



For College, Community, and Justice

HOPE4COLLEGE.COM

A FIRST LOOK AT IMPACTS OF THE COLLEGE HOUSING ASSISTANCE PROGRAM AT TACOMA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Sara Goldrick-Rab, Christine Baker-Smith, Kallie Clark, Sonja Dahl,
Stephanie Brescia, and Tiffani Williams

June 2021

INTRODUCTION

Affording living expenses presents a major barrier to degree completion for many community college students. Food, affordable housing, transportation, and childcare are central conditions for learning. Yet with stagnant incomes, rising tuition and living costs, and insufficient support from financial aid and the social safety net, approximately one in two community college students struggle to afford these basic needs.¹ Additionally, as many as one in five experience homelessness.²

The College Housing Assistance Program (CHAP), operated by the Tacoma Housing Authority (THA) and Tacoma Community College (TCC), is at the forefront of the nationwide fight to ameliorate homelessness among college students.³ CHAP is one of the country's first partnerships between a housing authority and a community college and offers a unique model. In contrast to other programs such as student-run shelters, rapid-rehousing, and college-owned affordable apartments, CHAP utilizes government-subsidized housing assistance to provide housing to homeless and near-homeless community college students.

This report offers the initial lessons learned from the first external evaluation of CHAP. Successful program implementation is crucial to providing benefits for students, and can be especially challenging in housing programs. We therefore focus on how students experienced the program, where they faced barriers, and where they found support. It is too early in the evaluation process to draw conclusions about the program's efficacy; these are short-term insights.

THE COLLEGE HOUSING ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

The CHAP began in 2014 as a pilot program offering housing vouchers to 25 homeless TCC students.⁴ Since then, it has expanded several times.⁵ Over the course of the evaluation period (academic years 2017–18 and 2018–19), the program was designed to support 150 students with vouchers funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) [Moving to Work program](#). The average monthly rental assistance was \$533; exact amounts depended on household size.⁶ Unlike traditional housing vouchers, which are income-based, all vouchers used in CHAP are worth 50% of the payment standard, an amount based on average rent of an apartment for each bedroom size.⁷ This means that students must have some income of their own to contribute towards rent. In this sense, CHAP cannot entirely fill the gap for

homeless community college students who have zero or very limited income. Vouchers were time-limited—students could retain the voucher for three years or until they graduated, whichever came first. For most of the evaluation period, TCC designated a staff person, whose title was “Resource Navigator,” with program outreach and case management responsibilities. Additional program information can be found in the [web appendices](#).

Both homeless and near-homeless students could apply for support from CHAP. During the evaluation period, all eligible homeless students were automatically admitted to the program and referred for a THA voucher. A lottery was used to determine admission of near-homeless applicants, since the program could not serve them all. Applicants denied admission could reapply during a later cycle; some did and were accepted.⁸ Correspondingly, the evaluation includes a descriptive study of homeless applicants and an impact study for near-homeless applicants, utilizing the lottery-based comparison group.⁹

A HOUSEHOLD EXPERIENCING ANY OF THE FOLLOWING:

1. Unable to meet basic housing expenses such as rent, mortgage, or utilities that will result in the loss of permanent housing;
2. Residing in a motel/hotel due to loss of permanent housing and lacks the resources to remain;
3. Has lost permanent housing and is living temporarily with a friend or family member and cannot be placed on the lease;
4. Eviction notices that will result in loss of permanent housing;
5. Pending unlawful detainer notices that will result in loss of permanent housing;
6. Recent history of serious housing instability;
7. Is a victim of domestic violence; or
8. Is facing discharge from a public institution (e.g., incarceration, hospital, etc.) without a housing discharge plan

= AT SERIOUS RISK OF HOMELESSNESS (NEAR-HOMELESS)

A HOUSEHOLD THAT IS:

1. In an emergency shelter or in a transitional housing facility; or
2. A client of a case-management program serving the homeless

= HOMELESS



“It’s hard when you’re homeless or when money is a real issue.... It’s very hard to study and pay attention and to function when...I don’t have a place.

– CHAP participant



Knowing you’re going to have a roof over your head is a big stress reliever... it’s important because it helps students be successful.”

– CHAP participant

EVALUATION DESIGN

The evaluation has three components:

1. An implementation study examining how the program operated and how students navigated the program. Includes interviews and survey data.¹⁰
2. A descriptive study tracking homeless students’ outcomes over time. Includes administrative and survey data.
3. An impact study comparing outcomes between near-homeless students admitted to the program and not admitted to the program via random lottery. Includes administrative and survey data.

For more information on evaluation methodology, see [web appendices](#).

CHAP APPLICANTS

TCC students face many challenges on their path to a credential. Many have children, work in order to make ends meet, and/or are the first in their family to attend college. Like community college students throughout the country, most take more than three years to graduate due to numerous barriers.¹¹ Living in Tacoma introduces an added, but not unique, challenge: an increasingly expensive and highly competitive rental market.

During the evaluation period, 64% of TCC students were women, at least one-quarter were people of color, and their average age was 27. Compared to the overall TCC population, students who applied to CHAP were disproportionately female and Black (see data in [Appendix E](#)). They also were older, more likely to hold GEDs than high school diplomas, had much lower Expected Family Contributions (EFC), and had lower GPAs. These differences between program applicants and TCC’s general population reflect disparities in the risk of housing insecurity. If the evaluation findings are generalizable, they apply to community college

students who are most at risk of housing insecurity. On their initial application to the program, students indicated a variety of immediate circumstances that led to their becoming homeless or near-homeless, including a loss of income, medical issue, family crisis, domestic violence, being new to Tacoma, or being evicted. Many experienced food insecurity, and a large share of the near-homeless students are parents.

PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

To obtain housing from CHAP, students need to navigate the program’s many stages, which include completing two applications, being accepted, searching for housing, and ultimately securing housing that they will partially pay for with a voucher. This lengthy process, detailed in Figure 1, challenged many homeless and near-homeless applicants.

