

**MEDIA RELEASE | November 19th 2014**

## ***McCreary report focusing on Northwest youth health is released***

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 Northwest area, which included students in Haida Gwaii (SD 50), Prince Rupert (SD 52), Coast Mountains (SD 82), and Nisga'a (SD 92) 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 most youth in the Northwest rated their mental health as good or excellent, boys generally reported better mental health than girls. Girls were almost three times as likely to have self-harmed in the past year (29% vs. 10% of boys), and around twice as likely to have seriously considered suicide (21% vs. 10% of boys), or attempted suicide (13% vs. 7%).

More than one in ten youth (11%) missed out on mental health care that they felt they needed. The most common reasons for this were hoping the problem would go away and not wanting their parents to know.

Only around half of students slept for at least eight hours the night before completing the survey. Over 80% were doing something such as homework or using their cellphone after the time they were expected to be asleep. The less sleep students got, the less likely they were to report positive mental health.

Despite these concerning findings, survey results were able to identify protective factors which were associated with more positive mental health among local students.

Annie Smith, Executive Director of McCreary commented on the report: *“Across the province, the results around mental health, particularly for girls are worrying. But local survey results also clearly show us that if youth got eight hours of sleep, ate well, were engaged in activities they found meaningful, and had supportive relationships at school and in the community they reported more positive mental health. Given these findings, it was reassuring for Northwest students that they were more likely to be able to identify a local adult who cared about them than students elsewhere in BC.”*

A copy of the report *Northwest: Results of the 2013 BC Adolescent Health Survey*, as well as the provincial report *From Hastings Street to Haida*

*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.*

### **Contact**

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*Gwaii: Provincial results of the 2013 BC Adolescent Health Survey* can be obtained at [www.mcs.bc.ca](http://www.mcs.bc.ca).

A series of webinars to share the findings have also been scheduled for **Wednesday Nov. 19<sup>th</sup> at 1:30pm, Monday Nov. 24 at noon, and Thursday Nov. 27<sup>th</sup> at 3:00pm**. Log-in details are available at [www.mcs.bc.ca](http://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.

Only three of BC's 59 school districts did not participate in the 2013 survey and two of those are located in the Northwest (Bulkley Valley and Stikine). Haida Gwaii took part for the first time since 1998.

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: Northwest***

- Most students rated their overall health (84%) and their mental health (78%) as good or excellent.
- As was the case provincially, males generally reported better mental health than females, including lower rates of suicidal ideation and suicide attempts. However, the percentage of local males who attempted suicide was higher than that for males across BC (7% vs. 3%). There was no difference among females (13%).

- In the past year, 11% of students missed out on mental health care which they felt they needed. More than half said the reason for this was that they did not want their parents to know.
- Fifty-one percent of students slept for at least eight hours the night before completing the survey. Most students (83% of males vs. 89% of females) were doing something such as homework or using their cellphone after the time they were expected to be asleep. The more hours of sleep students got, the more likely they were to report positive mental health.
- Thirty-two percent of males and 25% of females were injured seriously enough to require medical attention in the past year. Youth took injury prevention more seriously in some activities over others. For example, 62% always wore a helmet when snowboarding or skiing, while 24% always wore one when riding a bike.
- Among Aboriginal youth, 32% spoke an Aboriginal language (which was higher than the provincial rate of 14%).
- Eighty-nine percent of youth reported eating fruit or vegetables on the day before taking the survey, compared to 94% throughout BC. Eating fruit or vegetables three or more times a day was associated with positive mental health among Northwest students.
- Thirty-two percent of youth in the Northwest had ever smoked tobacco, compared to 21% across BC. Among local youth who smoked, 34% had successfully quit in the past year, which was higher than the provincial rate of 23%.
- Fifty-seven percent of youth had tried alcohol, and 42% had used marijuana at some point. The majority of youth who drank on the Saturday before taking the survey reported binge drinking: 76% of females had four or more drinks and 75% of males had five or more drinks.
- Friends appeared to play an important role in improved health outcomes. For example, students who had friends who would be upset with them if they got drunk were less likely to binge drink.
- Locally, 22% of males and 13% of females aged 12–17 met the Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines by exercising for an hour every day in the past week.
- Northwest students were more likely to be able to identify an adult in their neighbourhood or community who cared about them (69% vs. 61% provincially). Feeling cared about by such an adult was associated with positive mental health.
- Thirty-six percent of male and female students worked at a paid job during the school year. This was higher than the provincial rate (29%).
- 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 a stable home, and supportive relationships with peers and adults, including family, teachers, and other professionals.