, leaving basic needs centers to look for alternative funding to continue and expand services. Although colleges are now required to offer food pantries in order to receive Student Equity and Achievement (SEA) funds, no monies were allocated for this purpose and no parameters were set for what this requirement entails. In addition, the COVID-19 crisis has created a lot of uncertainty related to budget, staffing and emergency campus priorities.

Prior to the pandemic, many basic needs centers noted that expansion and growth plans were underway but that these aspirations have been halted in the face of this emergency, despite the reality that expanded services are now needed more than ever. Many basic needs centers report reducing staffing, as a result of

reduced, re-allocated or entirely eliminated campus budgets for basic needs work. Some centers have been able to survive because of diversified funding streams from external grants, philanthropy or alumni donations. Limited staff leads to a vicious cycle, wherein staff have even less capacity to seek out grant funding or diversify funding streams. Furthermore, they have less capacity to collect robust data, in order to document the need for this support. For example, at Butte College, prior to the pandemic, there were plans underway to launch an internship program for students to work on CalFresh issues, but these efforts have been temporarily paused. At College of the Redwoods, prior to COVID-19, the college was able to offer free showers and locker storage to housing insecure students, but they have been forced to halt these offerings, focusing mainly on the food pantry and case management services at this time.

While some basic needs centers receive funding from a variety of sources, most receive the lion's share of their resources from state funds administered through college districts. Those who have managed to diversify funding draw support from local philanthropic foundations, private sector partnerships, other sources of government funding (including local homeless Continuums of Care funding), alumni donations, their campus foundation, the Foundation for California Community College's Fresh Success project, in addition to funding from the campus budget. Those who have depended upon funding solely from the college have suffered the most, with colleges having to divert funds to COVID-19 related emergencies and engaging in hiring freezes. While some centers have successfully obtained a lifeline through college SEA funding, of the colleges interviewed, most centers have had to scale back operations, cease expansion plans and operate with minimal staffing. Again, as noted, this sharp decline in capacity hinders their ability not only to provide services in the short term but also to diversify funding and engage in strategic planning in the long term.

Lack of Resources & Expertise to Address College Student Homelessness

While the strategies to address food insecurity have increased significantly in recent years on college campuses, the same cannot be said for strategies to address homelessness and housing insecurity. Institutions of higher education are only beginning to develop expertise on homelessness, and homelessness support programs are evolving to serve college students. Thus, best practices related to serving homeless and housing insecure college students are just now emerging. Colleges are also just now beginning to acknowledge college student homelessness as a part of their institutional strategic planning efforts. Unless they are receiving funding from the state for the Homeless and Housing Insecure Pilot (HHIP) program noted previously, the majority of campuses lack an actionable housing strategy. One notable exception, however, is College of the Redwoods' "Room and Board Scholarship," which provides on-campus housing for qualified housing-insecure students. In addition, Cerritos College recently launched "The Village," off-campus housing for housing-insecure students. Imperial Valley College is also developing housing options for homeless students through the use of state-funded trailers.

Exacerbating this trend is a lack of connection between colleges and local homelessness services systems, and the growing lack of affordable housing impacting all Californians. The worlds of higher education and homeless services have traditionally operated in separate spheres. State funding for college-focused rapid rehousing has encouraged greater collaboration, however, outside of this pilot program, colleges at this time are largely unable to plan for or operationalize student housing services.

Reaching the Most Vulnerable Students

As with all social services in general, effectively targeting services to those with the greatest level of need is a longstanding challenge. Students who are the most vulnerable also may have the hardest time accessing services because of the numerous life challenges that they must contend with. This holds equally true in the college environment. This may be because these students are not aware of available services or that the challenges that led to their basic needs insecurity, such as mental health struggles, a reluctance to seek help, or an inability to navigate existing support systems, also create barriers to service access. Particular challenges exist reaching undocumented students and those who are struggling academically.

While California's Community Colleges are welcoming of all students regardless of documentation status, undocumented students cannot legally receive any federally funded student financial aid, including loans, grants, scholarships or work-study money, often leaving them financially vulnerable and at greater risk for basic needs insecurity. What's more, these same students are ineligible for most public social services, like CalFresh, CalWORKs or General Assistance. Even when services are offered to an undocumented student, many fear engaging in them or providing demographic information, for fear of being required to reveal their undocumented status and facing unfavorable immigration consequences, especially in the current political climate.

