



Washington State Student and Youth Homelessness COVID-19 Response Fund: Grantee Survey Results

Building Changes | October 2021

Washington State Student and Youth Homelessness COVID-19 Response Fund

Overview



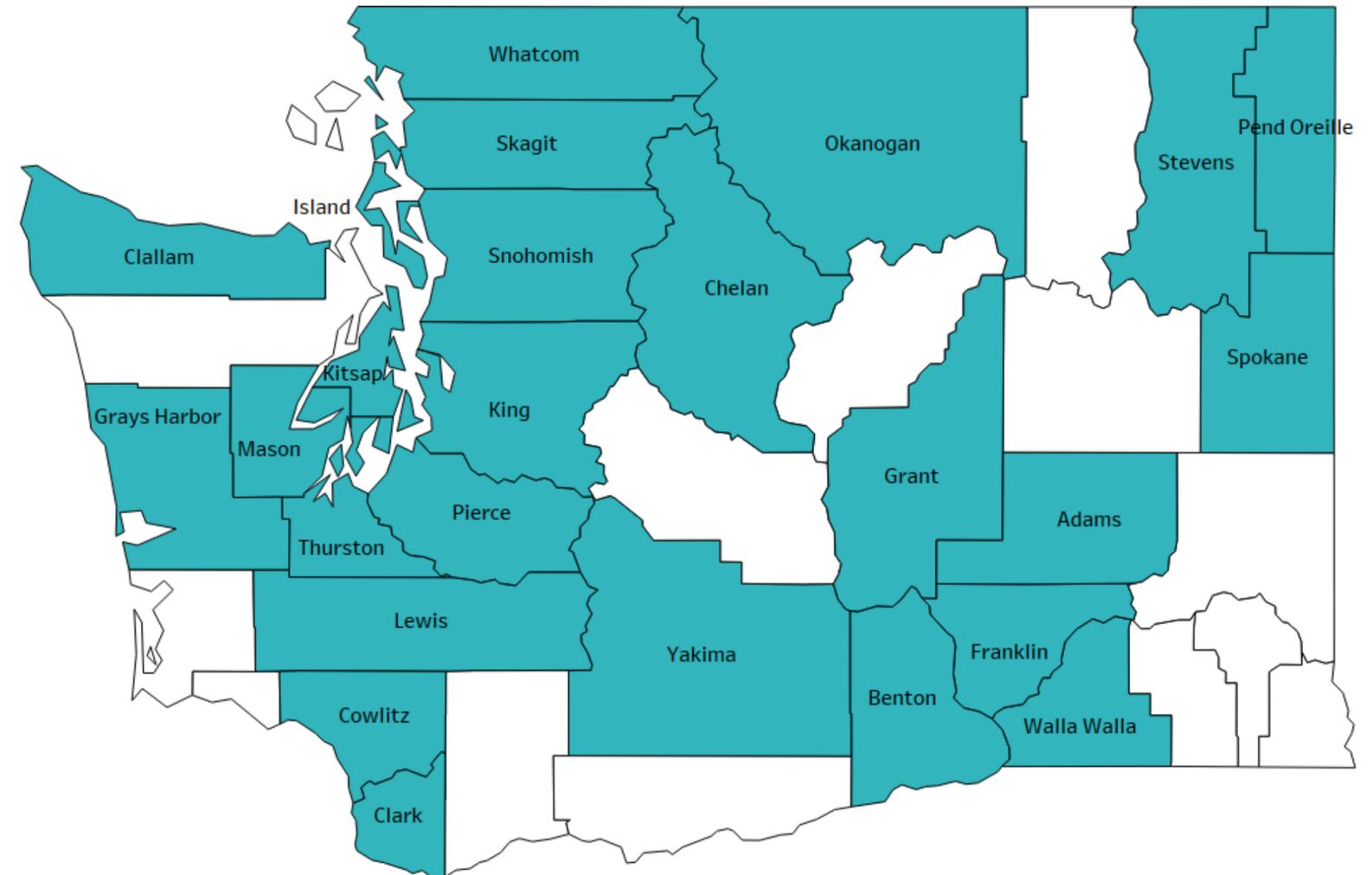
For more information, visit buildingchanges.org/our-work/covid-19-response/

\$4.1 million in private donations raised and distributed

199 community-based organizations, schools, school districts, and tribes

25 counties across the state

April 2020 – March 2021



Follow-up Survey of COVID-19 Response Fund Grantees

After awarding all available funds, we solicited grantee feedback to learn more about the following topics regarding students and youth experiencing homelessness:



Short- and long-term needs



Opportunities for funder and system change to better meet needs



Supports provided using grant funds

Follow-up Survey of COVID-19 Response Fund Grantees

Implementation and Response



Surveyed in April – May 2021

Sent to over 200 grantee staff including direct service providers and McKinney-Vento liaisons

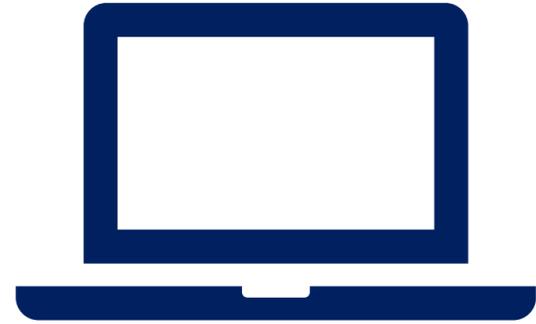
40 responses from grantees serving youth and young adults (YYA)

