

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CUNY CARES Bronx Pilot Baseline Assessment Report

CUNY CARES, Comprehensive Access to Resources for Essential Services, will implement and evaluate a new model for providing integrated and coordinated health and social services to meet the needs of CUNY students in order to support their academic success. For the last two years, CUNY students, faculty and staff from the three Bronx campuses – Bronx Community College, Hostos Community College and Lehman College -- the CUNY Central Offices of Academic Affairs and Student Affairs, Healthy CUNY, a university-wide initiative to promote the health of CUNY students that is based at the CUNY School of Public Health, and various partner organizations and city agencies have met to plan, collect data, and field test the various components of the CUNY CARES model.

In September 2023, with leadership from the CUNY Chancellor's Office of Transformation, CUNY CARES will launch the Bronx Demonstration Project, a three year effort to develop this model, build the infrastructure needed to support it, assess its impact on student well-being and academic success, develop a plan to scale it to all 25 CUNY campuses, and find sustainable support to transform CUNY's health and social student services.

This report summarizes the findings from the surveys, interviews, and observations at the three Bronx campuses over the last two years. It highlights the assets the CUNY CARES team has identified to support this program as well as the challenges the program is likely to encounter. It describes the core elements of the CUNY CARES model developed by the planning team and suggests some priorities for the implementation in the coming academic year. CUNY CARES is designed to be a student-centered program rooted in the realities and strengths of each of the three Bronx campuses, so the CUNY CARES team invites your feedback, suggestions, and questions.

Key Findings from Surveys and Interviews

This report is based on a Fall 2022 survey of a representative sample of 1,833 students enrolled on the Bronx campuses in the prior year, in-depth interviews with 24 Bronx campus students to elicit their experiences meeting essential needs and using campus and community services, interviews with more than 15 student services and other key staff on the three Bronx campuses, and an assessment of our field tests of CUNY CARES student advocates and navigators in the FY 2022-23 academic year.

Unmet Needs in Fall 2022

Food Insecurity

- 44% of Bronx students experience food insecurity and 36% report that hunger affects their academic performance. Food insecure students were three times more likely to discontinue their studies than their food secure peers.
- 34% of students used food assistance resources in the last year; of these, 22% most often utilize these resources on campus. Overall, 10% of Bronx students report using campus food assistance resources.
- Students who attended any food pantry were significantly less likely to drop out or take a leave of absence compared to those that did use pantries.
- 47% of students reported being aware of campus food assistance resources.
- 50% were eligible for SNAP(food stamps). Of these, 60% were not enrolled in the program, about 30% of the Bronx student population or 7,200 students.

Housing Instability

- 49% of Bronx campus students reported experiencing housing instability, defined as in the last year being unable to pay rent or mortgage, receiving a summons to

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appear in housing court, not paid the full amount of utility bill, moved in with others due to financial problems, lived with others in an overcrowded house or apartment, left the household due to feeling unsafe, and/or experienced homelessness.

- 6% reported having experienced homelessness in the past year.
- 39% reported feeling worried about losing their housing.
- Those who experienced housing instability were twice as likely to have stopped out of their studies compared to those with stable housing.
- Only 10% of students reported receiving assistance with housing in the last year and only 1% received any housing assistance from CUNY.

Mental Health Needs

- 32% of students reported anxiety or depression and 48% had symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder.
- 40% of students reported that mental health issues interfered with their schoolwork.
- Students with depression and PTSD had lower GPAs compared to peers without these conditions.
- 41% reported an unmet mental health need.
- Those with an unmet need were twice as likely to stop out than students whose needs were met.
- Students who used mental health services were half as likely to stop out compared to those who did not seek help.
- Those with any mental health problems were three times more likely to be dissatisfied with their overall experience at CUNY.
- Only 23% of students had received counseling or therapy from a mental health professional during the past year.
- Only 4% of students received any mental health counseling at CUNY.

Health Care Access

- 15% of students report having fair or poor overall health.
- These students were almost twice as likely to stop out compared to those who reported good health.
- 21% of students do not have a regular healthcare provider.
- 20% of students reported an unmet healthcare need, 6% lacked health insurance, and 16% were unable to get medical care when they needed it.
- Compared to students whose healthcare needs are met, students with unmet needs were 26% more likely to take a leave of absence and 13% to have a low GPA.

Unmet Needs and Academic Success

Overall, 22% of students had no unmet needs, 28% had one unmet need, 28% had two unmet needs, 17% three unmet needs, and 5% had four unmet needs. In sum, half of CUNY students in the Bronx had two or more unmet needs.

Our analyses showed a dose-response relationship between the number of unmet needs and the odds of experiencing academic problems. In models adjusted for age, gender, race/ethnicity, college type, and enrollment status, those with one unmet need had 16% greater odds of having academic problems, those with two unmet needs had 55% greater odds, those with three unmet needs had 72% greater odds, and those with four unmet needs had 84% greater odds compared to students with no unmet needs. Every unit increase in the number of unmet health or social needs increased the odds of having academic problems by 33%.

Bronx Campus Assets, Challenges and Opportunities

CUNY decided to begin planning and implementation of CARES in the Bronx because the three campuses were already creating innovative approaches to addressing their students’ health and social needs, several faculty, staff and students at each campus were committed to developing and testing the model, and compared to other boroughs, the Bronx and its students experience higher rates of health and social problems, making it an ideal place to develop services that contribute to more equitable health, social and academic outcomes across the CUNY’s 25 campuses. The table below shows the key assets, challenges, and opportunities for implementing CUNY CARES that our baseline report found.