Similarly, engaging with students with precarious academic standing is another challenge. According to Long Beach City College, these students are also among those least able to ask for help. Often having precarious enrollment status or being on the verge of "stopping out," these students frequently face multiple challenges, such as being a parenting student, veteran, having a mental health or other medical condition, having a prior criminal conviction, or facing a combination of these factors. These complex needs often exceed what a basic needs center, alone, can address. In the face of limited resources, centers are forced to make choices between providing intensive services to those with the most complex needs or limiting services to those with

less intensive needs. Those who cannot be served because of the complexity of their needs, however, are extremely unlikely to complete their education without added support and they are often students whom equity efforts hope to aid.

Second, interviewees reported that basic needs centers are similarly challenged by how to serve students who may have already "stopped out," are on academic probation or have already graduated. While basic needs centers, in general, can only serve active students, many center staff would like the flexibility to provide inactive students with support, so that they can re-enroll at the college. Another gray area for basic needs centers is defining their duty to recent graduates, who are no longer active students but may be struggling with unemployment and basic needs insecurity, especially during the COVID-19 public health crisis.

Concern About Mission Creep (Both Inside & Outside the College)

Many campuses expressed frustration that the cultural shift towards embracing basic needs practices is occurring too slowly. They note that naysayers, those who question whether it is the place of higher education to be involved with addressing basic needs, both within and outside of campuses, are a hindrance to change and that the only remedy is sustained and continuous education. To address this challenge, basic needs staff at Gavilan College, Imperial Valley College and East Los Angeles College take every opportunity to present at meetings of faculty, administration, student government, clubs, and classes and other events. They are aware that for a basic needs program to work, there must be buy-in at all levels of the college, and they arm themselves with compelling data and stories to change mindsets.

John Burton Advocates for Youth (JBAY) conducted interviews with basic needs centers staff at ten campuses highly regarded in the field for their work. The information gleaned from these interviews identified the practices described below, which represent promising strategies for improving student outcomes. These strategies should be implemented in concert with plans to adequately fund students with financial aid packages more tailored to the need of first-generation and low-income students.

1. PROMOTE COLLABORATION BETWEEN STUDENTS AND LEADERSHIP IN THE DESIGN OF PROGRAMMING.

At the campuses that have developed effective basic needs centers, students and administrators have worked in partnership to bring about campus-wide change. Regardless of whether the impetus for the creation of a center came from students or leadership, joining forces to champion basic needs work on campus led to greater success. On some campuses, students were personally faced with hunger or housing insecurity and reached out to counselors, advisors or the administration for help. Others observed their fellow students sleeping in cars or skipping meals because they did not have the funds to eat every day and brought these concerns to the administration. On other campuses, these observations began with faculty or administrators, who noted students struggling to meet academic demands while hungry or spending the entire day in the school library to access electricity and plumbing, before retreating to a local park to sleep at night. Troubled by these observations, administrators reached out to students to learn more about their experiences and began conversations on how to best support students.

The partnership between students and campus staff took various forms. For example, administrators worked with students to donate unused dining hall meals to fellow students; students donated student lounge space or faculty gave up underutilized offices to create food pantries; and campuses united around food drives or professional clothing drives to enable students to have appropriate job interview attire. Partnering with students to develop basic needs centers in ways that were student-friendly was also essential to ensure engagement by students.

Imperial Valley College's approach to basic needs work embodies a student-centered design, supported by top leadership, with the college president leading as a major champion of this work. The college president's deep understanding of basic needs, accompanied by her student-centered approach, has set the stage for campus leadership and students to work closely on basic needs initiatives, modifying and shaping services based on input from the entire community.

2. CREATE A BASIC NEEDS TASK FORCE.

Successful colleges often have a basic needs team or task force, with representatives from key departments (financial aid, admissions, student affairs, health services, housing, dining, etc.) as well as members from the student body, faculty and leadership. Such a team encourages participation from all perspectives, creative brainstorming, open communication and collective ownership of basic needs problems and solutions. In addition, this shared responsibility alleviates a portion of the burden too often carried solely by basic needs staff. The task force should collectively write and execute a strategic plan, with clearly defined goals and metrics of success.

The task force meetings should be open to everyone on the campus and allow everyone to make comments and participate. These convenings are also an opportunity to review data and engage in course correction or program modification. This level of transparency is necessary to further student trust and to demonstrate the college's true commitment to basic needs work. Recruiting a minimum of at least two to three students can help students to meaningfully engage in the task force and not feel as though one individual needs to represent the entirety of student perspectives.

At Imperial Valley College, they have developed a "caring campus committee" to work on basic needs. Similarly, Cerritos College has convened a formal task force of administrators, students and faculty to brainstorm basic needs strategies on campus.