41 responses from grantees serving students





**BUILDING
CHANGES**



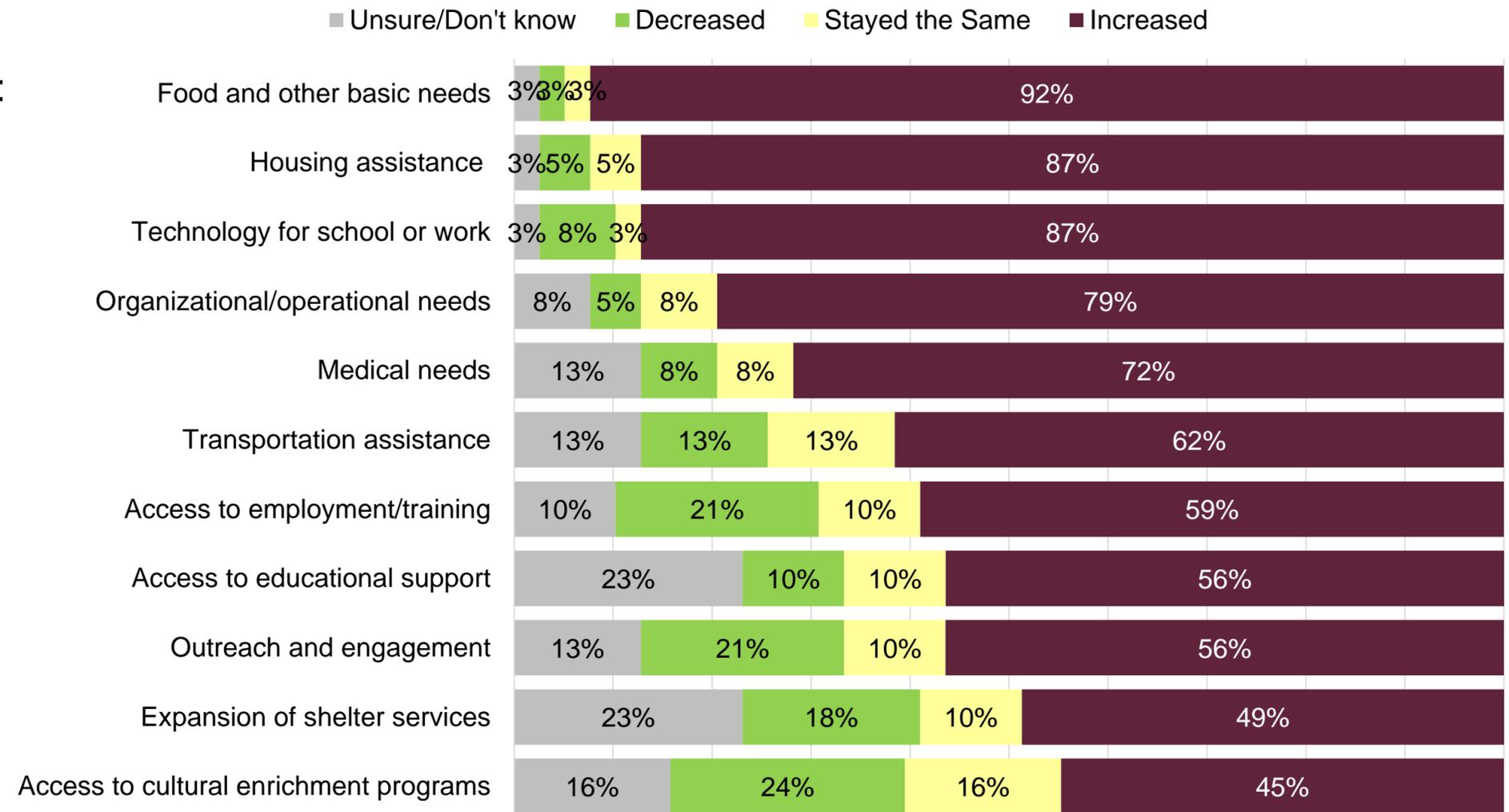
Needs of Students and Youth Experiencing Homelessness

How have needs changed for YYA since the start of pandemic?



There has been a general increase in needs among YYA across most domains.

- The top five domains in which grantees serving YYA (n=39) said need increased are:
 - Food and other basic needs
 - Housing assistance
 - Technology for school or work
 - Organizational/operational needs for agencies
 - Medical needs
- Some grantees also noted that there have been new responsibilities placed on YYA including providing financial support to households and caregiving

