



MEDIA RELEASE | October 2014

McCreary report highlights many local improvements in 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.

Results for the South Vancouver Island area, which included students in Victoria, Saanich, Sooke and Gulf Islands school districts, 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. 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.

In comparison to five years earlier local students felt safer at school, and the percentage who did not expect to graduate dropped to virtually none. Also, there was a decrease in the percentage of students who went to bed hungry because of a lack of money for food.

There were also many local improvements in health risk behaviours, including decreases in the percentage of youth trying alcohol, marijuana, or tobacco. However, just over half of youth who had ever tried smoking had smoked in the past month (51%), and this was an increase in recent smoking from 44% in 2008 and 38% in 2003.

Mental health was another area of concern highlighted in the survey, as 21% of local students reported at least one mental health condition (25% of females vs. 16% of males). Among students who felt they needed help for their mental health challenges, there was an increase in the percentage of local students who did not access services because they did not want their parents to know and because they did not know where to go.

Results also showed the link between sleep and mental health, and highlighted that 77% of local students were online and/or on their phone after the time they were supposed to be asleep.

Annie Smith, Executive Director of McCreary commented on the report: *"I think the results for South Vancouver Island show that youth are making some good decisions in areas such as substance use and injury prevention. They also show us where we need to focus our efforts in the areas where we didn't see such positive results such as mental health, bullying and the amount of sleep students are getting. Local results also showed us the*

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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important link between relationships with peers, family and important adults and improved outcomes for even the most vulnerable young people."

A copy of the report *South Vancouver Island: 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 **October 22nd at 3 PM**, **October 27th at Noon** and **October 30th 3 PM**. 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. 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: South Vancouver Island

- In comparison to previous years local students generally felt safer at school. They also felt safer in every location at school. For example, in 2013 91% felt safe in school washrooms compared to 68% in 2008.
- Unlike the provincial picture where some forms of bullying increased, there was no such rise locally, and there was a local decrease in the percentage of students who had been physically assaulted (from 10% in 2008 to 8%). Although the percentage of males who were cyber bullied remained constant (9%), the percentage of female students who were bullied online decreased from 25% in 2008 to 16%.
- There were decreases in the percentage of youth trying alcohol, marijuana and other substances. Compared to previous years, among those who did try these substances more waited until they were 15 or older.
- The Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines recommend that youth aged 12 to 17 do an hour of moderate to vigorous physical activity every day. Similar to the provincial picture,

18% of local students exercised for an hour a day in the past week, and 8% had not exercised on any day in the past week.

- The survey showed that local students were less likely to miss out on needed medical care than their peers in 2008. Local males were also less likely to miss out on mental health care, but there was no such improvement for females. The percentage of students who did not seek necessary mental health care because they did not want their parents to know rose from 45% in 2008 to 63% in 2013.
- Females were more likely than males to report a mental health condition (such as depression or anxiety). They were also more likely than males to report extreme stress, extreme despair, self-harm, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts.
- Results showed the link between sleep and mental health, and highlighted that most local students (77%) were doing something such as homework or using their cellphone after the time they were expected to be asleep.
- There were decreases in the percentages of students reporting that they had been physically abused but no such improvements in sexual abuse rates.
- Students in 2013 were more likely than their peers in 2008 to report that their friends would disapprove of them getting pregnant/getting someone pregnant, beating some up, getting arrested and getting drunk. Among students who rank alcohol in the past month, those whose friends would disapprove of them getting drunk were less likely to have engaged in binge drinking.
- Local results also highlighted the importance of supportive relationships with peers and adults including family, teachers, and other professionals. For example, youth who had been physically and/or sexually abused who found their teacher to be helpful were more likely to have post-secondary plans and were less likely to have attempted suicide in the past year, compared to those who approached their teacher for help but did not find the experience helpful.