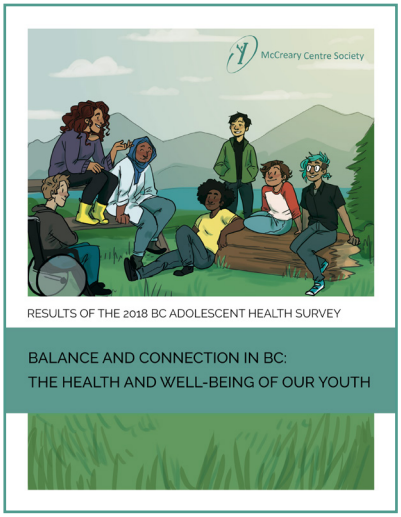
BC YOUTH'S ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY

A 2018 BC ADOLESCENT HEALTH SURVEY FACT SHEET

McCreary Centre Society



This fact sheet uses data from McCreary Centre Society's BC Adolescent Health Survey (BC AHS). The most recent BC AHS was completed in 2018 by over 38,000 youth aged 12–19. For more information about the survey methodology please visit http://mcs.bc.ca/.

The coronavirus pandemic has highlighted the 'digital divide' which exists in British Columbia, and has shown the inequities some youth face in accessing the Internet and other information communication technology. Using data collected before the pandemic through the 2018 BC AHS, this fact sheet looks at which BC youth are less likely to have access to the Internet and considers how this may relate to health and well-being.

Previous studies have suggested that lack of access to the Internet can mean that youth miss out on important information and supports pertaining to their health, including their mental health (Bernhardt, 2000; Blanchard et al., 2008; Christensen et al., 2002). Lack of Internet access has also been associated with reduced feelings of connectedness to community, culture, and social ties (Blanchard et al., 2008; Hargittai & Walejko, 2008; Jenkins, 2006). It can also impact youth's ability to do school work and gain employment skills (Chen, 2015; Reynolds & Chiu, 2016).

YOUTH WHO DID NOT HAVE ACCESS TO THE INTERNET

In 2018, 1% of BC youth did not have access to the Internet. Younger youth were slightly less likely to have access to the Internet than older ones. For example, 2% of youth age 12 or younger did not have Internet access, compared to 1% of those aged 17 or older.

There were regional differences in Internet access, with 3% of students in the Northern region lacking Internet access, compared to 1% in the Interior, Vancouver Island, Vancouver Coastal, and Fraser regions. Also across BC, 2% of rural-based youth did not have access to the Internet, compared to 1% of urban-based youth.

Newcomer youth were less likely to have Internet access. For example, 3% of those born abroad who had lived in Canada for less than two years lacked access to the Internet, compared to 1% who had lived in Canada for six or more years. Also, 7% of youth who arrived in Canada as refugees lacked access to the Internet, compared to 1% who were born in Canada.

Youth who identified as Indigenous were less likely to have access to the Internet than youth from some other backgrounds, such as those of European or East Asian descent.

FAMILY BACKGROUND OF YOUTH WHO DID NOT HAVE ACCESS TO THE INTERNET	
Indigenous	4%
West Asian	2%
African	2%
Southeast Asian	1%
European	1%
East Asian	1%
Latin/South/Central American	1%
South Asian	1%
Australian/Pacific Islander	NR
Don't know	2%
Other	2%

NR: Not releasable due to the risk of deductive disclosure.
Note: Youth could choose more than one response.
Note: Not all differences were statistically significant.

