



MEDIA RELEASE | November 2014

McCreary report: Less local students are using alcohol, marijuana and other drugs

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.

Results for the Northern Interior area, which included students in Quesnel (SD 28), Prince George (SD 57), and Nechako Lakes (SD 91) 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.

Although local students were still more likely than their peers across the province to have tried alcohol or marijuana, there were significant local decreases in the percentages who had done so. Also, in comparison to 2008, fewer youth in 2013 were trying substances such as cocaine, hallucinogens, ecstasy, mushrooms, inhalants, amphetamines, and crystal meth. They were also less likely to have used tobacco than their peers five years earlier.

Students were less likely to be seriously injured than five years previously. They were more likely to engage in some injury prevention behaviours such as wearing a seatbelt, and the percentage who had driven after drinking alcohol more than halved.

However, despite these improvements in injury prevention, almost one in five students (19%) experienced a concussion in the past year, which was higher than the provincial rate of 16%.

Mental health was another area of concern, particularly for girls, who were three times as likely as males to have deliberately harmed themselves in the past year. They were also more than twice as likely to have seriously thought about suicide. (20% vs. 9% of males).

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 girls in particular are struggling with mental health issues. We also see a direct relationship between these two as the more hours of sleep students got, the more likely they were to report positive mental health.*

I think the results also showed the importance to students of supportive and caring relationships with friends and adults, and it was great to see such high percentages of girls here who could name an adult in their community who cared about them."

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 *Northern Interior: 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.

A series of webinars to share the findings have also been scheduled for **Wednesday Nov. 12th at 3:00pm, Friday Nov. 14th at 3:00pm, and Wednesday Nov. 19th at noon**. 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 BC AHS.

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: Northern Interior

- Most students rated their overall health and their mental health as good or excellent. However, mental health ratings were lower than overall health ratings.
- As was the case provincially, males generally reported better mental health than females, including lower rates of self-harm, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts.
- Fifteen percent of local students seriously thought about killing themselves in the past year, which was higher than the provincial rate of 12%. Local females were over twice as likely as males to have seriously thought about suicide, with similar percentages to those in 2008.
- Similar to findings across BC, in the past year, 7% of students did not get medical help when they thought they needed it. This percentage reflected a local decrease from 14% in 2008. Rates of missing out on needed mental health care remained consistent with 2008 (11%).
- In the past year, 30% of students were injured seriously enough to require medical attention, which reflected a local decrease from 35% in 2008.

- In the past year, 19% of local students experienced a concussion, which was higher than the provincial rate of 16%.
- The night before completing the survey, 56% of students slept for eight or more hours. Most local students (83%) were doing something such as homework or using their cellphone after the time they were expected to be asleep.
- The percentage of students who were a healthy weight decreased from 2008 to 2013. Females were more likely to be underweight than five years previous, while males were more likely to be obese.
- Among youth who ever had sex, there was a decrease in reported rates of pregnancy or causing a pregnancy, from 10% in 2008 to 4% in 2013.
- Twenty-eight percent of youth in this region had ever tried smoking tobacco, which was a decrease from 35% in 2008. Youth who had smoked were less likely to have done so at 12 years or younger (28% in 2013 vs. 37% in 2008).
- Among local youth who had tried alcohol, 72% first drank before turning 15 years old, which was a decrease from 82% in 2008. Similarly, youth were waiting longer to use marijuana than their peers five years earlier.
- Despite no improvements from five years earlier in the percentage of students who were bullied at school or on the way to or from school, local youth felt safer in every area of their school in 2013 than in 2008.
- Canadian guidelines recommend youth aged 12–17 exercise for 60 minutes every day. Locally, 21% of students in this age group exercised for an hour every day in the past week, which was higher than the provincial rate of 17%.
- 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.
- Similar to the provincial results, 62% of local males reported having a caring adult in their neighbourhood or community. However, females were more likely than those across BC to feel this way (71% vs. 63%). Students who reported having an adult in their community who cared about them were more likely to feel that the activities they engaged in were meaningful to them, and to feel that their ideas were listened to and acted upon in these activities.