

MEDIA RELEASE | October 2014

First McCreary report at local level shows positives and concerns for youth health

Following the release earlier this year of the provincial results of the McCreary Centre Society's 2013 BC Adolescent Health Survey (BC AHS), local results are now available.

Although the survey has been conducted every five years since 1992, 2013 was the first year Abbotsford School District have participated, allowing a local report for Fraser East to be published for the first time.

Results for the Fraser East area included Fraser Cascade and Chilliwack, as well as Abbotsford. There were many positive findings as 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.

Most students felt safe at school, and got along well with their peers, teachers, and other school staff. Most also felt safe in their neighborhood.

Mental health and sleep were areas of concern highlighted by the survey. Locally, 84% of girls and 79% of boys were doing something such as texting, online gaming, or homework after they were expected to be asleep.

Accessing care was another challenge for some local students. In the past year, 13% of students had not accessed mental health services when they thought they needed to. This rate was higher than that in the province as a whole (11%). Local students were also more likely to miss out on medical care (10% vs. 8%).

Having supportive peers and adults in their lives was linked to more positive mental health for local students including those who were dealing with challenges such as a history of violence or abuse. For example, students who approached their school counselor for help and found this useful were less likely to self harm or attempt suicide than those who either did not ask for help or asked for help and did not find this helpful. They were also more likely to report feeling good about themselves and having positive plans for the future.

Fraser East students were less likely to have tried alcohol and some other drugs than their peers across the province. However among those who drank alcohol on the Saturday before taking the survey, 59% of males and 67% of females engaged in binge drinking.

Annie Smith, Executive Director of McCreary commented on the report:

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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"It is so valuable to be able to produce a report focused on the health of youth in this area as it shows us where things are going well, and where we might want to target our efforts - such as ensuring youth who need to access services for their mental health are able to do so."

A copy of the report *Fraser East: Results of the 2013 BC Adolescent Health Survey*, as well as the provincial report *From Hastings Street to Haida Gwaii: Provincial results of the 2013 BC Adolescent Health Survey* can be obtained at www.mcs.bc.ca.

Webinars to share the findings will take place on **October 28th at 3 PM, October 31st at 8.30am and November 6th at noon**. Log-in details are available at www.mcs.bc.ca.

BACKGROUND

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.

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: Fraser East

- Almost half of students (48%) did not get at least eight hours of sleep on the night before taking the survey. The more hours of sleep students got, the more likely they were to report positive mental health.
- Eighty-four percent of females and 79% of males were doing something such as texting, online gaming, or homework after they were expected to be asleep.
- In the past year, 13% of students reported not accessing mental health services when they thought they needed to. This rate was higher than that in the province as a whole (11%). Local students were also more likely to miss out on medical care (10% vs. 8%).
- Similar to the provincial rate, 8% of males and 25% of females reported cutting or injuring themselves on purpose without trying to kill themselves in the past year.
- The percentage of female students who considered suicide was higher than seen provincially (20% vs. 17%). The percentage who actually attempted suicide was similar (11%).

- Twenty percent of males and 14% of females had a concussion in the past year. The most common symptoms experienced were headaches; dizziness or balance problems; blurred vision; being dazed, confused, or suffering a gap in memory; and ringing in the ears.
- Canada's Food Guide recommends that youth eat at least six servings of fruit and vegetables. Consistent with students across the province, more than a third of local students had fruit or vegetables only once or twice that day (36%) and 7% had no fruit or vegetables.
- Eighteen percent of students had ever tried smoking. Among these youth a quarter had successfully quit smoking in the past year (30% of males vs. 21% of females).
- Students in Fraser East were less likely to have tried alcohol and some other drugs (e.g., hallucinogens and ketamine) than their peers across the province. Locally, 17% of youth drank alcohol on the Saturday before taking the survey. Among these youth, 59% of males and 67% of females engaged in binge drinking.
- Seventeen percent of students (24% of females vs. 8% of males) reported that they had been cyberbullied in the past year. Females in Fraser East were more likely than females across the province to have been cyberbullied (24% vs. 19%). Six percent of students admitted that they had cyberbullied someone else.
- Most students felt connected to their school, felt safe there, and got along well with their peers, teachers, and other school staff.
- Some of the protective factors which appeared to improve outcomes for even the most vulnerable youth included physical activity, nutrition, and sleep. Local results also highlight the importance of supportive relationships with peers and adults including family, teachers, and other professionals.