basic needs Oregon

BASIC NEEDS OREGON

Strengthening Student Success Through Campus-Based Support

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Acknowledgements

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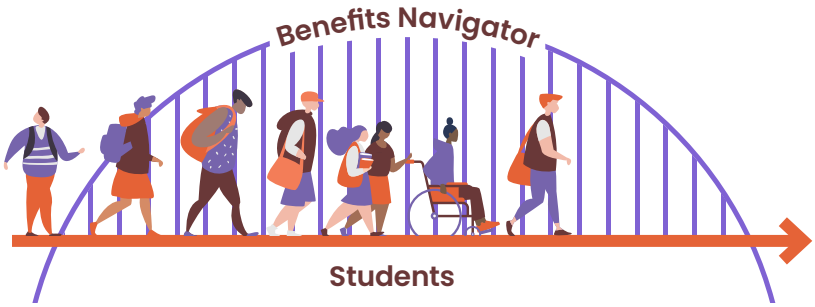
We also wish to express our appreciation for the hard work of the many college staff members, service providers, community-based organizations, and other partners who are helping Oregon students address their basic needs so they can succeed in higher education.

Executive Summary

Basic Needs Oregon embeds dedicated benefits navigators on every public community college and university campus in the state to support students in accessing critical resources including food, housing, health care, and financial support. The program was established in 2021 through Oregon House Bill 2835. This report documents the implementation and outcomes of Basic Needs Oregon during the 2023–2025 biennium, highlighting how navigators have supported thousands of students across the state, expanded institutional capacity, and worked to reduce stigma around seeking help.

Key findings

Between July 2023 and March 2025, Basic Needs Oregon served 30,865 students across the state's higher education institutions. This included 13,982 students from community colleges and 16,883 students from public universities. The number of students served by Basic Needs Oregon increased over time, reaching an all-time high in Q1 2025 at just over 6,000 students.



30,685 students
served from July 2023 to March 2025

Benefits navigators reported addressing a wide range of student needs, often addressing more than one need when meeting with a student:

- **48%** Food
- **20%** Transportation
- **16%** Housing
- **10%** Emergency financial assistance
- **8%** Health care
- **7%** Personal items
- **5%** Technology
- **2%** Child care

Source: Basic Needs Oregon statewide student metrics, July 2023–March 2025.

Recommendations

To ensure the long-term success and impact of Basic Needs Oregon, it is essential to build on the program's existing strengths while addressing areas for improvement. The following recommendations highlight key strategies to ensure program sustainability.

Ensure sustainable and flexible funding

Basic Needs Oregon needs ongoing, flexible funding beyond salaries. Institutions require resources for emergency aid, expanded services, and staff capacity. Long-term sustainability will also depend on coordinated state support for blending public, institutional, and philanthropic funds.

Institutionalize the statewide consortium

The consortium is a critical driver of program coherence, professional development, and shared learning. Continued investment will enable it to function as the statewide infrastructure for implementation. Institutions should embed consortium participation into their student support strategies.

Expand and formalize partnerships

Benefits navigators rely on partnerships to connect students with essential services, but building these relationships takes time and resources. Basic Needs Oregon should develop partnership toolkits and pursue statewide agreements with agencies like the Oregon Department of Human Services to improve access and coordination.

Implement new student feedback loops

Student feedback is essential to improve services. All campuses should implement the Basic Needs Oregon feedback toolkit and use input to guide program design. Elevating student voice ensures services remain responsive and student centered.

Strengthen data collection and infrastructure

Use of the new data collection tool will alleviate some of the inconsistencies and burdens in data reporting to measure impact. A centralized case management system would streamline the process, reduce administrative load, and support outcome monitoring.

Align with state equity and workforce goals

Basic Needs Oregon should be recognized as a core strategy for advancing college completion and workforce development. Embedding basic needs indicators into statewide metrics frameworks will reinforce the importance of meeting students' basic needs to support equitable student success.

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About Basic Needs Oregon

Basic Needs Oregon ensures that students attending public colleges and universities across the state have their basic needs met so they can succeed in higher education, their careers, and beyond, regardless of background or socioeconomic status. The program connects students to public benefits and on-campus and external resources through college staff members called benefits navigators. The navigators assist students to determine their eligibility for resources and apply for them. By connecting students to benefits, Basic Needs Oregon contributes to students' educational attainment and long-term economic mobility.

Basic Needs Oregon was established in 2021 through House Bill 2835 (ORS 350.262) which required each public institution of higher education in Oregon to employ a benefits navigator and to establish a statewide consortium to collect data and share best practices. Figure 1 illustrates the program's structure.

- The program is funded by the state through the Higher Education Coordinating Commission, which distributes funds to institutions, administers program contracts, and supports implementation.
- Each community college and public university implements the program locally by employing a benefits navigator who works directly with students to help them understand eligibility for benefit programs and apply for them.
- Benefits navigators are supported by the Basic Needs Oregon Statewide Consortium, which fosters collaboration and shared learning across institutions. The consortium provides statewide professional development, best practice sharing, and data collection and reporting.

Together, these components create a statewide system that supports Oregon college students in meeting their basic needs to promote student success.

Figure 1. Basic Needs Oregon is supported by state funding, implemented by higher education institutions, and supported by a statewide community of practice

Source: Basic Needs Oregon program implementation guide, 2024–25.

Biennium 2023–2025

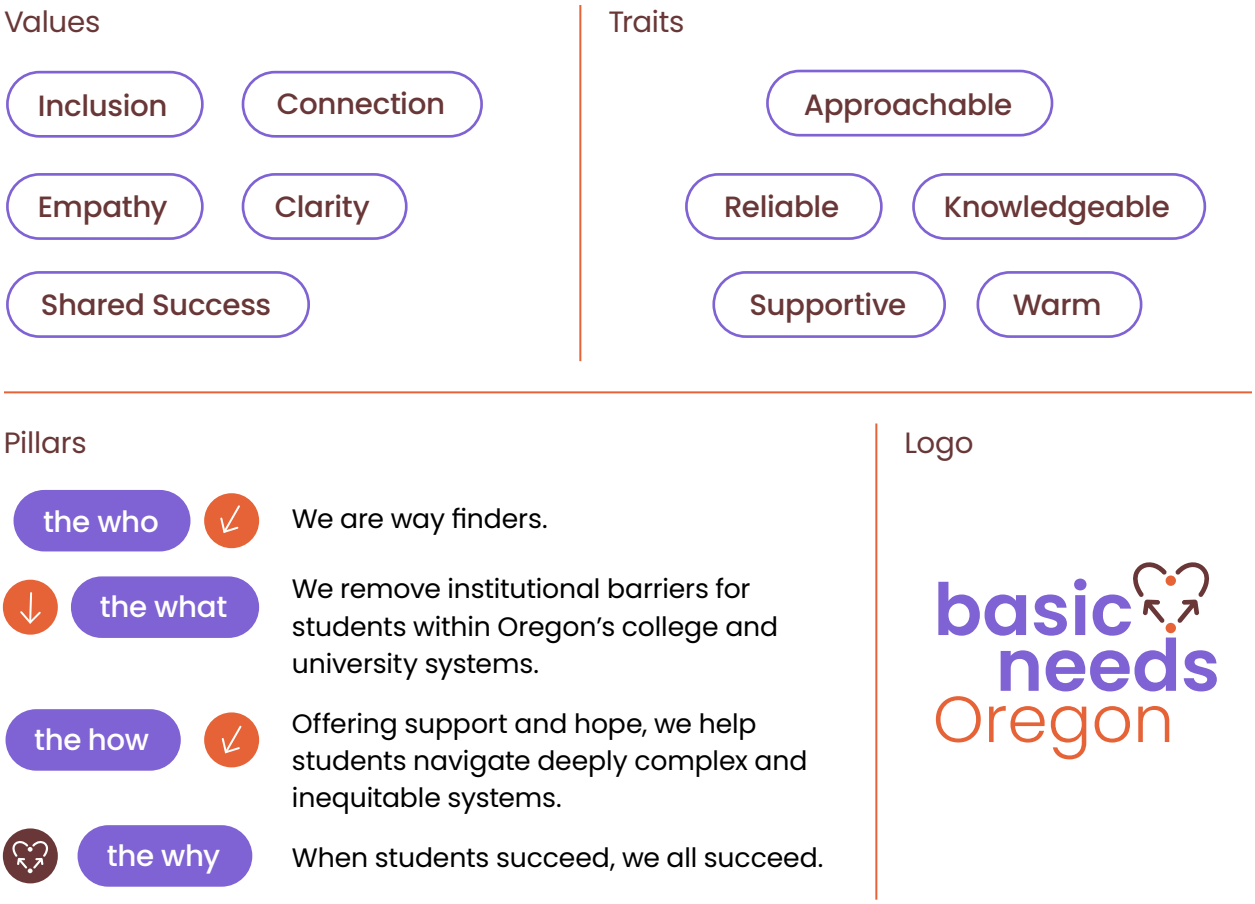
This report summarizes the implementation and outcomes of Basic Needs Oregon during the 2023–2025 biennium. In the program's first biennium (2021–2023), House Bill 2835 established Basic Needs Oregon, colleges hired benefits navigators, and navigators began supporting students while participating in the statewide consortium through community of practice meetings and data collection. During the 2023–2025 biennium, Basic Needs Oregon strengthened its foundation by establishing a clear program identity and developing tools to promote consistency, visibility, and enhance student support across institutions.

Key milestones from the second biennium are described below.

Launching a program name and visual identity

At the start of the 2023–2025 biennium, the consortium launched a new name, logo, and tagline—Basic Needs Oregon—to strengthen program visibility and recognition across institutions. Developed with input from benefits navigators, the new brand replaced earlier references to "House Bill 2835" and has since been used to unify communications and reinforce the program's purpose and values (figure 2).

