



Out of love and fear for the community® TYLER DAWSON

MEET THE FORMER ADDICT WHO'S THE ARCHITECT OF ALBERTA'S DRUG RESPONSE OVERHAUL

When Alberta introduces legislation next spring that will allow drug addicts to be forced into treatment, it will be the culmination of years of preparation and study and, according to its architect, may well provide a road map to politicians in British Columbia, who are looking to change the way they approach the nexus of drug addiction, mental health and social disorder.

Behind the overhaul of Alberta's larger addictions-treatment system is Marshall Smith. He's the chief of staff to Alberta Premier Danielle Smith. There is, by the way, no relation.

But before that, he was working in Alberta's mental health and addictions ministry, working to overhaul the way the western province tackled drug addiction. Alberta, like so many other jurisdictions, has been gripped by an escalating drug crisis.



But before all that, Smith was an addict. Still is, though he's in recovery.

Back in 2004, when he was an aide in the B.C. provincial government, he was charged with methamphetamine possession. It made headlines. Smith eventually wound up on the streets of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, the core of Canada's decades-long battle against substance use. In his case, it was a couple of cops who helped him get clean. "(They) said to me 'Marshall,

it's treatment or jail? And so I was faced with that decision," Smith recalled on Wednesday. He went to treatment in Maple Ridge, B.C.

Back in the province where Smith hit his lowest point, a sea change is underway in the way British Columbia approaches the opioid crisis. Back in April, the NDP government asked the federal government to recriminalize drugs in the province. They had been decriminalized in January 2023 as part of a larger pilot project.

And now, with a provincial election one month away, NDP Premier David Eby and B.C. Conservative challenger John Rustad are in agreement on one of the most controversial policy proposals out there in the world of substance use: involuntary treatment.

"I'm relieved," said Smith.

"Those of us who have been a big part of leading the recovery movement in the country have done so out of love and fear for the communities that we live in and out of fear for the people who are not getting the care that they need. That's what drives us."