

California's Homeless Coordinating and Financing Council White Paper Addressing College Student Homelessness

Submitted on behalf of:

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Introduction

As the HCFC considers strategies for reducing the total number of individuals and families experiencing homelessness in the State as well as reducing the number who are unsheltered, the above organizations urge the HCFC to consider the needs of homeless college students.

In today's economy, a post-secondary credential is essential. Nationwide over the past decade, the economy has 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 (Carnevale, Jayasundera, & Gulish, 2016). The college completion gap between those at different incomes levels however is growing as completion rates for wealthier students far outpace those of low-income students. Of children born in the 1980s, the college completion rate of those in the lowest 40% of the income range remained low at 11.8 percent (nearly unchanged from 11.3 percent among those born in the 1970s), while the share of those born into the wealthiest 20% who completed a college degree jumped from 46 percent to 60 percent (Pfeffer, 2018).

Contributing to this disparity is the fact that California is having a crisis in homelessness among its college students. The State's public college and university systems are recognizing that growing housing insecurity among college students poses serious barriers to educational achievement. Access to higher education, whether a vocational certificate, associate degree, bachelor's degree or beyond, is critical to help low-income youth move out of poverty. For low-income students whose academic prospects are already precarious, the experience of homelessness is extremely destabilizing and makes college completion unlikely.

When these students are supported through successful completion of a degree or certificate program, the likelihood of future homelessness declines. Conversely, when these students are not able to continue along their educational trajectory, they are more likely to enter the ranks of the chronically homeless. In fact, one California community found that 50 percent of chronically homeless adults became homeless for the first time before the age of 24 (Applied Survey Research, 2017). Homeless students are at a key crossroads in their life path. By intervening and providing interventions targeted to the homeless student subpopulation these individuals can be supported to move towards self-sufficiency, economic independence and life satisfaction and

avoid alternative outcomes that are not only detrimental to the individual but costly to society as a whole.

Homelessness Among College Students

The significant number of college students facing homelessness and housing insecurity in California has been well-documented. Community colleges have the highest rates of homelessness and housing insecurity across California's three public systems of post-secondary education, with a full 19% of community colleges students experiencing homelessness according to a 2019 study. Rates of basic needs insecurity are higher for marginalized students, including African Americans, students identifying as LGBTQ, and students considered independent from their parents or guardians for financial aid purposes. Students who have served in the military, former foster youth, and formerly incarcerated students are all at greater risk of basic needs insecurity. (Goldrick Rab et. al, 2019).

At the California State Universities, the problem is also severe. In a study of the California State University (CSU) system, 10.9% of students experienced homelessness in a 12-month period. Certain subgroups of students were markedly more likely to experience homelessness than other students. Students who were former foster youth were more than twice as likely (24.9%) to experience homelessness than other students and first generation, African-American students experienced homelessness at much higher rates (18%) than any other racial or ethnic group who were also the first in their generation to attend college (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2018). At University of California (UC) campuses five percent of students report experiencing homelessness while in college (UCOP, 2017).

National research has delved into the circumstances that these students face. Nationwide, homelessness affects 12% of community college students and 9% of university students over a twelve-month period. This included 7% of community college students and 6% of university students who did not know where they were going to sleep for even one night. Four percent of community college students and 3% of university students said that they slept in an abandoned building, car, or other place not meant for housing. Very few students at either community colleges or universities reported staying in a shelter (Goldrick-Rab, Richardson, Schneider, Hernandez, & Cady, 2018). Research has shown that stigmatization of homelessness may cause students to hide their unstable housing status, which could partially explain the extremely low rates of shelter access (Gupton, 2017; Tierney & Hallett, 2012).

According to a national study by Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, 4.2 million youth and young adults experienced homelessness on their own during a 12-month period. Chapin Hall's study found that 29% of young adults who experienced homelessness were enrolled in college or another educational program at the time that they experienced homelessness (Morton, Dworsky, & Samuels, 2017).

Homeless college students do not necessarily fit the traditional picture of a young college student fresh out of high school. Growing age diversity in higher education shows an increase in students who return to college at later ages (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2018) with hopes to stabilize their financial futures. Research on students experiencing

homelessness and housing insecurity further supports the notion that traditional college students who start college at 18-years-old with parental support no longer captures the majority of students' experiences in college (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2013; Deil-Amen, 2011; Goldrick-Rab, 2016). National research has found that rates of student homelessness across age groups remains fairly consistent with students over age 26 as likely as younger students to be experiencing homelessness (Goldrick-Rab, Richardson, Schneider, Hernandez, & Cady, 2018). A study of community colleges in California found that homelessness was most prevalent among those between 26 and 30 years old and least prevalent among the 18-20 age group (Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca, & Looker, 2019).

Homelessness and College Completion

Although there are policies and practices in higher education designed to help retain low income students most at risk of stopping out of higher education, there are very few safeguards and retention supports specifically for students who are unable to meet basic needs. Research suggests that students who experience homelessness and food insecurity struggle to meet a variety of competing needs, including management of personal and financial responsibilities and navigating college environments (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2018; Goldrick-Rab et al., 2015; Goldrick-Rab et al., 2017; Gupton, 2017).