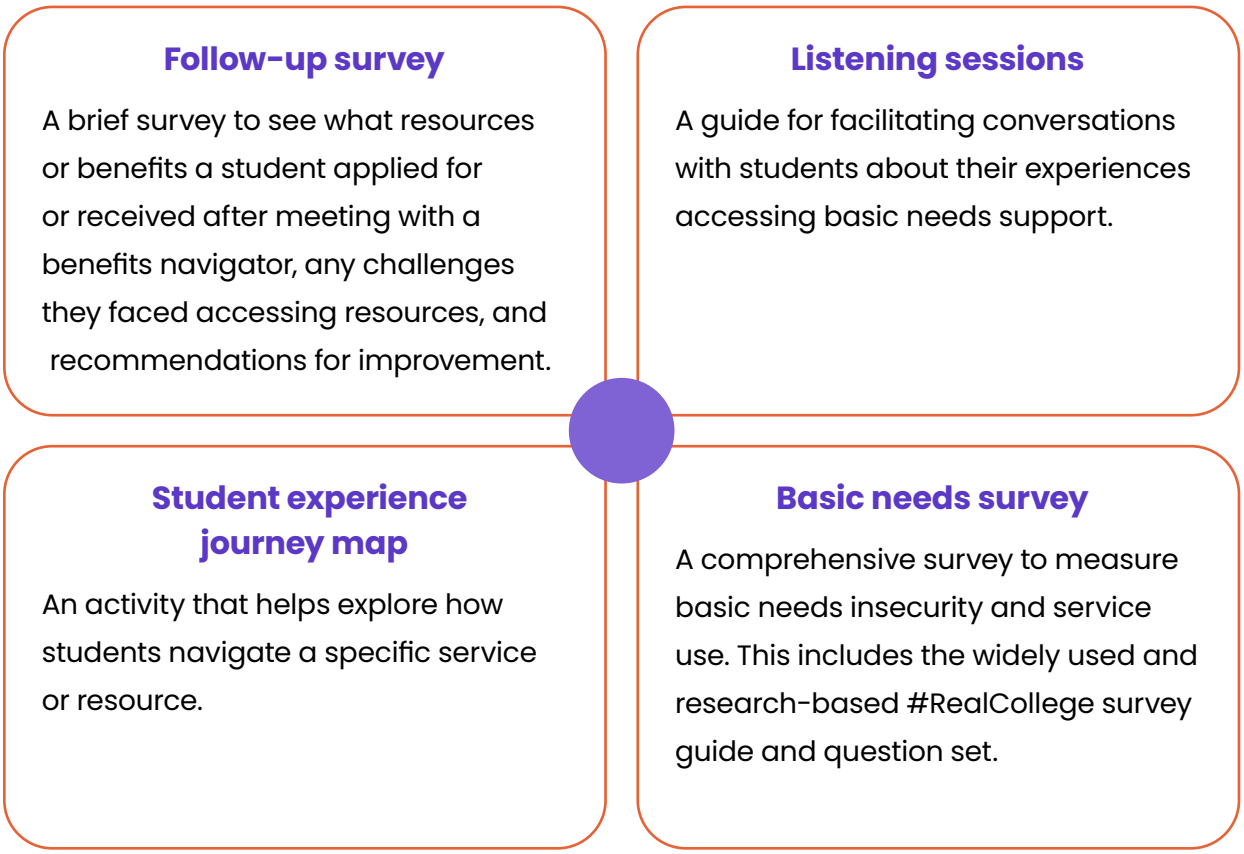
Figure 2. Basic Needs Oregon brand framework



Building a student feedback toolkit

During the previous biennium, the consortium provided training and guidance on student feedback channels, and many navigators reported using different methods to gather student feedback. However, navigators also experienced challenges implementing these practices consistently and expressed a desire for more ready-to-use tools. In response, Basic Needs Oregon partnered with Education Northwest to develop an adaptable and user-friendly feedback toolkit, which includes four tools (figure 3).

Figure 3. Student feedback toolkit



Developing a theory of action and data collection framework

Throughout the program, benefits navigators submitted monthly quantitative reports and quarterly qualitative reports. While these reports helped track the number of students served and supported program implementation, they did not fully capture the program's broader impact. Basic Needs Oregon partnered with Education Northwest to develop a theory of action and a refreshed data collection framework to support alignment across the program. The theory of action outlines three interconnected levels of strategy—program, institution, and state—that each have distinct but related activities, as well as midterm and long-term outcomes (figure 4).

Meeting these key milestones helped increase the consistency and visibility of Basic Needs Oregon across institutions, while enhancing the program's ability to gather meaningful feedback and evaluate its impact.

The following sections of this report describe how the program was implemented across institutions, its impact on students, and the ongoing challenges and opportunities to strengthen Basic Needs Oregon.

Figure 4. Basic Needs Oregon theory of action

Basic needs insecurity is a widespread challenge among college students today. Basic Needs Oregon supports Oregon community college and public university students in accessing public benefits through the assistance of benefits navigators, who are staff members at each public college and university.

Impact of Basic Needs Oregon. Students' basic needs are met, empowering them to succeed in higher education, their careers, and beyond, regardless of their background or socioeconomic status.

	Activities	Midterm outcomes	Long-term outcomes
Program strategy Benefits navigators connect students to public benefits and college basic needs services and resources.	• Connect students with resources through referrals • Provide education and awareness initiatives on available supports • Conduct culturally responsive outreach and relationship building • Establish student feedback channels for continuous improvement • Collect and track data to measure participation and outcomes • Learn and apply best practices from professional development	• Increased student awareness, connection, and use of basic needs services and resources, including public benefits • Increased student self-efficacy to seek support • Decreased basic needs insecurity among students	• Oregon community college and public university students have improved academic, social, and health outcomes

	Activities	Midterm outcomes	Long-term outcomes
 Institution strategy Higher education institutions work with public benefits programs to provide students with needed supports	• Employ and support benefits navigators to assist students in accessing resources • Develop partnerships internally and with community organizations and state agencies that administer public benefits • Provide college basic needs services and resources	• Demonstrated institutional commitment to address students' basic needs • Expansion and strengthening of college basic needs services • Increased local and state partnerships	• Oregon public higher education institutions have increased capacity to address students' basic needs
 State strategy State policy and funding support the Basic Needs Oregon program.	• Establish a statewide community of practice to share strategies and best practices • Model a consortium approach for addressing student basic needs • Offer professional development opportunities for benefits navigators • Advocate for sustained funding and policy support for basic needs resources	• Increased state-level commitment and funding to address basic needs insecurity • Increased capacity to address basic needs among consortium participants • Statewide institutional adoption and scaling of best practices	• Oregon state has a model infrastructure to address college students' basic needs insecurity

Implementation of Basic Needs Oregon

Benefits navigators play a central role in advancing the goals of Basic Needs Oregon. Their work includes connecting students to resources through referrals, increasing awareness of available basic needs supports, and building relationships with students through culturally responsive outreach. Navigators also contribute to continuous improvement by establishing student feedback channels and sharing strategies through a statewide community of practice. This section draws on qualitative data from navigator reflections submitted through quarterly reporting forms, where navigators described how they implemented and developed their programs.

Program implementation and development

Benefits navigators used a variety of tools and strategies to raise student awareness and reduce the stigma associated with accessing basic needs support

Some benefits navigators used a wide range of outreach strategies to increase student awareness of available resources and reduce the stigma often associated with seeking help. Many participated in campus events or hosted their own, using these opportunities to engage students in conversations about public benefits eligibility and assisting them with applications on the spot. These interactions helped normalize help-seeking behavior and positioned the navigator as a trusted resource.

To improve visibility and accessibility, some benefits navigators relocated their offices to more central, student-facing spaces and employed creative communication methods, such as peer-to-peer outreach, targeted messaging, and interactive events. At Southern Oregon University, the navigator made a point to invite students to drop by, regardless of whether they were currently experiencing insecurity, emphasizing that assistance is available to all individuals.

> ***"This has helped students become comfortable coming in and just visiting with the staff to help build relationships. This outreach has increased student engagement."***
>
> **– Benefits navigator at Southern Oregon University**

Several campuses also tailored outreach to specific groups of students. For instance, the University of Oregon created summer orientation activities specifically for incoming transfer students to raise awareness about the resources available. These efforts introduced students to services such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the off-campus student food pantry, and student-funded subsidies early in their transition.

> ***"We found in the first year of our program that we weren't reaching very many transfer students, so we hoped this would give us a chance to introduce them to the basic needs program and other resources ..."***
>
> **– Benefits navigator at the University of Oregon**

Benefits navigators often collaborated with faculty members, staff members, and student peers to identify individuals experiencing basic needs insecurity. They partnered with other campus groups and centers to conduct outreach and encourage more students to use resources that support their well-being and academic success. Some navigators, including those at Rogue Community College and Blue Mountain Community College, incorporated faculty and staff training into their implementation plans to equip more campus community members to recognize signs of need and make appropriate referrals.

Others, like the team at Lane Community College, scaled their outreach through class presentations, student government collaboration, and mass communications using tools like Salesforce and EAB Navigate. At Western Oregon University, navigators reflected on how a culture shift was beginning to take hold.

> ***"I believe we have made significant progress in reducing the stigma associated with accessing basic needs resources. It's rewarding to see that others are now willing to share their experiences and encourage others to utilize these resources. The training provided by professional staff to prepare our student staff has been incredibly beneficial."***
>
> **– Benefits navigator at Western Oregon University**

These coordinated and student-centered efforts have been critical for not only increasing awareness of Basic Needs Oregon, but also building trust and long-term engagement to help students feel seen, supported, and more connected to their campus communities.