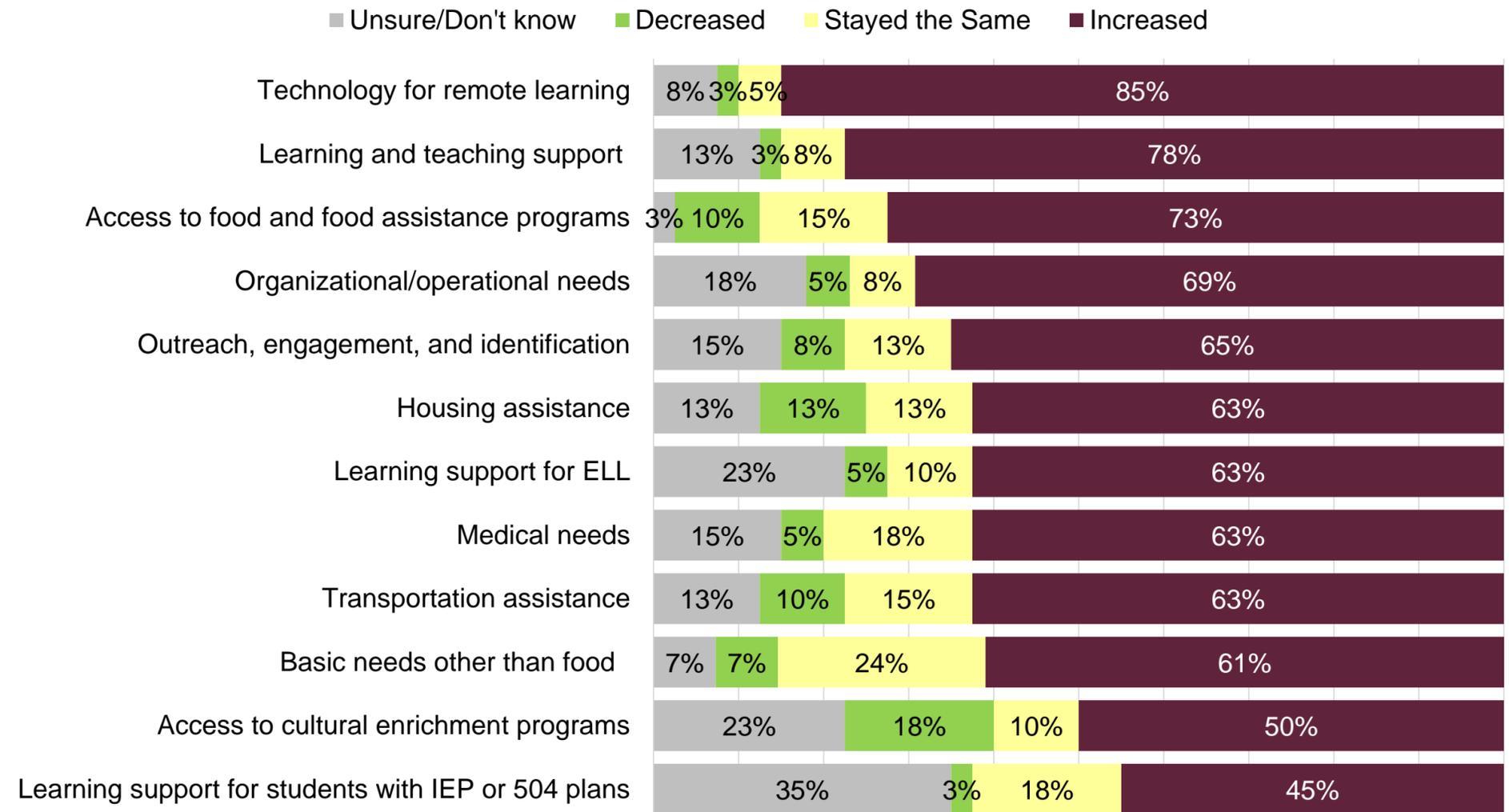


How have needs changed for students since the start of pandemic?



There has been a general increase in needs among students across most domains.

- The top five domains in which grantees serving students (n=41) said need increased are:
 - Technology for remote learning
 - Learning and teaching support
 - Access to food/food assistance programs
 - Organizational/operational needs for agencies or school districts
 - Outreach, engagement, and identification
- A few grantees also noted that there has been an increased need to assist parents' ability to support their student's education during remote learning

