

MEDIA RELEASE | March 2nd 2020

Rise in North Vancouver Island youth reporting mental health concerns but students more active than those across BC

McCreary Centre Society today released the North 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, including all school districts in the North Vancouver Island Health Service Delivery Area.

Results showed that compared to five years earlier local youth were more likely to be experiencing mental health challenges and were less likely to be accessing mental health services when they felt they needed them.

McCreary's Executive Director Annie Smith explained: *"We dedicated this report to former local School Principal, Jeff Stewart who passed away recently and was a passionate advocate for improving mental health supports to young people. The local results show that we need to keep working in this area, especially when we see 18% of students felt they needed mental health services but did not receive these."*

"The survey results also show us that youth are wanting to talk about mental health, as it was by far the most common topic they were asking for more information and curriculum about, including wanting to know how to better manage stress, and where and when to seek help."

Smith went on to say *"While the mental health results are concerning, there were lots of positives in the local findings too with most youth feeling connected to family and school, and more feeling connected to their community, and reporting they have an adults in their community who really cares about them than we saw five years ago."*

Bucking declining trends in physical activity seen elsewhere, local students were also more likely to be meeting Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines than five years earlier.

A copy of the report, *Balance and connection in North Vancouver Island: The health and well-being of our youth*, and an accompanying Power Point of the results, 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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BACKGROUNDER

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.

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.

North Vancouver Island HSDA is comprised of four school districts: Comox Valley (SD 71), Campbell River (SD 72), Vancouver Island West (SD 84), and Vancouver Island North (SD 85). All school districts in this region have participated in the survey since 2008. For the first time, schools in the Conseil scolaire francophone School District (SD 93) also participated in the survey.

The survey provides essential information about health trends, and about risk and protective factors that can influence young people's health and development. 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:

North Vancouver Island students remained more likely than their peers across BC to identify as European or Indigenous. However, the region is becoming increasingly diverse as the percentage who identified as European decreased (62% vs. 68% in 2013), and there was an increase in those who identified as East Asian (6% vs. 4%) and Latin/South/Central American (5% vs. 3%).

Around 4 in 10 (39%) local students spoke a language other than English at home at least some of the time (vs. 53% across BC), and 7% did so most of the time.

Local students were more likely than those across BC to have worked at a paid job during the school year (41% vs. 33%). They were also more likely to have been employed than local youth five years earlier (36% in 2013), and to have worked in excess of 20 hours a week (9% vs. 4% in 2013).

Similar to results in 2013, 53% of local youth slept for at least eight hours on the night before completing the survey, which was higher than across BC (48%). However, less than half (43%) reported going offline after their expected bedtime (e.g., turning off their phone or putting it in silent mode).

Most local youth were able to access the health care they needed in the past year. However, they were less likely than youth across BC to have visited a family doctor (56% vs. 61%); and were more likely to have accessed a walk-in clinic (43% vs. 35%), an emergency room (20% vs. 16%), or a nurse (12% vs. 9%).

There was a decline in the percentage of students who reported good or excellent mental health (71% vs. 83% in 2013). Also, youth were more likely to report having a mental health condition, including Anxiety Disorder/panic attacks (23% vs. 9% in 2013), Depression (17% vs. 10%), Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD; 11% vs. 8%), and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD; 3% vs. 1%).

Almost one in five students (18%) had seriously considered suicide in the past year, which was an increase for females (24% vs. 17% in 2013), and comparable to five years earlier for males (12%). Also, 5% had attempted suicide in the past year, with females more likely than males to have done so (7% vs. 4%).

In the past year, 18% of local youth reported they had needed mental health services but had not accessed them. The rate was comparable to the province as a whole and was a local increase from 11% in 2013.

North Vancouver Island youth were more likely than youth across the province to have tried tobacco (e.g., cigarettes; 27% vs. 18%), alcohol (54% vs. 44%), and marijuana (37% vs. 25%); and to have vaped with nicotine in the past month (29% vs. 21%).

Local youth aged 12-17 were more likely to meet Canadian physical activity guidelines for their age group than their peers across BC (21% vs. 18%). They were also more likely to meet the guidelines than local youth five years earlier (17% in 2013).

Compared to youth across BC, North Vancouver Island students were almost twice as likely to have participated in extreme sports on at least a weekly basis over the past year (17% vs. 9%).

There were some improvements in injury prevention behaviours. For example, 52% of those who rode a bike always wore a helmet when cycling (vs. 38% in 2013).

The percentage of females who had been sexually abused increased (22% vs. 16% in 2013), and remained comparable to five years earlier for males (7%).

Local students were more likely to have experienced bereavement than their peers across the province. For example, they were more likely to have lost someone to an accident (17% vs. 13%), suicide (16% vs. 9%), a fentanyl overdose (4% vs. 2%), and an overdose from a substance other than fentanyl (6% vs. 4%).

Compared to five years earlier, students were more likely to turn to a family member for help in the past year (72% vs. 65%), and the majority found this experience helpful (94%).

Most North Vancouver Island students (73%) felt safe at school. Local students were more likely than their peers across BC to feel safe in washrooms (89% vs. 86%), outside on school grounds (90% vs. 86%), and getting to or from school (92% vs. 89%).

There was an increase from 2013 in the percentage of North Vancouver Island students who felt quite a bit or very connected to their community (45% vs. 37%), and who had an adult in their neighbourhood or community (outside their family or school) who really cared about them (73% vs. 68%).