Benefits navigators built strong relationships with internal college departments, local government agencies, and community-based organizations to connect students with essential services and resources

Developing strong partnerships with internal college departments, local government agencies, and community-based organizations is crucial to effectively support students in meeting their basic needs. Benefits navigators assess the current campus resources and leverage these partnerships to provide comprehensive support to students. On campus, navigators often collaborated with offices such as financial aid, student housing, and career services to streamline referrals and coordinate support. For example, the navigator at Central Oregon Community College redesigned how students access services through the SNAP Training and Employment Program by modifying intake forms to route students directly through their community partnership with Thrive Central Oregon first, ensuring broader support from the outset.

When campus resources were not sufficient, navigators turned to external partners, such as local government agencies and nonprofit providers, to bridge service gaps. Many benefits navigators worked with county social service offices to help students access programs like SNAP or Oregon Health Plan (OHP). Public benefits are often the most sustainable and wide-reaching supports available to students, providing essential assistance for food, health care, and housing stability. However, one key challenge is that benefits navigators are not employees of the Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS), meaning they cannot directly enroll students or access state systems. For this reason, co-location of ODHS staff members on campus represents an important breakthrough.

> ***"Community outreach is done weekly with community partners. We are finally getting ODHS into their office on campus, which will greatly benefit our students. They will be able to get their EBT cards on the spot if they qualify. That is something that I have worked on for almost a year."***
>
> **– Benefits navigator at Clatsop Community College**

Other benefits navigators worked with local organizations to secure additional resources or to help them become trusted providers to whom navigators could refer students in crisis. Lane Community College's collaboration with local thrift stores enabled students to access affordable clothing, alleviating some financial pressures students face. Other partnerships provided access to important services like dental care.

"We signed a contract with Advantage Dental. Advantage will come to campus regularly to provide dental preventive care for our students at no cost. Advantage can bill students' OHP insurance. They will also provide services for students with private healthcare at no cost."

– Benefits navigator at Columbia Gorge Community College

Some partnerships led to broader collaborations that increased resources for students and secured additional funding for the Basic Needs Oregon program overall. For example, Columbia Gorge Community College shared how their college initially partnered with Goodwill Industries to provide clothing and gift cards. This partnership later expanded, and Goodwill became involved in the college's job connection program.

Improvements to operational support and program infrastructure allowed benefits navigators to more effectively support a greater number of students in meeting their basic needs

Across the state, benefits navigators demonstrated ingenuity in enhancing and expanding the resources and services available to students. Many navigators updated or extended services, like food pantry hours, online ordering systems, and student-centered referral platforms, to improve accessibility.

"We have kept up the high-volume use of the food pantry on campus this summer. I have updated our online ordering system to be accessible to our team if any student or community member is ever in need when I am not available. I also updated the Wolf Den hours to be more available."

– Benefits navigator at Blue Mountain Community College

Other navigators secured new funding to grow their programs, often by sharing student stories with donors or applying for institutional and external grants.

"I presented student stories and a call to action at the Rise Up foundation fundraiser, which helped raise funds for basic needs at CCC. The event raised $20,000 more than the year before."

– Benefits navigator Clackamas Community College

Additional staffing also expanded program capacity. Some campuses were able to hire student workers to support daily operations or establish more structured intake and referral systems. For instance, Southwestern Oregon Community College hired a student worker for their campus pantry and plan to hire one more. These operational improvements not only improved service delivery but also created more welcoming, efficient experiences for students seeking help.

> ***"I established a dedicated Teams site for faculty and staff on campus to refer students in need of support. Within the Teams site, I implemented a structured referral process to ensure that all students' needs are addressed in a timely and organized manner."***
>
> **– Benefits navigator at Klamath Community College**

Student feedback channels provided benefits navigators with valuable insights on how to more effectively support students

Student feedback is a core component of Basic Needs Oregon and is required under ORS 350.262. The legislation instructs benefits navigators to develop internal processes that enable students to provide feedback and recommendations on how the institution can better assist them in determining eligibility for benefits programs and applying for assistance under these programs. Across campuses, benefits navigators implemented a wide range of strategies, such as surveys, listening sessions, and focus groups, to gather input directly from students. This feedback proved to be a valuable tool for navigators: It informed their decisions about programming, communication, and service delivery.

> ***"I am preparing to initiate focus groups in April to gather valuable insights and feedback from students. This data will inform decision-making processes and drive improvements in services."***
>
> **– Benefits navigator at Rogue Community College**

By centering student voice in program design, navigators were able to tailor services more effectively and identify emerging needs. This feedback loop has been instrumental in strengthening student trust, improving outreach, and ensuring services reflect the lived experiences of the students they are meant to support.

Statewide consortium

The statewide consortium serves as a vital structure for connecting benefits navigators across Oregon's public colleges and universities. Facilitated by the statewide program coordinator at Portland Community College, the consortium fosters a cohesive and collaborative approach to implementing Basic Needs Oregon through regular professional development, shared learning, and coordination.

Community of practice meetings are forums to share best practices

Each month, benefits navigators participate in community of practice meetings that are designed as collaborative forums to exchange strategies, troubleshoot challenges, and align efforts across institutions. These sessions provide a consistent space for shared learning and cross-campus connection, contributing to the overall strength and consistency of the program. Typical agenda items include:

- **Program and resource update.** Updates on Basic Needs Oregon legislation, metric tracking, program implementation timelines, and changes to benefits eligibility
- **Training opportunities.** Information about upcoming conferences and webinars, professional development opportunities, and conferences such as the Pathways to Opportunity Summit
- **College spotlights.** Presentations by colleges showcasing how they have implemented the program
- **Guest presentations.** Partners and experts sharing insights into their programs, tools, and best practices

Through these meetings, benefits navigators built a robust peer support network and shared tools and strategies to meet the evolving needs of their campuses.

Benefits navigators developed advocacy skills to better support Basic Needs Oregon on their campuses

In addition to day-to-day implementation support, the consortium empowered benefits navigators to advocate for policies at the local, state, and national levels. Many navigators provided public testimony on legislation related to basic needs. They also participated in interviews and outreach efforts that raised the visibility of the program.

> *"This quarter, I provided testimony in support of House Bills 3182 and 3183 during the Senate hearing in January. I also participated in an interview with the Oregonian alongside the college vice president, where we discussed the importance of maintaining the benefits navigator position in Oregon's community colleges and public universities."*
>
> **– Benefits navigator at Clackamas Community College**

The consortium's engagement extended beyond Oregon. Members contributed to national working groups, such as the Federal Student Basic Needs Strategy Group, and collaborated regionally with the Washington Student Achievement Council, promoting the exchange of lessons learned and best practices. These partnerships fostered cross-state learning and positioned Oregon as a leader in the student basic needs space.

> *"This spring, I joined the Federal Student Basic Needs Policy Working Group … This has tuned me in to more of what is happening at the national level with policies that impact students, including things like student SNAP rules in the Farm Bill, the ongoing rollout of the new FAFSA, and more."*
>
> **– Benefits navigator at Linn-Benton Community College**

Through these opportunities, benefits navigators not only strengthened their understanding of basic needs policy but also became more effective advocates for institutional investment and legislative support. Their voices helped shape policy conversations and demonstrated the critical role of basic needs infrastructure in promoting student success.

Impact of Basic Needs Oregon

A central responsibility of benefits navigators is collecting and reporting data on student participation and outcomes. Navigators document each student interaction by recording who was served, the basic need addressed, and any referrals provided. In addition to these quantitative measures, they contribute qualitative insights quarterly by submitting student stories that capture how students were supported and the impact of that support. This section draws on both quantitative data and qualitative narrative accounts submitted through quarterly reports to illustrate the impact of Basic Needs Oregon.

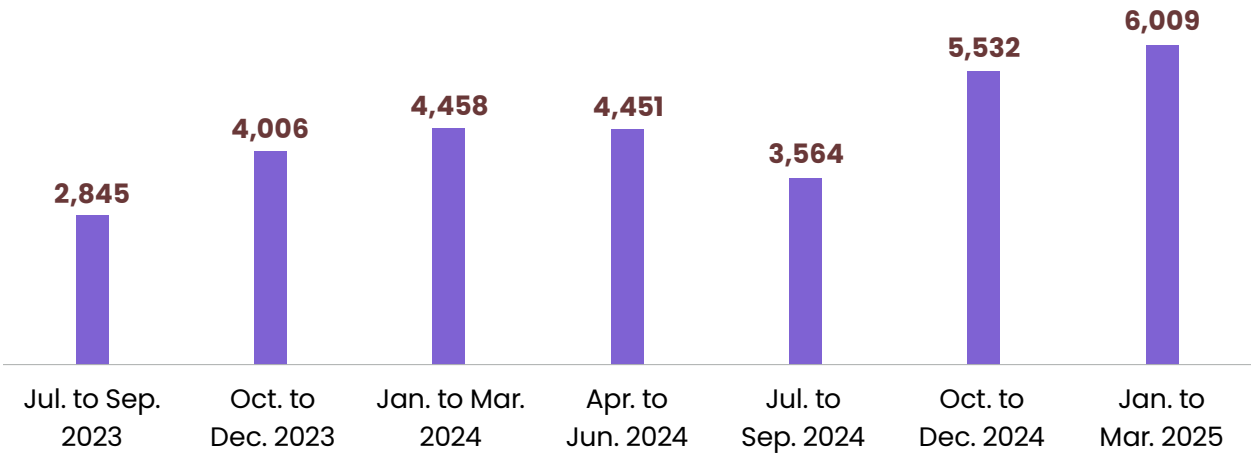
Students served

Basic Needs Oregon increased the number of students served over time

Between July 2023 and March 2025, Basic Needs Oregon served 30,865 students across the state's higher education institutions. This included 13,982 students from community colleges and 16,883 students from public universities. The number of students served by Basic Needs Oregon increased over time, reaching an all-time high in the last quarter at just over 6,000 students (figure 5).

