

**Press Release  
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**New Report Shows Northern Virginia Youth Have  
Better Potential Health Outcomes than Youth Nationally**  
*Area's 200,000 youth generally doing well; some risk factors need attention*

FAIRFAX –Voices for Virginia's Children, a statewide non-profit children's policy research and advocacy organization, today released "Self-Portrait of Youth in Northern Virginia", a report summarizing results from youth health risk surveys administered by four Northern Virginia localities.

The report shows that, overall, Northern Virginia youth exhibit a relative advantage in general well-being over their peers nationwide. Compared to youth nationally, youth in Northern Virginia show somewhat lower rates of drug use, violence and other health risk behaviors. The report also cautions that each locale has large numbers of at-risk youth, and urges community leaders to identify sub-groups and neighborhoods with higher rates of health risk behaviors and to promote community initiatives to address these risks.

"All those working to improve the well-being of the region's youth should be encouraged by these findings", said Kathy May, the report's author and Director of the organization's Northern Virginia initiative. "At the same time, because our area has so many young people, even relatively low rates translate into large numbers of youth who exhibit risky behaviors. Communities can use survey results to find 'pockets' of risk and design programs to reduce risk and promote health."

In the midst of the generally positive findings, the report identifies several health risks of particular concern for the region, including:

- A relatively high rate of troubling mental health signs, including "thinking about and attempting suicide".
- Troublesome rates of inhalant use and abuse of prescription and over-the-counter medications by the region's youngest teens.
- Evidence that bullying may be more prevalent than generally believed.

The report highlights the value of conducting periodic youth surveys and recommends that all jurisdictions use survey results to plan and evaluate prevention and health promotion efforts. Allen Lomax, Chair of the Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition of Alexandria said survey data helps his community "develop interventions that prevent youth substance abuse and other risky behaviors".

Report findings should prove useful to officials working to improve and protect the well-being of the region's youth. "The *Self-Portrait of Youth in Northern Virginia* is an excellent tool to support our regional collaboration and planning efforts," said Denise Raybon, County-wide Prevention Coordinator for Fairfax County.

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**About Voices for Virginia's Children**

*Voices for Virginia's Children is a privately funded, non-partisan child policy research and advocacy organization that champions public policies to improve the lives of Virginia's children. A recognized leader in child advocacy, Voices mobilizes support for initiatives by conducting research, developing policy solutions, building coalitions, and educating the public and our leaders about the needs of Virginia's children.*