

MEDIA RELEASE | March 26th 2020

Vancouver youth continue to be less likely to use substances but are experiencing mental health challenges

McCreary Centre Society today released the Vancouver results of the 2018 BC Adolescent Health Survey. The survey was completed by over 38,000 of the province's Grade 7–12 students.

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 getting a full night's sleep, but youth remained less likely to have used substances than their peers across British Columbia.

McCreary's Executive Director Annie Smith explained: "*Vancouver youth have traditionally been less likely to use substances such as alcohol, marijuana and tobacco and this continued. In 2018 they were also less likely to have vaped which is obviously good news.*"

Smith went on to say "*There were other positives in the report such as most youth feeling connected to their school and community, but there were also things we should be aware of and be thinking about how we can support young people better.*"

These included an increase in those who missed out on mental health services they thought they needed, a decline in youth reporting positive mental health, and one in ten local youth experiencing such poverty that they went to bed hungry because there was not enough money for food at home.

Other results from the survey showed a rise in those who had seriously considered suicide but a decline in actual attempts among girls.

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

This report covers Vancouver HSDA and includes data from Vancouver School District (SD 39) and local schools in Conseil scolaire francophone school district (SD 93). SD 39 has participated in all six waves of the BC AHS (1992, 1998, 2003, 2008, 2013, and 2018). The Conseil scolaire francophone school district (SD 93) participated for the first time in 2018.

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:

As in 2013, students in Vancouver most commonly identified as East Asian (47%). Local students were more likely than those across the province to identify as East Asian and Southeast Asian; and less likely to identify as European, South Asian, and Indigenous. Three quarters (75%) of students spoke a language other than English at home (vs. 53% provincially).

Reflecting the picture across BC, there was a decrease from 2013 in local students who rated their overall health as good or excellent (82% vs. 86%) and their mental health this way (75% vs. 81%).

Locally, 45% of students slept for at least eight hours on the night before completing the survey (vs. 48% in 2013). Six in ten (60%) were doing homework after the time they were expected to be asleep.

Vancouver students were less likely than their peers across the province to participate weekly in informal sports (48% vs. 52%) and extreme sports (5% vs. 9%). However, unlike across the province where there were decreases in some activities (organized sports; and dance, yoga and exercise classes) there were no such decreases locally.

Locally, 8% of youth experienced a concussion in the past year, which was a decrease from 11% in 2013 and lower than the 2018 provincial rate (13%). Around half of local youth (51%) who experienced a concussion received medical treatment for their injury.

Compared to 2013, there was a rise in youth who seriously considered suicide in the past year, for both males (11% vs. 7% in 2013) and females (19% vs. 13%). However, the percentage of females who attempted suicide decreased (4% vs. 7% in 2013).

In the past year, 15% of Vancouver students had missed out on needed mental health services. This was an increase from 10% in 2013. Among students who did not access needed mental health services, the most common reasons were thinking or hoping the problem would go away and not wanting their parents to know.

Local youth were less likely than those across BC to have ever had sexual intercourse. However, they were less likely than five years earlier to wait until they were at least 15 years old to first have sex (68% vs. 75% in 2013; among those who ever had intercourse).

Vancouver youth continued to be less likely than their peers across BC to have used tobacco (11% vs. 18%), alcohol (35% vs. 44%), or marijuana (15% vs. 25%). They were also less likely to have vaped in the past month (18% vs. 27%).

Half of youth (50%) who used alcohol or other substances reported negative consequences of their use in the past year, which was an increase from 40% in 2013.

One in ten youth (10%) went to bed hungry at least sometimes because there was not enough money for food at home (an increase from 6% in 2013).

Vancouver students were more likely than those across the province to feel deprived of a space of their own to hang out in (8% vs. 6% provincially), but were less likely to feel deprived of money to spend on themselves (7% vs. 10%), lunch for school or money for lunch (3% vs. 4%), and access to transportation (2% vs. 3%).

Compared to five years earlier, there were increases in youth who reported they had been discriminated against in the past year on the grounds of race, ethnicity, or skin colour (16% vs. 13% in 2013); gender (8% vs. 6%); and family income (7% vs. 5%).

Most students felt connected to their family, school and community. Also, youth were more likely than five years earlier to feel that an adult in their community (outside their school or family) really cared about them (59% vs. 50% in 2013).

Local youth were more likely than students across the province to have friends who would be upset with them if they used marijuana (63% vs. 55%), got drunk (53% vs. 45%), and beat someone up (70% vs. 65%).

The majority of youth (62%) felt the activities they took part in were meaningful to them, and 42% felt their ideas were listened to and acted upon in these activities.

Vancouver youth generally felt positively about their quality of life. For example, 77% indicated they had a good life and 70% reported their life was going well. Also, 74% were able to name something they were really good at (such as sports or art).