



Assessing Media Coverage of Supervised Consumption Sites

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This study was commissioned by the Centre for Civic Engagement. The CCE is a non-partisan Canadian charity dedicated to conducting original research on public policy issues related to Canadian prosperity, productivity, and national flourishing. The CCE's research informs an active program of policy seminars, events, conferences, and lectures all aimed at providing the policy making community with actionable insights that encourage informed decision making on issues that matter to Canadians.

Introduction

For decades, supervised consumption sites (sometimes called “safe injection sites”) were heralded¹ as a life-saving innovation by Canadian public health officials and supported by most municipal, provincial, and federal governments.

A famous Supreme Court decision² in 2011, coupled with the Trudeau government’s relaxed³ policy for creating new sites, contributed to an elite consensus that consumption sites—and the harm reduction philosophy underpinning them—were an unambiguous public health good for individuals and communities.

As this study shows, that consensus is eroding—albeit slowly, and in some institutions more than others. There has been a growing pushback against supervised consumption and harm reduction policies from provincial⁴ governments,⁵ academics,⁶ physicians,⁷ journalists,⁸ and community⁹ organizations.¹⁰ Yet this resistance has not penetrated most elite institutions.

In addition, this study conducts a media analysis to assess how supervised consumption sites are portrayed in public reporting. My analysis shows how the federal government, courts, and news reports from mainstream media outlets remain strongly supportive of supervised consumption sites, despite growing concerns about the efficacy of this approach to drug addiction. As provincial governments find creative ways to move away from harm reduction, they will face an uphill public relations battle.

¹ Ryan McNeil, Laura B. Dille, Manal Guirguis-Younger, Stephen W. Hwang and Will Small, “Impact of supervised drug consumption services on access to and engagement with care at a palliative and supportive care facility for people living with HIV/AIDS: a qualitative study,” *J Int AIDS Soc.* 17, no. 1 (2014).

² Canada (Attorney General) v. PHS Community Services Society, 3356, 2011 SCC 44, [2011] 3 S.C.R. 134. <https://decisions.scc-csc.ca/scc-csc/scc-csc/en/item/7960/index.do>.

³ “Apply to run a supervised consumption site: Overview,” *Government of Canada*, May 30, 2018, <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/substance-use/supervised-consumption-sites/apply.html>.

⁴ “Ontario Protecting Communities and Supporting Addiction Recovery with New Treatment Hubs,” *Government of Ontario*, August 20, 2024, <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/1004955/ontario-protecting-communities-and-supporting-addiction-recovery-with-new-treatment-hubs>.

⁵ “Impact of supervised consumption sites report released,” *Government of Alberta*, March 5, 2020, <https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=68744B5DE9A5D-D694-A553-44B691DDE7C56BF7>.

⁶ Julian Somers, “Our study found ‘safe supply’ isn’t safe. We were smeared for our work,” *National Post*, July 5, 2023, <https://nationalpost.com/opinion/julian-somers-our-study-found-safe-supply-isnt-safe-we-were-smeared-for-our-work>.

⁷ Mark Mallet, “We must end the unwitnessed safe supply of opioids,” *The Globe and Mail*, September 9, 2023, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-we-must-end-the-unwitnessed-safe-supply-of-opioids/>.

⁸ Adam Zivo, “Canada’s harm reduction regime is collapsing as disillusionment grows around decriminalized drugs,” *thehub.ca*, May 8, 2024, <https://thehub.ca/2024/05/08/adam-zivo-canadas-harm-reduction-regime-collapses/>.

⁹ Faiza Amin and Meredith Bond, “Leslieville residents resign from committee created to address safety concerns over lack of action,” *CityNews Everywhere*, October 5, 2023, <https://toronto.citynews.ca/2023/10/05/leslieville-residents-resign-committee-safety-concerns-lack-of-action/>.

¹⁰ “Niagara Neighbours for Community Safety,” <https://niagaraneighbours.org/>.

The Origins of Supervised Consumption: Vancouver's Insite

In 2001, Vancouver developed a “four pillar”¹¹ approach to drug policy, focused on prevention, treatment, enforcement and harm reduction. The new pillar of harm reduction, described as a “pragmatic approach that focuses on decreasing the negative consequences of drug use for communities and individuals,” required “accepting the fact that drug use does and will occur.”

