

Health minister to make recommendations on supervised injection sites this week, but says 'it's the premier's decision that counts'

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Over the past few months, **Christine Elliott** has been studying supervised injection sites in Ontario and is preparing to make recommendations to Premier **Doug Ford** this week on whether they should be allowed to continue.

But the health minister declined to disclose what personal decisions she's come to on the sites, telling *QP Briefing* Tuesday that, in the end, "it's the premier's decision that counts."

"We have some recommendations that we're going to make to the premier, but it's going to be up to him to make that decision," she said. "What I think is really not the point that matters. It's the premier's decision."

Under the previous Liberal government, Ontario gained the legal ability to approve supervised injection sites for temporary licences under a provincial process, and those that were approved were dubbed "overdose prevention sites." Meanwhile, other sites approved through a lengthier federal process are called "supervised consumption sites." But all of the sites provide supervised injection services: People who use drugs can use them in the presence of staff or volunteers who are trained to administer naloxone to reverse overdoses and prevent death.

In August, Elliott [announced her government had put a "pause" on the opening of three new overdose prevention sites](#) in Ontario – one in the Toronto neighbourhood of Parkdale, one in Thunder Bay and another in St. Catharines – that the previous government had approved. Elliott said she is personally leading the study of evidence concerning supervised injection services so that the government could make a decision on whether it will permit it in Ontario in the future.

She promised a decision would be made by Sept. 30, which is when the temporary licences for overdose prevention sites that were approved by the previous government are set to expire.

The premier will have all of the information he requires to make that decision by then, she said.

"We have been busy working on it for the past several months, consulting with people who are very knowledgeable about the sites, but also with community leaders, citizens that have had some involvement with them, people with lived experience. And I've visited several of the sites," Elliott said on Tuesday. "We're putting the material together and preparing to make a recommendation to the premier and it will be up to him to decide."

Ford has made seemingly contradictory comments about the sites in the past, both stating his opposition to them clearly, and promising to work with "experts" on the issue.

During the lead up to the election, Ford initially came out against the sites.

"I ask anyone out there, if your son, daughter, loved one, ever had an addiction, would want them to go in a little area and do more drugs? I'm dead against that," he said at a press event in Sarnia in April. However, his campaign later said that, while he was personally opposed to the sites, he was also "committed to working with the experts on where we need to go in order to save lives and help people."

During the first televised election debate, he took a question from a Toronto business owner who said he was concerned about supervised injection sites' impact on the neighbourhoods around them, and Ford was categorical. "Well my friend, what I'm not going to do is I'm not going to have injection sites in neighbourhoods," he said – with no mention of experts, or evidence.

During the course of her review, Elliott said the evidence shows the sites save lives, but other concerns, such as access to rehabilitation, will factor into the decision as well.

"There's no question that you do save lives, but there are other ways that you can get people into help to save their lives as well," she had said in August. "So I think we need to take a look at these injection sites particularly to understand are they doing everything that they're meant to do, saving lives, as well as helping people that wish to get into rehabilitation."