Living situations and home life

Youth who were living in poverty or experiencing challenges in their home life were more likely to miss out on access to the Internet. For example, youth were more likely to miss out on Internet access if they:

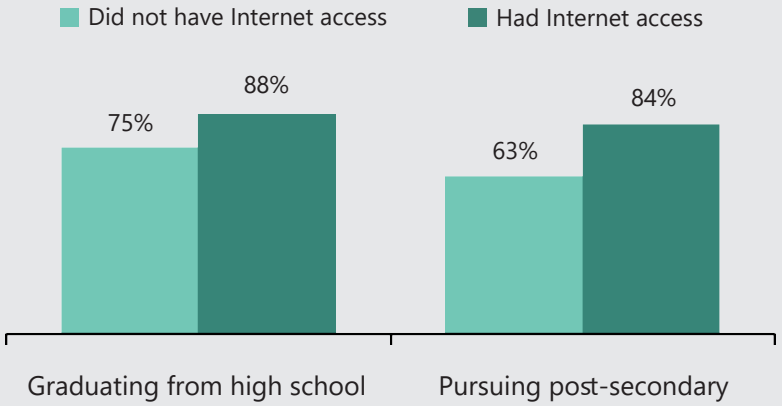
- Lived alone (10% vs. 1% who lived with someone else).
- Had experienced government care (6% vs. 1% who had never been in care).
- Had run away from home in the past year (4% vs. 1% who had not run away in the past year).
- Had been kicked out in the past year (4% vs. 1% who had not been kicked out in the past year).
- Had moved from one home to another in the past year (2% vs. 1% who not moved in the past year).
- Did not have lunch for school/lunch money (4% vs. 1% who had this).
- Did not have a quiet place to sleep (9% vs. 1% who had this).
- Did not have access to transportation (8% vs. 1% who had this).
- Did not have money for school supplies, school trips, and to do extracurricular activities (6% vs. 1% who had this).
- Did not have money to spend on themselves (4% vs. 1% who had this).
- Went to bed hungry at least sometimes because there was not enough money for food at home (4% vs. 1% who never went to bed hungry for this reason).

Future expectations

Five percent of students who did not have access to the Internet did not expect to finish high school (vs. 1% with Internet access). These youth were less likely to plan on graduating or pursuing post-secondary.

Around two thirds (66%) of youth who had Internet access felt hopeful for their future, compared to 47% of those without Internet access.

YOUTH WHO PLANNED ON GRADUATING HIGH SCHOOL AND PURSUING POST-SECONDARY IN RELATION TO INTERNET ACCESS



Mental health

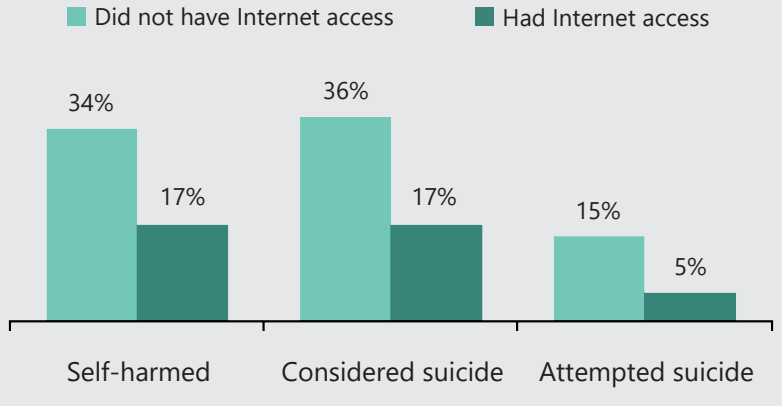
Youth who lacked Internet access reported poorer mental health and well-being. For example, they were less likely than those with Internet access to rate their overall mental health as good or excellent (58% vs. 73%), to feel happy most or all of the time in the past month (46% vs. 65%), to usually feel good about themselves (42% vs. 59%), and to feel they had what they wanted in life (33% vs. 60%).

Youth without access to the Internet were more likely to feel such extreme levels of stress (18% vs. 12% with Internet access) and despair (16% vs. 7%) in the past month that they could not function properly.

They were also more likely to have missed school in the past month, including as a result of their mental health (23% vs. 15%) and because of bullying (13% vs. 3%).

In the past year, 29% of youth who did not have access to the Internet had missed out on needed mental health services, compared to 18% of those with Internet access.

