

MEDIA RELEASE | 22ND SEPTEMBER 2020

New study looks at the relationship between youth and their pets



McCreary Centre Society in partnership with Paws for Hope Animal Foundation today released *Connections and Companionship II*. The report is a sequel to a 2016 report which was the first in the province to look at the relationship between adolescents and their pets. The 2020 report includes data from the 2018 BC Adolescent Health Survey (BC AHS) and from a 2020 survey specifically about youth's relationship with their pet.

Results showed that around half of BC youth had a pet and this came with benefits and challenges. Benefits included being physically active, youth feeling like they were skilled at something and feeling connected to nature.

Challenges associated with having a pet included finding and maintaining housing, missing out on leisure activities, and youth not accessing needed medical care and mental health service for themselves.

McCreary's Executive Director Annie Smith noted that the report also contains suggestions from youth about how those with pets can be better supported: *"Young people who filled out the 2020 survey spoke about the additional concerns they have for the welfare of their pet during COVID, including the need for pet food banks and support with their pet's vet bills at a time when they are not able to cover those costs."* Smith went on to say, *"The report also showed us that it is some of the most vulnerable youth in the province who have a pet and they see their pet as not only a source of comfort but also as a friend and family member whose welfare they will often prioritize over their own well-being."*

Paws for Hope founder Kathy Powelson added: *"The data confirms what we see anecdotally in our programs supporting pets and their people. The bond between young people and their pets is significant, and their well-being is impacted by the health and well-being of their pet. Our hope is that the voices of young people will be heard and both animal welfare and social service organizations will make efforts to create and/or enhance their programs to ensure that pets and their people are supported as a unit. This is also a great opportunity for our two sectors to begin a conversation on how we can work together to support young people and their pets."*

A copy of the report *Connections and Companionship II* is 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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Paws for Hope provides care, support and education through programs and services, including financial support, to individuals and groups to enhance companion animal welfare in BC.

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WEBINAR PRESENTATIONS

Webinar presentations of the results are scheduled for:

- September 22nd at 9am, noon and 3pm
- September 23rd at 9am
- September 24th at noon
- September 29th at noon
- October 1st at 11am

Webinar details:

- Join from your computer, tablet or smartphone: <https://global.gotomeeting.com/join/283669373>
- Join via phone: 1-888-455-1389 (Toll free). Access code: 283-669-373

BACKGROUNDER

Connections and Companionship II contains information provided by over 60,000 BC youth aged 12–19 who completed the 2013 and 2018 BC AHS, and 515 youth aged 12–24 who completed a survey specific to their experience with pets (Youth Survey About Pets, 2020).

The 2018 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. The results are considered representative of over 95% of mainstream school students in Grades 7–12 in the province.

The online Youth Survey About Pets was developed by young people who are members of McCreary's Youth Research Academy in partnership with adult researchers and animal welfare specialists.

Some key findings from the report:

BC AHS results showed that youth who lived in the Northern or Interior regions of the province were the most likely to have a pet, as were youth who identified as Indigenous or European.

Youth experiencing various challenges in their life were more likely to have a pet. For example, they were more likely to have a pet if they experienced poverty; had been kicked out or run away from home in the past year; did not feel connected to their family and school; experienced violence and discrimination; had a physical health condition or disability; or had mental health or substance use challenges.

Findings from the pet survey showed that in the past year, 7% of youth felt their pet needed veterinary care but did not get it. The most common reason was because they could not afford it (78%). Feeling worried about the financial cost of caring for their pet was associated with extreme stress, poorer mental health, and lower life satisfaction.

Youth with a pet who completed the pet survey identified benefits to having their pet, including improvements to their overall well-being (84%), mental health (78%), sense of responsibility (77%), and sense of purpose (71%).

Over half of youth who completed the pet survey (57%) reported that having their pet reduced the amount of time they spent on their phone or other electronic devices.

Youth who completed the pet survey offered suggestions for how young people with pets can be better supported. Their suggestions primarily focused on financial support (reduced costs of vet care, etc.) and housing, but also spoke of the need to educate young people on how to care for their pet.