

# Population Profile

Demographic indicators describe who lives in a region and how the population is changing. Health outcome indicators, like life expectancy and infant mortality, reflect overall health status and health inequities. In Island Health, future growth will be driven largely by international migration, with more growth in older adults and a decrease in the number of children. Geographic inequities in life expectancy and infant mortality rates indicate important inequities in health.

## Demographics

**908,627**

in 2023

Expected

**930,780**

in 2025

Estimated

**1,036,600**

in 2043



As of 2021, 7.8% of the population in Island Health self-identified as **Indigenous**, ranging from 4.5% in Greater Victoria to 29.8% Vancouver Island North.

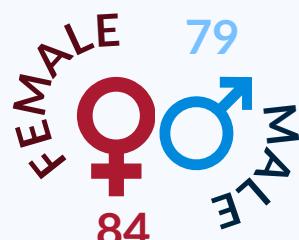
BC's future growth will be largely driven by international migration. Presently, 16% of Island Health residents are **new Canadians** (3% arriving within the past 5 years).

Population growth predictions suggest that Island Health's population is aging. The child and youth population is projected to decrease by 10%, while the population aged 85 years and older is expected to **more than double**.

## Disparities in Life Expectancy

Life expectancy has **decreased in recent years**, partially driven by **illicit drug toxicity**.

Life Expectancy at Birth (2021-22)
Saanich Peninsula 84.2 years (highest)
British Columbia 82.0 years
Island Health 81.3 years
Vancouver Island North 75.3 years (lowest)



In 2021/2022, the difference in life expectancy between men and women was **larger than historically reported**.

## Infant Mortality

Infant mortality rates reflect overall population health.



Island Health's infant mortality rate is **3.8 deaths** per 1,000 live births (2019-2023).



**Higher than the BC rate**  
(3.5 per 1,000).



**Equal to the Island Health rate** for 2018-2022 (3.8).

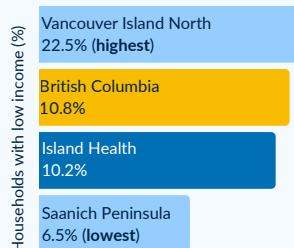
Future public health efforts will prioritize the drivers of disparities in life expectancy and infant mortality rates, as both are key indicators of a population's wellbeing. Addressing persistent health inequities will require interventions across the lifespan that meet the diverse needs of Island Health's communities.

# Determinants of Health

Determinants of health are the conditions that influence people's health and wellbeing. In Island Health there are notable differences across Local Health Areas in important determinants of health such as income, housing costs and food security. Access to health care is one determinant of health, and access to family doctors and urgent care is often seen as limited, especially in larger urban centres and rural or remote communities.

## Socioeconomic Factors

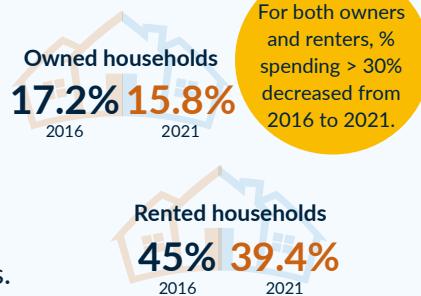
*For consideration: indicators from the 2021 Census may not reflect experiences in 2024.*



The proportion of people living in low income households decreased from 2016 to 2021.

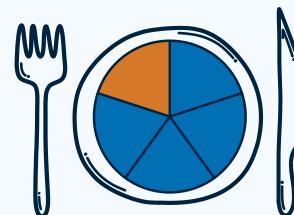


Across Island Health, more renters than owners spend over 30% of their income on shelter.



Those who do, may experience financial strain in other areas of their lives.

## Food Insecurity



1 in 5 were concerned about having enough to eat in the past year.

In 2023 ranged from 11% to 22% across Local Health Areas in Island Health



In BC, 21.8% of people lived in food insecure households in 2023, compared to 16.2% in 2019.

