



Updated: Doug Ford doubles down on opposition to supervised injection sites, mere hours after PCs promised he'd consult experts on the issue

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This story has been updated to reflect Doug Ford's comments in the Ontario election debate Monday evening.

At the first televised leader's debate, **Doug Ford** doubled down on his opposition to supervised injection sites — only hours after his party had promised the PC leader would consult with experts on the issue.

On Monday afternoon, the Tories told *QP Briefing* Ford had committed to consulting with experts on the issue of supervised injection sites, also known as supervised consumption sites, which are now legal in Ontario and have been opening in communities across the province.

"Doug has stated that he himself is against the sites – he is in favour of rehabilitation programs, however he is committed to working with the experts on where we need to go in order to save lives and help people," campaign communications chief **Melissa Lantsman** said in an email to *QP Briefing*.

What will that mean for the PCs' policy on the sites? "Again, Doug has committed to consulting with the experts on this one," she replied.

At a media event in Sarnia last month, Ford had been asked for his views on supervised consumption sites.

"I don't believe in safe injection areas, as I call them," he said. "I believe in supporting people, getting them help. Because right now, it's upwards to a thousand dollars a day in some cases, that people have to go rehab, we don't have enough rehabilitation. 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."

Ford had said something similar on Friday, promising to work with medical professionals on the issue.

The campaign told *QP Briefing* Monday afternoon that Ford's views on the sites hadn't changed: He remains personally opposed to them, but is committed to working with experts on the issue.

But then, in the first televised election debate that evening, he took a question from a Toronto business owner who is concerned about supervised injection sites, 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.

Explaining to Ford that expert evidence shows supervised injection sites save lives is something **Doris Grinspun**, executive director of the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (RNAO), had said she plans to do.

The RNAO has been heavily involved in the issue, including creating guidelines for best practices for supervised injection services.

At a press conference Monday morning, Grinspun said she intends to raise the issue with Ford — “in an amicable, evidence-based way.”

“Would you do the same if people were dying of cancer in the street, would you just do nothing?” she asked. “This is why we need these clinics. We need people that have substance use illnesses — because it is an illness like any other one — to have the services, so that they do not overdose.”

“Some of those individuals, through the relationships they have with nurses, they want to look at different opportunities to address their health issues,” she added. “The first priorities for us is to save lives.”

Grinspun also said the PCs have a candidate who is a registered nurse — **Natalia Kusendova** in Mississauga Centre — who would understand the evidence on supervised injection sites, as PC health critic MPP **Jeff Yurek** does.

“In this day and age, we govern — or we should govern — on evidence, not based on our own personal values,” she said.

Yurek told *QP Briefing* he supports supervised injection sites.

“I think Doug made a response based on his own experiences with his family, and I think he's expressed his opinion on what many families have said — they want to see more help for those with addictions, they want to see more treatment in getting people better — and as Doug has told me, he's going to base his policy on the experts, and the advice they give, based on scientific evidence,” Yurek said.

The PCs have promised to spend \$1.9 billion on mental health and addictions, including supportive housing, over a decade, matching funds offered by the federal government, and the PCs' policy decisions on how to spend that money will be based on expert advice.

NDP health critic **France Gélinas** said Monday morning that Ford “showed his true colours” when he made his initial comment against supervised injection sites.

"It's very typical of Doug Ford," she said. "I mean, there is a part of his electorate that really discriminate against people that have an addiction. People who have an addiction need help, they need care. That care could very well be through safe injection sites, the body of evidence is there that supports this."

"This is wrong," she continued. "People with mental health and addiction (issues) need our support. We need to keep them alive, we need to connect them to our health-care system and we need to help them get better. Mr. Ford is not going to do any of this ... A thousand people died last year. How many thousands of people need to die before the PC realize that those are human beings like you and I, worthy of care?"