30,685 students
served from July 2023 to March 2025

Figure 5. Basic Needs Oregon increased the number of students served over time



Note: N = 30,865.

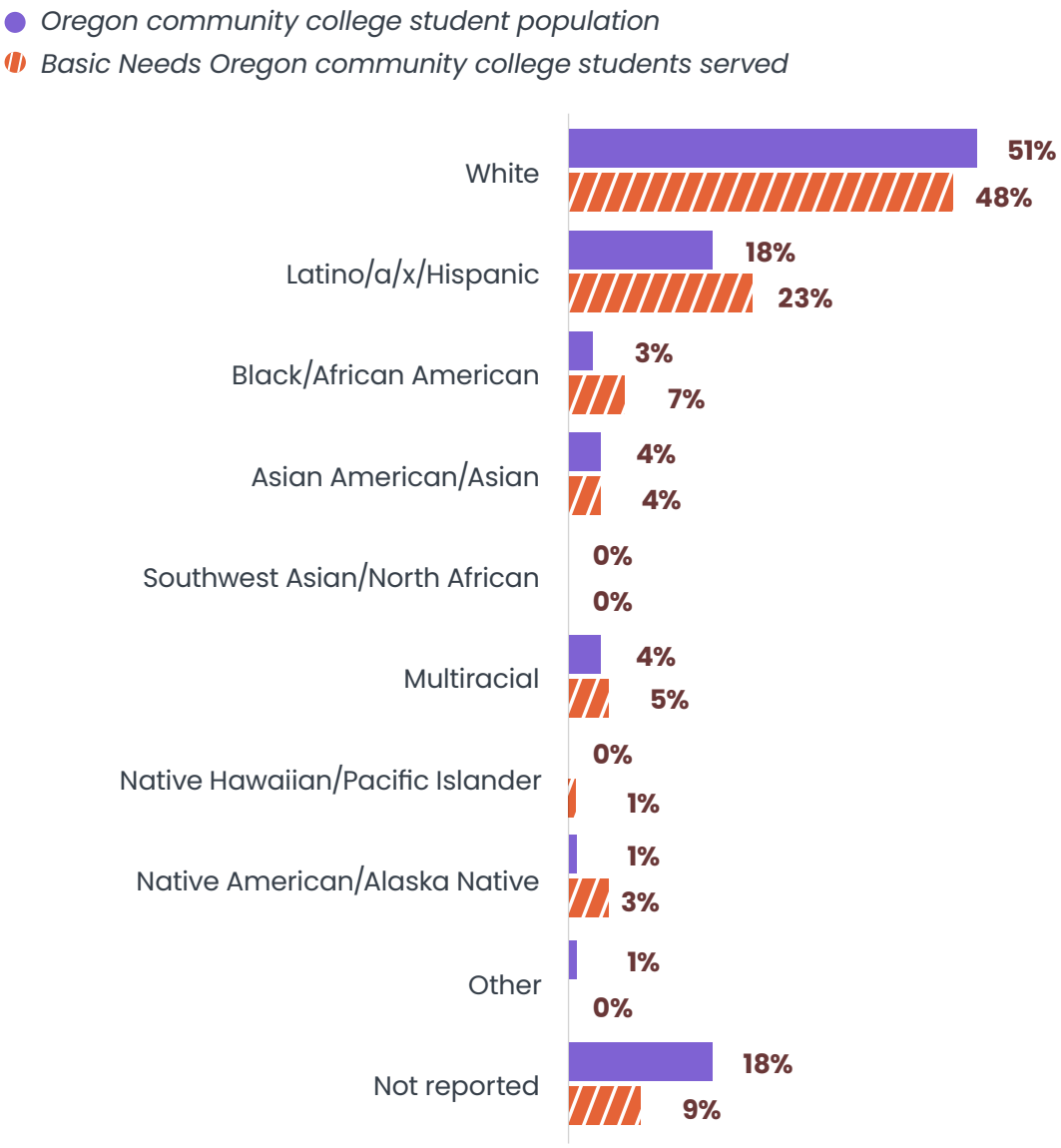
Source: Basic Needs Oregon statewide student metrics, July 2023–March 2025.

At the community colleges, Basic Needs Oregon served a disproportionately high percentage of students furthest from opportunity

Basic Needs Oregon aims to support a broad and diverse student population. While data from public universities were incomplete (unreported 42% of race/ethnicity data, 61% of gender data, and 89% of language data) community colleges provided more complete information. Therefore, demographic findings presented here focus on community college students.

Basic Needs Oregon served a disproportionately high share of Latinx and Black students at community colleges (figure 6). While Latinx and Black students make up a smaller percentage of enrolled community college students statewide, they were more heavily represented among those who accessed basic needs navigation services.

Figure 6. Basic Needs Oregon served a disproportionately high percentage of Latinx and Black students compared to the statewide community college student population

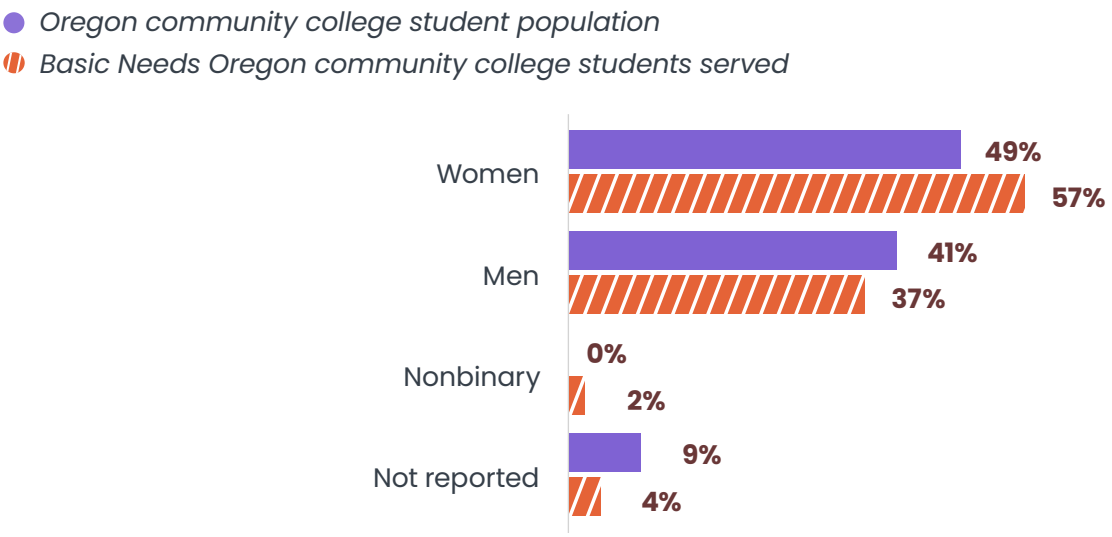


Note: N = 200,573 for community college student population and N = 13,982 for Basic Needs Oregon community college students served. "Other" race for the community college student population is international students.

Source: Higher Education Coordinating Commission Community College Data Dashboard 2023–24 and Basic Needs Oregon statewide student metrics, July 2023–March 2025.

Basic Needs Oregon served a disproportionately high percentage of community college students who identify as women (figure 7). While women make up a significant portion of Oregon community college students overall, they were more prominently represented among those who accessed support from benefits navigators.

Figure 7. Basic Needs Oregon served a disproportionately high percentage of women compared to the statewide community college student population



Note: N = 200,573 for community college student population and N = 13,982 for Basic Needs Oregon community college students served.

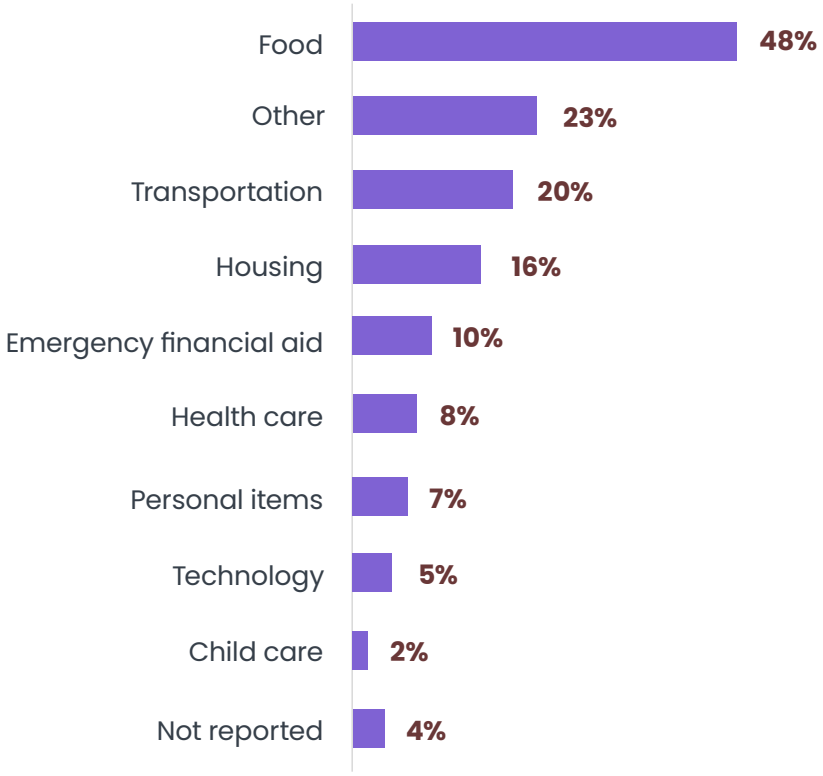
Source: Higher Education Coordinating Commission Community College Data Dashboard 2023–24 and Basic Needs Oregon statewide student metrics, July 2023–March 2025.

