

New Study Says Staying in School Promotes Health in Aboriginal Youth

November 16, 2000

Burnaby, BC

Aboriginal youth in BC schools are in good physical and emotional health and have high expectations for completing their education, a new study shows. The findings were published in a report, *Raven's Children*, released today by The McCreary Centre Society. The study of BC Aboriginal youth in Grades 7-12 covers a wide range of issues, including tobacco and alcohol use, injuries and attitudes towards school. Nearly two-thirds of Aboriginal students, according to the report, say they plan to continue their education past high school.

Many previous studies have shown that Aboriginal people have more health problems than other Canadians, but the new report suggests that most Aboriginal youth in school are doing well. These positive results "underline how important it is for Aboriginal youth to stay in school," says Dr. Roger Tonkin of the McCreary Centre Society. Data in *Raven's Children* were obtained from the responses of over 1700 Aboriginal students who took part in a survey conducted by McCreary, a non-profit BC organization with extensive experience in youth health research. *Raven's Children* was presented to the Aboriginal community at the Aboriginal Friendship Centre in Vancouver.

Raven's Children portrays some promising trends since a similar McCreary survey conducted in 1992. Students are waiting longer to have sex, rates of youth violence have remained stable, and sexual abuse of Aboriginal females appears to be decreasing. However, the study shows room for improvement on some health issues, including smoking and marijuana use, which occur at higher rates than among non-Aboriginal youth. Aboriginal students also are more likely than others their age to think about or attempt suicide, and to experience racial discrimination.

The report does not include information about Aboriginal youth who were not in school when the survey was conducted. McCreary plans additional studies to assess the health needs of Aboriginal young people who leave school. High school completion rates for Aboriginal students continue to be lower than for non-Aboriginal youth. "BC must find better ways to reduce the drop-out rate among Aboriginal students, to support programs that encourage them to finish high school, and to help more Aboriginal youth continue their education after secondary school," the report states.

The McCreary Centre Society also unveiled plans for a series of workshops designed to involve Aboriginal young people in a planning process to improve the health of youth in their communities. The "Next Step" workshops will be held in several BC communities within the next six months. *Raven's Children* and the Next Step Aboriginal youth health workshops are funded by the Population Health Fund, Health Canada.

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