## Education

Most Island Health residents have a **high school** diploma or equivalency certificate.



More Island Health residents have a **post-secondary** education.



**65%**  
ISHL

**57%**  
BC

## Perceived Access to Care

**70.2%**

of Island Health residents (65% in BC), reported **they were unable to access a family doctor when needed**, in the past year.



**19.3%**

of Island Health residents (17% in BC), reported **they were unable to access urgent care when needed**, in the past year.



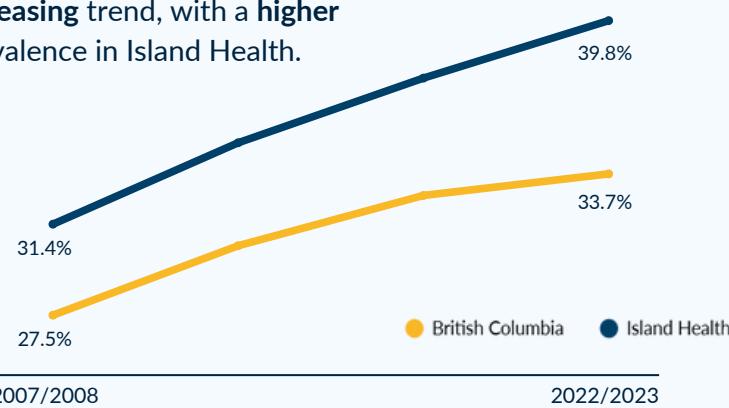
While individual choices affect health, the social, economic, and physical environments in which people live have and even greater influence on health. Improving health and reducing inequities across Island Health requires coordinated effort across society to improve the conditions that shape wellbeing.

# Mental Health

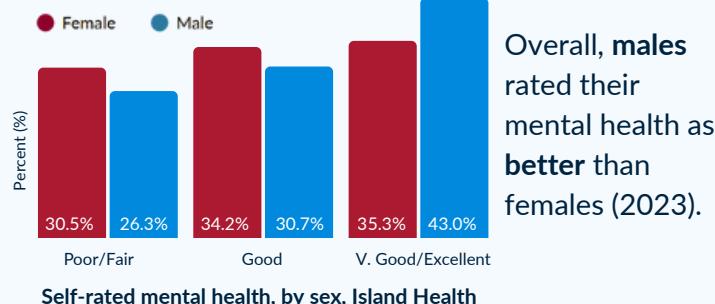
Prevalence of mood and anxiety disorders is increasing. Thoughts of suicide and death by suicide, which are higher among Island Health residents than among British Columbians, declined slightly since the peak in 2021, but have not returned to pre-pandemic levels.

## Mental Health

**Mood and anxiety disorders** show an increasing trend, with a higher prevalence in Island Health.



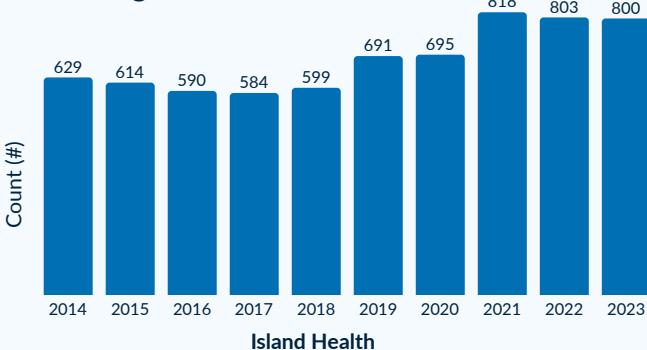
Mood and anxiety disorders are the **most common** chronic condition in Island Health and British Columbia.



1 in 3 residents reported that they needed mental health support but did not receive it (2023).

## Self-harm & Suicide

Suicide and non-fatal suicide attempt hospital admissions peaked in 2021 and have shown a decreasing trend since.