Student needs addressed by navigators

Food, transportation, housing, and financial needs are the most common barriers student experience

Basic Needs Oregon supports students in addressing a wide range of challenges that impact their ability to succeed in college. From July 2023 to March 2025, navigators documented addressing over 30,000 student needs, nearly half of which related to food insecurity (figure 8). Transportation and housing were the next most frequently addressed needs, followed by financial concerns, health-related issues, and child care. Some student needs were categorized as "other." These often included critical supports such as grocery or gas cards, textbook assistance, scholarships, and emergency funds.

Figure 8. Basic Needs Oregon mainly addressed food, transportation, and housing



Note: N = 30,865. Navigators could select more than one basic need per student. "Other" includes needs benefits navigators chose to write in, such as gas cards, grocery cards, textbooks, scholarships, and financial assistance.

Source: Basic Needs Oregon statewide student metrics, July 2023–March 2025.

Student stories shared by benefits navigators offer powerful insights into these data points. They show how even basic resource gaps, such as not having enough food or lacking safe transportation, can derail academic progress if unaddressed. For example, navigators described students who came to campus without having eaten or could not attend class due to unsafe driving conditions and worn-out tires. In one case, a student-athlete was unable to commute to school or work during winter storms, jeopardizing both his academic standing and his job on campus.

Housing insecurity was another recurring theme. One student sought support after learning that financial aid would not cover summer housing costs and they were at risk of being removed from their dorm. Another pair of students tried to secure shared housing through a community partnership program but struggled to find an option that would allow them to live together affordably, highlighting the complexity of housing challenges even when support systems exist.

Navigators also documented financial and health-related stressors that compounded students' academic challenges. One student, expecting a child, urgently needed both summer housing and health coverage for herself and her baby. The navigator helped her through the OHP application process and secured prenatal health care and insurance coverage for the infant. These critical interventions allowed her to plan for the transition out of residence halls and stay focused on completing the term.

These stories, drawn from navigator quarterly reports, reinforce what the quantitative data reveal: Food, transportation, housing, and financial needs are the most common barriers students experience, but they are rarely isolated. Students often face overlapping challenges that require coordinated, compassionate responses. Although mentioned less often, issues such as domestic violence and the need for legal services also surfaced. While less frequent in the data, these needs are important to acknowledge as they also affect students' well-being and persistence.

Table 1. Types of basic need insecurity mentioned in student stories

Basic need	Student stories
Food insecurity	Students arrived on campus hungry, needing immediate access to food and hygiene supplies. Navigators facilitated visits to food banks and distributed store gift cards.
Transportation	Students cited car problems or unsafe travel conditions as reasons for missed classes or work shifts. Some were provided with transit passes or other transportation support.
Housing	Students were unable to cover rent, secure roommate housing, or remain in dorms over breaks and received help identifying affordable options or emergency assistance to avoid eviction.
Financial issues	Emergency support helped cover unpaid bills or tuition gaps caused by financial aid delays, enabling students to stay enrolled and avoid housing or academic penalties.
Physical and mental health	Students were connected to health insurance, prenatal care, and counseling services to address urgent physical and emotional health needs, particularly during high-stress life transitions.

Source: Basic Needs Oregon qualitative data statewide student stories, July 2023–March 2025.

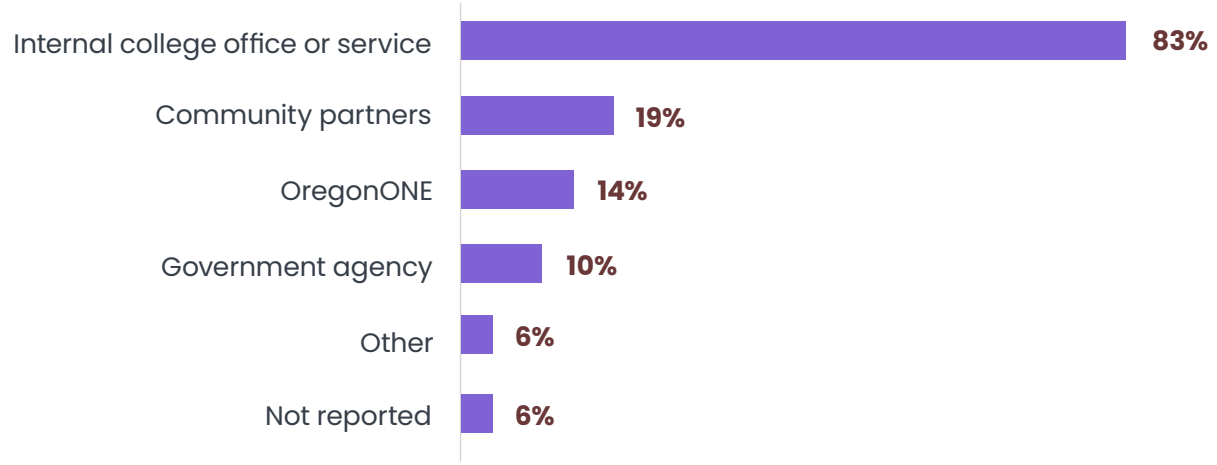
Together, these data offer a comprehensive view of how Basic Needs Oregon responds to students' complex realities. The numbers show the breadth of needs; the stories reveal the depth of impact.

Referrals made

Most referrals made by navigators were to internal college offices or services

Benefits navigators play a crucial role in guiding students to resources that address their basic needs, whether through internal campus services or external community partners. From July 2023 to March 2025, benefits navigators made over 30,000 referrals. Most of these directed students to internal college services or support programs, while others connected students to community partners or government agencies equipped to provide specialized assistance (figure 9).

Figure 9. Basic Needs Oregon mainly referred students to internal college offices or services



Note: N = 30,865. Navigators could select more than one referral per student. There was no write-in option for the "other" category.

Source: Basic Needs Oregon statewide student metrics, July 2023–March 2025.

Navigators provided personalized support and helped students navigate complex systems

While the quantitative data underscore the frequency and type of referrals made, student stories offer insight into how navigators help students navigate complex systems and find meaningful support. For example, one student struggling to meet the demands of parenting and academics was referred to the campus resource center for students with children.

There, she accessed support tailored to student parents, including free child care and classroom accommodations. This referral not only addressed an immediate need but also provided the student with a community of support.

In many cases, students who were overwhelmed by the eligibility requirements or application processes for public benefits (e.g., SNAP, OHP) relied on benefits navigators to guide them through the steps. One student, frustrated and confused by the web of agencies and documentation requirements, received help from a navigator who explained the options clearly, supported them in applying through Oregon ONE, and connected them to campus and community food resources.

Navigators also made critical connections to off-campus partners, especially when students' needs extended beyond the college's capacity. A nontraditional student and mother of four, for instance, reached out for support related to her newly adopted foster child. The navigator helped her identify community organizations offering infant support and secured an appointment on her behalf, ensuring timely access to care and supplies.

Table 2. Referral types coded from student stories

Referral type	Student stories
Internal college office or service	Students were connected to parenting support centers, food pantries, academic accommodations, or emergency grants directly through campus-based offices.
Local or state government agency	Navigators helped students apply for public benefits like SNAP and Oregon Health Plan, guiding them through state systems and simplifying complex application steps.
Community partner	When students' needs exceeded institutional capacity, navigators referred them to trusted community-based organizations for housing, food, and health-related support.

Source: Basic Needs Oregon qualitative data statewide student stories, July 2023–March 2025.

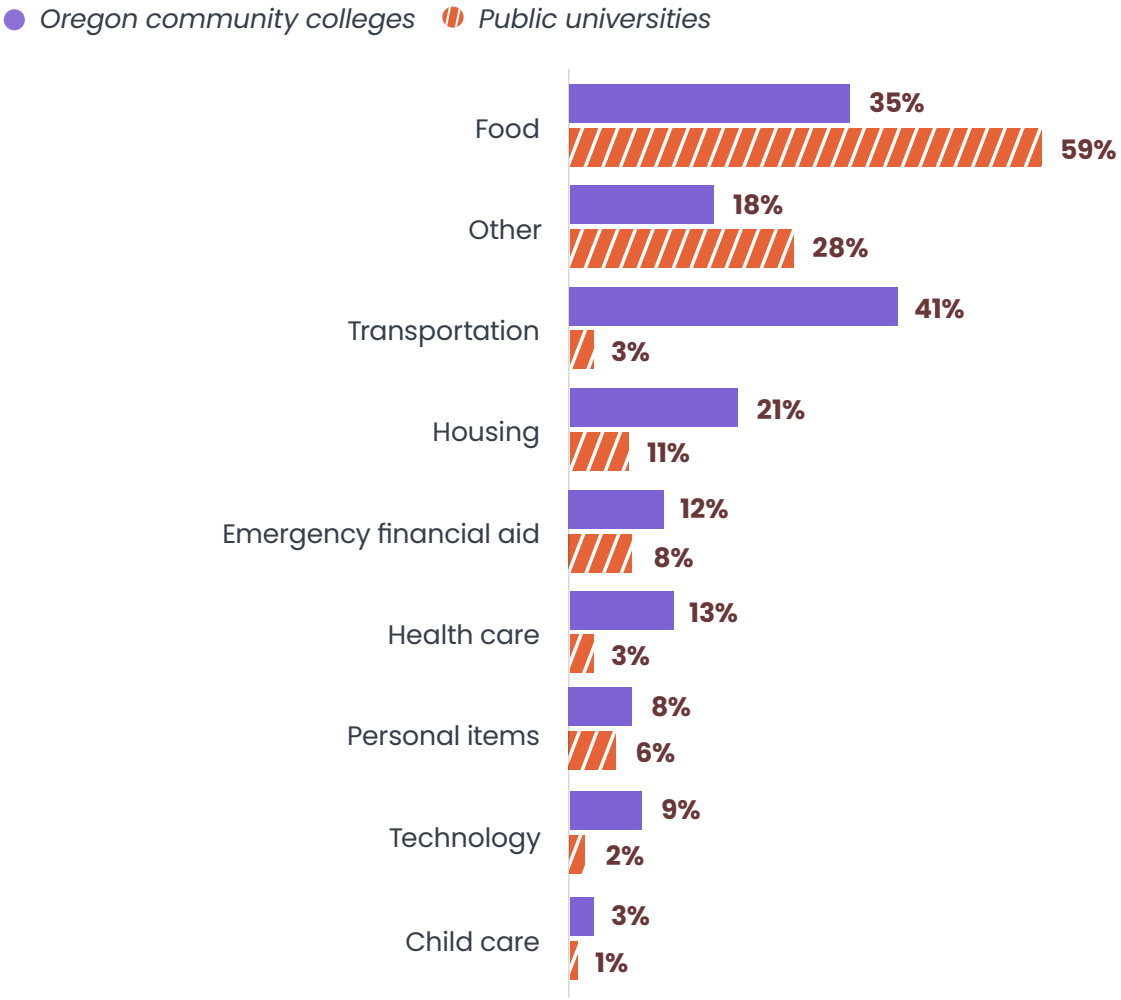
These findings show that referrals are not one-size-fits-all. Instead, benefits navigators tailor each referral to the student's unique circumstances, whether that means connecting them to the right office on campus or coordinating across sectors to tap into external support. Through these personalized efforts, navigators ensure that students are not only referred but actually supported in accessing the help they need to thrive.

