

MEDIA RELEASE | December 2014

McCreary report shows less youth trying alcohol but raises concerns about mental 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.

The BC AHS was conducted in 56 of BC's 59 school districts, with almost 30,000 students in Grades 7–12 taking part.

Results for the Okanagan area, which included students in Vernon (SD 22), Central Okanagan (SD 23), Okanagan Similkameen (SD 53), Nicola-Similkameen (SD 58), Okanagan Skaha (SD 67), and North Okanagan-Shuswap (SD 83) 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.

However, the survey also highlights some differences between this region and the province as a whole, as well as identifying some groups of students who may need additional support.

Positive findings included a decrease in the percentage of students who were seriously injured in the past year with a corresponding decrease in drunk driving and increases in students who engaged in injury prevention behaviour such as seat belt use.

More youth ate fruit and vegetables than in previous years and local students were more likely than those throughout the province to have taken part in informal sports on a weekly basis (such as road hockey, hiking, and skateboarding; 64% vs. 58% provincially) as well as yoga, dance, or exercise classes (21% vs. 18%) in the past year.

However, while most youth (80%) rated their mental health as good or excellent, males were more likely than females to do so. Males also reported lower rates of extreme despair, self-harm, suicide ideation, and suicide attempts than females.

Furthermore, local females were also more likely than females across BC to have thought about suicide (21% vs. 17% provincially) and to have attempted suicide (12% vs. 9% provincially) in the past year. These rates reflected an increase from five years previously.

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.

Contact

*Annie Smith
Executive Director*

*3552 Hastings Street
East
Vancouver, B.C.
V5K 2A7*

*Tel: 604-291-1996
ext 225
Cell: 604-728-9494*

*Email:
annie@mcs.bc.ca*

www.mcs.bc.ca

"It's encouraging to see that youth in the Okanagan are making some really good choices around injury prevention behaviour and substance use compared to students in previous years. There are definitely some concerning findings as well, which show us in particular where we need to focus our attention to make sure students, and particularly girls, are getting enough support around their mental health."

A copy of the report *Okanagan: 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 **Tuesday, December 2nd at 3:00 pm, Friday, December 5th at 8:30 am, and Wednesday, December 10th at noon**. Login 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. As in previous years, 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: Okanagan

- In the past year, 29% of students were injured seriously enough to require medical attention, which was a decrease from 33% in 2008 and 41% in 2003. Also, 20% of students had experienced a concussion during this time period. Mirroring what was seen provincially, almost one in five (19%) of those who had experienced a concussion had not accessed needed medical help.
- More than three quarters of local male and female students (76%) always wore a seat belt when riding in a motor vehicle. This rate steadily increased over the past decade.
- Overall, 9% of students (6% of males vs. 12% of females) did not get medical help when they thought they needed it, and 12% of youth (5% of males vs. 19% of females) did not access needed mental health services. Common reasons for students missing out on

needed services included not wanting their parents to know and thinking or hoping the problem would go away.

- Most youth rated their mental health as good or excellent, but they were less likely to rate their mental health this way than their overall health. Males generally reported better mental health than females, including higher rates of self-confidence and lower rates of extreme stress, despair, self-harm, and suicide attempts.
- Local females were more likely than females across the province to have thought about suicide (21% vs. 17%) and to have attempted suicide (12% vs. 9%) in the past year.
- Fifty-six percent of students (60% of males vs. 53% of females) slept for eight or more hours the night before taking the survey. Seventy-eight percent of males and 84% of females were doing something such as being online or on their phone after they were supposed to be asleep.
- Local youth were more likely than students throughout the province to have smoked tobacco or consumed alcohol. However, fewer students were trying these substances than in previous survey years, and those who did were waiting longer to do so. For example, among local youth who had tried alcohol, 69% had their first drink before turning 15 years old, which was a decrease from 74% in 2008.
- After staying consistent between 2003 and 2008, the percentage of youth in the Okanagan who had tried alcohol dropped from 62% to 52%. This rate remained higher than the provincial rate (45%).
- The Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines recommend that youth aged 12 to 17 do an hour of moderate to vigorous physical activity every day. Locally, 17% of students in this age group (23% of males vs. 11% of females) met these guidelines, which mirrored the provincial picture. However, Okanagan youth were more likely than those throughout the province to have taken part in informal sports on a weekly basis (such as road hockey, hiking, and skateboarding; 64% vs. 58%).
- According to their BMI, 77% of youth were a healthy weight for their age and gender, which was similar to the provincial picture. Females were more likely than males to be a healthy weight, whereas males were more likely to be underweight, overweight, or obese.
- Similar to youth across the province, 94% of local students reported eating fruit or vegetables at least once on the day before taking the survey, which was an increase from 92% in 2008. Youth who had three or more servings of fruit or vegetables were more likely than those who ate fewer servings to report good or excellent mental health.
- 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.