

# CONNECTIONS AND COMPANIONSHIP: THE HEALTH OF BC YOUTH WITH PETS

Statistics are from the 2016 report, *Connections and Companionship*. The report uses data from the 2013 BC Adolescent Health Survey<sup>1</sup> (BC AHS) which was completed by almost 30,000 youth aged 12–19 in schools across the province, and the 2014 Homeless and Street Involved Youth Survey<sup>2</sup> (HSIYS), which was completed by nearly 700 youth aged 12–19 in 13 BC communities.

## PET GUARDIANSHIP

Over half of youth aged 12–19 had at least one pet.



Youth with a disability or health condition, those living in poverty, and those who had been victimized were more likely to have a pet<sup>1</sup>.

Among homeless and street involved youth with a pet, the majority had a cat or a dog.



## BENEFITS OF PET GUARDIANSHIP

Taking care of a pet was linked to health benefits such as increased physical activity.



45% of youth with a pet got an hour of moderate or vigorous exercise on 5 or more days in the past week, compared to 38% of youth without a pet<sup>1</sup>.

It was also linked to positive future aspirations.



Youth with a pet were more likely to see themselves in a job or career in 5 years' time than youth without a pet<sup>1</sup>.

Having a pet was linked to feelings of safety.



75% of youth with a pet who were living on the street, in a car, or in a squat felt safe where they slept compared to 54% of those without a pet<sup>2</sup>.

It was also linked to increased school attendance.



Homeless youth with a pet were more likely to attend school and to be attending regularly than those without a pet<sup>2</sup>.

Having a pet was linked to reduced substance use for homeless youth, and those with a pet were less likely to use substances to manage stress.



Youth with a cat were less likely to have used marijuana daily in the past month than those without a pet<sup>2</sup>.

For homeless youth dealing with challenges such as discrimination, having a pet was associated with more positive mental health.



Homeless LGBTQ2S youth with a dog were more likely to report excellent mental health than those without a dog.<sup>2</sup>

## BARRIERS ASSOCIATED WITH PET GUARDIANSHIP

The benefits of having a pet can be negated by the barriers that come with pet guardianship.



Youth who cared for a pet were more likely to miss out on needed health care than those without this responsibility<sup>1</sup>.



They were also more likely to miss classes than those without a pet<sup>1</sup>.

Some of the most vulnerable youth in BC turn to animals for companionship, yet having a pet may exacerbate some of the challenges they face.



Homeless youth with a pet were almost half as likely to be in a safe house or a shelter as those without a pet<sup>2</sup>.



They were also less likely to access food kitchens<sup>2</sup>.



The lack of affordable pet-friendly housing in BC may explain why homeless youth with a dog were less likely to envision having a home of their own in the future<sup>2</sup>.

## SUPPORTING YOUTH WITH PETS

Pets play an important role in the lives of youth in BC, and having a pet can support positive outcomes for even the most vulnerable youth.



Across BC, 15% of homeless youth with a pet felt that more veterinarian services were needed in their community<sup>2</sup>.



Despite the changing housing market, the rate of pet ownership among homeless youth has remained stable<sup>2</sup>.



Findings support the need for more pet-friendly spaces and services to reduce the barriers associated with pet guardianship.

## FIND OUT MORE

Download the full report at [www.mcs.bc.ca](http://www.mcs.bc.ca). Learn more about the Paws for Hope Animal Foundation at [www.pawsforhope.org](http://www.pawsforhope.org).



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