



# Memorandum

**TO:** SATPAL SIDHU, COUNTY EXECUTIVE  
**FROM:** Health and Community Services  
**DATE:** 8/15/2024  
**RE:** HEALTHY YOUTH SURVEY DATA OVERVIEW AND PROGRAM UPDATES

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The Health Youth Survey (HYS) is administered to students in grades six, eight, ten, and twelve every two years across Washington State to collect important information about youth health, safety, and wellbeing. This information is used with other key data sources to conduct strategic planning and establish priorities to create positive long-term impacts.

Youth suffer from a variety of behavioral health concerns including depression, anxiety, and substance use. The magnitude of challenges associated with youth mental health in Whatcom County is clearly demonstrated in the HYS 2023 results, where nearly two in three 10<sup>th</sup> graders reported feeling anxious and one in six reported making a plan for suicide in the past year. Additionally, about 29% of 10<sup>th</sup> graders reported depressive feelings in the past year. Mental health is a public health priority and impacts many areas over the life course. While concerns exist, findings also demonstrate downward trends in substance use, along with increases in the rates of youth reporting increased access to social supports.

School and community partners use this information to focus their services. Schools, in particular, have been utilizing Behavioral Health sales tax reserves to provide essential mental health and substance use supports to youth and families in geographical locations where little or no services exist, or where needs and gaps still greatly exceed capacity. These services have supported the full Prevention, Intervention, Treatment, and Aftercare (PITA) continuum of care, but certainly strengthened upstream efforts.

Research shows that investing in youth and family mental health greatly benefits the community, including higher graduation rates, lower incarceration rates and lower healthcare and emergency services costs. Cost-benefit estimates also show that effective school-based programs can save \$18 for every \$1 spent on these programs. Community prevention coalitions and family-specific strategies also work in tandem to build resilience in multiple sectors.

We look forward to having staff share some of the highlights from HYS 2023. Please call Amanda Burnett, Human Services Supervisor, at 6069 if there are any questions. Thank you.