As part of this strategy, Insite, North America's first supervised consumption site, opened in Vancouver in 2003. Insite operates as a regulated health facility where users bring and consume their own drugs while monitored by healthcare staff. Users are provided with health information and can be given referrals to counselling and other services, including Onsite,¹² a recovery and withdrawal centre upstairs. However, participation in these additional services is voluntary.

Insite received immediate buy-in from municipal and provincial governments, community organizations, and even police. It received an exemption¹³ from the federal *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act* by the Chrétien Liberals in 2003 and the Harper Conservatives in 2006 and 2007. Yet the Harper government was never fully on board. “If you remain a drug addict, I don't care how much harm you reduce, you're going to have a short and miserable life” Harper said in 2007.¹⁴ Harper's Health Minister Tony Clement called Insite “a failure of public policy” and indicated he would no longer grant the site any exemptions, which would have forced it to close.

Not for the last time, supervised consumption sites went to the court—and won. After victories in lower courts, in 2011, a unanimous Supreme Court¹⁵ held that the federal government's decision not to grant Insite an exemption violated the Charter right to “life, liberty and security of the person.”

The Supreme Court was unequivocal in assessing Insite's impact: “Insite saves lives. Its benefits have been proven. There has been no discernable negative impact on the public safety and health objectives of Canada during its eight years of operation.” Insite remained open, but the Harper government passed a law¹⁶ making it far more difficult to open any future sites.

¹¹ Donald Macpherson, “A Four-Pillar Approach to Drug Problems in Vancouver,” *ResearchGate* (2001).

¹² “Onsite,” <https://www.phs.ca/program/onsite/>.

¹³ *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act*, S.C. 1996, c. 19, <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/c-38.8/page-7.html#h-95171>.

¹⁴ “PM doesn't know scourge of drug addiction, B.C. advocate says,” *cbc.ca*, October 4, 2007, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/pm-doesn-t-know-scurge-of-drug-addiction-b-c-advocate-says-1.671626>.

¹⁵ *Canada (Attorney General) v. PHS Community Services Society*, 3356, 2011 SCC 44, [2011] 3 S.C.R. 134.

¹⁶ *Respect for Communities Act* (S.C. 2015, c. 22), https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/annualstatutes/2015_22/page-1.html.

Supervised Consumption Policy Under the Federal Liberals

Justin Trudeau's election victory in 2015 signalled the end of federal opposition to supervised consumption sites. Harm reduction was added¹⁷ as a pillar of Canada's drug strategy in 2016, and a 2017 law¹⁸ simplified the application process for establishing a supervised consumption site.

As a result, a flurry of new sites opened; while the federal government's dashboard¹⁹ does not track sites before 2020, my contemporaneous lecture notes show that the federal government had approved 22 sites by 2017 and 42 by 2019. Between March 2020 and February 2025, the number of active sites "reporting"²⁰ to the federal government remained stable between 35 and 39.

At least 50 supervised consumption sites have been operational at some point in Canada (the federal dashboard²¹ lists 47, but does not include two current sites²² in Halifax and Regina nor a Red Deer site that was recently shut down²³).

As of September 2025,²⁴ the federal government lists 32 active sites: 14 in Ontario, five each in Quebec, Alberta and British Columbia, two in Saskatchewan, and one in Nova Scotia. Nearly two-thirds (20) of the 32 active sites are in five cities (seven in Toronto, four in Montreal, and three each in Ottawa, Vancouver, and Edmonton). Only one application—the Snuneymuxw Traditional Medicines Wellness Centre in Nanaimo, BC—has been refused²⁵ for "not sufficiently meet[ing] the medical purpose of a section 56.1 exemption under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act."

While incomplete (it does not include Alberta data), the federal dashboard²⁶ shows that, between March 2020 and February 2025, there were more than 3 million visits to consumption sites across 456,000 unique "clients" (drug users), 69 percent of whom were male and 63 percent of whom were between ages 30 and 49. Fentanyl constitutes nearly half (49 percent) of drugs used at the sites, followed by methamphetamine (21 percent) and hydromorphone/dilaudid (11 percent). While several Ontario sites have recently shut down (discussed below), there are eleven open applications²⁷ for new sites, including in Winnipeg, Whitehorse, Kelowna, and Cape Breton.

