

# Vancouver youth reporting poorer mental health and reduced substance use



McCreary Centre Society released the Vancouver results for the 2023 BC Adolescent Health Survey (BC AHS) today. Results of the survey of 12–19-year-olds showed that most local youth rated their overall health as good or excellent (74%), as well as their mental health. However, consistent with the pattern across the province, there were decreases in positive health and well-being ratings over the past decade. For example, 63% reported their mental health was good or excellent, compared to 75% in 2018 and 81% in 2013. There were also declines from 5 years earlier in those who felt their life was going well (65% vs. 70% in 2018), felt happy most or all the time (60% vs. 64%), and could name something they were good at (70% vs. 74%). Meanwhile, there were increases in local students who had deliberately cut or injured themselves in the past year (22% vs. 16% in 2018), and who reported they did not feel they could manage the stress in their life well or very well (49% vs. 54%).

McCreary Centre Society's Executive Director, Dr. Annie Smith, spoke to the results: *"I think these results can prompt us to think about how we can better support young people who are struggling. We had 17% of young people who felt they needed to access mental health support in the past year but did not do so. That is almost 1 in 6 young people in Vancouver who are not getting the care they feel they need, and the most common reason they tell us they don't seek care is because they don't want their parents to know."*

Smith added: *"We also had almost 1 in 5 of these youth report that their parents would not take them, which is particularly concerning because when we asked youth who they went to when they needed reliable information about mental health, the most common answer was that they went to their family. These findings really emphasize the need for us to help skill up families to support their children when they have mental health struggles, and support parents to understand and work through any hesitations they may have."*

Vancouver youth have traditionally been less likely than youth across BC to use substances and that remained the case, as they were less likely to have vaped (19% vs. 26% across BC), smoked tobacco (10% vs. 15%), tried alcohol (31% vs. 38%), and used cannabis (15% vs. 22%). Around 1 in 5 youth who had used substances reported that the last time they did so was because they were stressed, and a similar percentage used substances because they were feeling sad.

Smith reflected *"Most youth in Vancouver have not tried substances and among those that have, the majority are not going on to use regularly. However, we do see that young people who use them are doing so for very different reasons. This can be helpful information to have when we are thinking about talking to youth about their substance use. It is a very different conversation with a young person who is using as a way to try to manage how they are feeling, than it is with someone who is using because their friends are doing it, they feel pressured into it, or they feel it will be fun."*

To read the full results for Vancouver, please visit [mcs.bc.ca/pdf/2023\\_bcchs\\_vancouver.pdf](https://mcs.bc.ca/pdf/2023_bcchs_vancouver.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. 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 Vancouver Health Service Delivery Area (HSDA), including students in Vancouver School District and Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique. There have been seven waves of the survey since 1992, and Vancouver students have participated in every wave.

## Some key findings for Vancouver:

- Students most commonly identified their background as East Asian (40% vs. 17% provincially). However, youth were less likely than in previous survey years to identify as East Asian (47% in 2018 and 2013). Compared to 5 years earlier, there was an increase in students who identified as European (31% vs. 26% in 2018) and Latin, South, or Central American (7% vs. 5%).
- Local youth were less likely than youth across BC to have been born in Canada (69% vs. 77% provincially), and were more likely to speak a language other than English at home at least some of the time (72% vs. 54%).
- Vancouver youth were more likely to identify as a gender and/or sexual minority than in previous survey years. For example, the percentage who identified as straight decreased from 82% in 2018 to 72%.
- Youth in Vancouver were less likely than those across BC to work at a paid job during the school year (22% vs. 32%). Among those who worked, local youth were more likely to report working to contribute to their family's income (18% vs. 12% provincially).
- Youth most commonly accessed health care through a family doctor in the past year, but were less likely to have accessed a family doctor than Vancouver youth 5 years earlier (55% vs. 64% in 2018).
- Vancouver youth were less likely than those across BC to participate at least weekly in extracurricular physical activities, such as informal sports (44% vs. 53% provincially) and extreme sports (8% vs. 12%). Also, they were more likely to be unable to swim than youth across the province (11% vs. 9%).
- Reflecting provincial findings, local youth were generally less likely than those 5 years earlier to feel connected to school (e.g., 57% felt like a part of their school vs. 61% in 2018) and to feel safe there (65% vs. 75% in 2018). They were also less likely to feel connected to their community (37% felt quite or very connected vs. 40% in 2018).
- Provincially, there was a decrease from 2018 in youth who planned to continue their education beyond high school. In Vancouver, 83% planned to go to college, university, or trade school. This percentage was comparable to 5 years earlier and higher than the rate across BC (77%).
- There was an increase over time in youth who reported having supportive adults in their life whom they could speak to if they were having a serious problem. This included an adult inside their family (73% vs. 68% in 2018) and an adult outside their family (29% vs. 24%).
- 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 demonstrate 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](https://mcs.bc.ca/about_bcahs).