YOUTH WHO SELF-HARMED, CONSIDERED SUICIDE, AND ATTEMPTED SUICIDE IN THE PAST YEAR IN RELATION TO INTERNET ACCESS



Social connections

A lack of Internet access was associated with reduced social connections. For example, youth who lacked access to the Internet were less likely than those who had access to:

- Feel connected to their community (28% vs. 42%).
- Have an adult in their community (outside of school/family) who really cared about them (55% vs. 65%).
- Have an adult in their life who helped them with homework (51% vs. 63%), with finding employment (57% vs. 69%), preparing for post-secondary (54% vs. 77%), making appointments (73% vs. 89%), and getting to appointments (74% vs. 89%).
- Have friends in their school or neighbourhood (89% vs. 96%).
- Have enough time to spend with their friends (51% vs. 68%).
- Participate weekly in organized sports (40% vs. 53%).
- Participate weekly in informal sports (39% vs. 52%).
- Feel the activities they engaged in were meaningful (48% vs. 66%).
- Feel their ideas were listened to in their activities (27% vs. 44%).

Youth without Internet access were generally more likely than those with Internet access to report experiencing barriers to participating in sports and other extracurricular activities. The only reason they were less likely to endorse than youth with access to the Internet was being too busy.

YOUTH WHO EXPERIENCED BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATING IN EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

	Did not have Internet access	Had Internet access
Too busy	41%	48%
Couldn't afford it	29%	12%
No transportation	26%	14%
Too anxious/depressed	24%	14%
The activity was not available in their community	18%	13%
Worried about being bullied	14%	7%

SUPPORTING YOUTH WITHOUT ACCESS TO THE INTERNET

Note: All results in this section are among youth who did not have access to the Internet.

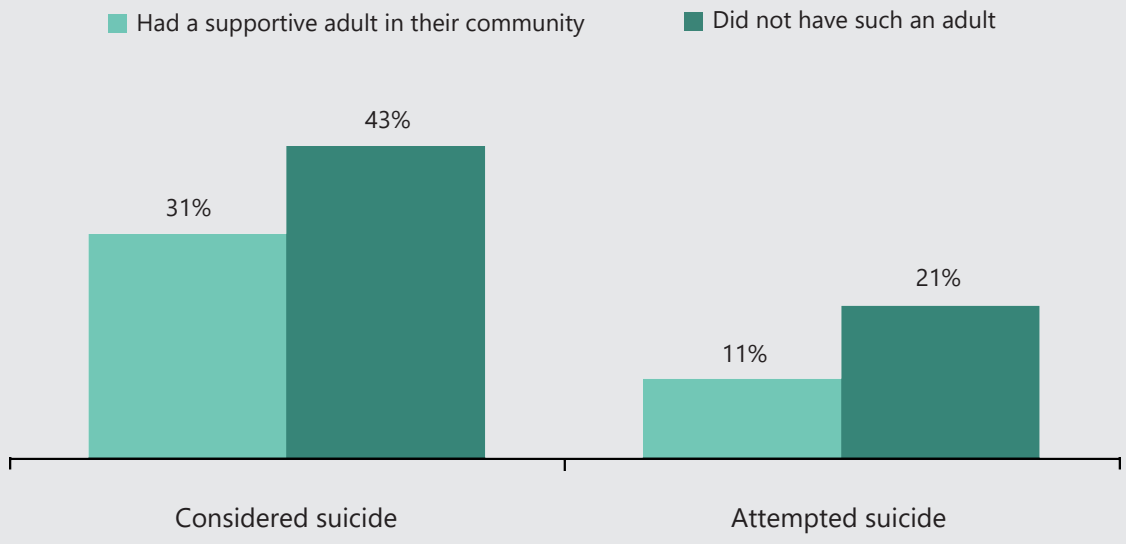
Having considered which BC youth are most likely to miss out on access to technology, and having identified some of the risks to well-being that can be associated with this, it is important to also identify supports that could help reduce any negative effects of the digital divide.

Community supports

Youth who lacked access to the Internet were less likely to feel like a part of their community and to feel there was an adult in the community (outside of school/family) who really cared about them. However, those that did feel connected to their community were more likely to rate their mental health as good or excellent (77% vs. 42% who did not feel connected), and were less likely to have considered suicide (16% vs. 52%), or to wish they had a different life (19% vs. 56%).