CAMPUS SPOTLIGHT

At **Santa Monica College,** the student council introduced a referendum which created a $40,000 fund for a Swipe Out Hunger meal voucher program. The students worked with campus administrators and food retailers to enable these meal vouchers to be used at on-campus restaurants and to establish a process for students to request the vouchers.

Following the success of the student initiative, the campus administration increased the funding for the program, and it continues to be run in partnership between students and campus administrators.

3. ENGAGE WITH STUDENTS DURING THE APPLICATION AND MATRICULATION PROCESSES TO IDENTIFY NEEDS.

Basic needs centers can partner with admissions offices to ensure that high school students understand the resources that are available and are not dissuaded from applying because of concerns about basic needs. Basic needs services, along with the availability of financial aid, should be highlighted in all admissions marketing materials and should be presented clearly and boldly on the college's website. Furthermore, basic needs staff should be included during admitted students' days or new student orientations to make presentations about available resources and to ensure students that their basic needs are a priority. This openness also contributes to destigmatizing and normalizing basic needs insecurity.

As an example, Gavilan College and College of the Redwoods work closely with their office of admissions to identify and outreach to enrolled or committed students who may benefit from basic needs services. However, colleges could begin even earlier, outreaching to potential students to draw them into the college by presenting basic needs offerings.

4. DEDICATE A PHYSICAL SPACE FOR THE BASIC NEEDS CENTER AND DEVELOP A STRONG REMOTE PRESENCE.

Far too often basic needs centers begin in a spare closet on campus, and the limited amount of space allocated for these centers does not adequately serve students. To ensure that these centers are equipped to meet students' needs and to promote the best practice of being student-friendly, basic needs centers need to be designed from a student-focused perspective and occupy a prominent and accessible space on campus, such as in the student lounge. Such a communal space allows for maximum engagement of the community and ongoing discussions that push for continuous improvement. For example, Cerritos College will soon be opening a "one-stop shop," where students can address a wide variety of needs, located in the same building as the student lounge.

At the same time, learning from the COVID-19 public health crisis, basic needs centers also need to have remote capacity and a strong presence outside of the physical space, so that students continue to know that they are supported, even from afar. As noted above, the availability of these services should be prominently displayed on the campus website with easy instructions for how to request support. Intake and referral procedures should be easy to follow and streamlined, without requesting government identification of any sort, so as not to pose unintentional barriers to access.

5. LEVERAGE FOOD PANTRIES AS A GATEWAY TO OTHER BASIC NEEDS SERVICES AND AS A TOOL FOR DATA COLLECTION.

As food pantries are often the cornerstone of basic needs centers, they provide an opportunity to engage students in conversation with support staff or collect data that may reveal more complex needs. Through simple conversations with basic needs staff and volunteers at the food pantry, students can make a case management appointment, obtain a referral or simply obtain a pamphlet with information to consider later. At a minimum, centers can leverage food pantries as a tool for students to become aware of available support and know where to go to obtain further help.

In addition, food pantries can serve as tool for data collection. By requiring either the completion of a simple intake form or swiping of a student identification card, information can be cross-referenced to demographic and academic information to better understand the student population accessing the resource and where there are gaps. In this way, basic needs centers can become more familiar with who is accessing services as well as identify larger demographic or other trends. Understanding these trends can help campuses to identify service gaps, determine the rates at which different groups are accessing support in order to spot disparities, and track the academic outcomes of program participants. Supplementing quantitative data collection with student conversations can provide additional context to the data and allows students to be a part of constructing solutions. With basic qualitative and quantitative data, centers can get a full picture, begin a continual dialogue and match students to appropriate services.

Whether through conversation or data collection, the food pantry is an opportunity to forge a relationship of trust with students, a starting point from which to address the specifics of each student's basic needs. All of the campuses interviewed for this report use the food pantry as a means of collecting student data; however, the level of analysis differs. At the very least, campuses are collecting basic information via intake forms that collect student identification numbers and contact information. Some campuses expand upon this basic data, reviewing student records to get a more holistic picture of both individual students and overall trends. For example, at Butte College students sign in on an iPad through the program Onvoy. The college can then cross reference data available in the Student Information System to track food pantry utilization and student demographic data.

