The American Association for Women in Community Colleges supports the community college completion agenda because it improves the lives of the students we serve and the communities in which we live. Students who complete certificates and degrees earn more money over the course of their lifetimes, are less likely to be unemployed, live healthier lives, and are more likely to give back to their communities.

Twenty-first century women have fewer barriers to access to higher education. Women have become the majority of students in our colleges, and their level of educational success has continued to rise. While female graduation rates are generally higher than male graduation rates, the completion rates of both male and female students in our colleges are alarmingly low. College completion is especially important for women for two primary reasons: women are more likely to live in poverty than men and women generally earn less than men.

According to US Census data, women are poorer than men in all ethnic groups. Moreover, more than 40% of single mothers are living in poverty. Further, in 2010, the child poverty rate escalated to 22%. We know that there is a high correlation between level of education and income. College completion—particularly the completion of awards in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics—is a tool for lifting women and children out of poverty and to help them become productive citizens.

While women make up the majority of the students in our college, they are still underrepresented in STEM programs and other programs that lead to high paying employment. In 2010, women’s wages were 77.4% of men’s wages. Indeed, 2010 Census data indicate that women working full-time earn less than men working full-time in every state in the United States, though the actual wage gap varies from state to state. Increased completion for our female students will facilitate closing that wage gap, and provide opportunities for women to have more productive and healthier lives.

AAWCC champions the work of our colleges in developing programs that assist our women students in attaining awards that will lead to better lives for themselves and their families. Therefore, the American Association for Women in Community Colleges pledges its support to the Community College Completion Challenge and commits to working toward our shared national goal to produce five million more certificate and degree holders by 2020.

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