NCAN's research documents the prevalence of “unaffordability” at public two-year and four-year institutions for students from low- and moderate-income families. The following charts demonstrate the affordability landscape of postsecondary education. When net price and emergency expenses are not covered by subsidized loans and student earnings from part-time employment, NCAN defines the remaining deficit as an “affordability gap.” In instances where the sum of loans and wages equals or surpasses the sum of net price and emergency costs, we refer to the surplus as “an affordability margin.”

The Pell Grant is a federal need-based aid award that helps millions of students annually.

State grant programs are crucial for college access and success, and can be based on financial need, merit, or a variety of factors.

Washington receives $321,383,575 in Pell Grant funding each year.

There are 77,686 Pell Grant recipients in Washington.

Source: Federal Student Aid Pell Grant 2021-2022 End of Year Report.


In the 2023-2024 FAFSA cycle, Washington ranks 48th in FAFSA completion.

The WASHINGTON Class of 2023 left $60 million in Pell Grants unclaimed, by not completing a FAFSA.

The chart to the right reflects degree attainment (including an associate’s degree or higher,) for adults ages 25 and older.


Source: NCAN, Pell Dollars Left on the Table Report.


41% of high school seniors in Washington completed a FAFSA for the 2023-2024 cycle (as of 7/1/2023).

The Financial Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) determines eligibility for many types of financial aid. FAFSA completion is strongly associated with college enrollment. Nationally, 59% of high school seniors completed the FAFSA for the 2023-2024 cycle.

College Access & Completion in Washington

The chart to the right reflects degree attainment (including an associate’s degree or higher,) for adults ages 25 and older.