FIGURE 1 | NAVIGATING CHAP: THE STUDENT JOURNEY

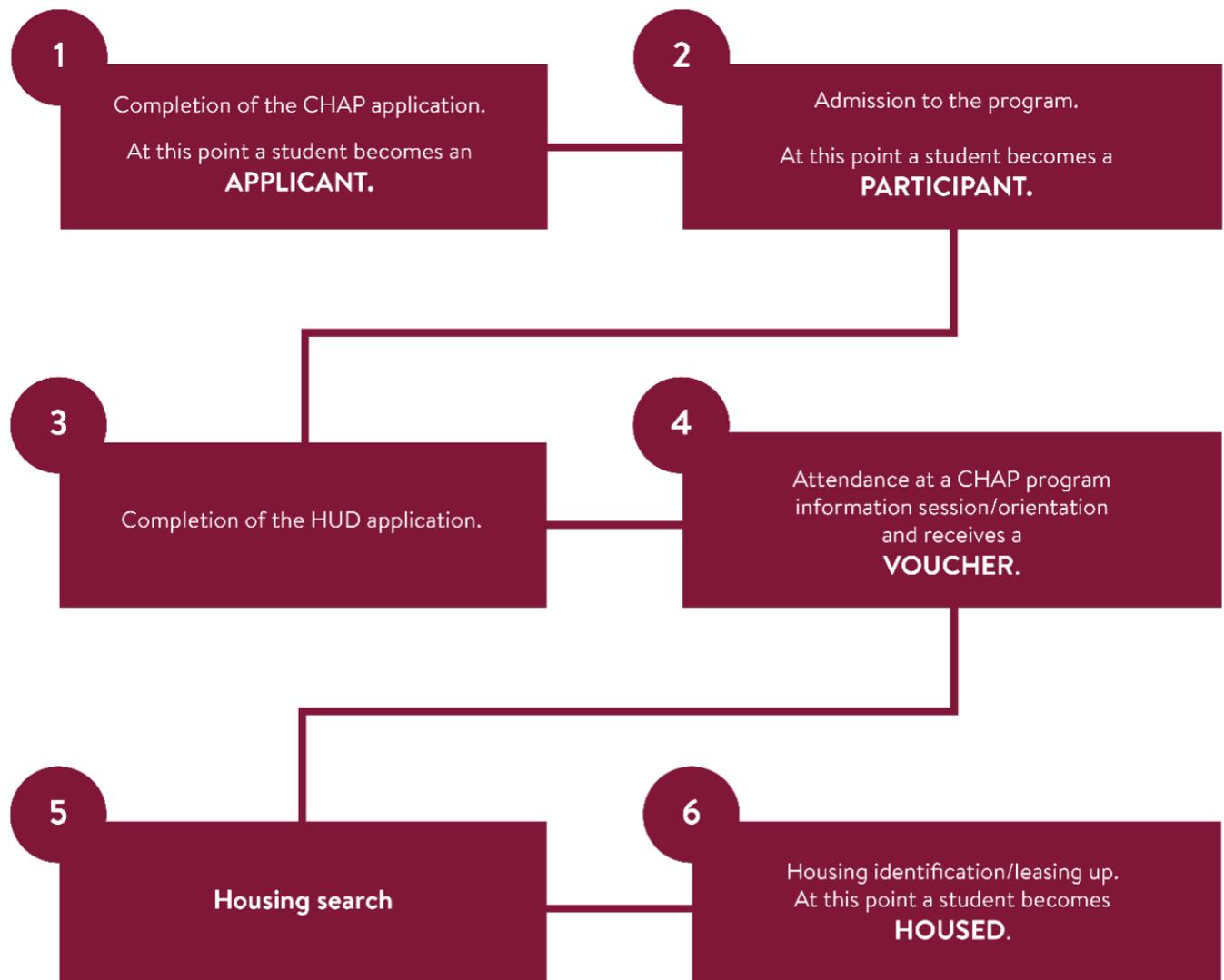
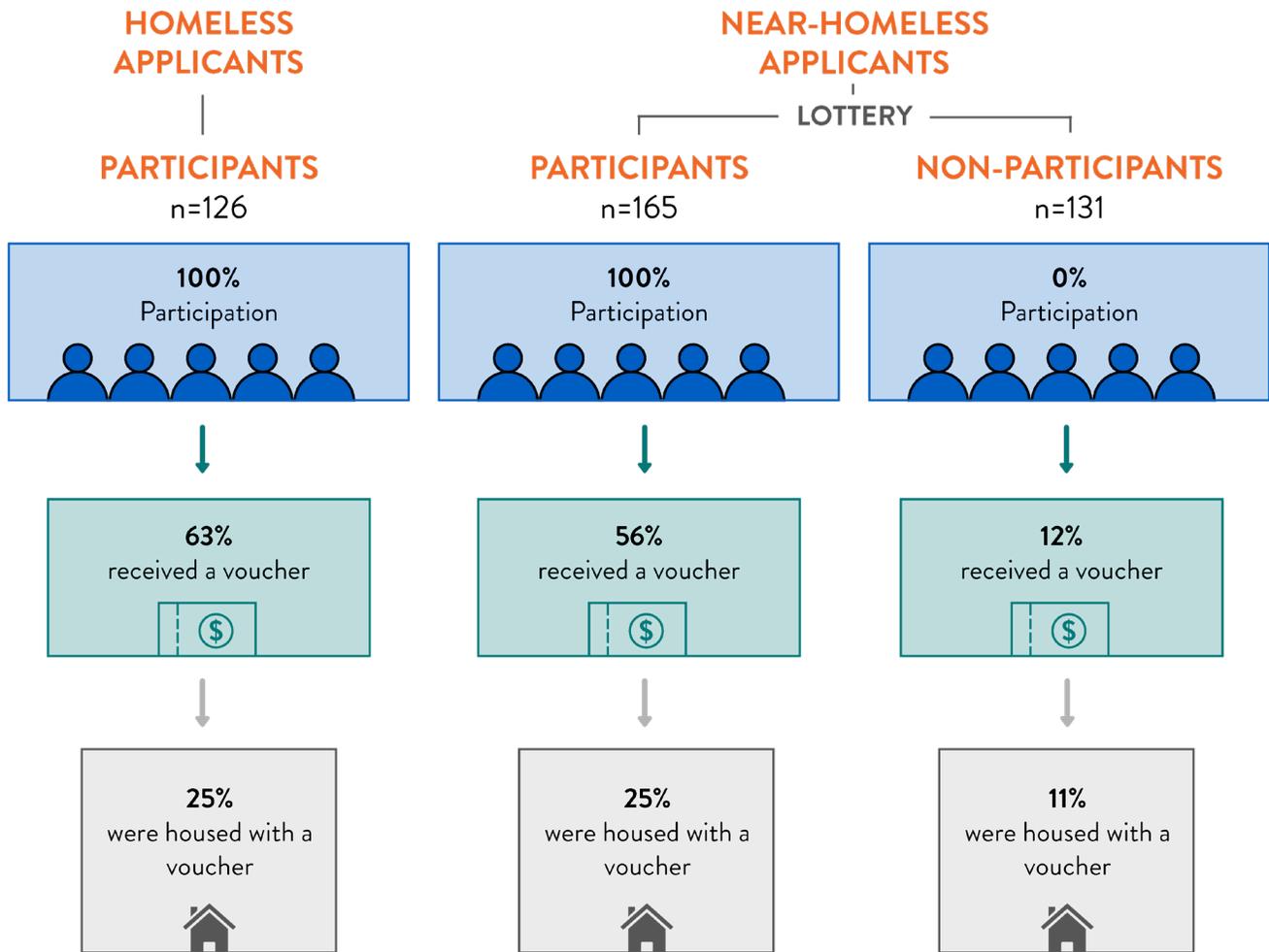