Variation by college type

Referral type and organization varied across community colleges and universities

The types of basic needs addressed and referrals made varied between community colleges and public universities, reflecting the influence of institutional context on students' needs. Community colleges more frequently supported students with transportation, housing, and health-related needs, while public universities more often provided food-related assistance (figure 10).

Figure 10. Community colleges addressed more transportation, housing, and health needs compared to public universities, which addressed more food needs

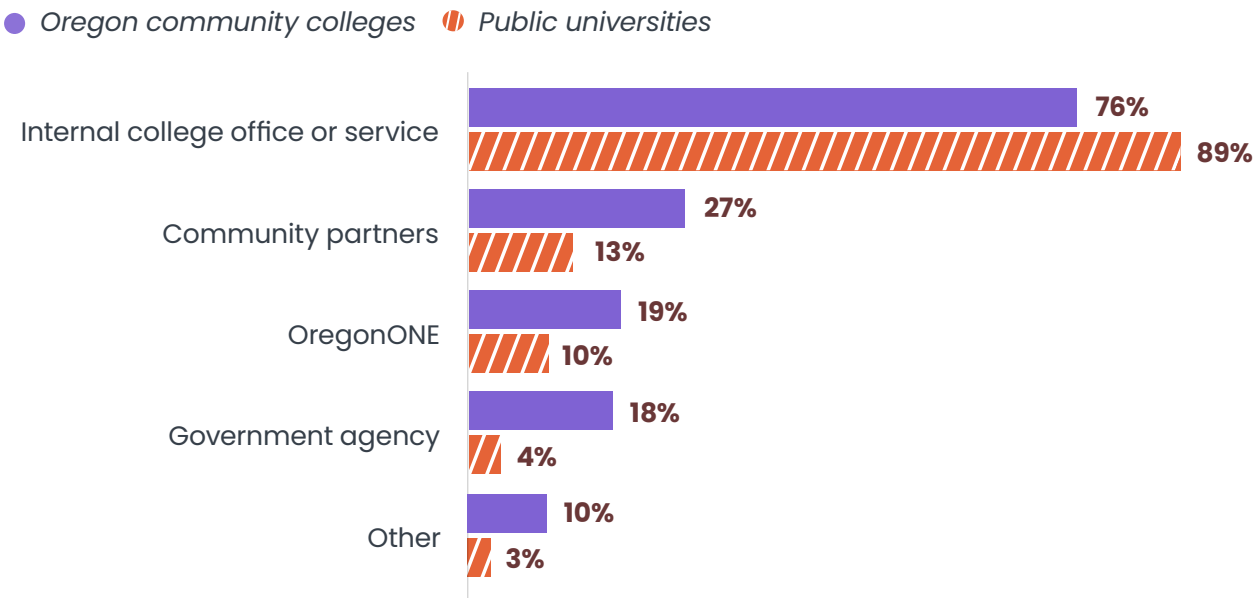


Note: N = 13,982 for community colleges and N = 16,883 for public universities.

Source: Basic Needs Oregon statewide student metrics, July 2023–March 2025.

Where students were referred to also differed by institution type, suggesting variation in available resources and community partnerships. Community colleges were more likely to refer students to external agencies, such as local nonprofits, OregonONE, or government agencies, highlighting their reliance on community-based supports to meet student needs. In contrast, public universities more often referred students to internal campus services, which may reflect greater institutional capacity to address basic needs in house (figure 11).

Figure 11. Community colleges more often referred students to external partners, while public universities more often referred students to internal college services



Note: N = 13,982 for community colleges and N = 16,883 for public universities.

Source: Basic Needs Oregon statewide student metrics, July 2023–March 2025.

Student outcomes

Students who received support from a benefits navigator were able to address their basic needs insecurity and focus on academics

Benefits navigators across campuses shared compelling success stories that highlight the positive influence of Basic Needs Oregon on students' academic progress and overall well-being. Students who received support were able to secure stable housing, improve their food security, and access health care, which in turn improved their mental and physical health. When students accessed resources or services, their situations either improved or allowed them to shift their focus back to academics. These outcomes were especially

evident in cases where benefits navigators were able to intervene early and leverage both campus and community-based resources.

For example, one student facing eviction due to a delay in financial aid delivery reached out to the student life office. Because of a strong existing relationship between the office and Mid-Columbia Community Action, the navigator was able to quickly coordinate with the external nonprofit, which in turn contacted the student's landlord and paid the overdue rent. This intervention prevented the student and her children from experiencing homelessness and allowed her to continue her education without disruption.

In another instance, a student whose financial aid was delayed was unable to pay their utility bills. A navigator connected them to emergency assistance through the Oregon Energy Fund, covering $400 to prevent their electricity from being shut off. The student was also referred to a short-term institutional loan program to cover rent until their aid arrived. With those supports in place, they were able to focus on classes and maintain academic progress.

Students described receiving critical support to address housing insecurity

Housing instability was a common concern, and navigators often played a key role in helping students navigate both short- and long-term solutions. One student experiencing verbal and emotional abuse at home sought help after attending a campus resource fair. The navigator referred them to Affordable Rent for College Students through College Housing NW. Later, that same student disclosed a disability and was connected to the Inclusive Career Advancement Program grant administrator for vocational rehabilitation. The student will also enroll in the SNAP Training and Employment Program. What began as a crisis conversation evolved into a comprehensive set of supports that included housing stability and pathways toward economic independence.

In a separate case, a student who became suddenly homeless was introduced to the campus food pantry by a navigator. Over time, she built a trusting relationship with the navigator, reenrolled in coursework, and began making more intentional choices about her academic and personal life. The navigator described how consistent check-ins and informal support helped the student feel seen and connected—critical factors in her decision to persist with school.

Students increased their awareness of available resources and public benefits

Navigators also described a growing awareness among students about the resources available to them. Students became more comfortable seeking assistance and turned to benefits navigators as a trusted source of guidance. One student, after receiving help navigating government programs and securing consistent access to housing and food, completed the semester with improved academic performance and a sense of personal stability. Another student who had been at risk of dropping out due to financial and emotional strain ultimately remained enrolled, passed his classes, and began exploring employment opportunities. He is now preparing to walk in commencement and finish his final coursework over the summer.

These examples reflect broader trends reported across the navigator network: When students' basic needs were met, they experienced improved academic outcomes, greater confidence in navigating systems of support, and renewed motivation to continue their education. Navigators not only addressed urgent material needs but also helped foster a culture of care, trust, and persistence that made a meaningful difference in students' lives, educational trajectories, and opened doors to economic mobility.

Challenges and Opportunities for Supporting the Implementation of Basic Needs Oregon

While Basic Needs Oregon has demonstrated success, benefits navigators encountered several challenges that constrained their ability to fully support students in meeting their basic needs and achieving academic success. These challenges included limited resources and operational capacity, such as insufficient funding and limited staffing capacity. This section outlines specific challenges navigators encountered, along with the types of support they identified as most beneficial for program implementation and expanding their reach to students in need.

Challenges

A major challenge for Basic Needs Oregon was the scarcity of resources, especially in underserved areas

While Basic Needs Oregon has expanded access to critical support across the state, benefit navigators consistently reported that resource limitations made it difficult to fully meet students' needs. Navigators described numerous instances when they referred students to outside providers, only to find that these providers lacked the capacity or funding to assist the students. The capacity constraints—such as funding cuts, staffing shortages, or paused applications—made timely referrals nearly impossible in some cases.

> ***"Community partners that have been instrumental in assisting CCC students are losing funding. One organization has scaled back their assistance … Another organization is on a referral pause until June 2025. A third organization is on a referral pause indefinitely."***
>
> **– Benefits navigator at Clackamas Community College**

One of the most persistent challenges involved housing and utility assistance. In many counties, students experiencing housing insecurity were referred to local housing authorities or community-based organizations, only to encounter closed waitlists or messages that no funds were currently available. In the words of one navigator, housing was among "the most consistent challenges," particularly given the lack of options that were affordable, immediately available, and compatible with students' academic schedules.