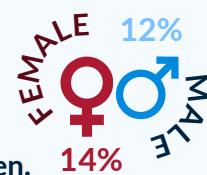
More Island Health residents have ever considered suicide.

**16%** ISLH    **12%** BC

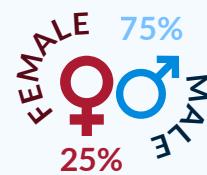
More Island Health residents have died by suicide.

**13.1** ISLH    **11.6** BC  
[rate per 100,000]

Thoughts of suicide is more common among women.



Death by suicide is more common among men.



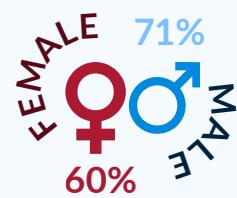
The increasing prevalence of mood and anxiety disorders highlights the need for population mental health promotion and prevention. Treatment approaches alone are not sufficient. Rather, sustained focus in creating health promoting environments before and during pregnancy, in the early years and in schools, and in workplaces and communities is required to reverse this concerning trend.

# Substance Use

In Island Health, substance use and its health harms such, as hospital admissions and deaths remain higher than British Columbia. Substance use is more commonly reported by males. Illicit drug toxicity is the leading cause of death for residents aged 19 to 59, and the second leading cause of potential years of life lost in Island Health, with a median age at death of 44 years old.

## Alcohol

Regular alcohol consumption (at least one drink per month) was more frequently reported by among males than females...



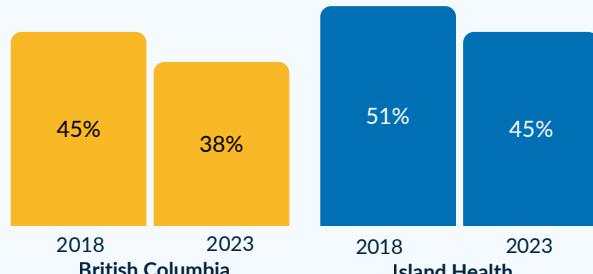
...and more frequently reported by Island Health residents than provincially.

[Regular consumption in the past year]

In 2022/23, Island Health had **1.3 times** more alcohol-related hospital admissions than the provincial average.



Over the past 5 years, the proportion of **youth** (age 12-18) who had ever tried alcohol decreased but more youth in **Island Health** report ever trying alcohol than provincially.



[Youth - ever tried alcohol]

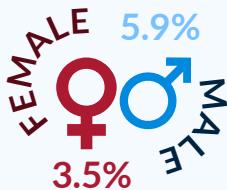
## Illicit Drugs

Use of illegal drugs or the misuse of prescription medications.

Illicit drug use was more frequently reported by Island Health residents than provincially...

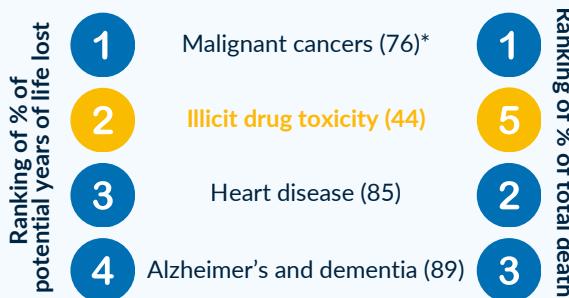


[Any illicit drug use in the past year]



...and more often among males than females.

Illicit drug toxicity is the leading cause of death for residents aged 19-59 (2024).



\*Underlying cause of death (median age at death), all age groups.

Island Health has a higher rate of unregulated drug deaths (**20.1% higher** in 2024) than British Columbia.

In 2024, for the first time in the past 10-years, unregulated drug deaths **decreased**.

Addressing the ongoing health and societal consequences of substance use requires focus on the social determinants of health (e.g. housing, income, education and social connection), which shape people's vulnerability to harmful substance use. Building a system of care and using effective laws and policies such as regulated production, promotion, availability, and pricing are also critical to address the significant population health harms of substance use in Island Health.