Figure 2 shows that most applicants admitted to the program did not secure housing. Approximately two-thirds of homeless students, and slightly over half of near-homeless students admitted to the program, received a housing voucher. But only one in four homeless and near-homeless participants used that voucher to become housed.¹²

FIGURE 2 | STAGES OF NAVIGATING CHAP



SOURCE | Administrative data (THA)

APPLICATION BARRIERS

In order to understand why so few students were housed, it is necessary to examine specific steps of the program’s process. Complex application and reporting requirements have been shown to hinder access to a wide variety of public programs.¹³ One factor in the drop-off between admission (“participation” in Figure 2) and receipt of a voucher is the HUD application, which requires students provide significantly more documentation than the initial CHAP application. The Resource Navigator at TCC was often able to assist students in completing the HUD application. However, our survey data suggest that some students still needed more help.¹⁴ This was particularly true of homeless students who may no longer have access to official documents required for the HUD application.

Simply obtaining the necessary documentation was a challenge for more than one in ten students.¹⁵ On top of producing paperwork, our interviews with CHAP participants revealed that finding time for the extensive HUD application was difficult as they also were juggling the challenges of their existing housing situations and their responsibilities as students, workers, and caregivers. For example, at the time of her interview, one student worked full-time, attended TCC part-time, and cared for her child and two nieces, who all lived with her. Under these circumstances, it was difficult for her to find the time and energy to complete the application and pull together documents for all three children. The Resource Navigator at TCC also reported that students who had moved frequently or had left home abruptly to escape domestic violence faced particular challenges.



“I feel like the process for initially applying to actually get in it was long, especially when, you know, your risk is homeless with kids.

– CHAP participant

HOUSING SEARCHES AND BARRIERS TO SECURING HOUSING

After obtaining a voucher, multiple steps in the process remain: participants search for housing, identify a place that would accept the voucher, finalize paperwork between the landlord and THA, pay the security deposit, and at long last move into their new home. These steps included some of the toughest obstacles that prevented students from fully taking advantage of the program. Based on interviews with program staff and students, the main challenges were:

1. Location and vacancy: Identifying units in a tight housing market that were within reasonable distance from TCC and/or students’ workplaces proved to be quite difficult. In many cases, students also had to factor in yet another location, such as a childcare provider or their children’s schools.

2. Affordability:

- A student must have the ability to pay rent to make use of the voucher. Not all students, particularly those applying for the program, have the ability to pay rent in the first place; the program best serves students that can pay *some* rent.
- Landlords often required that their tenants' incomes were at least three times the portion of the rent that they were responsible for. Many CHAP students did not meet this threshold.
- The value of the CHAP voucher was often not enough to meet students' needs in an area with low vacancy and steep housing prices—prices that continue to increase.¹⁶ While the voucher was never intended to cover the full rent, it was meant to make housing more affordable.
- Paying security deposits and other moving costs presented an additional, albeit one-time, hurdle.

3. Discrimination: Many landlords would not rent to CHAP students. In addition to subjecting them to negative stereotypes as voucher recipients (which is illegal in Tacoma), landlords judged them for being students, assuming they were irresponsible or otherwise risky tenants.¹⁷

4. Paperwork: Once participants identified potential rental units, they struggled with still more paperwork, including apartment applications and agreements between the landlord and THA.

Luz (pseudonym), a near-homeless student, was living with her two children at her brother's house when she found out about CHAP. She submitted her CHAP application at the end of October, knowing that she had to be out of her brother's house by November 1. After being admitted to the program, Luz thought that she would have the voucher soon. She moved her family to her mother's house outside of Tacoma, which was her last possible housing option and meant a longer commute to work, school, and childcare. She planned to stay just two weeks, but after filling out the HUD application, receiving a voucher at an orientation session, searching for housing, and moving her family into her new apartment, it was December 29. A few days later, the landlord had still not filled out the final THA paperwork, so Luz had to pay full market rent for January, which was not sustainable in her long-term budget. Luz again asked her landlord to complete the paperwork. A couple more weeks passed without a response, so Luz went to the landlord's office and gave them a blank copy to fill out. The landlord completed the paperwork this time, and Luz faxed it to THA. But there were still some forms missing. At the time of her interview, near the end of January, Luz was still trying to resolve the issue. A search of THA's administrative records revealed that she was eventually able to use her voucher, but without her extraordinary efforts, she might never have been able to do so.

