

NATIONAL POST

Chris Selley: Harm-reduction advocates need to accept defeat, regroup and refocus

The case for supervised injection sites is compelling; the execution has not been

[Chris Selley](#) Published Aug 29, 2024



Supervised-injection sites were sold to neighbourhoods as a win-win-win scenario, but the reality has fallen short. Photo by Brendan Miller/Postmedia/File

The first golden era of harm reduction for opioid addiction, such as it was, is fading rapidly into history — not just in Tory Ontario, which is where progressives are naturally focusing their ire, but in NDP British Columbia as well. There is so much blame to go around for this, everyone can have seconds. But where should we go from here?

Ontario recently [issued de-facto eviction notices](#) to 10 supervised injection sites, nearly half of the province's total, under new rules that prohibit such facilities within 200 metres of a school or daycare.

This comes months after B.C. [effectively ditched its approach to decriminalizing hard drugs](#), largely in response to a moronic court decision that essentially ruled addicts should be able to consume drugs in public wherever they want. In a fight for his political life, Premier David Eby — [a long-time harm-reduction proponent](#) — this week [ordered a review of a vending machine outside Nanaimo General Hospital](#) that distributes clean needles and pipes and the overdose-reversal drug Naloxone.

Clean paraphernalia. Overdose prevention. Out of a machine, no less. To my mind that's about as anodyne as harm reduction gets. Just three years ago, then federal Conservative Leader [Erin O'Toole had taken a balanced position on this issue](#): Yes to treatment, absolutely, and more money for it; but yes also to keeping people alive in the meantime, even if it makes us uncomfortable. Conservatives often pride themselves on seeing the world as it is, not as they would like it to be, and the reality of addiction is that the first or second stab at treatment often doesn't take.

But O'Toole's successor, Pierre Poilievre, is not at all of that ilk. B.C. Conservative Party Leader John Rustad thinks it's "appalling and irresponsible to have a vending machine handing out drug paraphernalia outside a hospital." And Eby is desperate enough to pretend he thinks Rustad might have a point.