¹⁷ "The New Canadian Drugs and Substances Strategy," *Government of Canada*, March 16, 2023, <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/news/2016/12/new-canadian-drugs-substances-strategy.html>.

¹⁸ "Royal Assent of Bill C-37 – An Act to amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act and to make related amendments to other Acts," *Government of Canada*, May 18, 2017, https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/news/2017/05/royal_assent_of_billc-37anacttoamendthecontrolleddrugssubstan.html.

¹⁹ "Supervised consumption sites – Dashboard," *Government of Canada*, September 19, 2025, <https://health-infobase.canada.ca/supervised-consumption-sites/>.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² "Supervised consumption sites: Status of applications," *Government of Canada*, September 23, 2025, <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/substance-use/supervised-consumption-sites/status-application.html#a1>.

²³ *Brown v Alberta*, 2025 ABCA 146. <https://canlii.ca/t/kbrwn>.

²⁴ "Supervised consumption sites: Status of applications."

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ "Supervised consumption sites – Dashboard."

²⁷ "Supervised consumption sites: Status of applications."

The Backlash Against Supervised Consumption

As supervised consumption sites became normalized, a parallel policy development occurred: “safer supply.” This policy involves prescribing²⁸ free drugs—opioids, stimulants, or benzodiazepines—to drugs users “as a safer alternative to the toxic illegal drug supply to people who are at high risk of overdose.” Health Canada began funding safer supply projects via the Substance Use and Addictions Program in 2020. The safer supply portion of that program expired²⁹ in March 2025 and was not renewed³⁰; however, many safer supply programs are still operated and funded by provinces³¹ and municipalities.³²

Safer supply has been heavily criticized. Journalist Adam Zivo has regularly³³ documented³⁴ how these drugs have been diverted to the black market in British Columbia and Ontario, with police,³⁵ addictions³⁶ experts,³⁷ academics,³⁸ and physicians³⁹ claiming safer supply has exacerbated the opioid crisis, particularly among youth.⁴⁰ Even the *Globe and Mail* has published⁴¹ op-eds⁴² criticizing safer supply (though its lead health columnist has called⁴³ safer supply diversion “trivial”).

The parallel developments of safer supply, BC’s failed experiment⁴⁴ with decriminalizing drug use in public spaces, and the normalization of supervised consumption sites have led to push back from provincial governments.

²⁸ “Safer supply,” *Government of Canada*, April 25, 2023,

<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/opioids/responding-canada-opioid-crisis/safer-supply.html>.

²⁹ Emily Gwun-Shun Lennon, “End of substance use and addiction program funding ‘very, very short-sighted,’” *healthydebate.ca*, April 2, 2025, https://healthydebate.ca/2025/04/topic/substance-use-addiction-program-funding/?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

³⁰ Andrew Duffy, “Ottawa’s large experiment with ‘safer’ opioids could be nearing an end,” *Ottawa Citizen*, December 30, 2024, <https://ottawacitizen.com/news/ottawas-experiment-safer-opioids-could-be-nearing-end>.

³¹ Adam Zivo, “Experts blame ‘safer supply’ for skyrocketing opioid abuse among students,” *Toronto Sun*, June 9, 2024, <https://torontosun.com/opinion/columnists/zivo-experts-blame-safer-supply-for-skyrocketing-opioid-abuse-among-students>.

³² “Coming Together to Build a Safer Community,” <https://safersupplyottawa.com/>.

³³ Adam Zivo, “Hydromorphone pills seized in London skyrockets 3,000% after safer supply expansion,” *National Post*, July 5, 2024, <https://nationalpost.com/opinion/adam-zivo-opioid-pills-seized-in-london-skyrocket-3000-after-safer-supply-expansion>.

³⁴ Adam Zivo, “Yes, ‘safer supply’ is really harming youth,” *The Line*, July 27, 2023, <https://www.readtheline.ca/p/adam-zivo-yes-safer-supply-is-really>.

