

## ***Are we supporting the rights of youth with physical or sensory conditions in BC?***

McCreary Centre Society today released, *Are we supporting the rights of BC youth with physical or sensory disabilities?* The report is based on data from the BC Adolescent Health Survey and is framed in the context of Canada's commitment to the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. It considers the health and well-being of the 12% of BC youth aged 12-19 who indicated having a chronic medical condition, a sensory disability (such as a vision impairment or were deaf/ hard of hearing) and/or a physical disability (such as a condition which required the use of a wheelchair).

The report highlights the many societal and systemic barriers that these young people experience, as well as their strengths and resilience, and the factors that are linked to more positive health and well-being.

McCreary's Executive Director, Dr. Annie Smith, noted: *"The report looks at various rights that all BC residents should enjoy including the right to freedom from violence and abuse, education, health care, transportation, and privacy, and really highlights where we are falling short for young people with these types of disabilities and health conditions. We were particularly concerned to see the high rates of violence and abuse, and the poorer mental health experienced by these youth."*

Smith went on to note: *"The results really showed the value of supportive connections with adults at home, at school, and in the community but also how stressful and disruptive it can be when young people have to miss school to attend medical appointments, and the impact that this can have on those relationships and their friendships with peers. Having services and appointments that are available outside of school hours is a consistent request we hear from young people, and would go a long way to easing some of the pressures they face."*

A copy of the report is available at [www.mcs.bc.ca](http://www.mcs.bc.ca).

Webinar presentations of the results are scheduled for:

Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> March at 9.00-9.45am, 12.00-12.45pm and 2.00-2.45pm

Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> March at 9.00-9.45am, 12.00-12.45pm and 2.00-2.45pm

Log in details are below:

<https://global.gotomeeting.com/join/365601885>

Access Code: 365-601-885

**For interviews contact Annie Smith at 604-728-9494 or email [annie@mcs.bc.ca](mailto:annie@mcs.bc.ca)**

## BACKGROUND

This is the first BC Adolescent Health Survey (BC AHS) report to focus on the health and well-being of youth with a physical or sensory condition. The needs, goals, and strengths of these youth are often overlooked in research, as are the barriers they face to enjoying their rights to full and meaningful participation in their family, school, and community. This report seeks to address these gaps and is framed in the context of Canada's commitment to the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*.

### Some key findings from the report:

In 2018, 12% of BC youth reported they had at least one of the three types of physical or sensory conditions asked about on the BC AHS, including 8% with a chronic medical condition, 4% with a sensory disability, and 1% with a physical disability.

Youth with one of these physical or sensory conditions were more likely than those without a health condition or disability to identify as female or non-binary, have been born in Canada, identify as a sexual minority, and have experience of government care.

Youth with a physical or sensory condition experienced barriers to fully participating in their family, school, and community. For example, they were more likely than youth without a condition to report they lived in poverty, felt unsafe at school and in their home, experienced violence and abuse, and missed out on needed mental health services.

Youth with a physical or sensory condition were less likely than their peers to have in-person friends and were more likely to have online friends whom they had never met in person.

Youth with a physical or sensory condition experienced poorer physical and mental health than those without a health condition or disability, including being more likely to have self-harmed (26% vs. 11%), seriously considered suicide (26% vs. 9%), or attempted suicide (9% vs 2%) in the past year. However, they reported more positive health and well-being when they experienced positive relationships with family, friends, teachers, and other adults. For example, 73% of those who had an adult in their family they could talk to about their problems reported good or excellent mental health, compared to 37% who did not have such an adult in their family.

Despite the barriers they faced, youth with a physical or sensory condition participated in a range of extracurricular activities over the past year, including volunteering, various sports, arts, exercise classes, clubs, and cultural or traditional activities. They were less likely than youth without a health condition or disability to participate in organized and informal sports but were more likely to volunteer and to participate in the arts, exercise classes, and clubs.

Most youth with a physical or sensory condition reported they persevered to achieve their goals when they experienced setbacks, were optimistic for their future and planned to attend post-secondary. Also, more than three out of four (78%) could name something they were really good at including sports, school, the arts, and helping others.