

Supporting Colorado's Young Adults Through Crisis and Beyond

"The working class, people like me, the people that are most often left out of conversations, are the people that are going to be hit the hardest by the coronavirus" - Katalina Garcia, student at the Community College of Denver.

The challenges COVID-19 brings to Colorado's young adults — from students and young adults wondering how they'll make rent, to accessing affordable mental health counseling — [are not new](#). But as our state becomes an epicenter of the global COVID-19 pandemic, we must ensure the needs of Colorado's college students are centered in policymaking. We call on Colorado's institutions and federal, state, and city lawmakers to address the immediate and longer-term impact of the pandemic by enacting the following student-driven agenda:

Ensure All Students, Regardless of Income, Immigration, or Housing Status, Can Access Online Classes

"The issue is, there are many students who don't have the ability to transfer into remote learning. Some [students] don't even own wifi or a device other than a phone" - Johny Ngyen, student at the Front Range Community College of Westminster.

- **Ensure that Students Have Access to Technology and Internet**

As Colorado higher education institutions move to digital classrooms, we must ensure every college student that needs a laptop and internet access with necessary technology and connection to attend class and complete assignments. **Recommendation: Institutions should prioritize a portion of the funding received from CARES Act to expand technology accessibility, especially to homeless youth.**

Ensure COVID-19's Disruption to Higher Education Does Not Impact Students' Financial Aid

- **Ensure No Penalty for Students' Satisfactory Academic Progress Status**

Students' class and instruction time will likely dip over the next few weeks and months, as students monitor the health and financial well-being of themselves and their families. **Recommendation: Colorado's Congressional leaders should ensure students are not penalized if they dip below [satisfactory academic progress requirements](#).** We also urge federal and state lawmakers to grant flexibility with lifetime eligibility usage for the Pell Grant and state grants. We also urge federal and state lawmakers to grant [flexibility with lifetime eligibility usage](#) for the Pell Grant and state grants.

- **Ensure borrowers in eligible repayment plans stay on track to receive loan forgiveness. Recommendation: Lenders should provide easy-to-access pathways to update payment plans once student loan repayment begins again in September 2020.**

Address Food and Housing Insecurity among College Students

"Many students are reliant on their schools to assist them with accessing food, and even if they only depend on their campus for one or two meals a week, those are now meals they have to find somewhere else or not eat. Higher education institutions and lawmakers should ensure that food security services support all students, regardless of how or where they take their classes" - Kim Tolchinsky, MPH student at the Colorado School of Public Health.

"As a record 3.3 million Americans file for unemployment in the wake of COVID-19, here in Colorado the pandemic's financial impact is nothing short of crippling for thousands. Students are among the thousands of Coloradans feeling the strain, and while our state's lawmakers have announced a series of measures, they will need Colorado's help to pay tuition, afford housing (especially if they've been recently displaced during the lockdown), and put food on the table. An emergency grants fund will be crucial to at least 250,000 college students in this state. For our students' survival, every dollar counts" - Dhivahari Vivek, student at the University of Colorado Denver.