Also, youth who had an adult in their community who really cared about them were less likely to experience extreme despair in the past month (12% vs. 20% who did not have a caring adult in their community), and were more likely to feel connected to their community (38% vs. 17% of those who did not have such an adult), to have friends in their school or neighbourhood (94% vs. 84%), to plan on attending post-secondary (68% vs. 57%), and to feel hopeful for their future (52% vs. 40%).

YOUTH WITHOUT INTERNET ACCESS WHO CONSIDERED OR ATTEMPTED SUICIDE IN THE PAST YEAR IN RELATION TO HAVING AN ADULT IN THEIR COMMUNITY WHO REALLY CARED ABOUT THEM



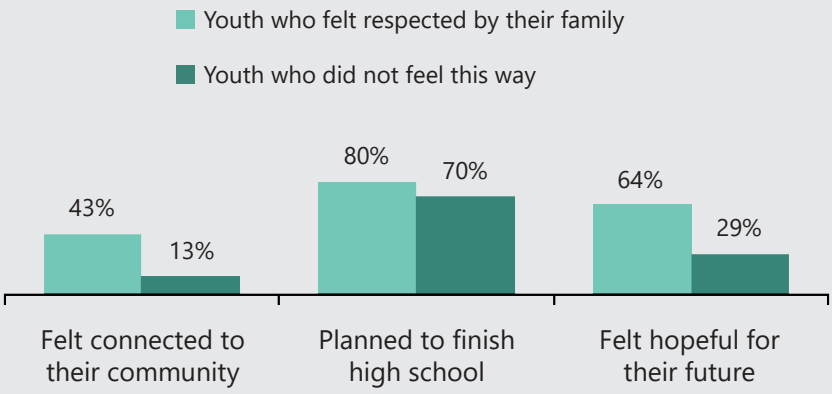
Family supports

Having supports within the family was associated with more positive mental health among youth who lacked access to the Internet. For example, youth who had an adult in their family they could talk to if they had a serious problem were more likely to rate their mental health as good or excellent (77% vs. 40% without such an adult) and to feel happy in the past month (67% vs. 27%).

Youth with a supportive adult were also less likely to have missed out on needed mental health services (14% vs. 44%), self-harmed (22% vs. 46%), considered suicide (19% vs. 53%), and attempted suicide (7% vs. 24%) in the past year. They were less likely to have experienced extreme stress (10% vs. 26%) and extreme despair (7% vs. 25%) in the past month.

Having supports within the family was also associated with feeling hopeful about the future and feeling connected to community.

CONNECTEDNESS AND POSITIVE FEELINGS ABOUT THE FUTURE AMONG YOUTH WITHOUT INTERNET IN RELATION TO FEELING RESPECTED BY THEIR FAMILY