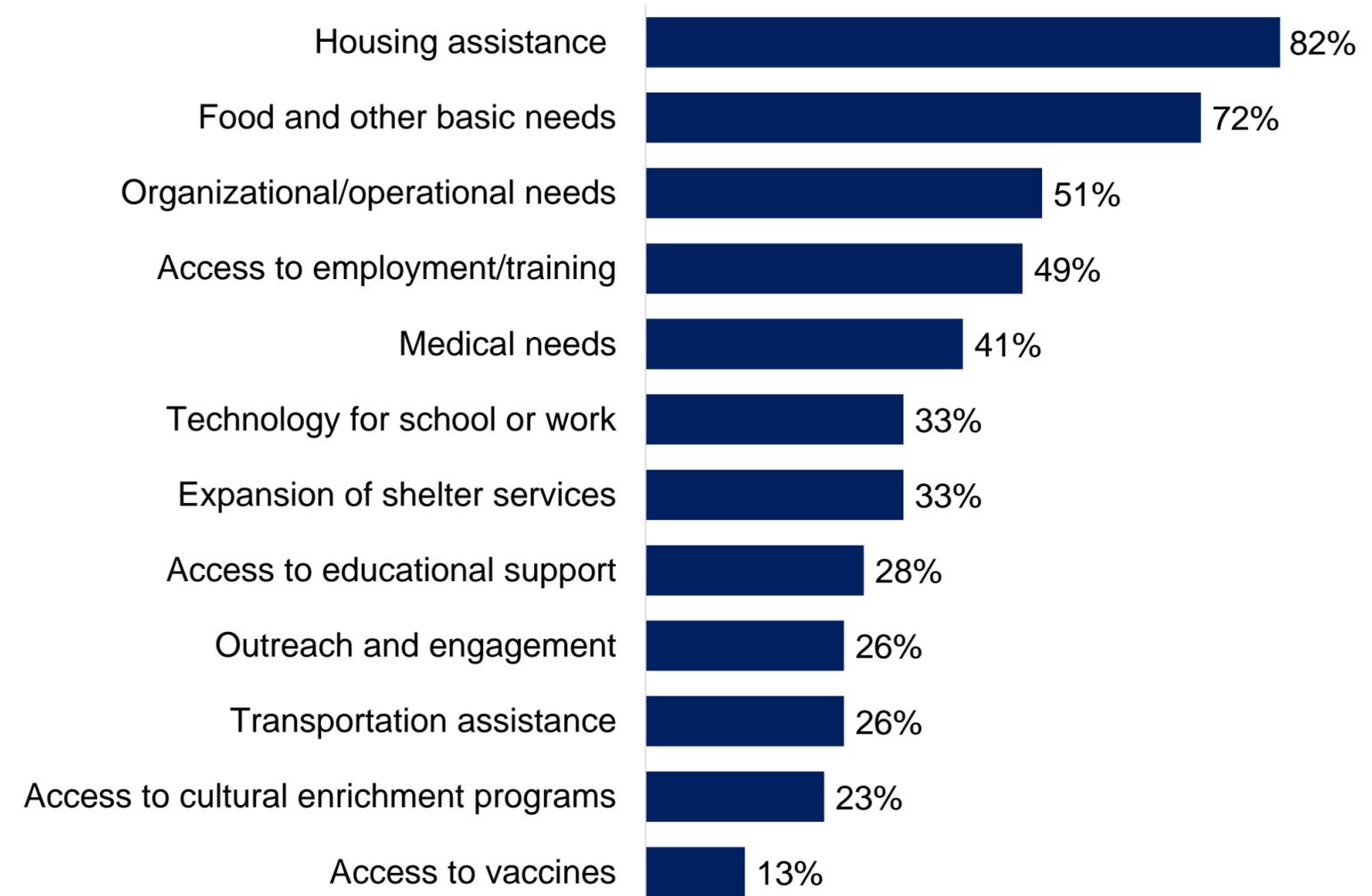


What are the short-term (next six months) needs of YYA?



Short-term needs identified by respondents (n=39) primarily involve stability and health.

- 82% of respondents felt housing assistance was one of the top five needs YYA will face over the next six months
- 72% of respondents identified food and other basic needs
- Additional needs selected by at least 40% of respondents include:
 - Organization/operational support
 - Access to employment/training
 - Medical needs
- Some grantees also cited behavioral health, translation supports, and education about COVID