- **Support State Funded Student Emergency Assistance Grants and Streamline the Emergency Aid Process**
Emergency aid is critical to ensure students persist through the semester. **Recommendation: Governor Polis and Colorado state lawmakers should support and advance [HB 20-1110: Higher Education Student Emergency Assistance Grants](#) and prioritize funding for a state-wide emergency grant from CARES Act dollars.** Institutions should also ensure their own fund applications for emergency aid are [as simple as possible](#) (including reducing the need for in-person verification) and are [frequently communicated](#) to students. Additionally, colleges and universities should leave applications open even if all funds are used, in order to document the need among students. Finally, students who have already received emergency aid in a previous semester should still be able to apply and receive emergency grant aid during this public health crisis.
- **Ensure Campus Food Pantries Are Open and that Students Know How to Access Campus and Community-Based Resources**
[40% of Denver undergraduates](#) experience food insecurity — and during the pandemic, we expect more students to struggle with affording food. During the crisis, many colleges and universities have limited the hours of operation of their on-campus food pantries, and increasingly require appointments to access food. **Recommendation: Higher education institutions must ensure that on-campus food pantries remain open and are frequently advertised to students.** If staffing during COVID-19 presents a challenge, consider leaving food pantries unlocked, while providing remote oversight and guidance to students, such as to take only what they need. Campuses should be prepared for more college students needing food and housing support once the fall 2020 semester begins.
- **Prepare for Increased Basic Needs Insecurity Now — and for Future Semesters**
Colorado can proactively support students and our institutions by:
 - Supporting a Hunger Free Campus Checklist to address food insecurity of postsecondary students on college campuses.
 - Building on last year’s vital state support for SNAP outreach to rural and frontier communities, we are requesting additional general funds to provide a portion of the cost of conducting [SNAP outreach to students](#) and their families. **Recommendation: We are supportive of the SNAP for Student Success proposal, seeking a 10% match from private funders, and together, the General Fund (40%) and private funds (10%) will draw down a corresponding federal match (50%):**
 - Only 6 out of 10 eligible Coloradans utilize SNAP. This gap represents a huge loss of federal dollars in benefits (in the hundreds of millions) that could support our local communities, especially in rural Colorado.
 - One of the Governor Polis’s goals for the upcoming state fiscal year is to utilize SNAP outreach partners to increase the enrollment of eligible Coloradans in SNAP with a particular focus on Colorado’s students, which aligns with the Governor’s proposed [Roadmap to Make College More Affordable](#).

Support Students’ Mental Health

“Students’ mental health will be affected because the tendency to isolate is higher if we’re not in classes together, but there’s plenty of opportunities for Zoom get togethers to remain socially connected” - Rebecca Turner, student at the Community College of Denver.

- **Sustain Mental Health Services Allowing for Teletherapy**
 - The COVID-19 pandemic will impact students’ mental health, and students are already feeling the impact of losing access to critical on-campus supports, such as mental health counseling. **Recommendation: During the pandemic, Colorado colleges must leverage existing campus counselors to create virtual counseling while campuses are closed, and ensure that each campus offers this service.**
 - We also must ensure that students returning to campus in the fall have sufficient access to mental health counseling. **Recommendation: State lawmakers should protect students’ mental well-being now by**

supporting the resolution: “Healthy Minds” Campus Designation Checklist. The resolution will help improve mental health resources and student wellness on Colorado’s higher institutional campuses and include a checklist of recommendations for institutions along with best practices concerning mental health for students in Colorado.

Support layed off or unpaid on-campus student workers.

“As a student worker, I feel like we have been forgotten once campuses closed. There’s very limited guidance on what resources are available to us, and I have no idea what my next paycheck will look like,” - Kim Tolchinsky, MPH student at the Colorado School of Public Health.

- We must ensure that every student has the resources needed to seek financial support under the relief package such as the emergency unemployment insurance [provision](#).

Support the Financial Stability of College Students and Recent Graduates

“In light of these uncertain circumstances, my education has never felt more crucial to my future success as it does now. Yet at the same time, my prospects for degree completion and future work have never felt so threatened.” - Olivia C, MSU Denver student

- **Allow Students to Receive Transcripts Without Having to Pay Off Past Debts**

The State should also ensure any past debts accrued while enrolled at a particular institution do not impact a students’ ability to transfer if needed during this uncertain time.

- **Create a Workforce Pipeline for Graduating Seniors**

Working college students, and graduating seniors in particular, are facing an uncertain economy. **Recommendation: State lawmakers must think creatively about creating employment opportunities for college students and graduates post-COVID-19.** The State could create a pipeline for civil service or green energy jobs to ensure employment opportunities for college graduates.

- **Invest in Job Training Programs that Meet the Demand for CO’s Growing Economy**

We can also build on [historic investments](#) in the state’s workforce development infrastructure, and ensure job-training programming connects with [critical wrap-around supports](#) young workers will need in the post-COVID-19 economy. **Recommendation: State lawmakers should study and broaden requirements on job training hours for apprenticeships.** This study should include gender and racial equity in its scope.