6. MITIGATE STIGMA BY OFFERING A SAFE AND WELCOMING SPACE OPEN TO THE ENTIRE COMMUNITY.

Effective basic needs centers embody stigma-reducing practices. An emerging trend is to welcome everyone—students, faculty and staff, alike. Proof of status as a student or evidence of income level is not required to use the food pantry or pick up free snacks at various spots on campus, as is the case at Butte College's Roadrunner Hub. This openness is a part of the stigma-reducing strategy, as no one is outed as "in-need" for picking up free food, and utilization of the resource by all is encouraged. The centers often provide a business card or other contact information for students to use if they want further help, or they have students provide their contact information on an intake form. The theory behind this approach is that when a student with food insecurity picks up free food, they blend in with everyone else, but they can contact the center privately, at a later time. When everyone can enjoy the same space and services, basic needs insecure students avoid the potential embarrassment of self-identifying as "disadvantaged" or "low income."

Another stigma-reducing strategy is to place basic needs centers in a centrally located, open and visible part of campus, such as the student union or wellness center. This strategy is a cornerstone of the SparkPoint campuses. The most welcoming centers also give the appearance of student lounges, often playing fun music and are festively decorated, encouraging students to "hang out" and enjoy free snacks, comfortable furniture and fun activities, like movie screenings or cooking demonstrations. These hangout spots allow the convergence of students, faculty, staff and the community at large, normalizing conversations surrounding basic needs instead of hiding such services. Butte College, Gavilan College, and Long Beach City College, among others, welcome students with such comfortable spaces.

Centers also use stigma-reducing language and marketing, using value-free names for the centers and avoiding language related to "needy" or "less fortunate" students, instead acknowledging, for instance, that everyone gets hungry and there are free snacks at the basic needs center. For instance, Imperial Valley College calls its food pantry "IVC Kitchen"; East LA College refers to its financial coaching sessions as "coffee chats"; College of the Redwoods has a "Room and Board Scholarship" for housing insecure students; and Cerritos College calls its basic needs center "The Falcon's Nest" and its food pantry "Franco's Market."

To reduce stigma and shame, food pantries either set uniform limits for all students (e.g. one grocery bag per week) or allow students to self-monitor through the honor system, like at Butte College, with students self-regulating out of concern for their fellow students. Campuses can also frame the availability of CalFresh as a financial aid source to help cover food costs, rather than as a public benefits program.

The collective effect of these stigma-reducing practices allows the basic needs center to become a point of campus pride, a known entity on campus, available to all.

7. UTILIZE STIGMA-REDUCING AND BROAD-REACHING OUTREACH STRATEGIES.

In order to ensure that students with the greatest needs are aware of available services, campuses must develop robust outreach strategies. The best basic needs centers seize every opportunity to market their services and educate the community on basic needs. They make presentations (often with free snacks) during classes, club meetings, faculty meetings, orientations and events. In addition, they provide free snacks and education throughout campus or during "pop-up events" or school events, attaching business cards with contact information for the basic needs center, strategies employed by Imperial Valley College and at the SparkPoint campuses.

During the COVID-19 public health crisis, outreach and marketing have been moved mostly online. Centers have reached out to students during online Zoom orientations, meetings and classes and have greatly utilized social media to promote services. At the same time, centers are still trying to use in-person services to connect with students. For instance, some campuses have been able to sustain food pantries but operate in a socially distant manner, or have modified services, such that participants "drive through" to pick up food or volunteers deliver food to students at home, as mentioned previously in this report. In all these models, the centers continue to provide students with referral and contact information, along with food, to continue dialogue and connect them to services.

Basic needs centers also educate faculty about the services available and how to support students to seek support, often taking advantage of flex days to offer training. Centers will often provide a statement for faculty to include on their syllabi with contact information for the basic needs center, exemplified in a sample syllabus statement created by the Hope Center. For example, Imperial Valley College and Long Beach City College provide such language for syllabi and present during classes about the available service. In addition, all of the interviewed basic needs centers invite participation from the entire community on social media, promoting awareness in ways that are fun and engaging. They also make information about available services easy to find on the campus website and through student portals. Information provided through online platforms is student-friendly and de-stigmatizing, avoiding jargon and cumbersome referral processes.

CAMPUS SPOTLIGHT

College of the Redwoods uses an "in-reach and outreach" strategy, where they review college applications to see if students self-identify as parts of marginalized groups in order to inform them about available services. In addition, they obtain a master list of students who were designated as homeless (McKinney-Vento students) from the Humboldt County Office of Education to do targeted outreach to incoming high-school students.