# Youth Mental Health

Among youth (age 12-18) in Island Health, self-reported mental health is showing signs of recovery post-pandemic. Key protective factors are improving, more youth report having a safe adult to turn to and are feeling good about themselves. While some mental health outcomes are improving, the prevalence of mood and anxiety disorders continues to increase.

## Protective Factors

*Strength-based indicators that support mental health.*

-  75% of youth reported a **connection to a caring adult** within their family in 2023.
-  Nearly **86%** of youth reported **feeling good about themselves** in 2024/2025, an increase from 2020/2021.

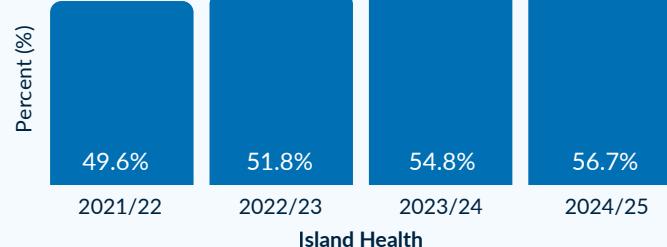
## Risk Factors

*Warning indicators that identify emerging issues.*

-  19% of youth felt they **couldn't get the mental health care they needed** in 2023.
-  **1 in 4** youth experienced **discrimination based on physical appearance** and **1 in 5** experienced discrimination based on **weight**.

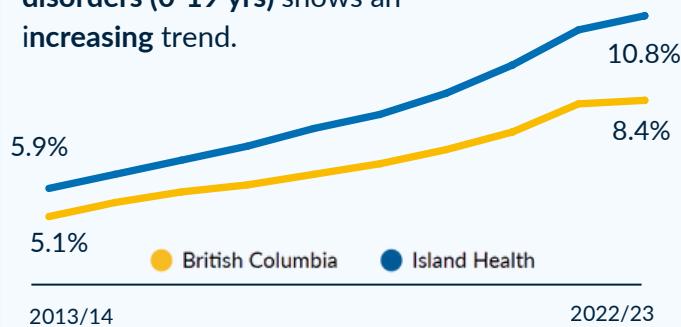
## Mental Health and Resilience Outcomes

The proportion of **Island Health** students reporting good or better mental health has shown an increase since 2021/2022.



Self-reported mental health is **improving**, but post-pandemic recovery is ongoing.

Prevalence of **mood & anxiety disorders** (0-19 yrs) shows an increasing trend.



The proportion of **youth emergency department visits** attributed to **mental health and substance use** has **decreased** since 2021/2022.



Mental health and resilience are key foundations for lifelong well-being. As youth recover from the effects of the pandemic response, tracking mental health, resilience, protective and risk factors will be needed to provide the supports that strengthen their ability to cope, adapt, and thrive.

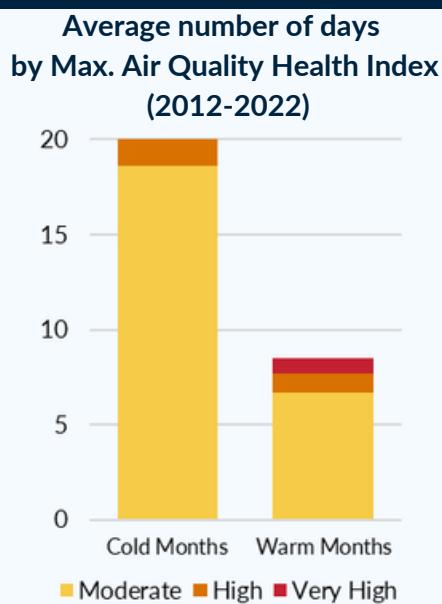
# Environmental Health and Climate Change

Climate change involves long-term shifts in temperature, precipitation, and weather, influencing the spread of infectious diseases, contributing to injuries, and worsening existing chronic conditions. In recent years, wildfires have contributed to poor air quality in the summer.

