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## ***Vaping and mental health a concern for Okanagan adolescents***

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McCreary Centre Society today released the Okanagan 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.

Bucking declining national trends in sports and physical activity participation, Okanagan youth were more likely to meet Canadian physical activity guidelines than five years earlier, and were also more likely than their peers across BC to engage in informal sports (such as hiking and biking) and extreme sports.

However, reflecting patterns across the province, there was an increase from five years earlier in local students who were struggling with their mental health and in those who had not accessed mental health care when they felt they needed it.

McCreary's Executive Director Annie Smith explained: *"At a time when more Okanagan youth are reporting conditions such as Anxiety Disorder, Depression and PTSD, it is concerning that 1 in 5 did not get mental health care that they felt they needed. It is particularly worrying that for 62% of the youth who missed out on care, a primary reason was not wanting their parents to know."*

Smith went on to say *"Vaping also stood out to me as an issue of concern locally as 29% of Okanagan students had vaped in the month before they took the survey, but the results also gave us lots of positives such as the percentage of local students who reported having caring adults in their life, who felt safe in their community and who felt skilled and resilient."*

The most common topic Okanagan youth reported they would like to learn more about and see included in school curriculum was mental health.

A copy of the report, *Balance and connection in Okanagan: The health and well-being of our youth*, can be obtained at [www.mcs.bc.ca](http://www.mcs.bc.ca).

A Power Point presentation is also available at [www.mcs.bc.ca](http://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 (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.

Okanagan Health Service Delivery Area is comprised of six school districts: Vernon (SD 22), Central Okanagan (SD 23), Okanagan Similkameen (SD 53), Nicola Similkameen (SD 58), Okanagan Skaha (SD 67), and North Okanagan-Shuswap (SD 83). All school districts in this region have participated in the survey since 1998, and five of the six have participated in all six waves of the survey. In 2018, Conseil scolaire francophone (SD 93) schools in this region 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:**

Okanagan students remain more likely than their peers across the province to identify as European (65% vs. 46%). However, over the past decade, the percentage who identified as European decreased and there was an increase in youth who identified as Indigenous (15% vs. 12% in 2008), East Asian (5% vs. 4%), and Southeast Asian (2% vs. 1%).

Most Okanagan students rated their overall health and their mental health as good or excellent. However, the percentages who rated their overall health this way decreased (81% vs. 87% in 2013), as did the percentage who rated their mental health positively (70% vs. 80%).

There was an increase in students who reported having a mental health condition, including Anxiety Disorder/panic attacks (24% vs. 11% in 2013), Depression (19% vs. 12%), and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD; 3% vs. 1%).

In the past year, 11% of males, a quarter of females, and around half of non-binary youth had cut or injured themselves on purpose without the intention of killing themselves. Also, 19% had seriously considered suicide (vs. 14% five years earlier), and 6% had attempted suicide.

Comparable to the province as a whole, 20% of Okanagan youth had needed mental health services in the past year but had not accessed them. This represented a local increase from 12% in 2013.

Local students were more likely to have engaged in oral sex and intercourse than their peers across the province. However, the percentage who ever had oral sex declined from 30% five and ten years earlier to 27% in 2018.

Okanagan youth remained more likely than their peers across BC to have ever smoked tobacco (24% vs. 18%) and were also more likely to have vaped in the past month. For example, 29% had vaped with nicotine in the past month compared to 21% provincially.

Rates of trying alcohol and marijuana were similar to five years earlier and higher than across BC. However, local youth were more likely than in previous years to wait until they were at least 15 years old to first try marijuana (e.g., 45% vs. 35% in 2013).

Locally, 21% of youth aged 12–17 met the Canadian Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines for their age range in the week before taking the survey. This reflected a local increase from 17% in 2013. Compared to youth across BC, local youth were more likely to participate weekly in informal sports (57% vs. 52%) and extreme sports (15% vs. 9%).

In the past year, local females were more likely than females across the province to have experienced physical sexual harassment (35% vs. 31%) and verbal sexual harassment (54% vs. 50%).

The majority of local students felt connected to their family, and most (75%) had turned to a family member for help in the past year (vs. 69% in 2013). The vast majority of students who sought help from their family (92%) found the experience helpful.

The majority of students felt school staff expected them to do well (80%), they were treated fairly by school staff (69%), their teachers cared about them (65%), they were part of their school (56%), and they were happy to be at school (56%).

Overall, 71% of Okanagan youth felt safe at school, which was similar to the provincial rate and a decrease from previous years (e.g., 77% locally in 2013).

The majority of Okanagan youth often or always felt safe in their neighbourhood in the daytime (93%) and at night (70%). Local youth were more likely than their peers across the province to feel safe in their neighbourhood at night (70% vs. 65%).

Most Okanagan youth (70%) felt there was an adult in their neighbourhood or community (outside their family or school) who really cared about them. This reflected a local increase from 63% in 2013 and was above the provincial rate of 65%.

Locally, 30% of youth had an adult outside their family whom they could talk to if they had a serious problem, which was above the provincial rate of 27%.

Most Okanagan youth could identify something they were really good at, felt good about themselves, reported satisfaction with their life, and were hopeful for their future.