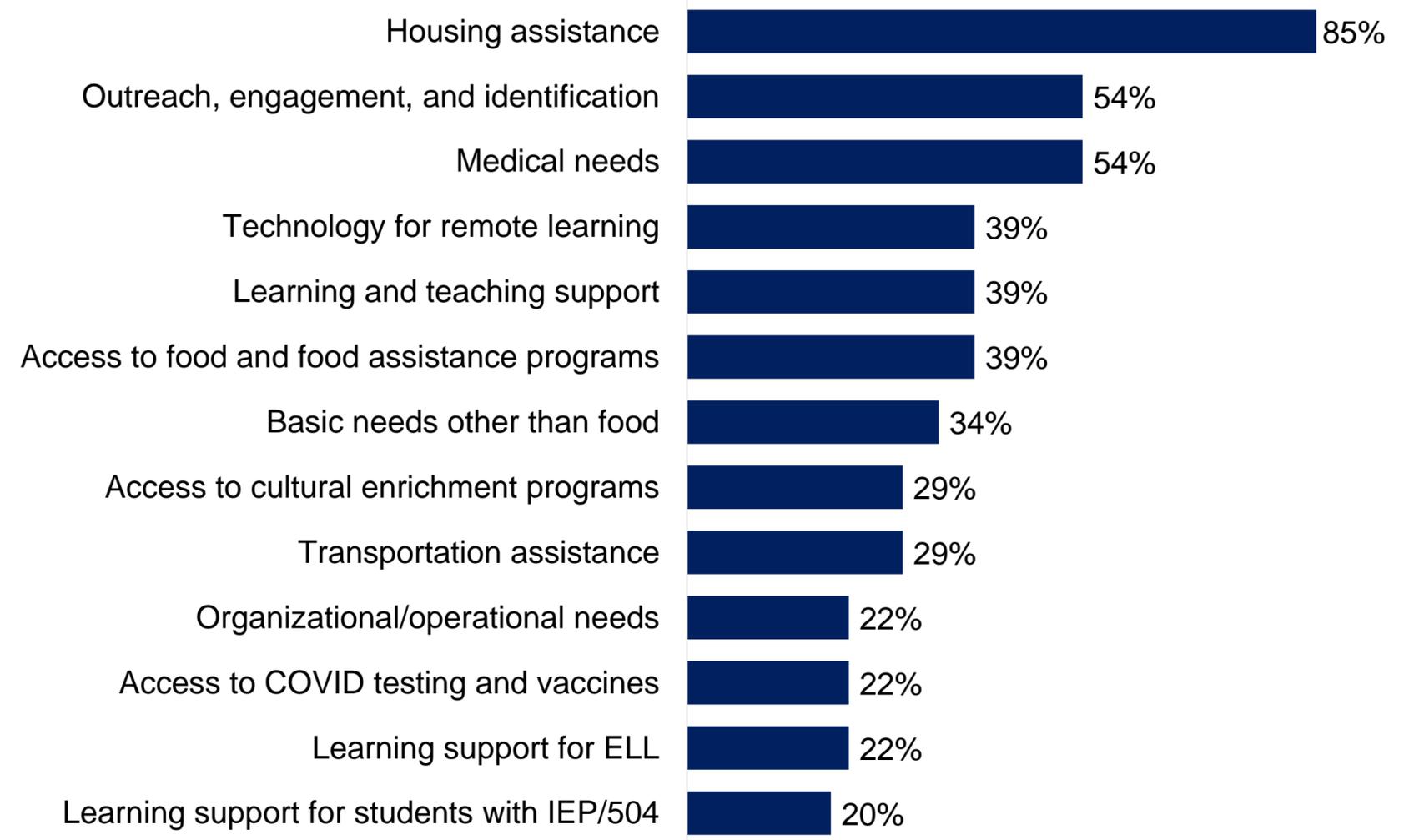


What are the short-term (next six months) needs of students?



Short-term needs identified by respondents (n=41) primarily involve housing and education supports.

- 85% of respondents felt housing assistance was one of the top five needs students will face over the next six months
- Additional needs selected by at least 50% of respondents include:
 - Outreach, engagement, and identification
 - Medical needs
- Over one-third of respondents identified the following needs:
 - Technology for remote learning
 - Learning and teaching support
 - Access to food/food assistance programs
 - Basic needs other than food



What are the long-term needs?



Many grantees cited housing, academic supports, and mental health.

YYA (n=34, open-ended)

- The most common answers were funding for housing and rental assistance, rent debt, and other ramifications of the lifting of eviction moratoria. Another common answer was mental and behavioral health needs.
- A few respondents cited educational needs and other housing needs (e.g., more housing units, more permanent housing programs, low barrier housing options).
- A few respondents indicated targeted needs for marginalized and/or POC communities such as therapy for trauma, language access, and services to address the surge in need among certain communities.
- Other answers included community engagement, basic needs, food, trainings for youth and families, technology, support for YYA caregivers, job training and support, and credit score services.

Students (n=37, open-ended)

- The most common answers were academic support to address learning loss, support for mental health and social-emotional learning to address the trauma of the pandemic, and housing assistance (particularly due to eviction moratoria expiring).
- A few respondents mentioned the need for additional capacity and staffing for youth/student serving organizations and the need for good paying jobs and other forms of economic support to increase stability.
- Other answers included a focus on equity, technology supports, access to basic needs (e.g., food), and transportation assistance.

Which YYA are having the most difficulty getting needs met? What challenges are they facing?



Respondents (n=34) identified several groups experiencing a variety of challenges.

Populations

- The most common response was that BIPOC youth were experiencing the most challenges. In particular, Black, African, and African American YYA were mentioned most often. Other specific BIPOC communities mentioned were Indigenous and Hispanic.
- The next most common responses were immigrants, refugees, undocumented youth, and/or those who do not speak English as their first language.
- Other answers included those who were currently in or had exited from foster care, those with mental or behavioral health challenges, those who were homeless in general, those who were disabled, LGBTQ+ youth, those experiencing substance abuse or addiction, those with low income, those without rental history or an established credit score, youth under 18 years old, those with criminal justice involvement, international students, and those without jobs.

Challenges/Barriers

- The most frequently cited challenges were a general lack of resources, ineligibility or inability to access unemployment and other economic assistance, few housing or shelter options, lack of access to mental and behavioral health supports, lack of appropriate engagement and outreach, and access to technology.
- Some respondents cited systemic and structural racism, the impact of cultural differences, educational needs related to reopening schools, employment supports, language access, access to basic needs, and unsafe living situations. .
- Other answers included transportation, lack of alignment across systems, and limited availability of public agencies (e.g., to obtain documents).

Which students are having the most difficulty getting needs met? What challenges are they facing?



Respondents (n=39) identified general difficulties and discussed some specific populations experiencing more barriers.

Populations

- The majority of respondents felt that students experiencing homelessness in general were having challenges getting their needs met.
- Some respondents highlighted students of color, English language learners, immigrant and refugee students, and students living with a single parent/guardian.
- Additional answers include students in special education, students living in families affected by unemployment, students with mental health challenges, students in elementary school, and students living doubled-up.

Challenges/Barriers

- The most frequently cited challenge was a lack of sufficient academic supports, particularly around remote learning.
- Several respondents cited the need for additional mental health supports, access to technology needed for remote learning, and challenges related to the capacity of caregivers to provide support while also working.
- Some respondents noted the need for additional supports for students in special education and English language learners, economic challenges, housing, and access to food and other basic needs.
- Other answers included a lack of access to healthcare, insufficient funding to support students/families, stigma, transportation, and equity.

