

MEDIA RELEASE | EMBARGOED until 9am on 13 March 2019

How are BC's adolescents doing?

Results from the latest McCreary Centre Society survey—of 38,000 of the province's Grade 7–12 students—show that most students are doing just fine, but there are clearly some areas we should be paying attention to.

The 2018 BC Adolescent Health Survey was conducted in 58 of BC's 60 school districts and is the sixth time students have been asked to complete the comprehensive health survey since 1992.

Many results were unchanged from five years ago when the survey was last conducted. For example, the percentages who had tried alcohol, marijuana, or ever had sex were consistent with those in 2013, as was the percentage who missed out on needed medical care.

Encouraging findings included a decrease in the percentage who had recently engaged in binge drinking, had a concussion or other serious injury, had attempted suicide, or engaged in sexting. There were also increases in the percentage of youth who felt connected to their community and had an adult in their community and at school who cared about them.

However, there were also some concerning findings, as McCreary's Executive Director Annie Smith explained: *"The survey results confirm what we have heard anecdotally: BC teens are generally less likely to be engaged in extracurricular activities, such as sports and volunteering, than five years ago, and they are more likely to be struggling with their mental health and sleep. It was also worrying to see increases in areas such as racial discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual abuse, and dating violence. It will be important to look into what is driving these results, and find ways to better support youth who are having these negative experiences."*

Smith further noted, *"We called the report, 'Balance and connection among BC youth' because what we saw is that young people who can find balance – in terms of things like going offline, getting enough sleep, and spending unstructured time doing things they enjoy – report better physical and mental health, as do those who have positive relationships with peers and adults and who feel connected to family, school, community, and culture."*

A copy of the report, *Balance and connection in BC: The health and well-being of our youth. Results of the 2018 BC Adolescent Health Survey* can be obtained at www.mcs.bc.ca

The report will be launched at 9am on March 13th at the Vancity Theatre. All media are welcome.

A webinar presentation is also scheduled for March 13th at 2:30pm. Details of how to join this and additional webinars are available at www.mcs.bc.ca.

McCreary Centre Society is a non-government, non-profit organization committed to improving the health of BC youth through research, evaluation and community-based projects.

Founded in 1977, our vision is that all youth are supported to be healthy and connected.

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BACKGROUND

Between February and June 2013, 38,015 students completed the BC Adolescent Health Survey (BC AHS) in over 2,000 classrooms across British Columbia. Participation was the highest since the survey began, and the results are considered representative of over 95% of mainstream school students in Grades 7–12 in the province.

The survey provides essential information about health trends, and about risk and protective factors that can influence young people's healthy transitions to adulthood. The 2018 survey included 140 questions asking youth about their perceptions of their current physical and mental health, their engagement in health promoting and health risk behaviours, and about factors that can contribute to a healthy transition to adulthood.

Some key findings from the report:

- In 2018, most youth reported they had a good quality of life, and most also rated their overall health and their mental health as good or excellent. For example, 79% felt they had a good life, and 73% felt their life was going well.
- However, health ratings declined from five years earlier, and there was an increase in youth reporting they had a mental health condition, including Anxiety Disorder or panic attacks (from 8% in 2013 to 19% in 2018), and Depression (from 10% to 15%).
- There was an increase from previous years in the percentage of students who had cut or injured themselves on purpose without trying to kill themselves, who had seriously considered killing themselves, and who had missed out on needed mental health services, although the percentage who had attempted suicide was lower than in 2013 and similar to 2008 at 5%.
- Most BC youth aged 12–17 fell short of Canadian physical activity guidelines, although there was a slight increase in the percentage of males who exercised daily (from 22% in 2013 to 24% in 2018).
- Half of all females had been verbally sexually harassed in the past year (an increase from 46% in 2013). There was also an increase in physical sexual harassment for both males and females.
- Half of students always ate breakfast on school days, and fewer than 4 in 10 (37%) always ate three meals a day on school days.
- There was a decrease in the percentage of youth who smoked tobacco. However, in the past month, 21% vaped with nicotine and 19% vaped without nicotine.
- Among the 15% of BC students who drank alcohol last Saturday, there was a decrease in the percentage who engaged in binge drinking, from 76% in 2013 to 61%.

- There was no increase from previous years in the percentage of youth who had tried alcohol, marijuana or other substances. Youth who did use marijuana waited longer to try it.
- The percentage of students who slept for eight or more hours the night before taking the survey decreased from 53% to 48%. Less than half of students (41%) reported going offline after their expected bedtime (e.g., turning off their phone or putting it on silent mode). Students who did go offline were more likely to have slept longer and woken up feeling rested.
- The housing crisis in BC may be having an impact on students' well-being, as youth were more likely than five years earlier to have moved to a new house and to have moved multiple times in the past year. Youth were also more likely to be living in homes with related and unrelated adults and children than previously.
- The percentage of students who had oral sex or intercourse was unchanged from five years earlier, although a lower percentage had intercourse at a young age. Among those who had intercourse, the percentage for whom withdrawal was their only attempt to prevent pregnancy increased from 6% to 10%.
- Twelve percent of youth with a phone used their device on their last school day to watch pornography. However, the percentage who had sexted dropped by half (5% vs. 10% in 2013).
- One in 10 BC students went to bed hungry at least sometimes because there was not enough money for food at home. Also, an Index of Deprivation developed with BC youth showed that the more items youth were deprived of that they wished they had, the less likely they were to feel like a part of their school, plan to finish high school, and report positive mental health, and the more likely they were to go to bed hungry.
- Among those who had experienced setbacks, the more often students persevered when faced with obstacles, the more likely they were to experience positive mental health and to have plans to pursue post-secondary education, and the less likely they were to experience extreme stress.
- The percentage of students who reported they had access to a supportive adult inside and outside their family decreased over the past decade. However, most students (71%) still felt they had an adult inside their family they could talk to if they had a serious problem, and 27% had an adult outside the family they could turn to.
- Compared to 2013, students were more likely to feel connected to their community (42% vs 39%) and to have an adult in their community who cared about them (65% vs.61%).