

MEDIA RELEASE | February 2015

McCreary report shows improvements in alcohol and other substances use but raises concerns about sleep

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

The North Vancouver Island Health Service Delivery Area is comprised of Campbell River (SD 72), Vancouver Island West (SD 84), Vancouver Island North (SD 85), and Comox Valley (SD 71). Local results 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.

Youth in this area reported higher rates of some health risk behaviours than seen provincially, but there were local improvements from previous years. For example local students were more likely to have tried alcohol than their peers across the province. However, the percentage who had done so dropped from 63% in 2008 to 45% in 2013, and the percentage who drove after drinking halved.

However, reflecting results across the province students, mental health and lack of sleep were areas of concern highlighted by the survey. More than a quarter of females and one in five males reported they had at least one mental health condition (such as Anxiety Disorder, Depression or ADHD). The more hours of sleep students got the more likely they were to report positive mental health.

Annie Smith, Executive Director of McCreary commented on the report: *"Almost 8 out of 10 of students were doing something such as homework or using their cellphone after they were expected to be asleep. This is concerning given the link between sleep and mental health, and shows us the need to address this issue not only locally but across the province.*

"Despite these findings, we have seen some great local improvements in areas such as alcohol use that show young people are making some good choices about their health."

A copy of the report North 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 2nd at 11:00am, Thursday, February 5th at 3:30pm and Tuesday, February 10th at 8:30am**. Log-in details are available at www.mcs.bc.ca.

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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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 2008 and 2013, which allowed for the inclusion of trends over the past five years.

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: North Vancouver Island

- North Vancouver Island students were more likely than those across BC to report having a European background (68% vs. 53%) and an Aboriginal background (17% vs. 10% provincially). Also, local students were more likely than those across the province to have been born in Canada and to speak only English at home.
- In the past year, 24% of males and 15% of females experienced a concussion. Mirroring what was seen provincially, 17% of those who had experienced a concussion had not accessed needed medical help.
- Eight percent of local students did not get medical help when they thought they needed it in the past year and 11% did not access needed mental health services. Among students who did not access needed care, the most common reasons included thinking or hoping the problem would go away and not wanting their parents to know.
- Most youth (83%) rated their mental health as good or excellent. Males were more likely than females to rate their mental health this way. Also, males were less likely than females to have experienced extreme stress in the past month and to have seriously thought about suicide or to have attempted suicide in the past year.
- A known risk factor for attempting suicide is having a family member or close friend attempt or die by suicide. Eighteen percent of students reported that a family member had tried to kill themselves at some point (6% in the past year), and 32% reported that a close friend had attempted suicide (21% in the past year).
- Fifty-seven percent of students slept for eight or more hours on the night before taking the survey, which was consistent with what was found provincially. Most local youth (75%) were online or on their phone after the time they were supposed to be asleep.

- Twenty-nine percent of youth had ever tried smoking tobacco, which was above the provincial rate of 21%. Half of youth who had tried smoking reported smoking in the past month.
- The percentage of youth who had tried alcohol was higher than that across the province (52% vs. 45% provincially). However, there was a local decrease from 63% in 2008 and youth were waiting longer to first drink than their local peers five years prior. Six percent of youth who had tried alcohol reported ever drinking and driving, which was half the local rate in 2008 (12%).
- Thirty-seven percent of local students had tried marijuana, compared to 26% across BC. The local rate was similar to the percentage in 2008, unlike in the province as a whole where there was a decrease over time.
- There were local decreases in the use of many other substances including prescription pills without a doctor's consent, cocaine, ecstasy, mushrooms, inhalants, amphetamines, and crystal meth.
- According to their BMI, 74% of youth were a healthy weight for their age and gender (81% of females vs. 68% of males). A quarter of healthy weight males were trying to gain weight and 46% of healthy weight females were trying to lose weight.
- There was a local increase in the percentage of youth who never went to bed hungry due to insufficient money for food at home (from 87% in 2008 to 92% in 2013), and a corresponding decrease in the percentage of youth who often or always went to bed hungry (from 3% in 2008 to 1% in 2013).
- Thirteen percent of students had been physically abused at some point in their life, which reflected a local decrease from 20% in 2008. There was also a decrease in rates of sexual abuse, from 14% in 2008 to 11% in 2013 (6% of males vs. 16% of females).
- Protective factors which appeared to improve outcomes for even the most vulnerable youth included physical activity, meaningful engagement in activities, 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.
- Local students were more likely than students across BC to be able to identify a local adult who cared about them and to have an adult to turn to if they had a problem. They were also more likely to feel safe in their neighborhood and on transit than their peers across BC.

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.