Additional thoughts on needs for YYA and students



Some respondents provided additional thoughts and emphasized the need for enhanced engagement and services.

YYA (n=18, open-ended)

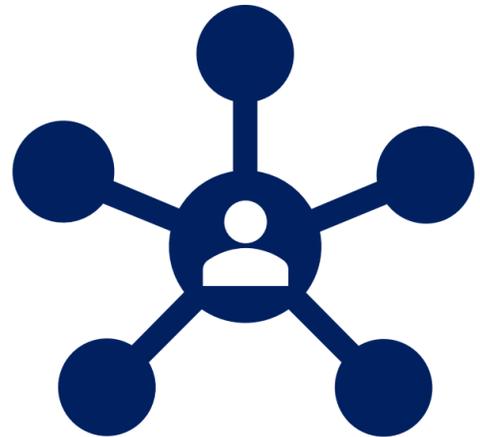
- Some respondents specifically called out the need for and benefit of culturally appropriate and language accessible services for BIPOC, immigrant, and undocumented individuals. This included long term funding to these communities.
- Respondents also mentioned the need for organizational funding for staff to meet demand for services and/or development and support staff for new, smaller organizations.
- Additional needs cited by some respondents included mental and behavioral health, flexible and unrestricted funding, meaningful workforce development, shelters and transitional housing with training programs, funding for permanent supportive housing and transitional living programs for young adults, rent forgiveness, and increased funding for household expenses.

Students (n=17, open-ended)

- Several respondents mentioned under-identification and the need to re-open schools. Respondents also discussed how COVID has exacerbated pre-existing challenges including limited access to basic needs and housing instability related to the upcoming expiration of eviction moratoria.
- Respondents also mentioned that there are several trusted organizations in communities who are working to meet these needs, but they need funding to conduct the work.
- Additional needs cited included mental and behavioral health, tutoring, additional shelter beds, mentoring, and home visiting programs.



**BUILDING
CHANGES**



Opportunities for Funder and System Change

How could the process of applying for funding from state agencies to serve YYA be improved?



The majority of respondents (59%, 22 of 37) have not applied for state funding; grantees cited several barriers and suggestions on how to make the process more accessible and equitable.

Orgs. that applied for funding (n=15)

- Just under half of respondents cited positive or very positive aspects regarding the application experience such as the availability of technical assistance and the amount of funding available.
- Some respondents discussed barriers related to the length and complexity of applications as well as eligibility and service type limits. A few grantees noted that these barriers can be more challenging for smaller, newer organizations that do not have the same infrastructure as more established organizations.
- Suggestions included more funding for general operation needs (as opposed to funding only for services), funding for bilingual staff, ensuring significant funding to serve Indigenous youth, and ensuring POC have a seat at the table where decisions are made.

Orgs. that did not apply for funding (n=21)

- The most common answer was that organizations were not aware of funding opportunities. Grantees highlighted the need for increased visibility, outreach, and access to announcements of available funding opportunities.
- Several respondents noted that funding opportunities are often for pre-existing, specific services or are restricted to certain populations and thus felt the services they offered would not qualify or would be outside the scope of the RFP.
- Other answers included unrealistic reporting barriers, the need for resources and capacity to identify and apply for funding, slow application processes, lack of funding for pilot programs, the competitive nature of grants limiting opportunities for newer organizations, and requirements that organizations have extensive upfront funding to pay for services before being reimbursed.

How could the process of applying for funding from state agencies to serve YYA be improved?

The majority of YYA respondents (59%, 22 of 37) have not applied for state funding; grantees cited several barriers and suggestions on how to make the process more accessible and equitable.

Additional Suggestions (n=13)

- Some grantees suggested more frequent and visible email notifications and/or publication of funding opportunities and RFPs
- Grantees appreciated that BC's COVID fund had an easy to navigate application for organizations without a grant writer. One grantee noted that the success of various grant awards has allowed them to have limited paid staff for fund development.
- Some opportunities voiced included talking more about the needs of small organizations with high need but thin budgets, ensuring a uniform definition of "by and for" organizations across funders/agencies rather than leaving the determination to the discretion of grant managers, and increased inclusivity on boards.



How should the public sector change to better meet the needs of YYA?



Respondents (n=35) cited increased housing supports and several other strategies.

- The most common answer was the need for additional funding for housing and housing supports including affordable housing, nonsubsidized housing that accepts various sources of income and allows short-term leases, transitional housing programs, expanded federal housing programs, YYA-specific housing projects, youth shelters in more locations and incentives to construct them, low barrier shelters, rental assistance and forgiveness, eviction prevention funding, and funding for move-in and moving costs.
- Another answer given by multiple respondents was listening to and including YYA and service providers in the discussion and decision-making process in order to better understand their unique needs and how those needs differ from adult populations. Some respondents felt this would also help to understand and address the root causes of housing instability.
- Several grantees cited the need for more flexibility in how funding can be used. This included allowing for more innovation in services, using a broader understanding of basic needs (e.g., hygiene, childcare, technology), and the ability to use funds for capacity building and staffing.
- Some grantees cited the need to improve access and increase the ability to navigate systems by de-siloing agencies, increasing communication in multiple formats and languages, reducing complexity, and following up with clients who have applied for Coordinated Entry.
- BIPOC focused funding was specifically mentioned by a few respondents. This included providing equal rights and opportunities to BIPOC, dedicated funding for BIPOC youth, addressing language access barriers including Indigenous languages, funding culturally relevant supports, and increased access to funding for minority-led organizations.
- Other answers included increased prevention funding, funding for mentoring, education supports, targeting organizations actively working in the community, access to funding for smaller organizations, easier grant applications, increased minimum wage, aligning homeless definitions to match that of McKinney Vento, funding for mental health and behavior health supports, and inclusive programming for LGBTQ youth.

