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South Vancouver Island youth have adults to turn to but are struggling with their mental health

McCreary Centre Society today released the South 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 South Vancouver Island Health Service Delivery Area.

Results showed that youth were less likely to rate their overall health and mental health positively compared to five years earlier and were more likely to have considered suicide.

McCreary's Executive Director Annie Smith explained: *“Eighteen percent of local youth had seriously considered suicide in the past year, which was an increase for both females and males. This is obviously concerning as was the rise in students who did not access mental health care when they felt they needed it but what was positive was we didn't see an increase in local youth attempting suicide.”*

Smith went on to say *“I think this speaks to students being more likely to feel connected to their community, to have an adult in their community who cares about them and to reach out to family and others when they need help than we've seen in previous years. Now, we need to build from this and ensure we can connect youth who might be struggling with their mental health to the services and supports that they need.”*

Other local results for South Vancouver Island showed that while rates of alcohol, marijuana and tobacco use were unchanged from five years earlier, 27% of students had vaped in the past month. This percentage was higher than the percentage who had ever tried tobacco.

A copy of the report, *Balance and connection in South 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.

South Vancouver Island HSDA is comprised of four school districts: Greater Victoria (SD 61), Sooke (SD 62), Saanich (SD 63), and Gulf Islands (SD 64). 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. The Conseil scolaire francophone school district (SD 93) also participated for the first time, and accounted for 5% of the sample in this region.

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:

Compared to five years earlier, the percentage of South Vancouver Island youth who identified as European decreased (60% vs. 68% in 2013), and there were increases in those who identified as Latin/South/Central American (7% vs. 5%) and Southeast Asian (5% vs. 3%).

Among Indigenous students, 39% had at least one member of their family who had been in residential school, most commonly their grandparents (21%).

Mirroring the provincial pattern, there was a decrease in local students who rated their overall health as good or excellent (81% vs. 89% in 2013), and their mental health as good or excellent (71% vs. 81%).

Compared to five years earlier, local students were more likely to report having Anxiety Disorder (22% vs. 10% in 2013), Depression (17% vs. 10%), and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (3% vs. 1%).

Locally, 18% of youth had seriously considered suicide in the past year, which was an increase for both females (24% vs. 15% in 2013) and males (13% vs. 8%).

The percentage of students who missed out on needed medical care in the past year continued to decrease (8% vs. 10% in 2013). However, there was a rise in those who missed out on needed mental health services (19% vs. 12% in 2013).

South Vancouver Island youth were less likely than five years earlier to have experienced a concussion (13% vs. 18% in 2013).

Among youth who cycled, local youth were more likely than their peers across BC to always wear a helmet when cycling (61% vs. 45%). They were also more likely to always wear a helmet when mountain biking (76% vs. 69% provincially), BMXing (55% vs. 42%), and skateboarding (35% vs. 27%).

There was a decrease in youth who used a condom to prevent pregnancy the last time they were sexually active (54% vs. 64% in 2013), and an increase in those using withdrawal as their only contraceptive method (11% vs. 7% in 2008), and emergency contraception (6% vs. 3% in 2008; among youth who had ever had sex).

Locally, 48% of youth had tried alcohol, 30% had used marijuana, and 21% had smoked tobacco. These rates were higher than across BC and similar to local rates five years earlier.

Among youth who had tried marijuana, the percentage who waited until they were at least 15 years old to first try it increased steadily over the past decade (from 30% in 2008 to 39% in 2013 to 46%).

Reflecting the provincial picture, 27% of local youth had vaped in the past month, including 22% who had vaped with nicotine and 18% who had vaped without nicotine.

Overall, 15% of South Vancouver Island youth reported they had been physically abused or mistreated and 12% had been sexually abused. The percentage of females who had been sexually abused increased from 14% in 2013 to 17%.

Compared to five years earlier, students were more likely to have experienced discrimination on the basis of their physical appearance (22% vs. 19% in 2013), race, ethnicity, or skin colour (13% vs. 7%), income or family income (8% vs. 5%), and their sexual orientation (7% vs. 5%).

Most students felt connected to their family and there was an increase in those who turned to a family member for help in the past year (72% vs. 67% in 2013). The majority of students (94%) found the support they received from family helpful.

Similar to the province and the local rate in 2013, most South Vancouver Island students (86%) planned to complete Grade 12. However, students were less likely than local students five years earlier to plan to pursue post-secondary education (81% vs. 85% in 2013).

There was an increase from five years earlier in the percentage of youth who felt connected to their community (42% vs. 37% in 2013) and who had an adult in their neighbourhood or community (outside their family or school) who really cared about them (66% vs. 62%).

South Vancouver Island youth generally felt positively about their quality of life. For example, most indicated they had a good life (80%) and their life was going well (74%).