8. EMBRACE A PEER-TO-PEER MODEL BY INVOLVING STUDENT WORKERS.

To encourage a culture of trust and communication, effective basic needs centers embrace student workers in all aspects of operations. Many student workers are eligible for federal work-study and often have lived experience with basic needs insecurity. They are credible messengers who offer both empathy and an understanding of the complexities of navigating college student life, and often provide culturally competent services in a variety of languages. It is no surprise that many students feel more comfortable speaking with a peer about sensitive issues than they do with staff.

On the part of the student worker, this win-win arrangement allows them to gain valuable job experience and to earn extra money. In short, the peer-to-peer model allows students ownership of the basic needs center, promoting a sense of responsibility and desire to pay forward the benefits received from the center to the next class of students. It is essential that student workers have access to robust training and support in these roles. Before the end of their positions, these students can be a part of training the next cohort of student workers. East LA College, College of San Mateo, Gavilan College and Skyline College all reported utilizing student workers and expressed the benefits of this approach.

A survey of centers by the CCCCO in 2018 found, however, that only **36** percent of respondents indicated that their team included students, indicating that student workers may be an underutilized resource.[19]

CAMPUS SPOTLIGHT

At the **College of San Mateo's** SparkPoint Center (prior to COVID-19) student assistants operated the Food Pantry and CalFresh program. They were identified by EOPS or the financial aid office as students with an expressed interest in helping other students because of their lived experience or a personal interest. They receive extensive training on CalFresh enrollment and how to address the various scenarios related to assisting their fellow students.

9. INTEGRATE SEAMLESSLY WITH OTHER CAMPUS DEPARTMENTS AND DEVELOP A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO FINANCIAL AID DETERMINATIONS.

The best basic needs centers do not serve students in isolation. To provide holistic care, they leverage the resources and expertise of other college departments to share information and provide students with wraparound care. Notable campus allies are financial aid, admissions & records, student services, health services, dining services and programs serving the most vulnerable students, such as EOPS and foster youth support programs.

Particularly crucial is a strong partnership with the financial aid office, which allows the basic needs center to communicate special circumstances facing a student that may alter their financial aid eligibility, such as their homeless status. Financial aid offices have significant flexibility to adjust students' financial aid packages to address extenuating circumstances or changes to a student's status. There are also varying degrees to which financial aid offices take advantage of the leeway given to them when verifying homeless status. For example, federal guidance allows the financial aid director to certify homeless status based on a verbal report from the student, but not all campuses utilize this discretion.

The financial aid office, along with admissions and records departments, can also serve a vital role in identifying both students in special populations and those with significant unmet need. These offices can be vital partners in identifying students with an increased risk for basic needs insecurity, including, but not limited to, Pell Grant recipients, former or current foster youth, homeless students, historically disadvantaged racial and ethnic groups, LGBTQ students, students with a prior criminal conviction, parenting students or veterans. Such students may require extra support, and with access to information, staff can engage in more targeted outreach.

CAMPUS SPOTLIGHT

Cañada College's SparkPoint Center works with the financial aid office to maximize students' unmet need. SparkPoint Center staff have an open line of communication with financial aid staff and they work collaboratively to determine how financial aid can be maximized to support students with specific financial obstacles.

Cerritos College's Falcon's Nest works with the college's public affairs office, utilizing its communications expertise to market services effectively. This arrangement allows basic needs staff to focus more specifically on the delivery of services while entrusting marketing efforts to in-house communications experts. This division of labor allows each department to focus on their respective area of expertise, while at the same time encouraging inter-department involvement in basic needs work.

At **Imperial Valley College, the basic needs center** works with faculty to allow students to obtain extra credit for participation in basic needs work. This allows students to strengthen and improve their academic standing, encourages and rewards giving back to the community and brings additional capacity to the basic needs center.

By working with other departments, not only do basic needs centers borrow the expertise of other departments, such collaboration and integration normalizes basic needs throughout campus, bringing the community together to support students.

All of the campuses interviewed for this report emphasized that they cannot do basic needs work alone. Integration and collaboration with other campus departments is vital for holistic student care. The three San Mateo County SparkPoint campuses noted the particular importance of the financial aid office in effectively targeting students and in improving their financial wellbeing though basic needs interventions.

10. COLLABORATE WITH OUTSIDE PARTNERS.

Just as basic needs centers need internal college partners, they also need outside community partners (from all sectors) to best serve students.

First, basic needs centers need trusted outside partners to which to refer students for services most colleges cannot provide, such as legal services, domestic violence counseling or substance use disorder treatment. For example, Long Beach City College has been actively forging partnerships in the community to access these supports for students. Sometimes colleges depend on outside partners to provide the most basic of needs, such as housing. With the recent state investment in the College-Focused Rapid Rehousing pilot project, discussed more fully later in this report, some colleges have received state funding to allow them for the first time to enter into formal partnerships with nonprofit housing providers to arrange housing for students. Some college basic needs centers have also teamed up with diaper banks and period product supply organizations in response to needs articulated by students on campus.

