

Poilievre says he supports involuntary addiction treatment for minors, prisoners

The Conservative leader's statement comes as multiple provinces debate the merits of involuntary care

[Kate McKenna](#) · CBC News · Posted: Oct 10, 2024 2:27 PM MDT



Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre rises during question period in the House of Commons on Parliament Hill in Ottawa on Monday, Oct. 7, 2024. (Justin Tang/The Canadian Press)

Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre says he supports involuntary drug addiction treatment for minors and prisoners when they are found to be incapable of making decisions for themselves — but is still looking into whether he can support it for non-incarcerated adults.

In July, when asked about a potential national strategy to compel drug users into treatment, Poilievre told reporters he was "open" to the idea of involuntary drug treatment for addicts but was not sure whether you could take someone off the street who hadn't committed a criminal offence and successfully rehabilitate them.

On Thursday, he was asked the question again.

"I believe for children, and for prisoners who are behind bars, there should be mandatory drug treatment, when they are found to be incapable of making decisions for themselves," Poilievre said in Toronto.

"For adults, I'm still doing a lot of research on how that would work."

Poilievre also repeated his promise to defund programs that prescribe drugs to people at high risk of overdosing on toxic street drugs — what the federal government calls "[safer supply](#)" — and to promote recovery and rehab instead.

He also promised to tighten border controls to prevent drugs from being imported into Canada.

Poilievre cited the case of Brianna MacDonald, 13, of Abbotsford, B.C. [MacDonald died of a suspected overdose in August after leaving treatment](#), despite her parents' objections.

"There's no question in my mind that she should've been in mandatory, involuntary, psychiatric and substance abuse treatment, rather than in a homeless encampment in a tent," he said.

Involuntary addictions care is a topic of fierce debate in several provinces, including British Columbia, New Brunswick, Alberta and Ontario.

Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland was asked about Poilievre's position Thursday. Without agreeing or disagreeing with the Conservative leader, she said her government supports a "science-based approach."

"We have to use all the tools that we have at our disposal, to make sure people get the treatment they need, and sometimes a person can be too sick to really recognize what treatment they need and we also have to be sure that people are safe in their communities," Freeland said.

[According to recent government data](#), there have been more than 44,000 opioid-related deaths in Canada since 2016, and 80 per cent of opioid-related deaths involve fentanyl and fentanyl analogues.

Civil liberties groups, including the Canadian Civil Liberties Association (CCLA), have raised concerns about the prospect of involuntary treatment. They point out that the courts have established individuals have a Charter right to decline medical treatment, and people who are incarcerated have not lost their Charter of Rights protections.

"I would add that it's well documented within prisons that there's a lack of resources for voluntary treatment, so why not start there?" said Anaïs Bussièrès McNicoll, director of the fundamental freedoms program at the CCLA.

New Brunswick Premier Blaine Higgs has [refused to rule out preemptively using the Constitution's notwithstanding clause](#) to protect any involuntary treatment law from a Charter challenge.

Others have warned that forcing people into care is not an effective way to treat addiction and [risks driving people away from the health care system](#).

"If you look at global statistics, it doesn't work," said Leslie McBain of the group Moms Stop the Harm, an advocacy group representing Canadian families affected by substance-use-related harms and deaths.

"It isn't successful because people have to want to recover, they have to come to the need to recover on their own."

She also said the "devil is in the details" and without knowing what form of involuntary treatment is being proposed, it's hard to judge the potential effects.

She said provinces should focus on making sure there are enough low-barrier recovery options for people with addictions who want treatment.