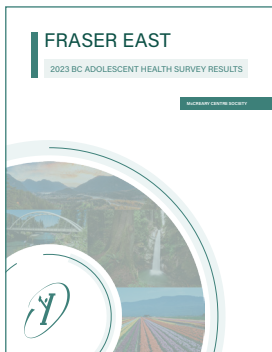


Fraser East adolescents' mental health a concern but substance use and sexual activity declining



The 2023 BC Adolescent Health Survey (BC AHS) results for Fraser East were released today by McCreary Centre Society and offered both positive and concerning news for the region.

The majority of youth rated their health as good or excellent. However, consistent with provincial trends, there was a decrease in those who rated their overall health and mental health this positively (e.g., 59% rated their mental health as good or excellent vs. 71% in 2018 vs. 79% in 2013). Males were the most likely to rate their overall health and mental health as good or excellent (e.g., 71%

rated their mental health this way vs. 49% of females vs. 17% of non-binary youth).

McCreary's Executive Director and co-author of the report, Dr. Annie Smith, commented on the results: *"The picture of young people's health in this region reflects what we are seeing in other parts of the province, with Grade 7-12 students less likely to report positively on their health, and particularly on their mental health than in previous years. Locally, we have seen decreases from before the COVID-19 pandemic in youth who feel connected to school and family, and in those who have in-person friends. These are all things that we know are linked to mental health, and it is also sad to see a decrease in local youth who feel hopeful for their future."*

Sleep, exercise, and nutrition are known to support more positive mental health among adolescents. Fraser East youth were less likely than their peers across BC to have slept for at least 8 hours the night before completing the survey (38% vs. 42% provincially), and compared to local youth in previous survey years (e.g., 48% in 2018). Also, just under 1 in 5 local youth (19%) met the daily recommended targets for physical activity, and the percentage who ate breakfast on school days dropped by 10% in 5 years.

Smith went on to say: *"These are all concerning findings. We also know that 28% of local students missed school in the month before they took the survey because they slept in, and that the majority were on their phone after they were expected to be asleep. Teaching youth good sleep hygiene and ensuring they get enough sleep could really support their well-being, and particularly their mental health."*

However, Smith was quick to add that there is also a lot for the region to celebrate in terms of how young people are doing: *"We have seen decreases in youth who have engaged in sexual activity and used substances; and we still see the majority do report positively on their life, have things they enjoy and feel they are good at, and have positive plans for the future."*

Youth in Fraser East were more likely than those 5 years earlier to have an adult they could talk to if they were having a serious problem (e.g., 26% had such an adult both inside and outside their family vs. 19% in 2018). Rural-based youth generally reported less positive health and well-being than urban-based youth. However, they were more likely to report having an adult outside their family they could talk to (46% vs. 33% of urban-based youth).

To read the full results for Fraser East, please visit mcs.bc.ca/pdf/2023_bcchs_fraser_east.pdf.



McCreary Centre Society is a non-government, non-profit organization committed to improving the health of BC youth through research, evaluation, and community-based projects.

Founded in 1977, our vision is that all youth are supported to be healthy and connected.

For interviews, contact:

Annie Smith
Executive Director
Tel: 604-291-1996 ext. 225
Cell: 604-728-9494
Email: annie@mcs.bc.ca

Where to find us:

3552 Hastings Street East
Vancouver, BC, V5K 2A7

Backgrounder

The BC AHS is conducted every 5 years in public schools across BC. The 2023 BC AHS was completed by around 38,500 young people aged 12–19 in 59 of BC's 60 school districts. The Fraser East report released today is one of 16 regional reports of the 2023 BC AHS results. It shares data provided by students in Grades 7–12 in the Fraser East Health Service Delivery Area (HSDA).

Fraser East HSDA is comprised of four school districts: Chilliwack (SD 33), Abbotsford (SD 34), Mission (SD 75), and Fraser Cascade (SD 78). This was the second successive time all four school districts in Fraser East took part in the survey. This HSDA also includes students in Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie Britannique (SD 93).

Some key findings for Fraser East:

- Compared to 5 years earlier, youth in Fraser East were more likely to be born abroad (16% vs. 13% in 2018), speak a language other than English at home most or all the time (24% vs. 17%), and identify as a gender and sexual minority (e.g., 5% identified as non-binary vs. 2% in 2018).
- Indigenous youth were more than twice as likely as Indigenous youth a decade earlier to speak at least a few words of an Indigenous language (24% vs. 10% in 2013).
- Around a third of youth (32%) were accidentally injured seriously enough to need medical attention in the past 12 months (vs. 26% in 2018). There was also an increase in non-accidental injuries during this time frame, as 24% of youth cut or injured themselves on purpose without trying to kill themselves (vs. 19% in 2018).
- Youth were less likely than those 5 years earlier to have smoked tobacco (13% vs. 19% in 2018), used cannabis (21% vs. 27%), and tried alcohol (35% vs. 43%). However, those who had tried alcohol were more likely than youth 5 years earlier to have first done so before their 13th birthday (32% vs. 24% in 2018).
- There were decreases in the percentages of youth who had ever engaged in oral sex (17% vs. 22% in 2018) and sexual intercourse (16% vs. 21%). However, youth who had ever had sex were less likely than those 5 years earlier to have used a condom or other barrier the last time they had sex (59% vs. 66% in 2018).
- In Fraser East, 11% of youth had lost someone close to them to an overdose. This was higher than the provincial rate (8%), and reflected a local increase from 7% in 2018.
- Most youth often or always felt safe in their neighbourhood during the day (89%) and at night (62%). Just under half of those who used transit (48%) felt safe doing so, which was lower than across the province (54%).
- The local survey results highlight some of the factors that can negatively affect health and well-being, such as experiencing deprivation; as well as the value of exercise, sleep, and access to healthy food. The results also clearly show the importance of youth feeling connected to family, culture, school, and community.



For more information about the BC Adolescent Health Survey, please visit mcs.bc.ca/about_bcahs.