These difficulties are not unique to CHAP. Other studies on HUD voucher programs document similar barriers to securing housing, including landlord discrimination against voucher-holders, scarce and expensive housing markets, financial (e.g., security deposits) and logistical (e.g., transportation to prospective apartments) costs, demanding deadlines, and confusion about housing authority rules and paperwork.¹⁸

STAFFING

Sufficient staff resources are critical for effective program implementation. With limited resources, TCC and THA both contributed staff to the project, including for program oversight and administration, case management and coaching, program navigation, and processing of applications, vouchers, and other paperwork. This work also includes disbursing rental assistance, data management, and relationship management with external organizations and departments of the college and housing authority that offer additional supports. On the college side, these roles require skills beyond those required for traditional student affairs positions, making it particularly difficult to find qualified staff. For the housing authority, it is essential to have dedicated staff to support students and their unique needs (such as a project manager with a background in post-secondary education), which requires additional resources. Students' need for support from staff across multiple domains often complicates the search for housing and success in this process. These issues impact not only program effectiveness but also equity.



“I can’t get the people to call me back or email me back... I have the voucher, I have the money, I have everything, and I still cannot find [housing]... I have called and emailed probably 100 places.

–CHAP participant

EQUITY CONCERNS

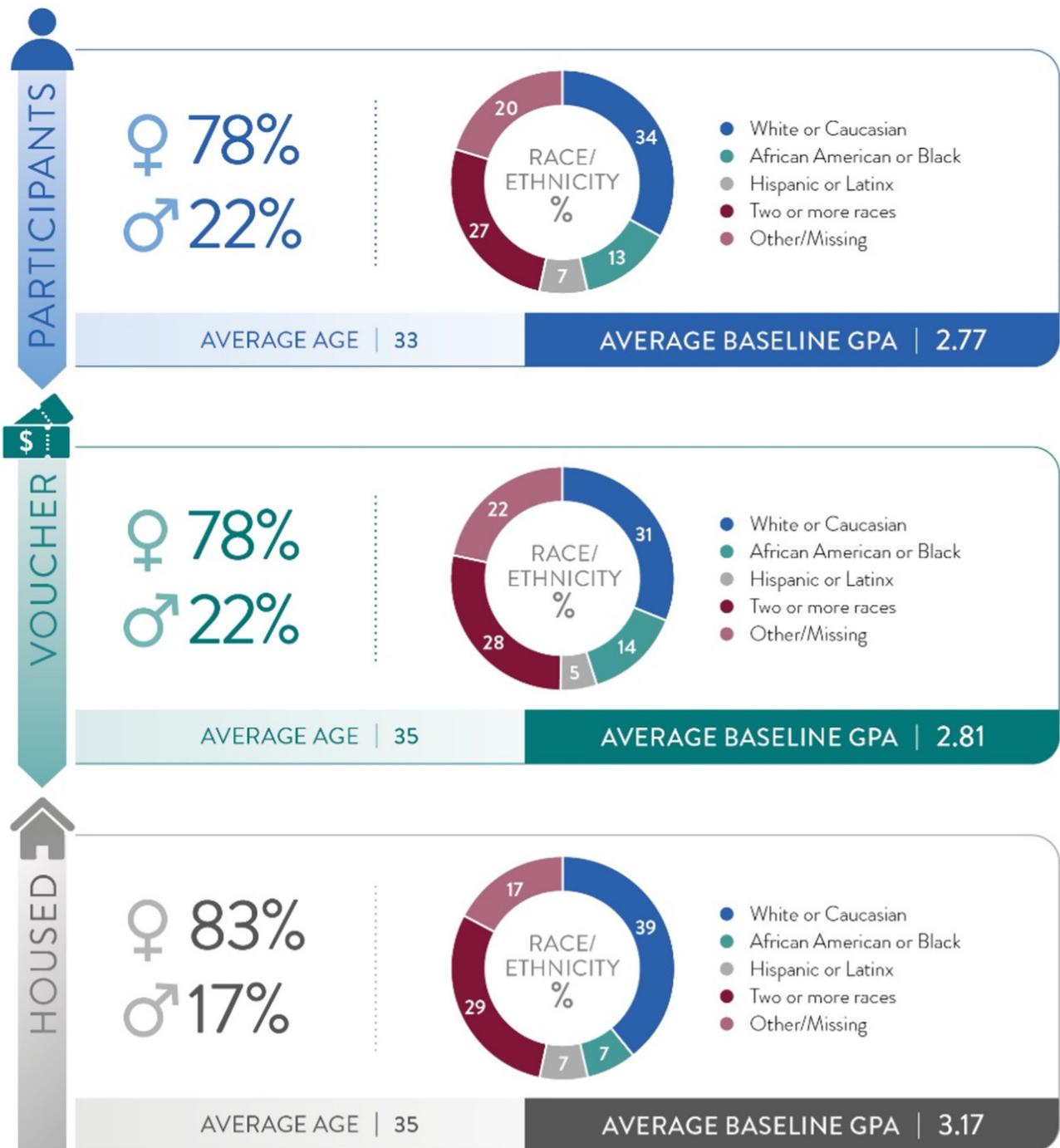
CHAP best serves students who already have some form of income; among these students relatively few participants were able to eventually secure housing, and there were also disparities in who among those participants was able to do so. This suggests that the barriers we outlined above were more prominent or posed more of an obstacle for some students than others.

Figure 3 illuminates these disparities by showing characteristics of near-homeless participants at each of the stages depicted in Figure 2. The main takeaways are:

1. Female and male students obtained vouchers at similar rates, but female students were slightly more likely to eventually secure housing.
2. Black students are underrepresented among those who secured housing, compared to both participants and voucher-holders.
3. Older students are more likely to complete the process than younger students.

In addition to these gender, race, and age disparities, students with stronger academic profiles were much more likely to obtain housing. Compared to the wider pool of all students admitted to the program, students who secured housing had significantly higher average GPAs at the time they were admitted to the program. Independent of programs like CHAP, having a higher GPA can signal not only academic proficiency but also an ability to navigate bureaucracies—meaning they know how to register and drop classes, who and how to ask for help, etc.¹⁹ This pattern in the data suggests that students with less experience navigating systems like higher education and safety net programs may be less likely to secure the benefits of housing programs without additional supports.

FIGURE 3 | CHAP PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS BY HOUSING STATUS



SOURCE | Administrative data (TCC & THA)

NOTES | Student background information on race/ethnicity and term GPA come from TCC administrative data at baseline. Gender and age are drawn from program application data. Missing data were imputed using multiple imputation with regression as recommended by What Works Clearinghouse (2020). “Housed” includes only participants who were housed with a voucher; it does not include those housed with property-based subsidies (n=5 for the full evaluation sample). The sample for this figure includes near-homeless students assigned to treatment (n=165). Categories may not total 100% due to rounding.



