

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The University of Hawai'i (UH) System has recognized the critical importance of addressing basic needs insecurity among its students. National data from The Hope Center for College, Community and Justice's #RealCollege survey highlights alarming levels of basic needs insecurity across the U.S., with 39% of students experiencing food insecurity, 46% facing housing insecurity, and 17% experiencing homelessness. Similarly, within the UH System, survey results indicate that 39% of respondents were food insecure in the past 30 days, 44% were housing insecure in the past year, and 14% experienced homelessness in the past year.

While high levels of basic needs insecurity were identified, only a small number of students reached out for support, indicating gaps in awareness and utilization of available resources among students. For instance, 45% of students were unaware of emergency aid, 25% never heard of assistance for SNAP applications, and 45% did not know about resources for affordable housing, and 53% were unaware of emergency housing options. All factors are critical aspects of student success in ensuring that their basic needs, including but not limited to food, housing, healthcare, and financial security, are adequately met. Recognizing this imperative, the University of Hawai'i has developed a comprehensive strategic plan aimed at addressing the basic needs of our diverse student body.

National best practices and UH institutional priorities for student basic needs planning were integrated and highlighted in the inaugural UH Student Basic Needs Master Plan (SBNMP). As the SBNMP is updated every three years, the UH System recognizes and accepts the plan as a key part of institutional policy to better continue practices. In addition, the UH System SBNMP includes crafted best practices from each campus, as teams work to tailor a plan that works for their individual campuses. The UH Basic Needs Committee management team is authoring a basic needs best practices survey to help university staff merge existing student needs data with best practices to clarify basic needs priorities and programming most effectively executed at the UH system level. This iterative process-evaluation of student basic needs insecurity across the UH System, defining programming priorities based on institutional best practices, and reconciling priorities with institutional capacity and resource constraints- will be repeated every three years to re-assess basic needs priorities as new data becomes available and institutional resource circumstances change.

To ensure that UH students' basic needs are met, an on-going committee has been established with access to appropriate resources such as staffing, education, and a clearinghouse of resources. For UH to successfully and effectively address our

students' needs, a system-level and campus-level commitment has been established through the creation of the UH System Student Basic Needs Committee (UHSBNC) and a Student Basic Needs Committee at all 10 of the UH campuses. The UHSBNC realize systematic infrastructure, partnerships and extramural funding are important components of the continuance of basic needs support across the UH System and have committed to pursuing and securing these avenues.

KEY RISK FACTORS & ROOT CAUSES OF STUDENT BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY

.....

The UH System serves and supports ten main campuses across the State of Hawai'i, including universities, community colleges and education centers on six islands. Each campus serves the unique needs of its island community, students, 'ohana (family), and workforce. The University of Hawai'i System serves a diverse student body, including many low-income, first-generation, and underrepresented students. Many UH students face food insecurity, housing instability, and other basic needs challenges that impede their academic performance and overall well-being. Hawai'i's high cost of living often influences student and family decisions about college attendance, impacting their enrollment status, retention and progress toward completion.

ALICE: Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed households - are households that earn more than the Federal Poverty Level, but cannot afford the basic living expenses in their county. According to the United Way ALICE report update in 2024, 44% of households in Hawai'i (N = 215,152) are below the ALICE threshold and 11% of those households are living in poverty ([United Way, 2024](#)).

In poverty and ALICE households, there are tough choices to be made, such as deciding whether or not to pay rent or pay for quality child care - choices with long-term impacts not only for students and their families, but also for the entire community as a whole ([United Way, 2024](#)). Understanding and addressing these student basic needs at the campus- and system-level is critical to improving student retention, graduation rates, and long-term success.

In 2023, the UH Economic Research Organization (UHERO) conducted a study to examine the return on investment and value of a degree from the University of Hawai'i. UHERO found that a college education from UH offers a considerable investment return in lifetime earnings ([UHERO, 2023](#)):

- \$2.7 million for AS and AAS degree holders, 22% higher earnings than for those who left a program without a degree;
- \$2.8 million for Bachelor's degree holders, 27% higher earnings than for those who exited a program without a degree; and
- Certificate bearers earn 33% more wages than those of similar demographics who withdraw from a program without completion.

Additionally, according to the U.S. Census, 35.4% (N = 362,704) of adults in Hawai'i who are 25 years or older have attained a Bachelor's degree or higher, 26.8% (N = 273,910) earned just a high school degree or equivalent and 19.6% (N = 200,539) attended some college without a degree completion (U.S. Census Bureau, 2024). This means that 46.6% of adults 25 years and older in Hawai'i will earn significantly less money over their lifetime than college students who completed a program in higher education. While enrollment across the UH System has stabilized and the in-state tuition has decreased by 3-5% over the past ten years to increase college affordability for Hawai'i residents, initiatives aimed at supporting student basic needs will improve academic and lifetime outcomes for the people of Hawai'i.

THE PRINCIPLES OF STUDENT BASIC NEEDS MASTER PLANNING FOR THE UH SYSTEM

.....

The principles in this plan serve as pillars to provide the framework and support the foundation for the UH Student Basic Needs Master Planning process while providing opportunities for input from a diverse set of UH and community stakeholders. This process consists of leadership, culture of care, inclusivity, and sustainability.

LEADERSHIP

Leadership is the ability of an individual or group of individuals to influence and guide other members of an organization. The UH Student Basic Needs Committee's responsibilities include providing strategic direction, direct services, staffing, communications, staffing, direct services and other programming, for the UH System over the long term.

CULTURE OF CARE

The UH System Student Basic Needs Committee and the UH Student Basic Needs Master Planning process is committed to creating a safe, welcoming, caring and inclusive environment for all UH students to access while concurrently destigmatizing basic needs insecurity, preserving students dignity, and understanding the context of broader socio-economic conditions.

INCLUSIVITY

The UH System Student Basic Needs Committee membership and the SBNMP process has, and will continue to be a representative of all 10 UH campuses and is informed by a diverse set of UH community stakeholders, including undergraduate and graduate students.

SUSTAINABILITY

The UH System and UH Student Basic Needs Committee are committed to addressing the long-term basic needs insecurity in the student population over the long-term while committing to the pillars above.