³⁵ Not found

³⁶ Adam Zivo, “Can we now admit that concerns with safer supply aren’t disinfo?,” *The Line*, April 12, 2024, <https://www.readtheline.ca/p/adam-zivo-can-we-now-admit-that-concerns>.

³⁷ Somers, “Our study found ‘safe supply’ isn’t safe. We were smeared for our work.”

³⁸ Hai V. Nguyen, Shweta Mital, Shawn Bugden, et al., “Safer Opioid Supply, Subsequent Drug Decriminalization, and Opioid Overdoses,” *JAMA Health Forum* 6, no. 3 (2025).

³⁹ Lori Regenstreif, “Moving the Needle: How ‘safe supply’ became Canada’s answer to the opioid crisis, why it failed, and how we can do better,” *The MacDonald-Laurier Institute*, June 2025, https://macdonaldlaurier.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/20250711_Moving-the-Needle-Regenstreif_PAPER-REVISED-DD-2.pdf.

⁴⁰ Zivo, “Can we now admit that concerns with safer supply aren’t disinfo?”

⁴¹ Mallet, “We must end the unwitnessed safe supply of opioids.”

⁴² Vincent Lam, “As a doctor, I was taught ‘first do no harm.’ That’s why I have concerns with the so-called ‘safe supply’ of drugs,” *The Globe and Mail*, November 20, 2021, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-as-a-doctor-i-was-taught-first-do-no-harm-thats-why-i-have-a-problem/>.

⁴³ André Picard, “Diversion of safer supply drugs is a trivial issue distracting us from the real challenge: Toxic drug deaths,” *The Globe and Mail*, March 19, 2024, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-diversion-of-safer-supply-drugs-is-a-trivial-issue-distracting-us-from/>.

⁴⁴ Rob Shaw, “B.C. police chiefs pull support for decriminalization, call it a ‘failed experiment,’” *cheq News*, December 4, 2024, <https://cheqnews.ca/rob-shaw-b-c-police-chiefs-pull-support-for-decriminalization-call-it-a-failed-experiment-1227586/>.

A triggering event was the 2023 death of Karolina Huebner-Makurat, a mother of two, who was struck by a stray bullet near a supervised consumption site in the Leslieville neighbourhood in Toronto. It later emerged that the shooter was treated by a nurse⁴⁵ at the consumption site after the shooting, and that a site employee helped the shooter evade police and subsequently developed a romantic relationship with him. The shooting made national headlines⁴⁶ for months, and the employee eventually pleaded guilty to being an accessory but avoided jail time.⁴⁷

This seemed to spur the Ontario government into action. In December 2024, Ontario passed a law⁴⁸ banning supervised consumption sites from operating within 200 metres of schools or daycares, which would have forced ten sites to close. However, as part of its new addictions strategy,⁴⁹ the government also announced it would provide former consumption sites with up to four times⁵⁰ as much funding to transition into rehabilitation-focused homelessness and addiction recovery treatment (HART) hubs—as long as they no longer offer supervised consumption services, which Premier Ford called⁵¹ a “failed policy.”

A similar shift occurred in Alberta. A 2020 review⁵² commissioned by the Alberta government was critical of the public safety implications of consumption sites, particularly with respect to needle debris, discarded drug paraphernalia, and panhandling.

Alberta has since moved towards⁵³ a recovery-oriented⁵⁴ approach to addictions and mental health. Five⁵⁵ consumption sites still operate in the province, although the government shut down⁵⁶ a Red Deer site earlier this year and announced plans⁵⁷ to close another one in Calgary. Opposition⁵⁸ leaders⁵⁹ of the Conservative Party of Canada and the Conservative Party of British Columbia have also promised⁶⁰ to shut down consumption sites, which they referred to as “drug dens.”

⁴⁵ Isaac Callan and Catherine McDonald, “Ontario supervised consumption site worker pleads guilty to accessory in shooting,” *Global News*, December 20, 2024, <https://globalnews.ca/news/10928276/leslieville-mother-stray-bullet-shooting-worker-pleads/>.

