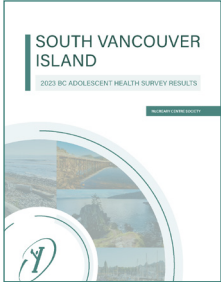


Mental health an area of concern for students in South Vancouver Island but adults can be a source of support



Today, McCreary Centre Society (McCreary) released the regional results for South Vancouver Island from the 2023 BC Adolescent Health Survey (BC AHS). The survey focuses on the health and well-being of students in Grade 7-12, and is considered one of the most reliable sources of data in North America. The data is considered representative of 98% of students in mainstream public schools across BC.

Results for South Vancouver Island showed that the majority of youth rated their overall health and their mental health positively. However, ratings were lower than 5 and 10 years earlier. For example, 58% rated their mental health as good or excellent, compared to 71% in 2018 and 80% in 2013.

Local survey results also showed that around a quarter (26%) of youth reported they had an anxiety disorder. This was higher than the provincial rate and also higher than the local rate 5 years earlier (both 22%). One in five South Vancouver Island youth indicated that they did not participate in extracurricular activities because they were too anxious. Also, local youth were more likely than those across BC to have missed school in the past month because of anxiety or other mental health challenges (25% vs. 22% provincially).

McCreary's Executive Director, Dr. Annie Smith, commented on the results: *"This was our first survey since the COVID-19 pandemic and I think it really highlights the impact that has had on some young people. Across the province, we have seen a decline in youth reporting positive mental health and an increase in those reporting they are struggling in this area. It was concerning to see in this region that a quarter of students had missed school in the past month because of their mental health, and 20% did not take part in extracurricular sports or other activities because they felt too anxious or depressed."*

Smith continued: *"In this region, we also saw that over half of those who felt they needed to access mental health services in the past year did not do so because they didn't want their parents to know, and 14% reported that their parents had refused to take them to get help. I think that tells us that we should be working with young people and their families to address any stigma or concerns that they have about accessing supports. We need to make sure that everyone who feels they need help knows where to get that help and that it is OK to reach out."*

Despite these findings, local results also showed that youth were more likely than those 5 years earlier to have an adult they could turn to when they had a serious problem. In South Vancouver Island, 75% of youth had an adult inside their family they could turn to (vs. 71% in 2018), 37% had one outside their family (vs. 31%), and 28% had both (vs. 21%).

Smith concluded *"Having supportive adults in their life can be a huge protective factor for youth, so it was encouraging to see that the majority of youth had at least one adult who they would be able to go to in a crisis, and we also saw the vast majority had someone who would help them with things like getting to appointments, applying for college, or getting a job. We know that young people are far more likely to report positive outcomes if they have such an adult in their life. They are not only more likely to report positive health and well-being now but are also more likely to feel hopeful, and have positive plans for the future."*

To read the full results for South Vancouver Island, please visit mcs.bc.ca/pdf/2023_bcchs_south_vancouver_island.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 youth aged 12–19 in 59 of BC's 60 school districts. The survey was developed in consultation with young people, parents, and other experts in youth health. 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 South Vancouver Island Health Service Delivery Area (HSDA). South Vancouver Island HSDA is comprised of four school districts: Greater Victoria, Sooke, Saanich, and Gulf Islands. Three of the four school districts in this region have participated in all seven waves of the BC AHS; and the other has participated in the last six waves. Students in Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique in South Vancouver Island have participated in the last two waves of the survey.

Some key findings for South Vancouver Island:

Results from the 2023 BC AHS showed that youth aged 12–19 in South Vancouver Island were more likely than youth across BC to identify their heritage as European (68% vs. 59% provincially). However, the region is becoming increasingly diverse, with a greater percentage of youth born abroad and identifying as a gender and/or sexual minority than in previous survey years. Local results also showed:

- There were some changes in youth's living situations over the past 5 years. For example, there was a decrease in those who moved in the past 12 months (19% vs. 26% in 2018), and a rise in those who had caretaking responsibilities for a relative on a typical school day, such as a relative with a disability or a younger sibling (22% vs. 17%).
- There were some gender differences in the health picture of South Vancouver Island youth. For example, males were the most likely to rate their mental health as good or excellent, and the least likely to have experienced abuse and sexual harassment. Also, 81% of males rated their overall health as good or excellent, compared to 69% of females and 44% of non-binary youth.
- The percentage of youth who slept for at least 8 hours the night before completing the survey continued to decrease (42% vs. 51% in 2018 vs. 55% in 2013). The night before taking the survey, 26% of youth had their sleep interrupted; and the majority engaged in activities after they were expected to be asleep (e.g., 64% were scrolling through social media after they went to bed).
- In the past 12 months, 17% of youth experienced a concussion, which was an increase from 13% in 2018. Among youth who experienced a concussion, there was a decrease in those who received medical treatment for their most serious head injury (36% vs. 53% in 2018).
- Reflecting provincial results, local youth were less likely than those 5 years earlier to feel connected to their family and school (e.g., 54% felt like a part of their school vs. 60% in 2018), feel safe at school (65% vs. 77%), and plan to attend post-secondary (75% vs. 81%). They were also less likely than youth 5 years earlier to have three or more close friends in their school or community (70% vs. 82% in 2018).
- South Vancouver Island youth remained more likely than youth across BC to have tried tobacco, alcohol, and cannabis (e.g., 27% had ever used cannabis vs. 22% provincially). However, there was a local decrease in those who had tried alcohol (45% vs. 48% in 2018).



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