How should the philanthropic sector change to better meet the needs of YYA?



Respondents (n=35) cited flexible funding, accessible grants, and specific types of supports.

- The most frequent answers given by respondents were more flexibility in how funding can be used and making the funding application and reporting process more accessible. Specific suggestions included providing funds for administration/operating costs and capacity building, working with more organizations (rather than only large, established organizations), trusting community-based organizations to get funds to where they are needed most, eliminating bottlenecks that hinder by/for organizations from accessing adequate funding, creating low barrier funding opportunities, longer grant cycles, and more flexibility around reporting and outcomes.
- Several respondents noted the need to hear directly from youth and providers to better understand their needs and target services.
- Other answers included providing direct payments to clients, supporting partnerships between schools and community-based organizations, focusing on the unique barriers of different populations, skills training programs, funding mental and behavioral health services, equal opportunities to BIPOC communities, raising awareness about the needs of YYA, supporting “unseen” communities (e.g., rural, under resourced), life skills, mentorships, peer networking, funding low barrier shelters with wraparound services, supporting new organizations, building relationships with trusted messengers to advocate with and for youth, transitional housing hubs, and increasing access to postsecondary education by covering the true costs of attending college (e.g., housing, childcare, transportation).

How should the public sector change to better meet the needs of students?

Respondents (n=41) cited flexible funding opportunities, organizational support, partnerships, and other strategies.

- The most frequently cited way in which public agencies could change was by increasing the flexibility of funding to allow agencies to better meet each student/family's specific needs. Some respondents noted that the documentation, categorization, and reporting requirements of various funding streams can be burdensome and can at times prevent families from receiving assistance.
- Respondents also cited the need for an increase in affordable and/or public housing, increased funding to support organizational capacity and staffing (particularly for smaller organizations), increased partnership with organizations closest to the communities they serve, increasing the amount of input and decision making from people with lived expertise and agency staff, more equitable economic systems including a living wage, and the need for agencies to conduct better outreach to students, youth, and families and develop better guidance on various topics (e.g., how to implement McKinney-Vento, how to work with school districts).



How should federal/state stimulus funding be used to support the academic needs of students?



Respondents (n=29) felt funding should primarily support direct academic and wraparound supports.

- The most frequently cited use of stimulus funding was enhanced academic supports to address learning loss. Suggestions included increased access to free tutoring, expanding mentorship programs, and conducting individualized needs assessments.
- Similar to other questions, respondents also felt that additional mental health supports, housing assistance, basic needs, continued/increased access to technology, expanded outreach, more partnerships with and enhanced funding for community-based organizations would be beneficial.
- Additional suggestions include in-school supports for physical health, home visiting programs, parent and/or peer to peer support programs, provision of safety supplies/personal protective equipment, and providing information to students and families about vaccines.



What lessons learned during the COVID pandemic should be sustained in the future to support students?



Respondents (n=41) cited flexibility, enhanced outreach, access to supports, and other practices.

- The most frequently cited lesson learned was again to maintain and extend flexibility of funding/assistance and reducing "red tape" to allow agencies to better meet each student/family's specific needs.
- Some respondents cited additional practices and policies that should remain in place including enhanced outreach and engagement strategies, enhanced basic need and food access (such as P-EBT), increased support for technology access, and options to provide education supports and other services remotely.
- Other lessons learned included the need to plan ahead in anticipation of future challenges, the need to build and maintain partnerships with community-based organizations, enhancing the ability of school systems to provide direct supports (e.g., temporary housing assistance), the need to hire social workers and sufficiently fund staff, and an increase in access to mental health supports.