Assets	Challenges	Opportunities
<p>1. Campus resource centers can be foundation for CUNY CARES.</p> <p>2. Campus health and mental services include dedicated professionals committed to helping students and providing a range of services.</p> <p>3. CUNY students have life experience, academic training, and a commitment to helping their peers find services they need.</p> <p>4. For many NYC health and social services agencies, CUNY students are a desirable population, relatively healthy, tech savvy, and most with health insurance.</p>	<p>1. Students experience time poverty, making pursuit of benefits and services problematic.</p> <p>2. Students encounter administrative hurdles to services and benefits both at CUNY and at public agencies.</p> <p>3. Resource center staff report inadequate staffing, space, and funding.</p> <p>4. Internal and external stigma deters students from seeking help.</p> <p>5. Some at CUNY believe that providing health and social services to students is not within CUNY’s mission.</p> <p>6. Existing student services are siloed and often lack coordination.</p>	<p>1. Growing national, state, city, and CUNY recognition that to improve retention and graduation rates, universities must meet students’ essential health and social services needs.</p> <p>2. The experience of the pandemic shows that public benefits can expand rapidly, serve those most in need, and contribute to better outcomes.</p> <p>3. CUNY commitments to career readiness and workforce development can strengthen CUNY CARES’ role in preparing students for careers in health care.</p> <p>4. CUNY’s new strategic plan calls for student centered innovation and a new focus on student health.</p> <p>5. A NYC Mayoral initiative to maximize enrollment in public benefit programs can support CUNY CARES.</p>

CUNY CARES Program Model

The key components of the CUNY CARES model are activities designed to:

1. **Expand CUNY’s capacity to connect students to services, benefits, and careers** by preparing students to serve as CUNY CARES navigators, trained to connect their peers to benefits and care and CUNY CARES advocates, prepared to educate and lead outreach and media campaigns to inform their peers about campus and community services.
2. **Expand resources for students facing housing instability** by hiring a housing specialist to serve the three Bronx campuses and providing one-on-one housing assistance to students with housing instability.
3. **Develop partnerships with agencies that can provide integrated referral systems and comprehensive services** by establishing agreements with providers of food assistance, mental health, health care, and social services to serve CUNY students and by exchanging information with these providers to ensure continuity and quality of care.

4. **Increase student awareness of supportive services** by training campus faculty and staff to provide information and referrals for services to students and engaging campus and CUNY leadership in promoting CARES in multiple arenas.

5. **Conduct a comprehensive, rigorous, and participatory evaluation of CUNY CARES** that can assist in monitoring implementation, identifying best practices to expand and strengthen, providing immediate feedback to program staff to enable them to improve services, providing CUNY leaders with the evidence needed to sustain, scale and replicate the model, and to public and private funders to demonstrate the impact of CUNY CARES on health, social and academic outcomes and the life success of our students.

To implement CUNY CARES, the CUNY Office of Transformation, led by Rachel Stephenson, with teams of students, faculty, staff, and leaders from the three Bronx campuses, Healthy CUNY and the CUNY School of Public Health, staff from the CUNY Offices of Student and Academic Affairs, and outside providers and experts will create ongoing structures for planning, implementing, evaluating, and scaling this model.

New Directions for CUNY CARES

In the process of collecting data, field testing models, and talking to CUNY and other experts about essential needs and higher education, the CUNY CARES team has identified five areas for further research and program development in the coming year. These include:

1. To expand access to mental health services, CUNY CARES will develop new approaches to assist students with mental health needs to move across campus, community, and telehealth systems of care to choose the approach that suits their needs.
2. As CUNY CARES connects students to the range of health care services needed to maintain well-being, we will focus more specifically on the sexual and reproductive health of CUNY students and assure that they can find needed services and support.
3. A new Mayoral initiative to better coordinate benefits enrollment across city agencies and services and to ensure that all New Yorkers are enrolled for the benefits for which they are eligible provides an opportunity for more robust, comprehensive partnership to bring this approach to CUNY students.
4. CUNY CARES recognizes the potential for integrating our model for linking students to health and social services with CUNY's growing commitment to preparing students for employment, providing internship experiences while they are enrolled, and ensuring that graduates have marketable skills that will help them find lifetime employment. With the CUNY Office of Health of Human Services, we will look to develop and field test various approaches to integrating our navigator and advocate programs with academic programs, certificates, and opportunities for workforce development.
5. *CUNY Lifting New York* is the strategic plan to transform CUNY into "the nation's foremost student-centered University system by 2030." By describing how CUNY CARES will contribute to and benefit from this plan, CUNY CARES will lay the foundation for a sustainable and replicable approach to meeting our students' health and social needs.

Conclusion

Building upon CUNY's 150-year history, CUNY CARES endeavors to establish a national model for supporting students from low-income families, immigrants and Black and Latine communities. Through our comprehensive approach, we aim to facilitate college completion, improve lifelong well-being, and contribute to closing the economic, educational, and health disparities that characterize both New York City and the nation as a whole. By championing the success of our students, we strive to create a transformative impact that extends beyond the boundaries of our institution.