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Student Aid Commission Workgroup Offers Recommendations for Ensuring Food Security for College Students

A third of postsecondary students in California experience food insecurity. In a new report, the California Student Aid Commission (CSAC) offers policymakers a variety of recommendations for making CalFresh benefits more accessible for college students.

A third of all postsecondary students in California experience food insecurity. Early in the pandemic, this number grew even more worrisome—about 7 in 10 students lost some, or all, of their income that was a source for securing basic needs, such as nutritional food.

In a new report, the California Student Aid Commission (CSAC) offers policymakers a variety of recommendations for making CalFresh benefits more accessible for postsecondary students.

CalFresh provides nutritional assistance to those students who lack adequate or consistent access to basic nutrition. The CalFresh program is open to students in higher education, but only a small fraction of eligible students receive assistance. It's estimated that between 400,000 and 750,000 are eligible for CalFresh; however, only 127,000 students receive benefits.

Seeking to understand and document the systemic barriers contributing to low student participation rates in the CalFresh program, CSAC convened a diverse statewide workgroup.

CSAC is the principal state agency responsible for administering financial aid programs for students attending public and private universities, colleges, and vocational schools in California.

The workgroup included practitioners, students, state administration staff, county workers, legislative staff, advocates, researchers, and content experts. WestEd staff lent support in facilitating the workgroup's sessions.

The workgroup gathered feedback from a variety of sectors, including state and county social service agencies, state and local higher education institutions, state, and county K–12 education agencies, students, and content experts to make sure the resulting recommendations reflected students' lived experience of trying to access these benefits.

Participants analyzed each step in a student's CalFresh journey and assessed the program's strengths, barriers, and challenges to generate sustainable and actionable policy recommendations to increase the effectiveness of the CalFresh eligibility process, from identification and enrollment of students to the administration of the benefits.

CSAC Executive Director Marlene Garcia said, "This report sets the stage for an overdue conversation on how we can best meet our college students' basic needs so they can succeed in higher education. This pandemic has only widened the gaps for students living in poverty. Students need solutions now. This report lays out both long-term goals and immediate fixes to help us break free of all the silos of information and create a more streamlined experience for students seeking support."

Download the full report, *Access to Proper Nutrition Equals College Success: Making CalFresh Work for Students*, to learn more. Link:

https://www.csac.ca.gov/sites/main/files/file-attachments/calfresh_workgroup_report.pdf?1646697827

To read more about what others are saying about the report, including U.S. Senator Alex Padilla, visit: https://www.csac.ca.gov/sites/main/files/file-attachments/what_others_are_saying_about_access_to_proper_nutrition_equals_college_success.pdf?1646697935

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The California Student Aid Commission administers the state's \$4 billion portfolio of student financial aid programs and services, including the Cal Grant, the Middle Class Scholarship, and the California Dream Act Application. The Commission serves as a resource for policymakers and the public on college affordability and financing issues, and advocates for policy changes to eliminate cost as a barrier to any qualified California student pursuing a higher education. Visit our website at <https://www.csac.ca.gov/> or follow us on Social Media by clicking on our Link Tree, <https://linktr.ee/castudentaid>.

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