INITIAL PROGRAM OUTCOMES

Providing housing matters. In the space of two academic years, 91 homeless and near-homeless students were able to secure safe, stable housing through CHAP, with all the potential benefits for them and their families that such security can bring. The CHAP program was launched with the intent of improving academic attainment. In that spirit, we next look at the potential impact of CHAP on students' success in college in the two quarters after they applied to the program.²⁰

Stable housing may provide long-term benefits that we cannot yet observe but, thus far, the results are inconclusive. With only two quarters of data available for students in each application cycle, we can only explore short-term impacts. The relatively small number of students in the evaluation combined with the low percentage of students who were ultimately able to obtain housing also limits our ability to assess impacts.

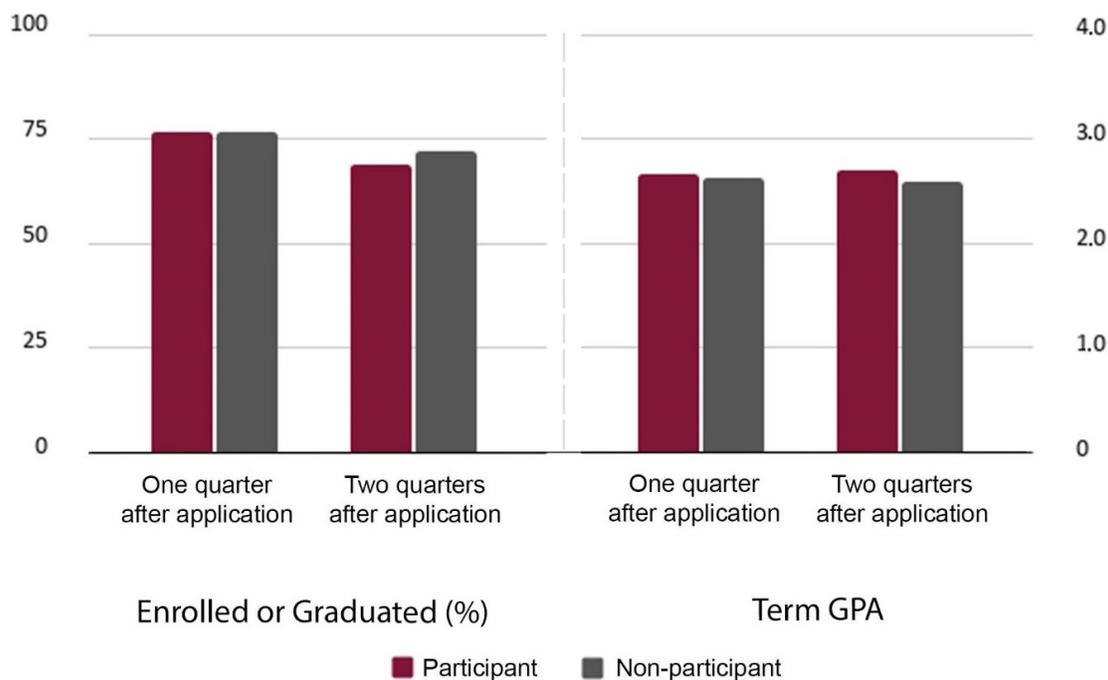


[The] voucher would absolutely 100% help. And you know, that would allow me to be not so stressed out about putting gas [in my car], being able to eat, and you know focusing on school.”

– CHAP participant

For near-homeless students, we compare CHAP participants (those admitted to the program via lottery) to non-participants (those not admitted via lottery) in order to understand the program impact, independent of other factors. The use of a lottery in determining program admission for near-homeless students ensured that, independent of the program, students faced similar odds of succeeding in college when they applied. Figure 4 examines the impact of being admitted to CHAP on: a) whether a student remained enrolled or had graduated at the end of the term, and b) if still enrolled, what, if any, change appears in the student’s term GPA. These outcomes are displayed at two points in time: one quarter and two quarters after application to the program.²¹ Though there are small differences between those who were admitted to CHAP and those who were not, with the data we have, we cannot be confident that these differences are significant.

FIGURE 4 | IMPACT OF CHAP ON ACADEMIC OUTCOMES FOR NEAR-HOMELESS PARTICIPANTS, ONE AND TWO QUARTERS AFTER APPLICATION

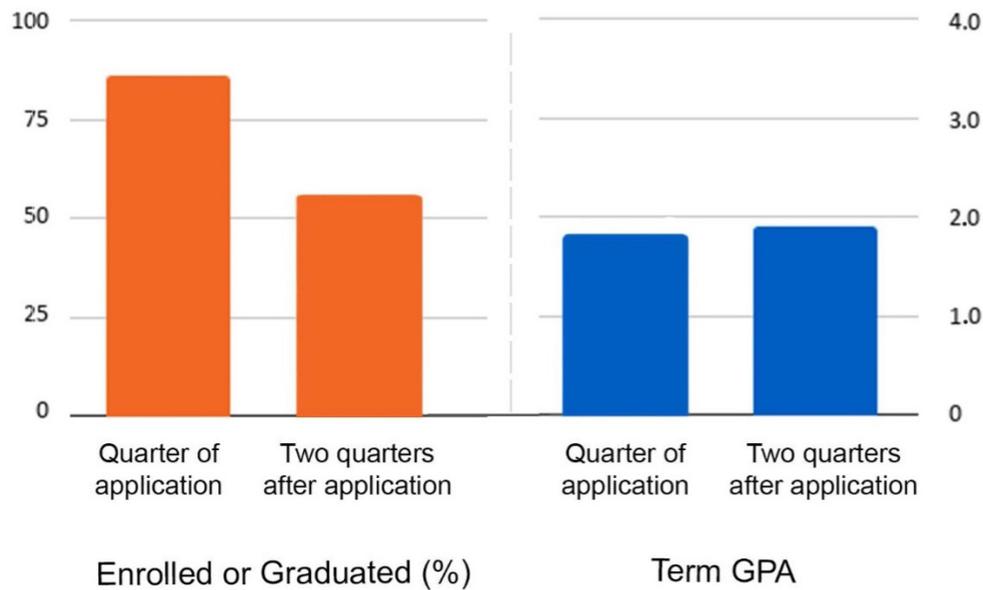


SOURCE | Administrative data (TCC)