Partnerships with outside organizations, such a housing provider, not only bring resources to the student population, but also provide colleges with subject matter expertise on issues that they have not traditionally had, and vice versa. The college gets to learn about the world of housing, and the housing provider becomes more familiar with college-student homelessness. Both sides increase their expertise and find new ways in which to expand their core competencies.

Basic needs centers also rely upon external strategic partnerships of mutual value. For instance, colleges have collaborated with food banks, donating the college's physical space to hold community food drives, in exchange for in-kind donations of food. The SparkPoint campuses, Butte College, Long Beach City College and Gavilan College, in particular, have very strong connections to local food banks. In addition, they have worked with grocery stores to provide students with grocery gift cards or local restaurants, in exchange for positive

advertising. Santa Monica Community College has developed a partnership with a local farmers' market to gather the food left over from the weekly market to distribute for free on campus. The project is largely run by student workers and volunteers.

The three SparkPoint centers have partnered with a local credit union to provide students with financial expertise and coaching, in exchange for the student becoming a new customer of the financial institution. These win-win arrangements utilize multi-sector partnerships that encourage creative problem-solving and leveraging existing resources to better serve students.

Lastly, as a part of their strategic planning, campuses should continue to strengthen partnerships with philanthropy and government to diversify funding streams. Engaging the college's foundation or development office to support fundraising efforts can also be extremely helpful. Colleges cannot do this work alone.

CAMPUS SPOTLIGHT

SparkPoint campuses have partnered with Safeway grocery stores to provide students with grocery gift cards during the COVID-19 public health crisis; local food banks to provide free food to everyone in the larger community; and local credit unions to provide **expert financial coaching and seed money** and financial incentives to students to meet personal financial goals.

11. INVEST IN ROBUST DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS.

The most stable and effective basic needs centers collect and analyze both quantitative and qualitative data to further support the efficacy of basic needs interventions. This can include collecting data from both the student population more generally and from those who specifically access basic needs services. Data is solicited through campus-wide surveys as well as by tracking data from intake forms from students who access the food pantry or other services, or having students swipe their student identification cards in order to track information about student utilization. This information can then be used to discern trends. Historically, the SparkPoint campuses have collected the most extensive data, with more campuses building their capacity to follow suit.

Data about who is accessing services can also be cross-referenced to other information included in student information systems such as admissions, financial aid and academic data. Such data adds to the body of evidence that investment in basic needs leads to better educational outcomes and is a crucial part of social justice and equity movements. In addition, data that tell a compelling story can support more effective fundraising and safeguard against budget cuts.

Robust data collection and sharing across systems also leads to more efficient and effective operations. By periodically surveying students, basic needs centers can better stay abreast of student issues and needs, allowing centers to tailor offerings and referrals in relation to demand. In addition, demographic data collection can help basic needs centers target outreach to students who could most benefit from services.

Unfortunately, given the myriad resource and capacity constraints of most basic needs centers, data collection and analysis remains an area for improvement. However, at a minimum, basic needs centers have been able to collect data on the number of students served. According to the 2018-19 Hunger Free Campus survey results, 109 food pantries combined to serve a total of 162,496 unduplicated students throughout the California Community College system.

In addition, centers make use of compelling student success stories, sharing these personal experiences on social media, campus presentations and events.

CAMPUS SPOTLIGHT

East LA College and Imperial Valley College both survey students periodically to ensure that basic needs offerings align with student priorities and needs. Through both campus-wide surveys and informal "survey monkey" polls of students who have participated in the basic needs center, the colleges mold their offerings to directly respond to stated student needs. This "action research" approach is both efficient and student driven.

SparkPoint Centers collect extensive and detailed data from students who access their centers. The United Way provides both data collection trainings to SparkPoint staff and use of Salesforce to collect data. While supporting students as they achieve higher education, SparkPoint Centers also take a "two-generational" longitudinal approach, looking at a family unit's progress towards an increase in income, credit, savings, asset acquisition, adherence to a household budget and a decrease in debt. They also survey families to measure the extent of quality of life improvement, including health (measured by health insurance coverage, the number of medical visits, etc.) and for parenting students, the level of participation their child's activities or school.

In addition to reaffirming the best practices noted above, this report offers recommendations to support the future growth of basic needs centers.

