

MEDIA RELEASE | 25th February 2020

Central Vancouver Island students remain positive despite rise in mental health concerns

McCreary Centre Society today released the Central Vancouver Island regional results of the 2018 BC Adolescent Health Survey. The survey was completed by over 38,000 of the province's Grade 7–12 students, and included all school districts in the region.

Most local students felt positively about their quality of life. For example, most felt they had a good life, their life was going well and they were hopeful for their future. However, reflecting results across BC, there was an increase from five years earlier in local students who were struggling with Anxiety Disorder, Depression and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and also an increase in those who had not accessed mental health services which they felt they needed.

McCreary's Executive Director Annie Smith explained: *"The percentage of youth who felt they needed to access mental health services but did not do so almost doubled in five years – from 11% in 2013 to 21% in 2018 – and one of the main reasons they didn't access care was because they did not want their parents to find out. I think this speaks to the need for us to keep working to remove the stigma attached to talking about mental health, particularly as local students told us it was the number one topic they would like training and education about."*

Smith went on to say *"What is great in this region is that students generally feel connected to their family, school and community, and have supportive friends. They are also more likely than youth across BC to have an adult outside their family they can turn to for help, so most students have a support network in place and I think we really just need to skill these people up to feel more comfortable talking about mental health."*

A copy of the report, *Balance and connection in Central Vancouver Island: The health and well-being of our youth*, can be obtained at www.mcs.bc.ca.

A Power Point presentation is also 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.

Contact

*Annie Smith
Executive Director*

*3552 Hastings
Street East
Vancouver, BC
V5K 2A7*

*Tel: 604-291-1996
ext 225*

Cell: 604 728-9494

*Email:
annie@mcs.bc.ca*

www.mcs.bc.ca

BACKGROUND

The 2018 BC Adolescent Health Survey (BC AHS) 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.

Participation was the highest since the survey began, and the results are considered representative of over 95% of mainstream public school students in Grades 7–12 in the province.

Central Vancouver Island HSDA is comprised of four school districts: Nanaimo-Ladysmith (SD 68), Qualicum (SD 69), Alberni (SD 70), and Cowichan Valley (SD 79). All school districts in this region have participated in the survey since 1998, and three of the four have participated in all six waves of the survey. Schools in the Conseil scolaire francophone school district (SD 93) also participated in the survey for the first time.

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:

Central Vancouver Island youth are becoming increasingly diverse. Compared to five years earlier, there was a decrease in students who reported they were of European heritage and an increase in those who identified as Southeast Asian and Latin/South/Central American. Over a third (37%) of local students spoke a language other than English at home at least some of the time.

Among local Indigenous students, 5% had parents who had been in residential school and around a third (32%) had grandparents who had attended.

Most students in Central Vancouver Island (80%) rated their health as good or excellent. However, this was a local decrease from 86% in 2013. The percentage who rated their mental health as good or excellent also decreased (from 80% in 2013 to 69%), and was lower than across the province (73%).

Half (50%) of students slept for at least eight hours on the night before completing the survey (vs. 55% in 2013). Most students were engaging in activities after their expected bedtime, including gaming (26%) as well as watching videos, checking social media, and other online activities (70%).

Local youth were more likely than their peers across the province to have experienced a concussion in the past year (17% vs. 13%). However, there were some improvements in helmet use, with local youth more likely to wear a helmet when cycling than in previous years.

Compared to 2013, there was an increase in local students who reported they had Anxiety Disorder/panic attacks (23% vs. 9%), Depression (19% vs. 10%), and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD; 4% vs. 1%). Local females were more likely than males to report each of these conditions.

In the past year, 10% of males and 26% of females had cut or injured themselves on purpose without the intention of killing themselves. Also, 19% of youth had seriously considered suicide (vs. 12% in 2013) and 5% had attempted suicide during this time period.

Provincially, there was a decrease in the percentage of youth who had smoked tobacco (e.g., cigarettes or cigars). However, this was not the case locally, as 26% had tried smoking which was similar to five years earlier (and above the provincial rate of 18%).

Local youth were more likely than youth across BC to have vaped with nicotine in the past month (26% vs. 21%). Local youth were also more likely than students across BC to have tried alcohol (52% vs. 44%) and marijuana (33% vs. 25%), but were less likely to have done so than local youth a decade ago.

The percentage of students who had met someone through the internet who made them feel unsafe increased (from 14% in 2013 to 21%).

Most Central Vancouver Island youth felt connected to their families and 71% felt they had an adult inside their family they could talk to if they had a serious problem.

Most students also felt connected to their school. For example, they felt they were treated fairly by school staff (71%), their teachers cared about them (66%), they were part of their school (57%) and they were happy to be at school (55%).

Reflecting the provincial picture and the local rate five years earlier, 67% of Central Vancouver Island youth felt there was an adult in their neighbourhood or community (outside their family or school) who really cared about them.

Locally, 31% of youth had an adult outside their family they could talk to if they had a serious problem (vs. 27% provincially).

Most Central Vancouver Island youth had friends who would disapprove of them engaging in health risk behaviours. However, local youth were less likely than their peers across the province to have friends who would disapprove if they used marijuana (49% vs. 55%) or got drunk (40% vs. 45%).

Central Vancouver Island youth generally felt positively about their quality of life. For example, most felt they had a good life (79%) and their life was going well (73%). Also, 68% felt quite a bit or very hopeful for their future.

The most common topic local students wanted to learn more about was mental health, including information about specific conditions, how to manage a mental health condition, and where and how to access mental health services.