

MEDIA RELEASE | February 2015

McCreary report shows improvements in substance use but raises concerns about mental health

Central Vancouver Island results of the McCreary Centre Society's 2013 BC Adolescent Health Survey (BC AHS) are now available.

Results for the Central Vancouver Island area, which included students Nanaimo-Ladysmith (SD 68), Qualicum (SD 69), Alberni (SD 70), and Cowichan Valley (SD 79) showed that the majority of Grade 7–12 students reported good physical and mental health; felt connected to their family, school, and community; had positive plans for the future; and were engaging in health promoting behaviours which will assist them to transition successfully to adulthood.

Around a quarter (24%) of Central Vancouver Island youth had ever tried smoking tobacco, which was reflected a local decrease from 2008 (30%) and 2003 (35%). However, almost half (49%) of youth who had ever smoked reported smoking in the past month, which was similar to the provincial rate.

The percentage of local students who had alcohol and marijuana was also lower than in previous survey years, and Central Vancouver Island youth were waiting longer to first try these substances than in previous years.

There was a decrease in the percentage of students who were seriously injured and improvements in some injury prevention behaviours. For example, 5% of students who had tried alcohol had ever driven a car after drinking, which was a decrease from 12% in 2008.

However, reflecting results across the province students, mental health and lack of sleep were areas of concern highlighted by the survey. There were no improvements in the percentage of male and female students who attempted suicide, and 22% of females and 7% of males had deliberately harmed themselves without the intention of killing themselves in the past year.

Annie Smith, Executive Director of McCreary commented on the report: *"We have seen great local improvements in areas such as substance use that show young people are making some good choices about their health, but the results also show us that a lot of students are not getting enough sleep, and are struggling with mental health issues."*

We see a direct relationship between getting enough sleep and positive mental health, yet 45% of local students did not get eight hours of sleep on the night before taking the survey and over three quarters were online or on their phone after their parents expected them to be asleep."

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

Founded in 1977, the Society sponsors and promotes a wide range of activities and research to address unmet health needs of young people.

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A copy of the report *Central Vancouver Island: Results of the 2013 BC Adolescent Health Survey* can be obtained at www.mcs.bc.ca.

A series of webinars to share the findings have also been scheduled for **Monday, February 16th at 11:00am, Thursday February 19th at 8:30am, and Wednesday, February 25th at 3:30pm.** Log-in details are available at www.mcs.bc.ca.

BACKGROUNDER

Between February and June 2013, almost 30,000 students in Grades 7–12 completed the BC Adolescent Health Survey (BC AHS) in schools across British Columbia. This is the fifth time students have been asked to complete the survey. It was conducted previously in 1992, 1998, 2003 and 2008. All school districts in this region participated in the survey in 2003, 2008 and 2013, which allowed for the inclusion of trends over the past decade

The survey results are used by federal and provincial policy makers and program planners, as well as by local decision makers and others with an interest in youth health.

The survey is designed to consider emerging youth health issues and to track trends over time. It included 130 questions asking youth about their perceptions of their current physical and emotional health, as well as risky behaviours and health promoting practices. Healthy development for youth includes many contributing factors, and the survey also asked about broader issues such as feelings of safety, relationships, and engagement in a variety of activities.

Key Findings: Central Vancouver Island

- Students in Central Vancouver Island most commonly identified as being of European heritage, which was above the provincial rate (70% vs. 53%). Fourteen percent of students identified as Aboriginal, which was also above the provincial rate of 10%.
- Most youth (80%) rated their mental health as good or excellent, but students were less likely to rate their mental health positively than their overall health.
- Males reported better mental health than females, including higher levels of self-confidence and lower rates of extreme stress, self-harm, and suicide attempts in the past year.
- Compared to five years previous, there was a decrease in the percentage of students who missed out on accessing needed medical care (15% in 2008 vs. 9% in 2013) and mental health services (14% in 2008 vs. 11% in 2013) in the past year. The most common reasons for students missing out on these services included thinking or hoping the problem would go away and not wanting their parents to know.
- Similar to the provincial picture, 18% of local students (24% of males vs. 12% of females) met the Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines which recommend that youth aged 12 to 17 do an hour of moderate to vigorous physical activity every day. Seven percent of students in this age group did not exercise at all during the past week.

- In the past year, 29% of youth (33% of males vs. 26% of females) were injured seriously enough to require medical attention, which was a decrease from 35% in 2008.
- Nineteen percent of students (23% of males vs. 15% of females) experienced a concussion in the past year. Mirroring what was seen provincially, almost 1 in 6 youth who had a concussion had not accessed needed medical help.
- Most students (75% of males vs. 81% of females) were online or on their phone after their expected bedtime. Also, 34% of males and 41% of females were doing homework after the time they were supposed to be asleep.
- Twenty-four percent of Central Vancouver Island youth had ever tried smoking tobacco, which was reflected a local decrease from 2008 (30%) and 2003 (35%). However, almost half (49%) of youth who had ever smoked reported smoking in the past month, which was similar to the provincial rate.
- Youth in Central Vancouver Island were more likely than their peers across BC to have tried alcohol (53% vs. 45% provincially) and marijuana (30% vs. 26% provincially). However, the percentage of local students who had tried these substances was lower than in previous survey years. Youth were also waiting longer to first try these substances than in previous years.
- Five percent of students who had tried alcohol had ever driven a car after drinking, which was a decrease from 12% in 2008. There was also a decline in the percentage who drove after using marijuana (from 23% in 2008 to 16% in 2013).
- Central Vancouver Island youth felt safer in every area of their school in 2013 than in previous survey years. Males and females were equally likely to feel safe in these areas.
- Females were more likely than males to have experienced verbal sexual harassment (52% vs. 31%) and physical sexual harassment (31% vs. 11%). The percentages of youth who had experienced these forms of sexual harassment were lower than in past survey years.
- Protective factors which appeared to improve outcomes for even the most vulnerable youth included physical activity, meaningful engagement in activities, good nutrition, and getting eight or more hours of sleep. Local results also highlighted the importance of supportive relationships with peers and adults, including family, teachers and other professionals.

In addition to local findings, the provincial report *From Hastings Street to Haida Gwaii: Provincial results of the 2013 BC Adolescent Health Survey*, and other resources are available at www.mcs.bc.ca.