## Air Quality

Open burning and woodstoves contribute to more Moderate and High AQHI days from October to March.

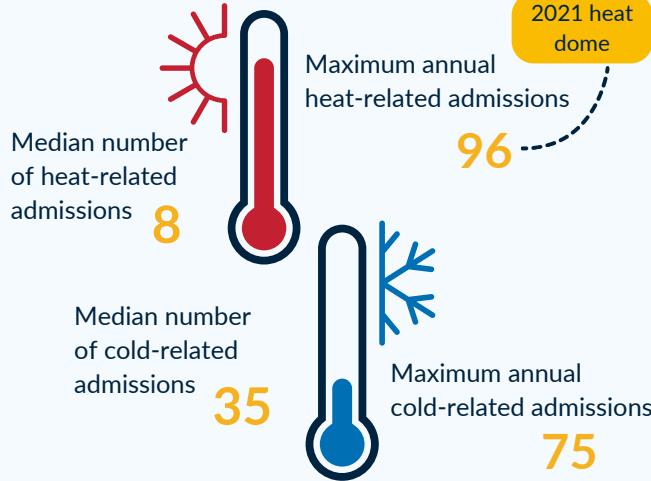
Wildfires are influencing the number of Very High AQHI days from April to September.



## Extreme Temperatures

Island Health communities may see a **4-5°C rise** in maximum annual temperature by 2100.

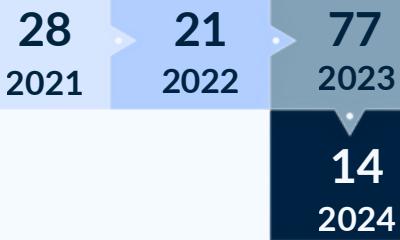
### Annual Hospital Admissions (2014-2024)



## Drought

Number of days with level 5\* drought.

\* most severe rating on the provincial drought scale.



In the future, **more** frequent and **more** severe droughts are expected across Island Health.

Per year, **more** hospital admissions are related to cold temperatures than hot, but larger increases are experienced during heat events.

## Heating and Cooling

51% of Island Health residents have a **heat pump** or **air conditioner** in their homes.



The health impacts of climate change are wide-ranging and complex. Monitoring is essential for public health planning and response and to help ensure communities are prepared for future climate challenges.

# Communicable Diseases

Communicable diseases are infections that spread from person to person, through contact with animals or a contaminated environment. In Island Health, rates of invasive group A streptococcal disease, shigellosis, tuberculosis, and infectious syphilis have increased in recent years. People living with homelessness or unstable housing are disproportionately affected.

## Infectious Syphilis

Infectious syphilis is **increasing** in Island Health but remains below the provincial rate.

In 2024, **43.7%** of cases were females age 15-49. 

Historically, **38.2%** of females reported experiences of **housing insecurity** (2018-2023). 

### Central Island Syphilis Cluster



Since 2022, infectious syphilis in Central Island have nearly **tripled**.

## Tuberculosis

Tuberculosis cases in Island Health have **increased**. Recently locally acquired cases have risen, but the majority of cases are still associated with exposures outside of Canada.

**127** Latent TB (2024)  
2019-23: 106.8 (avg.)

**25** Active TB (2024)  
2019-23: 24.4 (avg.)

### South Island Tuberculosis Cluster

**34**  
Active Cases

Largest cluster of genetically similar cases in the past 10 years.

**41**  
Latent Cases

Centered in Greater Victoria, among people experiencing **housing insecurity**. 

## Shigellosis

In 2024, Island Health saw the **largest increase** in shigellosis. This included a cluster in Central Island (46 cases) that predominantly affected people experiencing housing insecurity. 

