

MEDIA RELEASE | March 30th 2020

Mixed health picture for youth in the Northwest

McCreary Centre Society today released the Northwest 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 five of the six school districts in the Northwest Health Service Delivery Area.

Results showed that compared to five years earlier local youth were more likely to be experiencing mental health challenges such as Anxiety Disorder, Depression, and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

McCreary's Executive Director Annie Smith explained: *"We also saw that 18% had not accessed mental health care when they felt they needed it, which was an increase from 11% five years earlier. There is clearly still stigma attached to seeking out care as local students were more likely than those across the province to report that the reason they didn't get needed care was because they were afraid somebody they knew might see them."*

Smith went on to say *"While these results are concerning, there is also a bit of a disconnect as local youth are more likely than five years earlier, and in comparison to youth across the province, to have an adult in their community who really cares about them. To me this suggests that if we could skill these adults up to feel comfortable talking about mental health, we could reduce some of the stigma and shame young people are experiencing when they struggle with their mental health."*

"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."

Other results showed that despite the challenges they experience, the majority of Northwest youth could identify something they were really good at, reported satisfaction with their life, and were hopeful for their future.

A copy of the report, *Balance and connection in the Northwest: 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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BACKGROUND

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.

Northwest HSDA is comprised of six school districts: Haida Gwaii (SD 50), Prince Rupert (SD 52), Bulkley Valley (SD 54), Coast Mountains (SD 82), Stikine (SD 87), and Nisga'a (SD 92). Five of the six school districts participated in the 2018 BC AHS, including Bulkley Valley (who did not participate in 2013). As in previous years, Stikine did not participate.

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:

Northwest students most commonly identified as European or Indigenous. They were less likely than a decade earlier to identify as European (50% vs. 66% in 2008) and more likely to identify as Indigenous (43% vs. 28%).

Over half (59%) of Indigenous students could speak at least a few words of an Indigenous language, including 7% who could hold a conversation or were fluent.

More than 6 in 10 Indigenous students (63%) reported that at least one member of their family had been in residential school, most commonly their grandparents (41%).

Most students in the Northwest rated their mental health positively. However, there was a decline in females who rated their mental health as good/excellent (from 73% in 2013 to 60%).

Just under half (48%) of Northwest students got at least eight hours of sleep on the night before completing the survey. Students reported doing various activities after the time they were normally expected to go to sleep, including chatting or texting (61%), homework (40%), gaming (33%), and online activities other than gaming (e.g., watching videos, checking social media; 74%).

There was a decrease in the percentage of Northwest youth who experienced a concussion in the past year (15% vs. 19% in 2013).

Locally, 12% of youth went to bed hungry at least sometimes because there was not enough money for food at home, including 1% who often or always went to bed hungry.

There were increases in students who reported having Anxiety Disorder/panic attacks (22% vs. 10% in 2013), Depression (20% vs. 14%), and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD; 3% vs. 1%). Local females were more likely than females across BC to have Anxiety Disorder/panic attacks (35% vs. 28% provincially) and Depression (27% vs. 19%).

In the past year, 20% of local youth had seriously considered suicide (vs. 17% provincially) and 7% had attempted suicide (vs. 5% provincially).

Nearly a fifth (18%) of Northwest students had not accessed needed mental health services in the past year. This represented a local increase from 11% in 2013. Among youth who needed mental health services, local youth were more likely than those across BC to report they did not access services because they were afraid someone they knew might see them (48% vs. 38%).

Northwest students were more likely than those across the province to have tried tobacco (29% vs. 18%), alcohol (57% vs. 44%), marijuana (42% vs. 25%), and substances other than alcohol or marijuana (21% vs. 16%). Local youth were also more likely to have vaped in the past month (39% vs. 27% provincially).

Overall, 15% of Northwest youth had been physically abused, which was a decrease from 20% in 2008. Also, 14% had been sexually abused, which was comparable to rates five and ten years earlier.

Local students were more likely to have been bereaved than students across the province, including to an accident (23% vs. 13%), violence (5% vs. 3%), and suicide (13% vs. 9%).

Fifty-two percent of Northwest students felt connected to the land/nature (vs. 44% provincially) and the majority (60%) felt they had the right amount of time to spend in nature (vs. 56% provincially).

Most local students felt connected to their family, school, and community. Northwest youth were more likely than their peers across the province to feel an adult in their community really cared about them (74% vs. 65% provincially). Local youth were also more likely to report having such an adult in their lives than Northwest youth five years earlier (69%).