NOTES | This figure reports on adjusted intent-to-treat (ITT) estimates. Term GPA impacts are derived from linear regression models. Enrollment impacts are derived from logistic regression models. Enrollment or graduation is reported as probability; term GPA is reported in GPA points. This model controls for cohort and variables not equivalent at baseline: gender, race, age, GPA at baseline, high school education, marital status, and Expected Family Contribution (EFC). See [web appendices](#) (Appendix F) for more information about variables excluded from analysis due to small cell size. Missing baseline data have been imputed using multiple imputation with regression as recommended by What Works Clearinghouse (2020); no outcomes were imputed. “Enrolled or Graduated” represents the percentage point difference between students in the treatment group and control group who were currently enrolled or who had completed a degree or certificate. Enrollment at TCC was a condition of admission to the program; however, since outcome data comes from enrollment records at the end of the quarter, not all students were enrolled at that time. Term GPA is based on enrolled students only. Quarter refers to academic quarters: fall, winter, and spring.

Keeping in mind that no comparison group exists for homeless CHAP students in this evaluation, we simply show the trajectory of students’ academic outcomes. Figure 5 shows that two terms after application, 56% of homeless students either had graduated from or remained enrolled at TCC. Among homeless students who were still enrolled, the average term GPA was only slightly higher than their average GPA when they applied to CHAP.

FIGURE 5 | ACADEMIC OUTCOMES FOR HOMELESS STUDENTS OVER TIME: QUARTER OF APPLICATION AND TWO QUARTERS AFTER APPLICATION



SOURCE | Administrative data (TCC)

NOTES | Term GPA is based on enrolled students only. “Enrolled or Graduated” represents the percentage of students who were currently enrolled or who had completed a degree or certificate two quarters after baseline. Enrollment at TCC was a condition of admission to the program; however, since data comes from enrollment records at the end of the quarter, not all students were enrolled at that time. This figure reports observed outcomes only (no imputation). Quarter refers to academic quarters: fall, winter, and spring.

THE EVOLUTION OF CHAP

Our evaluation tracks students who applied to CHAP between fall 2017 and spring 2019. Over that timespan and continuing today, the program has adapted considerably as it seeks to better meet students' needs. At TCC, case management for program participants and referrals to resources within the college and broader Tacoma community have expanded and become more systematized. In another notable addition, property-based subsidies were introduced in 2018 as an alternative means of providing housing. (In contrast to vouchers, which are assigned to individuals and thus classified as "person-based," property-based subsidies are assigned to specific housing units.) In an expensive and limited rental market, having apartments set aside for CHAP participants ensures that students do not need to compete for the few available market options they can afford with a voucher. THA has steadily increased the number of units with property-based subsidies, especially in partnership with the developer Koz. As of writing, there are a total of 289 subsidies allocated to the program—189 property-based subsidies, 75 person-based vouchers for general use, and 25 person-based vouchers set aside for future use with students returning from incarceration. Units and buildings for property-based subsidies vary with respect to rent, room sizes and numbers, and income eligibility requirements.

Many of the program's policies and procedures have changed as well. Eligibility criteria have shifted slightly and requirements for continued program participation have been relaxed, in acknowledgement of the many challenges CHAP participants face. This includes flexibility for students who may need to temporarily stop out or take fewer classes for a variety of reasons. (See [web appendices](#) for details.) After the last application period for students included in this evaluation, the program returned to using a waitlist rather than a lottery to determine who is admitted to the program. Homeless applicants continue to be prioritized over near-homeless applicants on the waitlist, and TCC provides case management support to students on the waitlist in addition to students in the CHAP program. The maximum time for students to continue to receive voucher assistance has also been increased, from three years to five, and students graduating with a college credential of any type (certificate, Associate's degree, or Bachelor's degree) can keep their assistance for up to a year after graduation.

Lastly, CHAP is no longer solely a partnership between TCC and THA, or even with developers and property management companies involved with property-based subsidies. CHAP now has a similar partnership with the University of Washington, Tacoma (UWT), with the notable difference that CHAP participants at UWT can only receive property-based subsidies, not vouchers. (CHAP students who transfer from TCC to UWT keep their housing assistance, however, including vouchers.) CHAP assistance is also available to certain high school students in Tacoma Public Schools, and the Washington State Department of Corrections is working on a program to refer citizens returning from incarceration who are studying at TCC but lack secure housing.

CONCLUSION

The Tacoma CHAP is a leading innovative attempt at addressing a difficult problem. The evidence clearly indicates that many community college students need help securing stable and affordable housing, and that the program can best support them by being as seamless and easy to navigate as possible.

Thus far, data indicate that students struggled to complete the detailed HUD application after being admitted to the program. It was difficult for them to find and move into housing that would meet their needs. And support from program staff in both of these areas was limited by capacity constraints. As a result, despite a strong need for stable, affordable housing, most students admitted to the program were not housed and there were inequities in who secured housing. Moreover, the voucher model makes it easiest for the program to serve participants that have at least some other form of income, which poses a challenge for students who do not. Given all these factors, the program's efficacy remains unclear at this point.

To continue improving CHAP and programs like it, we offer the following recommendations:

- 1. College housing programs should be adequately staffed and resourced.** Colleges and housing authorities both need consistent, qualified, and dedicated staff for this work. There are many responsibilities needed to effectively support students while also doing administrative tasks. Students need help navigating applications, meeting requirements, searching for housing, troubleshooting issues with landlords, and so on. Staff must also guide students through the transition from one institution/agency to the next to ensure continuity and clarity. A clear delineation of responsibilities between organizations should be established from the start, resources allocated accordingly, and accountability for performance on both sides clarified. Coordinating assistance is also important and a point person ought to be identified at each organization so that students are not lost in the gaps.
- 2. Consider additional assistance for housing searches.** Providing this type of support requires specific expertise. It may be helpful for higher education institutions and housing authorities to partner with local nonprofits who specialize in supporting voucher-holders. Landlord education, which CHAP has explored, could further reduce barriers. A philanthropically supported security deposit fund (which CHAP started in 2019) may be useful. Structuring voucher amounts to be accessible to students with zero or very limited non-voucher income might help as well.
- 3. Reduce administrative burden on students.** Wherever possible, aim for simple applications and transparent, streamlined processes, both in terms of establishing qualifications for support by the college and by the housing authority.