1. CREATE A PERMANENT STATE-FUNDING SOURCE FOR STUDENT BASIC NEEDS CENTERS.

In order to both adequately address the needs of students so that they can be successful in college and move basic needs centers out of survival mode and into the realm of strategic planning, there needs to be a consistent and reliable source of funding for these programs. The state should include ongoing funding in future state budgets to ensure that there is adequate staffing and resources for basic needs interventions.

The parameters surrounding the funding should ensure that spending is limited to costs directly associated with the provision of basic needs services. Funding should be structured to ensure that campuses target resources towards proven or promising interventions while simultaneously providing colleges with the flexibility needed to operate effectively within their own local context.

Funding should allow colleges to secure paid positions for student workers in basic needs centers and also provide training for these workers. In addition, funding guidelines should allow for monies to be used as part of an emergency response to issues such as the COVID-19 public health crisis, wildfires and earthquakes.

Finally, this funding should require that colleges have a campus task force with impacted student participants in order to receive funding.

CAMPUS SPOTLIGHT

Butte College has been an example of resilience, having managed two back-to-back emergencies: first, the Campfire of 2018 and then the COVID-19 public health crisis. Throughout both emergencies, because of the flexibility provided by the legislature in how Hunger Free Campus funds could be utilized, they were able to use this funding to address emergency needs within the context of these dual crises, which proved to be invaluable to their ability to address immediate student needs.
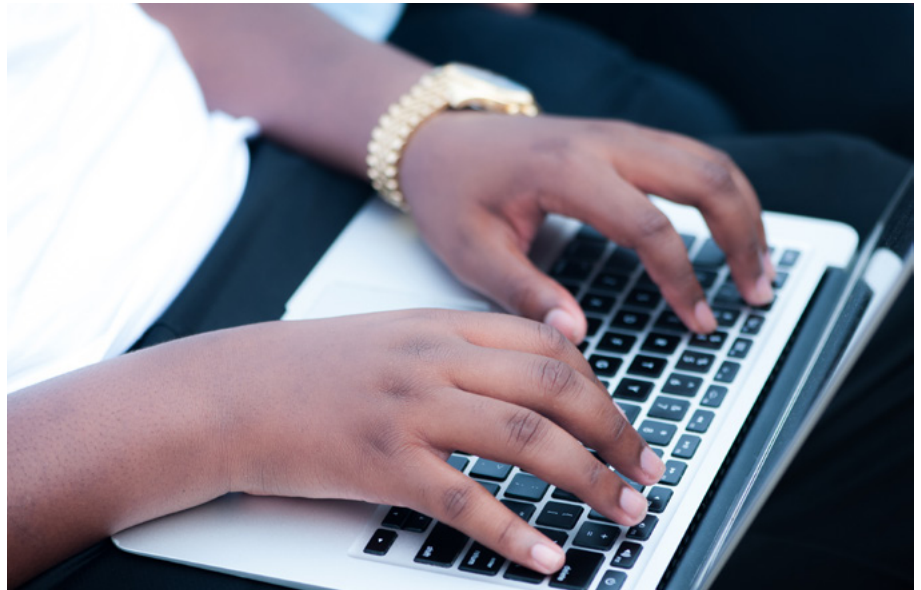
2. FURTHER DEVELOP CAMPUS STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS COLLEGE STUDENT HOMELESSNESS.

As noted in the challenges section of this report, basic needs work needs to be a part of a larger campus strategy to address college student homelessness. While addressing college student homelessness remains a significant challenge, promising practices do exist. Most significantly, in its 2019-20 budget, the state funded college-focused rapid rehousing, through an annual $19 million allocation across California's three public post-secondary systems. The community college allocation comprised $9 million. Funds are dedicated to support rapid rehousing efforts that assist homeless and housing insecure college students with housing location, rental subsidies and housing stability services through partnerships with local housing providers.

With this infusion of state funding, 14 colleges (listed in Appendix A) now have formalized relationships with nonprofit housing providers, to enable homeless students to quickly obtain and maintain housing. An additional three campuses provide similar services in partnership with Jovenes Inc., which developed the model of College Focused Rapid Rehousing using a combination of private and local public funds. Four other campuses have received funding through the state's Homeless Emergency Aid Program (HEAP), either directly or in partnership with a local housing provider, to operate a similar model. These partnerships are bridging the divide between the two worlds of academia and homeless services, building the capacities of both.