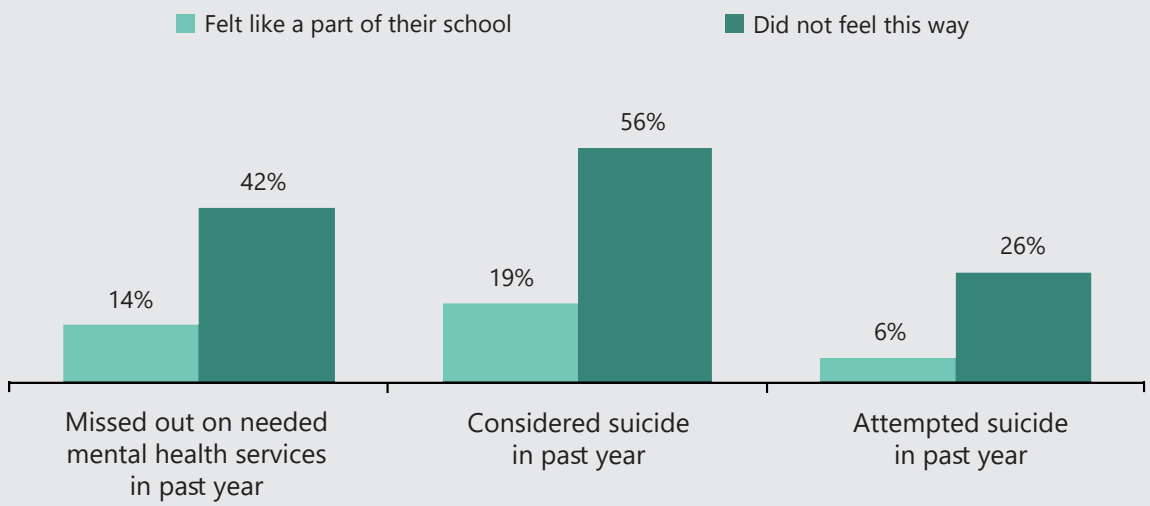


School supports

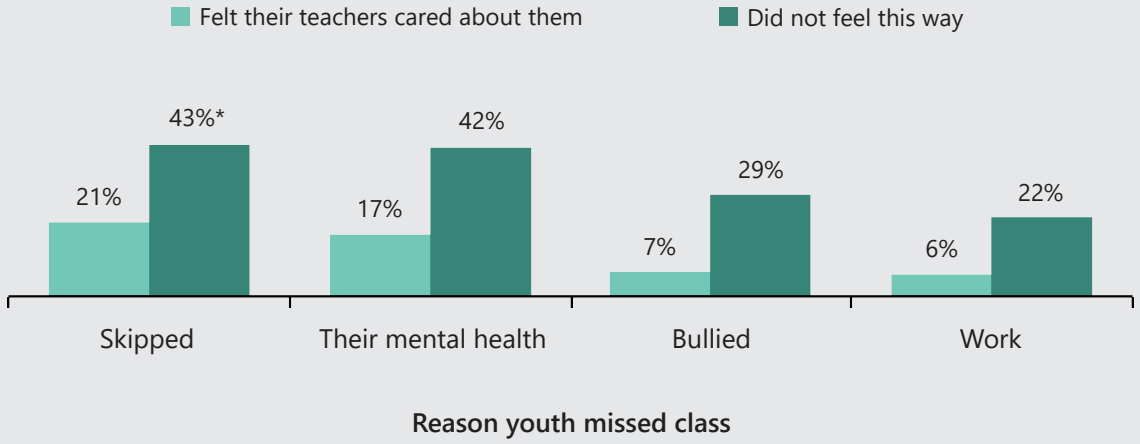
School connectedness appeared protective for youth who lacked Internet access. For example, those who felt like a part of their school were more likely to rate their mental health as good or excellent (80% vs. 32% who did not feel like a part of their school), to feel happy (66% vs. 23%), and to plan to continue their education beyond high school (70% vs. 57%). They were less likely than those who did not feel connected to their school to have missed out on needed mental health services and to have considered or attempted suicide in the past year.

Students who felt like their teachers cared about them were less likely to have skipped class in the past month. They were also less likely to have missed classes, including because of their mental health, bullying, and work. In addition, those with a caring teacher were more likely to feel connected to their community (38% vs. 18%).

MENTAL HEALTH OF YOUTH WITHOUT INTERNET ACCESS IN RELATION TO FEELING LIKE A PART OF THEIR SCHOOL



YOUTH WITHOUT INTERNET ACCESS WHO MISSED CLASS IN THE PAST MONTH IN RELATION TO WHETHER TEACHERS CARED ABOUT THEM



*Percentage should be interpreted with caution as the standard error was higher than expected but is still within the releasable range.

SUMMARY

This fact sheet has shown that some youth are more likely to lack access to the Internet, including Indigenous youth, youth who arrived in Canada as refugees, those living in poverty, and youth in Northern and rural parts of the province. It has also shown that lack of access is associated with poorer mental health, reduced connectedness, and can impact future plans.

However, findings have also shown that having supportive relationships within schools, communities, and families can buffer against these negative effects and promote positive health and well-being.

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