

Report finds some health improvements and some concerns among Aboriginal youth

McCreary Centre Society has today released its latest report about Aboriginal youth health. ***Raven's Children IV*** includes data from the 2013 BC Adolescent Health Survey, along with context to the findings provided by youth, Elders and other community members.

The report highlights many improvements in Aboriginal youth health over the past decade, including reductions in substance use and serious injuries, and improvements in nutrition and in students planning to graduate high school and attend post-secondary education.

Despite the many improvements in Aboriginal youth health, it is also clear from the findings where increased efforts are needed to improve disparities between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth, as well as for youth living on-reserve and in different parts of the province.

The report shows the importance of supportive relationships, and of cultural and community connectedness for Aboriginal young people.

Reflecting the views of those who participated in community consultations, the report emphasizes that the results cannot be viewed without considering the intergenerational impact of residential schools and other policies and practices that have marginalized Aboriginal peoples.

Samantha Tsuruda, Chair of McCreary Centre Society, commented on the report findings:

"Raven's Children IV highlights areas in which Aboriginal youth health in BC has improved, demonstrating their strength and communities' efforts to support them. The results also show that connecting to culture is still a positive factor that contributes to their wellbeing. Yet there are health outcomes that remain disparate from non-Aboriginal youth, aligning with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action. It is critical to sustain and enhance services and supports, particularly around mental health and physical health, so that we provide equitable opportunities for Aboriginal youth to thrive."



McCreary Centre Society is a non-government, non-profit organization committed to improving the health of BC youth through research and community-based projects.

Founded in 1977, the Society sponsors and promotes a wide range of activities and research to address unmet health needs of young people.

Contact:
Annie Smith
Executive Director
3552 E. Hastings St.
Vancouver, B.C.
V5K 2A7

Tel: 604-291-1996
ext 225

Cell: 604-728-9494

annie@mcs.bc.ca

www.mcs.bc.ca

BACKGROUND

This is the fourth Raven's Children report to be released, with previous reports focusing on results from the 1998, 2003 and 2008 BC Adolescent Health Survey (BC AHS). This report is based on Aboriginal youth's responses to the 2013 BC AHS. The survey was completed by over 3,000 Aboriginal youth aged 12-19 in 56 of the 59 BC school districts.

The report was guided by an advisory committee made up of experts in Aboriginal youth health, and provides decision makers and others with an interest in youth health with information on the health picture of Aboriginal young people in BC, as well as essential information about health trends and about risk and protective factors that can influence healthy transitions to adulthood.

The BC AHS includes 130 questions asking youth about their perceptions of their physical and emotional health, risky behaviours, and health promoting practices. It also asks about broader issues such as living on reserve, eating traditional foods, speaking an Aboriginal language, relationships, and engagement in cultural activities.

This report was funded by the BC Ministry of Children and Family Development and First Nations Health Authority. The 2013 BC Adolescent Health Survey was funded by BC Ministry of Children and Family Development, BC Ministry of Health, and BC Office of the Representative for Children and Youth.

A SELECTION OF KEY FINDINGS

The percentage of Aboriginal youth who did not expect to finish high school decreased from 3% in 2008 to 1% in 2013, and 3/4 intended to continue to post-secondary education.

Aboriginal youth were less likely to have tried tobacco, alcohol, marijuana or other substances than in previous years. There was also a decrease in youth reporting drinking and driving.

Despite these improvements, the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth has not closed in some key areas. For example, the disparity in reporting extreme stress and considering suicide widened among females, as did the gap in positive physical health ratings between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal males.

Youth who experienced discrimination were less likely to report good or excellent mental health or physical health, and were more likely to have missed out on needed medical care in the past year, compared to those who had not faced discrimination.

The percentage of females who attempted suicide in the past year (17%) returned to the 2003 rate after a drop in 2008 (13%), whereas the percentage among males was consistent over time (8%).

Having a friend or family member attempt or die by suicide is a known risk factor for youth attempting suicide. Overall, 45% of youth reported having a family member or close friend who had attempted suicide, with 27% having this experience in the past year.

After worsening between 2003 and 2008, a number of key health trends returned to 2003 levels, including the percentage of youth experiencing physical or sexual abuse or dating violence.

Youth living on-reserve generally experienced more challenges to their healthy development than those living off-reserve. However, they were more likely to speak an Aboriginal language, engage in cultural activities, and find their families supportive.

Rural students generally reported poorer health than urban ones, and community members credited this difference to lack of available services and supplies in rural parts of the province.

Only 6% of youth who had never lived on-reserve spoke an Aboriginal language (compared to 41% living on-reserve). However, if they did speak an Aboriginal language, they were less likely to report mental health challenges and were more likely to be engaging in positive health behaviours.

Youth who participated in weekly cultural activities in the past year were more likely than those who did not take part to feel highly connected to school, feel like a part of their community, and volunteer weekly in their community. Similarly, eating traditional foods from their culture was linked to positive mental health for Aboriginal youth.

Youth who felt connected to their family, peers, school, or community reported better health than those who did not have these types of relationships. The more positive relationships youth had, the better their health picture.

The report will be launched at 9am on Thursday 17th March at Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre, 1607 East Hastings St, Vancouver.

A copy of ***Raven's Children IV: Aboriginal youth health in BC*** can be obtained at www.mcs.bc.ca.

Webinar presentations of the findings are scheduled for 18th March at noon, 21st March at 9am and 3pm, and 22nd March at noon. Webinar details are available at: www.mcs.bc.ca/upcoming_webinars.