CAMPUS SPOTLIGHT

Imperial Valley College has embraced addressing homelessness among students as part of their core mission. The college has pursued several strategies towards this goal, including partnering with the broader homelessness services system by participating in their region's **Homeless Task Force** and applying for funding from the local homeless Continuum of Care body. IVC is also leveraging state funding to provide portable trailers and is exploring creating a tiny home student community.

Another example of creative solutions to college student homelessness is the Higher Education and Homelessness Workgroup (HEHW), convened by the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA), Los Angeles County's homeless Continuum of Care (CoC) body. This group helped to motivate an allocation of $700,000 through the LA County Board of Supervisors to LAHSA in 2019 to contract with local housing agencies to provide housing navigators on each of the county's 19 community college campuses. These navigators assist community college students experiencing homelessness to locate housing opportunities. The HEHW also recently released a [Strategic Plan on College Student Homelessness](#), making LAHSA the only CoC to create a plan focused on the needs of college students.[20] The strategic plan aims to close silos between homeless support efforts and higher education, two systems that traditionally have not worked closely together, to better serve students ages 16 to 24 who are experiencing homelessness and housing instability.

3. EXPAND FRESH SUCCESS.

The Fresh Success program offers an opportunity for campuses to leverage federal funding to support their basic needs centers and other programs that support students receiving CalFresh benefits. The state should evaluate what would be required to take this program, currently operating at five campuses and several community partner sites, to scale and invest as needed to make participation a viable option for every community college.

4. INVEST IN DATA COLLECTION AND EVALUATION.

As noted throughout this report, data is vital to a basic needs center's proof of efficacy and ability to tell a compelling story. Basic needs centers should think strategically about ways in which to leverage their college's academic capabilities to reduce the high costs of data management. As a part of capstone projects or course work, statistics or computer science students could collect and analyze basic needs data, evaluating the efficacy of various interventions. English or communications students could similarly provide grant writing services or marketing. In addition, peer universities at the CSU, UC or private university levels could engage in such work. Lastly, colleges could look to the private sector for pro bono licensing of otherwise cost-prohibitive data collection programs, such as Salesforce.

CONCLUSION:
"BASIC NEEDS CENTER" IS A MISNOMER

The information obtained from the stakeholders interviewed for this report made clear that a basic needs center is not actually a "center." This phrase is an oversimplification. Rather, basic needs centers embody a mindset change, a campus-wide integration of services and support that truly recognizes that basic needs are a prerequisite to learning. The need to address basic needs insecurities is becoming embedded into college culture, interwoven across departments and communities and translated into action to provide students with holistic, wraparound care. This long-term approach transcends giving a student a one-time meal, but rather, ensures that they can equitably partake in higher education. This need for this level of access has never been more dire with the concurrent crises facing students and our communities.

Stakeholders interviewed repeatedly emphasized that colleges cannot rise to this challenge without adequate resources. They emphasized that the patchwork of one-time funding that has been allocated to date, while extremely valuable, has left colleges without the ability to plan over the long term. The lack of a dedicated funding source in the current year's budget has created significant instability and threatens colleges' ability to continue to provide the robust level of support that has been provided to date at the time that it is needed the most.

There is a growing recognition that colleges must focus intentionally on issues of diversity and inclusion if we as a state are to create a truly equitable system of post-secondary education. There are many elements that must be included in a strategy towards equity, including full implementation of guided pathways reforms, comprehensive financial aid reform, expanding faculty diversity and developing cultural competency. Included in these efforts, however, must also be addressing basic needs insecurities. While financial aid reform, in particular, will help to address some equity gaps among the most vulnerable college students, these reforms are not likely to fully close these gaps quickly. Basic needs programs are a valuable tool that can ensure that all students truly have an equal opportunity to learn and realize their dreams.

ENDNOTES

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Homeless and Housing Insecure Pilot (HHIP) Program

- Antelope Valley College
- Barstow Community College
- Butte College
- Cerritos College
- College of the Redwoods
- Fresno City College
- Gavilan College
- Imperial Valley College
- Long Beach City College
- Los Angeles Southwest College
- Modesto Junior College
- Riverside City College
- San Diego City College
- Victor Valley College

Campuses serving students with HEAP funding

- Imperial Valley College
- San Joaquin Delta College
- Santa Rosa Junior College
- Southwestern College

Partners in Jovenes Inc.'s College Success Initiative

- Cerritos College
- East Los Angeles College
- Los Angeles Trade Technical College
- Rio Hondo College

- Cañada College
- Chabot College
- College of San Mateo
- Contra Costa College
- Evergreen Valley College
- Laney College
- Skyline College
- San Jose City College
- Solano Community College