

# Saskatchewan Rural Youth Healthy Lifestyles and Risk Behaviour Project

## Why was the study done?

The overall goal of this project was to assess the needs of youth in rural Saskatchewan in order to encourage healthy lifestyles and reduce risk behaviours. Very little information exists for rural Saskatchewan or indeed rural western Canada about the particular issues facing rural youth.

The results of this project have informed a community consultation about creating community plans to promote healthy lifestyles for rural youth. It has also given service providers, parents and the general public a better understanding of the issues facing youth in their local communities.

## What did we ask youth about?

The study focused on the following issues facing rural youth:

- ✓ General health
- ✓ Sexuality
- ✓ Tobacco use
- ✓ Alcohol use
- ✓ Drug use (illegal, prescription and non-prescription drugs)
- ✓ Healthy eating and weight
- ✓ Physical activity
- ✓ Gambling
- ✓ Personal safety (seatbelt and bicycle helmet use, fighting, stolen or damaged property, etc.)
- ✓ Depression and thoughts of suicide

Youth were also asked to provide ideas on how to promote healthier lifestyle choices.

## What did we do?

The project involved a number of initiatives. These included:

- ✓ Forming a steering committee with key community partners from health, education, social services and justice sectors.
- ✓ Interviews with key informants-professionals working as service providers for rural youth dealing with substance abuse issues.
- ✓ A questionnaire administered in the classrooms of 954 youth in grades 7 to 12 in 34 schools in rural Saskatchewan, Canada.
- ✓ Focus groups with 25 rural youth in three high schools who had participated in the questionnaire.
- ✓ Information nights in communities to present and discuss the results.
- ✓ Planning sessions with communities to develop strategies around healthy lifestyles for rural youth.

## For more information about the study:

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## Most rural youth describe their health as good or better

In this study, 61% of youth described their health as very good or excellent. There is no difference in how rural youth of different ages describe their health.

## What did rural youth report about their general health?

- ✓ Self rated health declines with the number of days youth smoke in a month.
- ✓ Youth who report higher levels of drinking, drinking on more occasions or binge drinking rate their health more poorly.
- ✓ The more time youth spend on physical activity, the more likely they are to rate their health as excellent or very good.
- ✓ Youth who noted that they had felt sad to the extent it affected their activities were more likely to rate their health more poorly.

## Male youth rate their health as better than female youth

Male youth rate their health as better than female youth, in particular 7% more male youth describe their health as excellent.