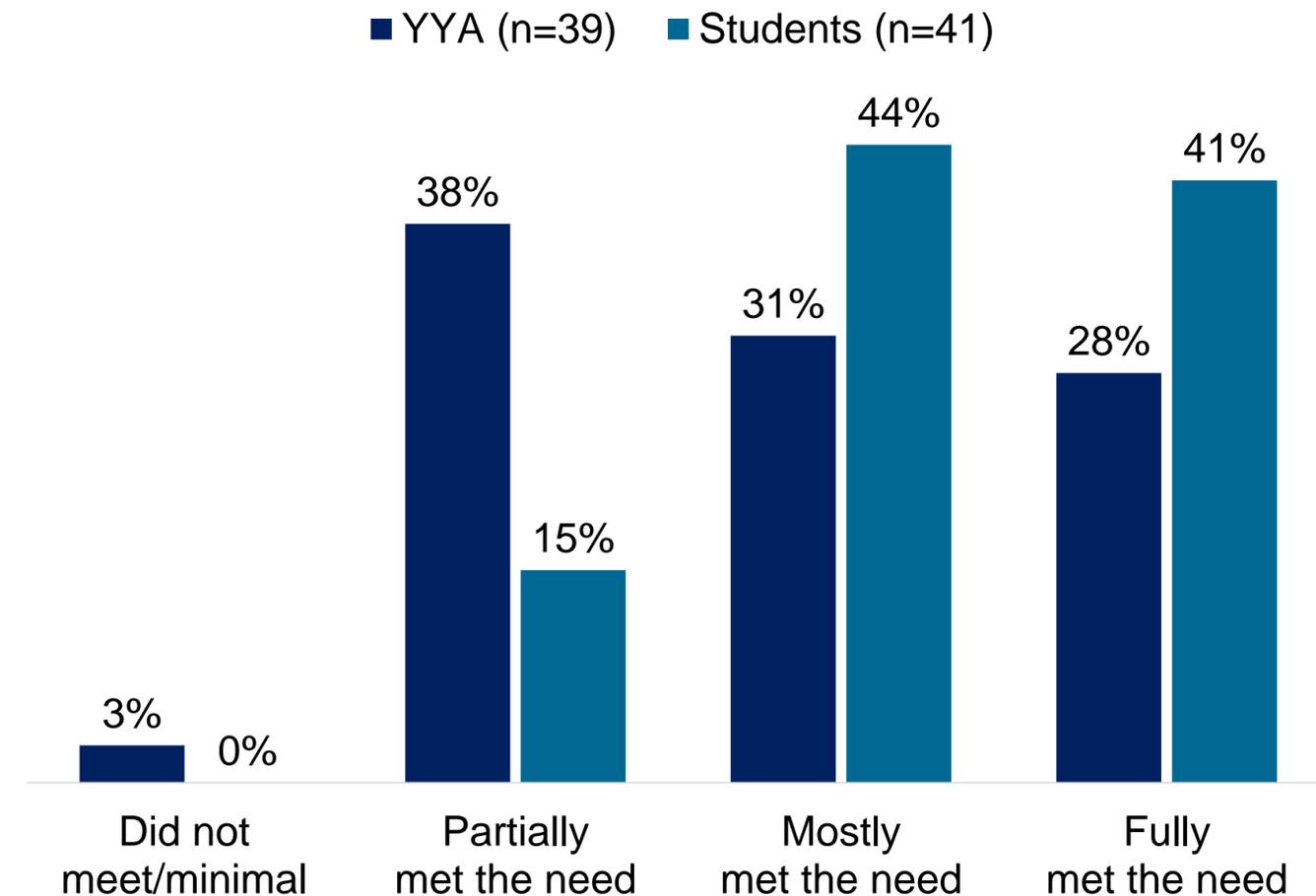
Supports Provided Using Grant Funds

How well did the grant help address the needs identified in the application?



The majority of respondents felt the grant mostly or fully met the identified needs.

- Grantees serving YYA (n=39):
 - Most common response was 'partially met' (38%, n=15)
 - Majority (59%, n=23) felt the grant 'mostly' or 'fully' met the need
- Grantees serving students (n=41):
 - Most common response was 'mostly met' (44%, n=18)
 - Majority (85%, n=35) felt the grant 'mostly' or 'fully' met the need



How were the grants used to advance racial equity?



Grantees provided direct assistance and some targeted services to BIPOC YYA and students.

YYA

(n=34, open-ended)

- Many respondents provided direct supports (e.g., housing assistance) to all clients which included serving BIPOC youth, students, and families. Some respondents mentioned an increase in need during the pandemic.
- Some organizations are by/for organizations and/or specifically target services towards different communities including BIPOC; refugee, immigrant, and undocumented; and indigenous communities.
- Some respondents discussed specific services and strategies including direct financial assistance, allotment of funds specifically to support BIPOC, hiring bilingual staff, mentors, providing culturally-specific materials and supplies, and recruiting BIPOC host homes.

Students

(n=41, open-ended)

- Most grantees discussed providing direct supports (e.g., basic needs, rent assistance, school supplies) to students and families of color and noted that BIPOC families are disproportionately represented.
- Some additional strategies included culturally relevant outreach; employing bilingual staff and/or staff that reflect the students served; reviewing data to examine disproportionality; and targeting supports to students/families who may not be able to access federal, state, or other supports (e.g., immigrant/refugee students).

How did this grant differ from other funding sources to support students experiencing homelessness?

Grantees highlighted the flexibility and responsiveness of the COVID-19 Response Fund.

- The most common difference described by grantees was how flexibly and quickly the dollars could be used.
- Respondents were able to meet the immediate needs identified by students and families with few restrictions and minimal, if any, "red tape" or documentation needed. For example, several grantees were able to pay for housing related costs including rent assistance, rental applications, and temporary hotel stays. Other grantees were able to quickly buy gift cards for basic needs or provide other supports like transportation or utility payments.
- Some grantees highlighted the ability to serve students/families that may not be eligible for other funding sources (e.g., federal funding) including immigrant, refugee, and undocumented families.



Thank You



Building Changes advances equitable responses to homelessness in Washington State, with a focus on children, youth, and families and the systems that serve them.

To learn more about our work, visit buildingchanges.org

To learn more about the Washington State Student and Youth Homelessness COVID-19 Response Fund, visit buildingchanges.org/our-work/covid-19-response/

