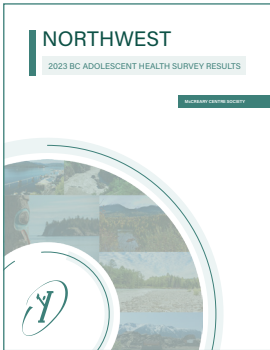


# Northwest survey results show reduced substance use and sexual activity among local teens but also highlights concerns about mental health and poverty



Northwest regional results from the 2023 BC Adolescent Health Survey (BC AHS) were released today by McCreary Centre Society.

The results showed some encouraging trends with fewer youth aged 12–19 engaging in sexual activity and decreases in alcohol and other substance use. However, it was not all good news for the region as McCreary Centre Society's Executive Director and co-author of the Northwest report, Dr. Annie Smith explained: *"We know that economic well-being is a key component of adolescent health. So, it was concerning to see that students in*

*the Northwest were not only more likely to be going to bed hungry because there wasn't enough money for food than youth across BC, but they were also more likely to be going to bed hungry than local students 5 years earlier."*

Smith added: *"We have a Youth Deprivation Index which was developed with the help of students in this region. The Index focuses on the 10 most common material items youth feel they need in order to belong and be able to fully participate with their peers. We see that the more items youth feel deprived of, the more likely they are to report poor physical and mental health and the less likely they are to feel hopeful for their future. It was therefore worrying to see the percentage of Northwest students who were deprived of three or more items on the index increased since our last survey."*

Locally, 15% of youth went to bed hungry at least sometimes because there was not enough money for food (vs. 12% in 2018 and the 2023 provincial rate of 9%). Smith also drew attention to the local increase in students who worked in excess of 20 hours a week during the school year by adding: *"We saw that 1 in 10 students who were working reported that the reason they had a job was to contribute to their family income. We know it can be a huge burden on young people's health and well-being when they are trying to juggle school with work and family responsibilities."*

Other results showed that declines in mental health seen in the region before COVID-19 have continued. There was a decrease in the percentage of youth who rated their mental health as good or excellent (51% vs. 70% in 2018 vs. 78% in 2013), and an increase in those who had self-harmed and seriously considered suicide. There was also an increase in youth who missed out on accessing needed mental health services in the past year (23% vs. 18% in 2018 vs. 11% in 2013).

Smith noted: *"The decline in youth reporting positive mental health is something we are seeing across the province not just here. It shows us that we really need to focus on ensuring young people are getting access to the services and supports that they need; as well as to information which can help them to manage the stress in their lives. We can also support them to make healthy choices about things like sleep, time outdoors, and screen time which can all really impact mental health. Positive news for this region is that we do see most local youth are able to identify caring adults in their life, and have adults they can turn to when they have problems."*

To read the full results for Northwest, please visit [mcs.bc.ca/pdf/2023\\_bcchs\\_northwest.pdf](https://mcs.bc.ca/pdf/2023_bcchs_northwest.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.

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# Backgrounder

The 2023 BC AHS was completed by around 38,500 young people aged 12–19 in 59 of BC's 60 school districts, including all districts in the Northwest. This report is one of 16 regional reports of the 2023 BC AHS results. It shares data provided by students in Grades 7–12 in the Northwest Health Service Delivery Area (HSDA). Northwest HSDA is comprised of six school districts: Bulkley Valley, Coast Mountains, Haida Gwaii, Nisga'a, Prince Rupert, and Stikine. The HSDA also includes students in Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique.

## Some key findings for Northwest:

Results from the 2023 BC AHS showed that youth (aged 12–19) in the Northwest are becoming increasingly diverse, with a greater percentage born abroad and identifying as a gender and sexual minority than in previous survey years. Local results also showed:

- Forty-four percent of local students identified as Indigenous (vs. 10% across BC). Local Indigenous youth were more than twice as likely as Indigenous youth across the province to speak at least a few words of an Indigenous language (66% vs. 32% across BC).
- The percentage of youth who lived in households with their grandparent(s) and sibling(s) increased, as did the percentage who had caretaking responsibilities for a relative (29% vs. 23% in 2018).
- Around 4 in 10 youth (38%) slept for at least 8 hours the night before completing the survey. This rate was lower than across BC (42%) and a decrease from 48% 5 years earlier.
- There was an increase in the percentage of youth who had been injured seriously enough to need medical attention in the past 12 months (40% vs. 30% in 2018), and specifically in those who received a concussion during that time period (22% vs. 15%).
- Fewer local youth had ever had oral sex (24% vs. 29% in 2018), and there was also a decrease in those who used their phone for sexting and watching pornography. However, the percentage who used withdrawal as their only method to prevent pregnancy more than tripled in a decade, from 5% in 2013 to 17%.
- Substance use rates remained above the provincial average. However, there were local decreases over the past decade in youth who had tried alcohol (e.g., 51% vs. 57% in 2018), ecstasy/MDMA (2% vs. 6% in 2013), and hallucinogens other than mushrooms (3% vs. 6% in 2013).
- Reflecting the provincial trend, there was an increase in youth who reported adverse experiences such as sexual harassment, abuse, discrimination, and bereavement; and a decrease in those who felt connected to their school and family, and had in-person friends.
- When youth did feel supported and connected, they reported better health and well-being. Local youth were more likely than those across BC to have an adult in their community who cared about them (79% vs. 73% across BC), and were more likely than 5 years earlier to report having an adult who would help them apply to post-secondary (85% vs. 81% in 2018). Also, local youth were more likely than youth across BC to often or always feel connected to the land and nature (29% vs. 23%).

For more information about the BC Adolescent Health Survey, please visit [mcs.bc.ca/about\\_bcahs](https://mcs.bc.ca/about_bcahs).

