

# SECURING BASIC NEEDS FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS

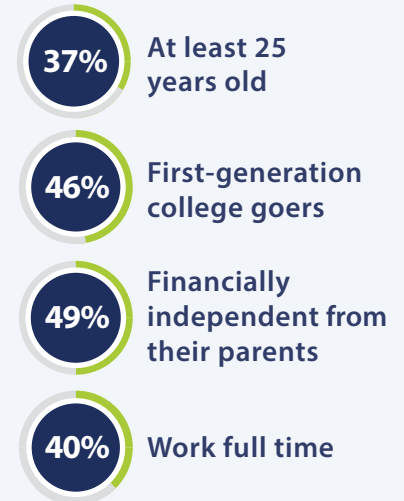


Today, attaining a college degree or skills credential is as important as ever to expand career opportunities, secure higher lifetime incomes, and lay the pathway to economic mobility. Yet **less than 40% of all college students — and only 1 in 3 students at two-year institutions — complete their degrees.** The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated glaring inequities in our higher education system: Enrollment at community colleges, which serve large shares of low-income and Black and Hispanic students, dropped by almost 20% between 2019 and 2020.

Many factors impede a student's ability to enroll and graduate, but the biggest hurdles are **financial stress and affordability.** The demographics of college students are changing — many have young children or aging parents to care for, are working to support themselves and their families, and/or the first in their families to go to college. Each year, millions of students face unique stressors as they juggle responsibilities at home and at school, struggling to pay for their education and afford basic needs such as food, childcare, housing, and healthcare.

**In Fall 2020, almost 40% of students at two-year institutions faced food insecurity, and 48% faced housing insecurity.**

## Today's College Students



Source: [Lumina Foundation](#)

To ensure college students from all backgrounds and circumstances can overcome barriers and have an opportunity to succeed, **we must facilitate streamlined access to programs** that can alleviate the financial burden of pursuing a degree. Currently, millions of eligible students are missing out on vital assistance.

### Federal Application for Student Aid (FAFSA)<sup>®</sup>

Each year, nearly \$4 billion in Pell Grants is left on the table by high school students who don't complete the FAFSA<sup>®</sup>.

### Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

Approximately 2 million students are eligible for food assistance through SNAP but are not enrolled.

### Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP)

Out of 6 million total Pell Grant recipients, less than 385,000 have enrolled in the program\*, which provides money for internet services. \*as of July 1, 2022

## Building a Path Forward

**Targeted, scalable solutions** are needed to connect college students to financial aid and assistance programs providing access to food, healthcare, and broadband services. Currently, many colleges provide necessary but temporary or one-time solutions in the form of campus food pantries, meal swipe donation programs, and emergency aid. But addressing what is, at its root, a systems-level problem requires systems-level solutions.

**Benefits Data Trust** is focusing on **four strategies** that increase student access to public benefits, and in turn, improve educational outcomes.



**Helping colleges identify students who are eligible for benefit programs**



**Conducting data-driven outreach campaigns to benefits-eligible students**



**Providing benefit application assistance that meets students where they are**



**Informing policy design and implementation to ensure streamlined and equitable access to assistance**

## BDT's Solutions-Oriented Approach

With nearly 20 years of expertise in improving access to benefits, BDT also creates solutions that help students better afford college and meet their basic needs so they can focus on academic success and achieving their degree



### Helping colleges identify students who are eligible for benefit programs

Many colleges are uncertain whether their students are eligible for SNAP, Medicaid, and other government programs. What they may not realize is they already have the data they need to identify those students.

#### OUR WORK IN ACTION:

BDT is developing a toolkit to help colleges leverage verified data (including financial aid and basic needs risk indicators) to identify incoming or enrolled students who are eligible for benefits.

### Providing direct application assistance that meets students where they are

Benefit application processes can be cumbersome and confusing, deterring students from applying. BDT offers dignified and equitable access to assistance, helping individuals submit applications over the phone and providing personalized assistance via text message.

#### OUR WORK IN ACTION:

BDT has developed Wyatt®, a text message-based chatbot, that provides reminders and AI-driven personalized assistance with completing the FAFSA®. Since 2019, Wyatt has helped **more than 30,000 students** secure **~\$39 million in federal grant aid**.

BDT is partnering with community colleges in Maryland and Pennsylvania to provide students with one-on-one phone assistance to determine eligibility and submit applications for multiple benefit programs.

### Conducting data-driven outreach campaigns to benefits-eligible students

Providing data-driven outreach to students informing them of their benefit eligibility and offering direct application assistance can help advance enrollment at scale.

#### OUR WORK IN ACTION:

We're helping higher education institutions in Maryland and Pennsylvania conduct text campaigns to inform students about benefits they can apply for.

### Informing policy design and implementation to ensure streamlined and equitable access to assistance

By helping governments test and adopt practical policy and practice solutions that bring more equity and efficiency to benefits systems, we can advance equity in higher education and give students more opportunities to thrive.

#### OUR WORK IN ACTION:

BDT advised Michigan on streamlining SNAP for college students, **allowing those in career and technical education programs to more easily meet eligibility requirements**.

BDT informed the U.S. Department of Education on guidance around **how institutions can apply Higher Education Emergency Relief Funding** delivered in the American Rescue Act **toward student basic needs initiatives**.

*Benefits Data Trust (BDT) improves health and financial security by harnessing the power of data, technology, and policy to provide dignified and equitable access to assistance. Together with a national network of government agencies and partners, we efficiently connect people today to programs that pay for food, healthcare, and more while helping to modernize benefits access for tomorrow. A nonprofit since 2005, BDT has secured more than \$9 billion in benefits for households across the country, helping to reduce hunger and poverty and build pathways to economic mobility. Learn more at [bdtrust.org](https://bdtrust.org).*

 To learn more about BDT's higher education initiatives, contact Neeta Sonalkar at [nsonalkar@bdtrust.org](mailto:nsonalkar@bdtrust.org).