> *"The most common reason preventing me from referring students to a service provider is that service provider having a long waitlist or pausing entirely on accepting applications."*
>
> **– Benefits navigator at Eastern Oregon University**

In some counties, essential partners paused services entirely. Benefits navigators noted that organizations facilitating energy assistance programs, such as the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program, were unable to process applications for months. As a result, students went without utility support during critical periods. Even well-established housing organizations were forced to turn students away due to depleted funding, a situation that left both students and navigators with limited alternatives.

> *"One of the biggest barriers preventing me from making referrals for students seeking housing support is that Arches, Salem Housing Authority, and Marion County Housing Authority do not have funding available to assist individuals with their housing needs. I have been informed that … there is no funding available, creating uncertainty about when housing support will be accessible to students in need."*
>
> **– Benefits navigator at Chemeketa Community College**

Despite their commitment and creativity, navigators found themselves operating in a strained system—students were increasingly in need, but the broader safety net was under-resourced and overstretched.

Lack of operational support, including funding and staffing capacity, made it difficult to provide adequate services and resources

While the state provided initial funding through House Bill 2835 to establish the benefits navigator role, the legislature did not allocate resources to cover additional associated costs of addressing students' basic needs. As a result, many navigators reported having limited funding to sustain or expand their services. Often benefits navigators had to apply for additional funding or support to keep the program afloat. However, this mechanism was not always sustainable.

> *"The biggest challenge is that HB 2835 does not provide ongoing/permanent funding support beyond benefit navigator salary. Benefits navigators need more funding to support students and alleviate some of their basic needs."*
>
> **– Benefits navigator from Lane Community College**

Inadequate operational support also constrained staffing. Without sufficient funding, most programs could not hire additional full-time staff members and often relied on interns or volunteers. This limited capacity created challenges in maintaining consistent support, especially as student demand grew across campuses.

> *"Staffing continues to be an issue as we are open 9–5 p.m. Monday through Friday but only have one part-time student worker and me, to be upfront. So, we rely on student interns to fill in."*
>
> **– Benefits navigator at Mt. Hood Community College**

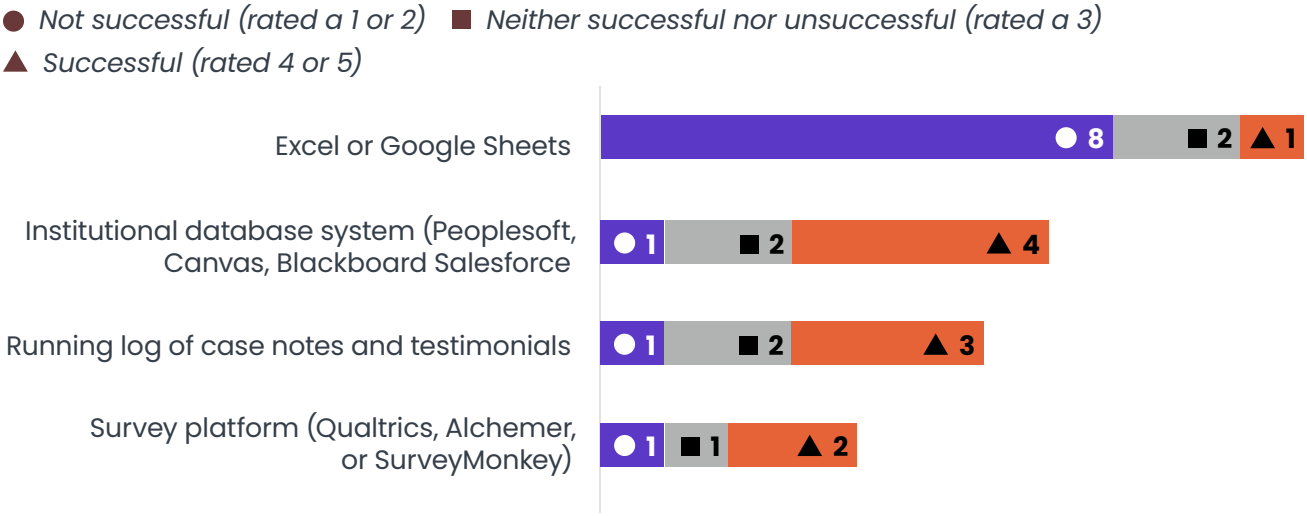
These structural limitations placed strain on the existing staff and limited the reach and responsiveness of the program, making it difficult to keep pace with the level of student need.

Data collection sometimes limited benefits navigators' ability to effectively support students, especially students from underserved backgrounds

Some benefits navigators reported challenges with entering data from their intake and referral processes. They found the process or system they were using to be time consuming and difficult to navigate, which often made their work more cumbersome. Many expressed a desire to spend less time on data entry and case management tasks and more time directly supporting students.

In addition, Education Northwest conducted a survey of benefits navigators to identify effective methods for collecting data on basic needs insecurity. The findings revealed that navigators most commonly used Excel or Google Sheets to collect data, followed by institutional database systems and case notes. However, the navigators who used Excel or Google Sheets rated it unsuccessful for data collection and tracking (figure 12). Consequently, most benefits navigators use different methods to gather data for the requirements of the legislation as well as their own day-to-day work.

Figure 12. While most benefits navigators reported using Excel or Google Sheets, the majority considered this method unsuccessful for data collection and tracking



Note: Participants could select more than one option.

Source: Author's analysis of Basic Needs Oregon Data Collection Process and Assessment Survey, N = 11.

Opportunities for support

Increasing funding and staffing would allow benefits navigators to serve a greater number of students

Benefits navigators continually faced challenges in supporting students, primarily due to limited funding and staffing. These constraints made it challenging to meet the increasing demand for services, particularly in under-resourced areas of Oregon. As a result, navigators often exhausted available resources, leaving students without the necessary support.

Increased funding would allow institutions to hire additional staff members, extend services, and directly assist students with practical emergency support such as cash assistance, groceries, or gas cards. These types of flexible resources are among the most immediate and effective tools navigators can use, but they are currently in short supply.

> ***"Being able to have funding to help students more directly would be so helpful. Other community partners … take time because [students] might have difficulty accessing their physical office. The process would make it easier to have funding for emergencies or urgent reasons to offer direct support."***
>
> **– Benefits navigator at Western Oregon University**

Even campuses that benefit from donor support are feeling the strain. In some areas, regional food banks have reduced inventory, making it harder for navigators to maintain consistent access to food and forcing them to stretch limited budgets.

> ***"While our programs are well supported by generous donors, there have been decreases in the food available through the emergency food system of Oregon Food Bank and our regional food bank that do impact the amount of food we need to purchase and strategize around."***
>
> **– Benefits navigator at Klamath Community College**

With greater investment, benefits navigators could scale their reach, respond more quickly to student needs, and offer support that addresses both short-term emergencies and long-term stability. Strengthening this infrastructure is critical to ensure that students have what they need to stay enrolled and on track to complete their education.

Developing additional community partnerships would increase available resources, especially in under-resourced counties

A persistent challenge for Basic Needs Oregon has been the limited availability of external resources in many communities. Benefits navigators frequently noted that even when they identified students' needs, local service providers were often at capacity or lacked the infrastructure to respond quickly. In these contexts, building stronger and more strategic partnerships is critical to expanding the safety net available to students.

Navigators also shared that forming and maintaining new partnerships requires time, staffing, and local knowledge—resources that are often in short supply. Navigators would greatly benefit from additional initiatives or training to foster capacity building and partnership development. Capacity-building initiatives geared toward navigators and community agencies could strengthen local networks and create more stable referral pipelines.

> ***"Capacity-building initiatives can also be explored, providing training and support to agencies to enhance their ability to serve the community effectively. Additionally, partnerships with organizations outside of Klamath Falls can be strengthened to supplement local resources, while strategic resource allocation can prioritize support for students with the most urgent needs."***
>
> **– Benefits navigator at Klamath Community College**

Navigators emphasized that sharing partnership information would make it easier to connect students to services. If Basic Needs Oregon has existing partnerships, sharing this information up front and informing partners about incoming students seeking resources would help navigators build rapport and ensure community services are accessible to students.

Improving the data infrastructure and processes of Basic Needs Oregon would improve support for benefits navigators and, in turn, for students

When benefits navigators were asked about their ideal system for data tracking and reporting, most indicated that a centralized case management system would be their preferred solution. Such a system would not only streamline reporting for benefits navigators but also make it easier for Basic Needs Oregon program staff to support annual reporting efforts. A centralized case management system would also make it easier for benefits navigators to track multiple interactions with individual students, allowing for a more accurate reflection of ongoing engagement and the support that students are receiving. While the current spreadsheet-based system allows for documenting initial visits, it lacks the capacity to capture multiple types of ongoing interactions, like informal check-ins, follow-up appointments, or emerging needs like textbook or mental health support.

> ***"Access to more comprehensive data management tools would also help streamline referrals and track outcomes more effectively, ensuring that we can provide timely and efficient support to our students."***
>
> **– Benefits navigator at Klamath Community College**

Many navigators described having to rely on manual systems that were time consuming, inconsistent across institutions, and often insufficient for representing the full scope of their work. A centralized case management system, they noted, would make it easier to document each student interaction, generate accurate reports, and support continuity of care, especially as students' needs evolve over time.

> ***"Tracking every single interaction with a student during the month in a spreadsheet or even better, a software that could track it better."***
>
> **– Benefits navigator at Columbia Gorge Community College**

Additionally, benefits navigators expressed a desire for stronger connections and relationships with their campus institutional research department. Not all navigators have established working relationships with their institutional research team, which limits access to data for understanding which students are being served, what outcomes are associated with basic needs support, or how to target outreach more effectively. Greater alignment with institutional research could reduce the administrative burden on navigators, freeing up more time to focus on direct student service.