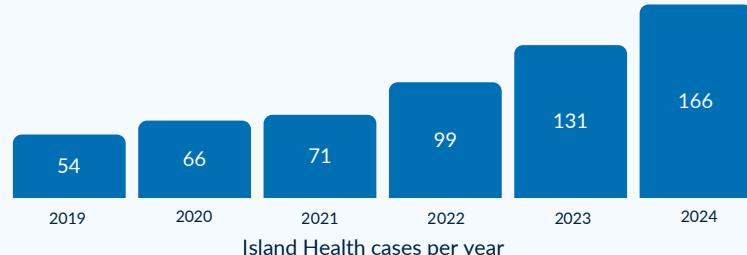
### Shigellosis



## Invasive group A streptococcal

In Island Health, invasive group A streptococcal infections have nearly **tripled** since 2019. Among South Island Health cases in 2024, **30.6%** had **communal living** identified as a risk factor. 

### Invasive Group A Streptococcal



Addressing the rise in communicable diseases requires a sustained focus on equity and the social conditions that shape health. Unstable housing remains a major risk factor, highlighting the need for equitable, community-based interventions that are accessible, culturally safe, and meet people where they are.

# Non-Communicable Diseases and Injuries

Non-communicable diseases and injuries are long-term health conditions or physical harms that are the result of genetics, lifestyle, and environment. In Island Health, breast cancer diagnoses have increased, falls remain the leading cause of injury-related hospital admissions among older adults, and 30% of drownings involved alcohol or drugs; all outcomes are associated with modifiable risk factors.

## Cancer

### BC Lifetime Estimated Risk

**1 in 2**

Cancer Diagnosis

**1 in 4**

Dying from Cancer

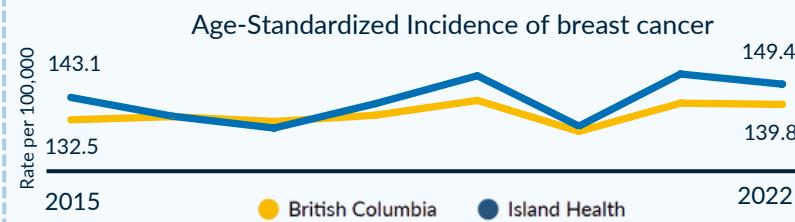
**40%**

projected **increase** in cancer diagnoses between 2022 and 2035.

Most (89%) of the increase linked to **population growth and aging**.

### Breast Cancer

Incidence of breast cancer has slowly **increased** over the past 5 years in BC, rising by about 0.5% per year. In recent years, breast cancer was **more common** in Island Health than provincially.

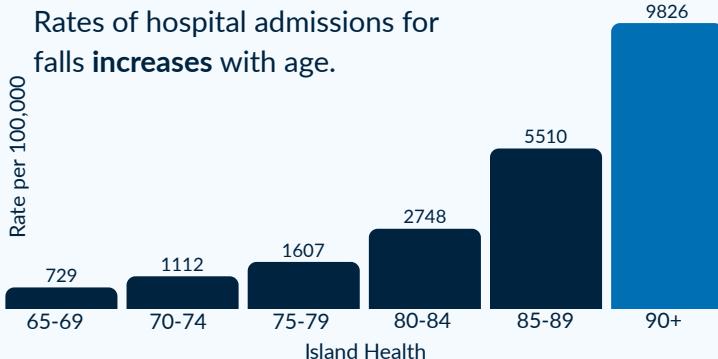


Alcohol consumption is one of the leading modifiable risk factors for breast cancer. Reducing or eliminating alcohol use can lower disease risk.

## Senior Falls

### Falls are preventable

Rates of hospital admissions for falls **increases** with age.



## Drowning

### Drownings are preventable

Swimming can be a life saving skill.



Only 70% of Island Health students reported that they were **confident swimmers** and 4% said they **could not swim at all**.



**34%**

Of fatal drownings in BC involved alcohol and/or drugs (2022).

Investing in prevention, health promotion, and data-driven policies can help reduce the burden of disease and improve health equity. Public health efforts focus on prevention through screening, fall prevention, and substance use awareness.