ON THE GROUND: REFLECTIONS FROM THA

As a new and innovative program, the College Housing Assistance Program (CHAP) has not been perfect. However, we have been responsive as the program has grown. In partnership with TCC, we have worked to address the barriers that we have learned about through evaluation and administrative data or have heard about anecdotally from program staff and participants. There are four particular areas where we have made program changes and where we continue to work to better serve students.

- **Housing Search:** To support students receiving tenant-based subsidies, we have partnered with the county to identify a third-party housing search and support resource. We expect this effort to improve the number of students housed by the program and bring about more equitable program outcomes.
- **Lease-Up Support:** In 2019, THA fundraised to develop a landlord mitigation fund for the newest property to partner with CHAP. This fund was used to negotiate with the property owner to reduce the screening criteria to ensure that students with no, or poor, rental/credit history would not be denied a lease. Over the past year, we have continued to fundraise in order to expand the landlord mitigation fund to the entire program.
- **Flexible Program Requirements:** Though not addressed in this report, we were initially concerned by the number of students who were being removed from the program early for not maintaining enrollment and academic progress requirements. In partnership with the college, we lowered the minimum credit requirement to allow part-time enrollment, made academic progress measures more flexible, and permitted students to take up to two quarters off, if needed.
- **Property-Based Subsidies:** Most significantly, THA has added “property-based” assistance to the CHAP program. This resource currently provides 189 apartments dedicated to CHAP students. THA owns some of these apartment complexes and has contracted with private developers to secure other units. THA then pays down the rents for those apartments so they reach a level affordable to program students. All these apartments are in walking distance of either the TCC or University of Washington–Tacoma campus. Crucially, these dedicated apartments eliminate the need to hunt and compete for housing on the private rental market, which allows CHAP students to avoid a major obstacle to securing housing in Tacoma’s extraordinarily tight rental market.

Since we serve students that have experienced homelessness, marginalization, or trauma, we want to ensure our processes and requirements respond to their needs and conform to their realities. Over time we have learned more about the areas in which students need greater support, and we continue to adapt in order to provide that support. We are grateful for the work The Hope Center has done to highlight and reaffirm where we direct those efforts.

ON THE GROUND: REFLECTIONS FROM TCC

Concerns about college affordability are widespread, and the biggest budget item while attending college is living expenses. Too often we see students' basic needs go unmet as they struggle to cover those costs by maintaining full-time employment while attending college. The College Housing Assistance Program (CHAP) offers a partial solution. While each student's situation is different, scholars have cited three main contributors to college student homelessness; lack of a living wage; lack of affordable housing; and conflicts with family/parents, including violence, neglect, and abuse. We understand stable housing does not address the myriad barriers our students face, such as lack of childcare, coordination of work and class schedules, and access to technology, but it is nevertheless an essential component.

The need for safe, affordable housing that is conducive to student retention and success is critically important to TCC students. The number of students seeking housing assistance through the CHAP program far exceeds the available housing supply, so the next phase of CHAP should continue to expand and explore housing options for homeless and near-homeless students.

Due to the lengthy application process, students that apply to the CHAP program are unable to immediately access safe housing. Emergency shelters that are designed to meet student needs could provide safety and stability until a student can secure permanent housing. The program should also consider creating temporary facilities that would provide computer labs, printers, kitchen areas, laundry machines, and restrooms.

College administrators should also continue to offer and expand food pantries, to provide counseling and mental health services, to facilitate access to emergency funding, and to ensure work study programs and on-campus employment are available for students. Lastly, campuses should provide information on the rights of homeless students as well as resources to help understand tenant rights and responsibilities in general. These additional services would support students' drive toward self-efficacy and agency.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We gratefully acknowledge the financial support provided by Arnold Ventures, the Kresge Foundation, and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for making this project possible. We also extend our sincere thanks and appreciation to our partners, Tacoma Housing Authority (THA) and Tacoma Community College (TCC), for administering the CHAP program and supporting CHAP students. We also thank REL Northwest, which is operated by Education Northwest and funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences, for their collaboration in an expansion of our exploration into students' reflections of the program.

Many Hope Center staff contributed to this report:

- Research and writing: Christine Baker-Smith, Stephanie Brescia, Kallie Clark, Sonja Dahl, Sara Goldrick-Rab, and Tiffani Williams.
- Communications: Stefanie Chae and Deirdre Childress Hopkins. We acknowledge the team at HudsonLake for their contributions to report design, and Cory Oldweiler for copyediting services.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Goldrick-Rab, S., Baker-Smith, C., Clark, K., Dahl, S., Brescia, S., & Williams, T. (2021). *A first look at impacts of the college housing assistance program at Tacoma Community College*. The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice.

FUNDER DISCLOSURE

The findings and conclusions contained within are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect positions or policies of our funders.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

¹ Goldrick-Rab, S. (2016). [*Paying the price: College costs, financial aid, and the betrayal of the American dream.*](#) University of Chicago Press.

² For research that documents the prevalence of housing insecurity and homelessness among college students, see: Broton, K. (2020). [*A review of estimates of housing insecurity and homelessness among students in U.S. higher education.*](#) *Journal of Social Distress and Homelessness*, 29(1), 25–38; Goldrick-Rab, S., Baker-Smith, C., Coca, V., Looker, L., Richardson, B., & Williams, T. (2020). [*#RealCollege 2020: Five years of evidence on campus basic needs insecurity.*](#) The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice; Crutchfield, R., & Maguire, J. (2018). [*California State University Office of the Chancellor study of student basic needs;*](#) Broton, K., & Goldrick-Rab, S. (2017). [*Going without: An exploration of food and housing insecurity among undergraduates.*](#) *Educational Researcher*, 47(2), 121–133.

