



MEDIA RELEASE | October 2014

McCreary report finds many positives changes in local 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 for Vancouver 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 Vancouver 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 found many positive differences between Vancouver and the province as a whole, as well as identifying some areas where results were less positive. The survey also highlighted groups of students who may need additional support.

Among the most positive findings were those that showed fewer youth were trying tobacco, alcohol or marijuana than a decade ago, and fewer were doing so than was seen across the province in 2013. In comparison to 2003, local youth who did try any of these substances waited longer to do so.

Mental health was an area of concern highlighted in the survey, particularly among females, who were more likely than males to have deliberately harmed themselves, seriously considered or attempted suicide, and were less likely to report positive mental health.

The more hours of sleep students got, the more likely they were to report positive mental health. Yet less than half of Vancouver youth (48%) slept for eight or more hours on the night before taking the survey. Students were more likely than those across the province to be doing homework after they were expected to be asleep.

Annie Smith, Executive Director of McCreary said of the Vancouver results *"We have seen some great local improvements in areas such as substance use, sexual abuse rates, gambling and feelings of safety at school, but there are also areas such as engagement in physical activity, bullying, and the number of hours of sleep students are getting where we have seen less positive results. The local results also really show the unique aspects of living in Vancouver with local students less likely than those across the province to expect to have their own home but more likely to think their future would include more schooling and being engaged in their community."*

Society is a non-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 *Vancouver: 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 **Thursday October 16th at noon, Wednesday Oct 22nd at 8:30 am, and Monday Oct 27th at 3:00 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. Vancouver has always participated in the survey.

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: Vancouver

- Students in Vancouver were more likely than their peers across the province to have been born outside of Canada (29% vs. 19%), although fewer local students were born abroad than a decade earlier (40%). Also, 39% of local youth spoke a language other than English at home most of the time, compared to 21% provincially.
- Most youth rated their mental health as good or excellent. However, consistent with provincial findings, students were less likely to rate their mental health as good or excellent than their overall health.
- In the past year, 8% of students (6% males vs. 10% females) did not get medical help when they thought they needed it, and 10% of students (5% of males vs. 14% of females) missed out on accessing needed mental health services. The most common reasons for not accessing either type of service were thinking or hoping the problem would go away, and not wanting their parents to know.
- Males generally reported better mental health than females, including higher rates of self-confidence, a greater likelihood of feeling happy and calm most of the time, and lower rates of extreme stress, despair, and suicide attempts.)

- Less than half of youth (48%) slept for 8 or more hours on the night before taking the survey. Fifty-one percent of males and 60% of females were doing homework after the time they were normally expected to go to sleep. These percentages were higher than those across the province, where 40% of males and 49% of females were doing homework after their expected bedtime.
- In the past year, 23% of males and 17% of females were injured seriously enough to require medical attention. Eleven percent had a concussion during this time period (compared to 16% provincially). Consistent with the provincial picture, 17% of Vancouver youth who had experienced a concussion had not accessed needed medical help.
- There was an increase in the rate of students who reported always eating breakfast, from 50% in 2003 to 59% in 2013. Youth who always ate breakfast on school days were more likely than those who ate breakfast less often or not at all to report good or excellent mental health, better nutrition (such as eating fruit or vegetables three or more times yesterday), and to have slept for eight or more hours the previous night.
- Local students were less likely to have ever had sexual intercourse than students a decade earlier (12% vs. 15% in 2003), and were less likely than their peers across BC to have ever had sex (19% provincially). Also, those who did have sex were waiting longer to do so than a decade earlier.
- Compared to youth across BC, local students were less likely to have used tobacco, alcohol, or marijuana. Also, local rates of using these substances were lower in 2013 than in 2003, and students who did use these substances were waiting until they were older to first try them.
- Vancouver students felt safer at school than their peers in 2003, and the percentage who were physically assaulted at school or on the way to or from school decreased. However, the percentages who were socially excluded or teased did not improve.
- A total of 7% of students had been sexually abused at some point. This represented a decrease from 9% in 2003. The percentage of students who were physically abused were unchanged from a decade earlier.
- Local students aged 12 - 17 were less likely than those across the province to meet the Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines of an hour of moderate to vigorous exercise a day (13% vs. 17% provincially).
- Protective factors which appeared to improve outcomes for even the most vulnerable youth included physical activity, 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.
- Feeling listened to and valued in their activities and feeling that their activities were meaningful to them also appeared protective for local youth. Although, local rates of feeling engaged in these ways were lower than across the province, when Vancouver youth did feel engaged and valued in their activities they reported more positive mental and overall health.