The myriad of problems associated with a lack of basic needs undoubtedly impedes academic success. Students experiencing housing and food insecurities have higher levels of stress (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2018; Eisenberg, Goldrick-Rab, Lipson, & Broton, 2016). Students are often in the precarious position of having to sacrifice their well-being in the pursuit of their education (Broton & Goldrick-Rab 2016; Cady, 2016; Crutchfield & Maguire, 2018; Freudenberg et al., 2013). Students are regularly put in the position of having to choose between purchasing books or food or making car payments instead of rent because they know that their car can function as shelter in a crisis. Housing insecurity and homelessness show a strong, statistically significant relationship with college completion rates, persistence, and credit attainment (Broton, 2017). Further, state and federal programs intended to support low income individuals and families, like Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and housing support programs, often fail to help struggling students because of restrictive eligibility requirements specifically for those in higher education (Crutchfield & Maguire, 2018). At California's community colleges, just 22% of food insecure students receive SNAP. Likewise, only 8% of students who experience homelessness receive housing assistance (Goldrick-Rab, et. al, 2019).

Despite this reality, California has no targeted intervention to address student homelessness. While some individual campuses have undertaken new programs, these have tended to offer only very short-term emergency housing options rather than long term solutions. With the passage of Assembly Bill 801 in 2016, community colleges and CSUs are required, and UCs are requested to designate at least one staff member as the college homeless liaison on each campus to support this student community with financial aid and referrals to on and off-campus resources. However, many college homeless liaisons have multiple job titles and 64% of CCC staff said that they spend 5 hours or less on their homeless liaison duties each week. This same study found that 82% of college-level staff designated as homeless youth liaisons indicated that housing is the

need they are least able to address with their students (Hyatt, S., LePage, N., & Piazza, A., 2019).

Recommendations

1. **Invest in rapid rehousing programs, college-focused bridge housing, and other housing interventions that are designed to meet the needs of homeless students.** Existing models for addressing homelessness are typically not tailored to meet the needs of students and may not be best suited for this population. Several communities are exploring the development of a new model using Homeless Emergency Aid Program (HEAP) funding, known as college focused rapid rehousing. College-Focused Rapid Rehousing combines the three core elements of Rapid Rehousing (housing identification, rental and move-in assistance and case management services) with meaningful, sustained connections to post-secondary education to support retention and completion.

In addition to general case management, students are provided services tailored to meet their unique needs as students including access to tutoring and study skills development, support with balancing their academic schedule against other priorities, help with applying for and maintaining financial aid, and communication between the housing provider and on-campus support services. Providers of College-Focused Rapid Rehousing also have a unique relationship with their local college(s) in that a staff member is located on campus in order to identify students experiencing homelessness and refer them to the program.

This model has been effective at supporting both housing stability and continued college enrollment. Jovenes Inc., located in Los Angeles, has partnered with four local community colleges with great success. Of the students who have enrolled in the program to date, 33% have graduated, 45% are currently enrolled (total 78% retention rate), and 22% withdrew from college. The program is just two years old, and so graduation rates are expected to increase over time as more students have the opportunity to complete. The retention rate, however, already exceeds the overall student fall to spring retention rate at community colleges which was 70% in 2017/2018. This is especially notable given that the available data on the general student population measures retention over just one year whereas the data from the Jovenes program spans two full years.

As new funding is made available to address homelessness, it is crucial that mechanisms be put in place to ensure that college students have access to these resources. For example, making funding available directly to college campuses to pilot new programs or specifying requirements of funding recipients that ensure that students' needs are addressed are two possible approaches. With the recent roll-out of funding of HEAP to continuums of care, many communities chose to direct funds into existing priorities, which left no room for expansion into serving homeless students.

2. **Create incentives for homeless coordinated entry systems to co-locate on college campuses and create pathways for students into the homeless service system.** As noted above, homeless students often avoid identifying as homeless due to concerns about stigma and as such may be less likely to reach out to mainstream homeless service systems. In

addition, very few students report spending any time in homeless shelters, which are the primary access point in many communities for permanent housing options. Some coordinated entry systems have begun to co-locate on college campuses in order to facilitate screening and referral of homeless students for housing options that may be available in the community. Providing incentives for Continuums of Care to ensure that access points are made available that are accessible to students experiencing homelessness will help to ensure that these students have access to the range of resources that may be available to them.

3. **Include representatives from post-secondary education on the Homeless Coordinating and Financing Council (HCFC) advisory board.** The current HCFC board does not include representation from any of California's post-secondary segments. Inclusion of a representative on the board would help to ensure that the needs of college students are being met as new solutions to homelessness are developed.
4. **The State of California should fully fund homeless liaison positions at public colleges and universities.** The existing mandate that public colleges and universities designate a homeless liaison is currently unfunded. Typically, those who take on this role have multiple job titles and responsibilities. With additional funding, colleges could designate at least one employee whose primary responsibility is to support students experiencing homelessness at each campus. Doing so would give liaisons the capacity to build partnerships with nonprofit service providers and local county agencies; develop databases of local, state, and federal resources that students may qualify for; conduct student outreach; increase awareness of student homelessness in the campus community; and provide comprehensive case management.

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