For research that primarily examines challenges that homeless and housing insecure students face, see: Cabrera, V., Jaffe, H., & LePage, N. (2020). [*Student resilience in the face of challenges at California's Community Colleges.*](#) California Homeless Youth Project; Ambrose, V. K. (2016). [*It's like a mountain: The lived experience of homeless college students*](#) [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Tennessee Knoxville; Gupton, J. T. (2017). [*Campus of opportunity: A qualitative analysis of homeless students in community college.*](#) *Community College Review*, 45(3), 190–214; Vasquez, M. C., Vang, M., Garcia, F., & Harris, F., III. (2019). [*What do I eat? Where do I sleep? A concern for men of color in community college.*](#) *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 43(4), 295–306.

For research that illuminates associations between college homelessness and academic success, see: Broton, K. (2017). [*The evolution of poverty in higher education: Material hardship, academic success, and policy perspectives*](#) [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Wisconsin–Madison; Silva, M. R., Kleinert, W. L., Sheppard, A. V., Cantrell, K. A., Freeman-Coppadge, D. J., Tsoy, E., & Pearrow, M. (2017). [*The relationship between food security, housing stability, and school performance among college students in an urban university.*](#) *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory and Practice*, 19(3), 284–299; Crutchfield & Maguire, 2018; Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca, Looker, Richardson, & Williams, 2020.

³ Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation. (2018). [*2018 innovations in American government award top 25 programs.*](#) Harvard University, John F. Kennedy School of Government.

⁴ Tacoma Housing Authority. (2021). [*College housing assistance program: Project summary.*](#)

⁵ Today the program can support more than 250 students across several subsidy types, including both person-based (i.e., vouchers) and property-based approaches. Since property-based subsidies were just beginning to be rolled out in the 2018–19 academic year, we focus on housing vouchers in this report.

⁶ Voucher subsidy amounts shifted slightly over time according to market trends. For average monthly rental assistance as of May 2019, see: Thompson, A. (2019). [*College housing assistance program 2019 redesign.*](#) Tacoma Housing Authority. For context, a study THA commissioned in September 2018 listed the “low-end” price for an “affordable market” two-bedroom apartment as \$750, with a market rate of \$1,395. Similarly, the [*“RentCafe” website*](#) lists the average rent in Tacoma, Washington, in November 2018 as \$1,266.

⁷ The payment standard is calculated based on housing market research. THA uses this method of determining voucher amounts for vouchers outside of CHAP as well; see: Tacoma Housing Authority. (n.d.). [Housing Opportunity Program](#).

⁸ Students who were denied in one cycle and later admitted are classified as their original status (non-participant) for the purpose of analysis, per What Works Clearinghouse standards.

⁹ See [web appendices](#) for more information on evaluation methodology.

¹⁰ We do not summarize survey or interview data in this report. However, student quotes and anecdotes throughout the report are from the interviews we conducted.

¹¹ Three years, or “150% of normal time,” is the standard length of time to measure community college graduation rates. However, national data show that most community college students do not graduate in that time. See National Center for Education Statistics. (n.d.) [Table 326.20. Graduation rate from first institution attended within 150 percent of normal time for first-time, full-time degree/certificate-seeking students at 2-year postsecondary institutions, by race/ethnicity, sex, and control of institution: Selected cohort entry years, 2000 through 2014](#) [Data set].

¹² Some applicants who were not initially admitted to the program reapplied and were admitted. The vast majority of those re-applicants became housed.

¹³ Herd, P., & Moynihan, D. (2018). *Administrative burden: Policymaking by other means*. Russel Sage Foundation.

¹⁴ Among CHAP participants who completed both an initial and a follow-up survey, about one-third of homeless students and one-fifth of near-homeless students reported needing more help completing the HUD application. Since survey responders tended to be relatively advantaged, we suspect that these challenges were more widespread among the full group of students.

¹⁵ This data also comes from our surveys.

¹⁶ For a news account summarizing a variety of studies on rising rents in Tacoma, see: Martin, K., & Cockrell, D. (2018, January 31). [How big are the rent increases here? Big enough to put Tacoma at the top of one list](#). *The News Tribune*.

¹⁷ See here for the City of Tacoma’s protections for voucher-holders: City of Tacoma, Washington. (n.d.) [City of Tacoma’s Fair Housing Law](#).

¹⁸ Tremoulet, A., Dann, R. J., & Adkins, A. (2016). [Moving to location affordability? Housing choice vouchers and residential relocation in the Portland, Oregon, region.](#) *Housing Policy Debate*, 26(4–5), 692–713; Gubits, D., Khadduri, J., & Turnham, J. (2009). [Housing patterns of low-income families with children: Further analysis of data from the study of the effects of housing vouchers on welfare families.](#) Harvard University, Joint Center for Housing Studies; Orr, L., Feins, J. D., Jacob, R., Beecroft, E., Sanbonmatsu, L., Katz, L. F., Liebman, J. B., Kling, J. R. (2003). [Moving to opportunity interim impacts evaluation.](#) U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Policy Development & Research; Finkel, M., & Buron, L. [Study on Section 8 voucher success rates \(Volume I: Quantitative study of success rates in metropolitan areas\).](#) U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Policy Development & Research; Sard, B., & Gibson, S. (2015, December 11). [Understanding housing voucher utilization and success rates; Local applications for utilization and success rate challenges](#) [PowerPoint slides].

¹⁹ Gehringer, T. A., Folberg, A. M., & Ryan, C. S. (2021). [The relationships of belonging and task socialization to GPA and intentions to re-enroll as a function of race/ethnicity and first-generation college student status.](#) *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*.

²⁰ To learn what outcome measures we are tracking beyond GPA and enrollment/graduation, see [web appendices](#). There are also numerous potential benefits to housing students and their families that we do not measure; for example, satisfactory academic progress (SAP), more flexibility in students' budgets, ability to pay off debt, and well-being and academic success of students' children when their families move less frequently.

²¹ For more detailed methodological information about the analyses we performed here, see [web appendices](#).



This brief carries a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits re-use of Hope Center materials providing that re-use abides by the conditions below.

You are free to:

Share. Copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format

Under the following terms:

Attribution. You must give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made. You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use.

NonCommercial. You may not use the material for commercial purposes.

NoDerivatives. If you remix, transform, or build upon the material, you may not distribute the modified material.

For the full legal code of this Creative Commons license, please visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/legalcode>