> ***"It would be great if there could be a communication between our research office and the BNO consortium, allowing the navigator to focus more on their direct service to students."***
>
> **– Benefits navigator at Mt. Hood Community College**

To address these concerns, Basic Needs Oregon worked with Education Northwest to improve and update its intake and referral processes. The goal was to create a more integrated and intuitive tool that fits within navigators' daily workflow, reduces reliance on spreadsheets, and captures insights with minimal disruptions. This tool will help Basic Needs Oregon achieve its mission of providing basic needs support and services to support the success of postsecondary students throughout Oregon.

Results from a recent navigator survey also affirm the need for a stronger data system. Navigators highlighted gaps in current data collection that, if addressed, could better illustrate the program's full impact at both the campus and community levels. Out of 11 survey respondents, six indicated that their current metrics only somewhat communicate the impact of their work and require improvement. Four said the current system communicates impact effectively, while only one said it does not effectively communicate impact at all (figure 13).

Figure 13. Current Basic Needs Oregon data collection and tracking can be improved to better communicate the program's impact to institutions and to the community

Source: Authors' analysis of Basic Needs Oregon Data Collection Process and Assessment Survey, N = 11.

Navigators identified several additional data points that would tell a more complete story of the impact of Basic Needs Oregon:

- Events and workshop participation
- Follow-ups with students after they have graduated or transferred
- Feedback from students after their check-in or follow-up appointment
- The impact of community partnership
- Other areas of basic needs insecurity that are not currently on the tracking tool, such as mental health and textbook support
- Additional demographics, such as whether students identify as parents

By investing in improved data infrastructure and processes, Basic Needs Oregon can strengthen its capacity to demonstrate impact at the institutional and statewide levels.

Looking Forward for Basic Needs Oregon

Basic Needs Oregon has grown from a legislative mandate into a statewide infrastructure to meet students' basic needs. The 2023–2025 biennium marked a period of deepened implementation, stronger identity, and expanded collaboration, positioning the program to scale its impact in the years ahead.

Looking ahead, the priority is sustainability: sustaining staff capacity, strengthening institutional support, building student trust, and measuring impact. This next phase must be guided by a vision of Basic Needs Oregon as not just a support program, but a core component of Oregon's higher education and workforce development strategy. As Oregon strives to expand its educated workforce and close racial and economic gaps in postsecondary attainment, the state must recognize that addressing nonacademic barriers like food, housing, and transportation insecurity is foundational to academic and career success.

Ongoing investment, cross-sector partnership, and institutional alignment will be essential to position Basic Needs Oregon as a national model for how states can systematize student support in ways that are driven by equity, connected to the community, and focused on outcomes.

Summary of findings

Findings from the 2023–2025 biennium illustrate Basic Needs Oregon's meaningful progress and critical role in supporting students.

Widespread program reach and student impact

More than 30,000 students received support through Basic Needs Oregon, with needs ranging from food and housing to transportation, health care, and child care. Students reported increased basic needs security, improved academic performance, and greater persistence due to support from benefits navigators.

Institutional and statewide implementation strengths

Benefits navigators embedded themselves across institutional ecosystems, leading outreach, training staff members, and coordinating with internal departments and external partners. The statewide consortium strengthened peer learning, professional development, and policy advocacy, becoming a vital driver of alignment and innovation.

Persistent systemic challenges

Navigators consistently reported limitations due to underfunded services, lack of direct financial supports for students, and insufficient staffing. Rural and under-resourced regions faced especially acute service gaps. Resource constraints and the lack of dedicated operational funding reduced navigators' capacity to meet demand.

Recommendations

To ensure the long-term success and impact of Basic Needs Oregon, it is essential to build on the program's existing strengths while addressing areas for improvement. The following recommendations highlight key strategies to ensure program sustainability.

Ensure sustainable and flexible funding

Basic Needs Oregon needs ongoing, flexible funding beyond salaries. Institutions require resources for emergency aid, expanded services, and staff capacity. Long-term sustainability will also depend on coordinated state support for blending public, institutional, and philanthropic funds.

Institutionalize the statewide consortium

The consortium is a critical driver of program coherence, professional development, and shared learning. Continued investment will enable it to function as the statewide infrastructure for implementation. Institutions should embed consortium participation into their student support strategies.

Expand and formalize partnerships

Benefits navigators rely on partnerships to connect students with essential services, but building these relationships takes time and resources. Basic Needs Oregon should develop partnership toolkits and pursue statewide agreements with agencies like ODHS to improve access and coordination.

Implement new student feedback loops

Student feedback is essential to improve services. All campuses should implement the Basic Needs Oregon feedback toolkit and use input to guide program design. Elevating student voice ensures that services remain responsive and student centered.

Strengthen data collection and infrastructure

Use of the new data collection tool will alleviate some of the inconsistencies and burdens in data reporting to measure impact. A centralized case management system would streamline the process, reduce administrative load, and support outcome monitoring.

Align with state equity and workforce goals

Basic Needs Oregon should be recognized as a core strategy for advancing college completion and workforce development. Embedding basic needs indicators into statewide metrics frameworks will reinforce the importance of meeting students' basic needs for equitable student success.

Appendix. Qualitative Coding Themes

Since the Basic Needs Oregon program launched in 2023, benefits navigators have submitted quarterly responses featuring student stories and notes on program implementation and development. Education Northwest conducted inductive qualitative coding to analyze data collected through the quarterly responses. The analysis highlighted key themes concerning the types of basic needs insecurity that students face, the outcomes for these students, the implementation and development of programs, the challenges they experience, and the support benefits navigators need to effectively fulfill their roles with Basic Needs Oregon.

Below is a summary of the frequency of these themes across the data.

Student stories

Housing, financial issues, food insecurity, and transportation were the most frequently mentioned basic needs insecurity that the benefits navigators addressed.

Table A1. What type of basic need insecurity did students need to be addressed?

Basic need insecurity theme	Count
Housing	145
Financial issues	120
Food insecurity	109
Transportation	65
Domestic violence	47
Health care	45
Career and employment	37
Mental health	37
Utilities	22
Academic resources and support	14
Child care	12

Basic need insecurity theme	Count
Disability needs	11
Other	6
Legal services	4

Source: Basic Needs Oregon qualitative data statewide student stories, July 2023–March 2025.

Benefits navigators described supporting a range of diverse student populations, with student parents mentioned most frequently.

Table A2. Student identifiers referenced in student stories (if applicable)

Student identifier theme	Count
Student parent	50
Other (multilingual, immigration status, returning student, etc.)	45
BIPOC	12
Veteran status	11
Student athlete	10
Disability	10
First generation	6
LGBTQ	2

Source: Basic Needs Oregon qualitative data statewide student stories, July 2023–March 2025.

Students received various referrals and services, either internally through their college or externally through community-based organizations and local, state, or federal agencies.

Table A3. Type of referrals or services students received to support their basic needs

Type of referrals theme	Count
External (community-based organizations, local and state government agencies)	182
Internal (college services and resources)	174

Source: Basic Needs Oregon qualitative data statewide student stories, July 2023–March 2025.

Some students' stories mentioned that they increased their basic needs security, graduated, persisted into the next term, accessed or utilized services, or increased their awareness of available resources and services.

Table A4. In what ways did the support and referrals students accessed help them meet their basic needs or improve their academic outcomes?

Theme	Count
Increased basic needs security	33
On track for graduation or persistence into the next term	30
Academic improvement or increased attendance in class	26
Increased awareness of services and resources	25
Accessed or utilized services	24
Improved health outcomes	20

Source: Basic Needs Oregon qualitative data statewide student stories, July 2023–March 2025.

Program implementation and development

Benefits navigators provided quarterly updates on the development of their program and improvements made to better serve students. Many focused on enhancing outreach and raising awareness of campus services, as well as expanding and establishing partnerships with internal and external providers.

Table A5. How did benefits navigators advance or improve Basic Needs Oregon at their campus?

Theme	Count
Outreach and awareness	144
Internal and external partnerships	105
Expanding services and resources	84
Intake and referral services	70
Operational support	56
Professional development and training, statewide consortium	41
Funding	36
Data collection	35
Other	27

Source: Basic Needs Oregon qualitative data statewide program implementation and development, July 2023–March 2025.

Challenges

The most common challenges faced by benefits navigators when implementing Basic Needs Oregon included limited resources and services available in the area to assist or refer students. Additionally, there were insufficient operational support and resources, such as staffing and capacity. Furthermore, limited funding presented challenges in providing students with adequate support.

Table A6. Challenges with implementing Basic Needs Oregon

Theme	Count
Lack of resources and services	145
Operational support	53
Intake and referral services	35
Data collection	34
Funding	33
Internal and external partnerships	32
Outreach and awareness	30
Policy implications	20
Other	18
Eligibility and application process for public benefits	54

Source: Basic Needs Oregon qualitative data statewide program implementation and development, July 2023–March 2025.

Opportunities for support

Benefits navigators highlighted the importance of additional support to expand services and build relationships with both internal and external partners. They also indicated a need for increased operational support, including staffing, as well as securing additional funding. Some navigators suggested that improvements were needed in their intake and referral processes.

Table A7. What support would help improve the implementation of Basic Needs Oregon on your campus?

Theme	Count
Operational support	40
Intake and referral process	33
Funding	32
Internal and external partnerships	32
Data collection and research	23
Outreach and awareness	22
Institutional buy-in and support	10
Other	5

Source: Basic Needs Oregon qualitative data statewide program implementation and development, July 2023–March 2025.