⁴⁶ Abby O'Brien, “Leslieville locals propose class-action lawsuit against safe injection site where Toronto mother was fatally shot in July,” *CTV News*, February 16, 2024, <https://www.ctvnews.ca/toronto/article/leslieville-locals-propose-class-action-lawsuit-against-safe-injection-site-where-toronto-mother-was-fatally-shot-in-july/>.

⁴⁷ Betsy Powell, “Ex-harm reduction worker avoids jail for role after killing of Leslieville bystander Karolina Huebner-Makurat,” *Toronto Star*, June 16, 2025, https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/ex-harm-reduction-worker-avoids-jail-for-role-after-killing-of-leslieville-bystander-karolina-huebner/article_b21ff89d-e0e6-46be-acc8-e0da5ec632d5.html.

⁴⁸ *Community Care and Recovery Act, 2024*, S.O. 2024, c. 27, Sched. 4, <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/24c27a>.

⁴⁹ “Ontario Protecting Communities and Supporting Addiction Recovery with New Treatment Hubs.”

⁵⁰ Liam Casey, “9 Ontario supervised consumption sites to close despite injunction, minister says,” *cbc.ca*, March 31, 2025, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/consumption-sites-ontario-1.7498128>.

⁵¹ Chris Selley, “Harm reduction for opioids is over. Now let's seriously measure the result,” *National Post*, December 11, 2024, <https://nationalpost.com/opinion/harm-reduction-for-opioids-is-over-lets-measure-the-result>.

⁵² Government of Alberta, *Impact: A socio-economic review of supervised consumption sites in Alberta* (2025), <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/dfd35cf7-9955-4d6b-a9c6-60d353ea87c3/resource/11815009-5243-4fe4-8884-11ffa1123631/download/health-socio-economic-review-supervised-consumption-sites.pdf>.

⁵³ Paul Wells, “Alberta's system builder,” *Paul Wells Substack*, June 7, 2024, <https://paulwells.substack.com/p/albertas-system-builder>.

⁵⁴ “Alberta Recovery Model,” *Government of Alberta*, <https://www.alberta.ca/alberta-recovery-oriented-system-of-care>.

⁵⁵ “Supervised consumption sites: Status of applications.”

⁵⁶ *Brown v Alberta*, 2025 ABCA 146.

⁵⁷ Stephen Hunt, “‘We're going to work on shutting it down': Smith says province looking to close Calgary safe injection site at Chumir Centre,” *CTV News*, March 29, 2025, <https://www.ctvnews.ca/calgary/article/were-going-to-work-on-shutting-it-down-smith-says-province-looking-to-close-calgary-safe-injection-site-at-chumir-centre/>.

⁵⁸ “Poilievre will Make Recovery a Reality for 50,000 Canadians,” media release, 2025, https://www.conservative.ca/poilievre-will-make-recovery-a-reality-for-50000-canadians/?utm_content=National.

⁵⁹ John Rustad, “John Rustad Expresses Shock At Video in Port Alberni, Vows to Shut Down David Eby's Drug Dens and Crack Pipe Dispensaries, Zero Tolerance Policy on Open Drug Use,” media release, September 26, 2024, https://www.conservativebc.ca/john_rustad_expresses_shock_at_video_in_port_alberni_vows_to_shut_down.

⁶⁰ Andrea Woo, “Poilievre takes aim at harm reduction, vows to fund addiction treatments for 50,000 people,” *The Globe and Mail*, April 6, 2025, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/politics/article-poilievre-takes-aim-at-harm-reduction-vows-to-fund-addiction/>.

Unsurprisingly, the Ontario and Alberta closures have produced Charter litigation, with mixed results. In Alberta, the Court of King's Bench⁶¹ and Court of Appeal⁶² both denied a temporary injunction to keep a Red Deer consumption site open earlier this year; a full Charter case was heard⁶³ on its merits in June, and a judgment has not yet been released.

In Ontario, Superior Court Justice John Callaghan granted an injunction⁶⁴ in March preventing the government from banning sites within 200 metres of a school or daycare. Justice Callaghan held that consumption sites "provide both lifesaving and health benefits" and that permitting the sites to remain open "will have a substantial public benefit of preventing serious health risks and deaths." While it will be months before his full Charter judgment is released, it is difficult to foresee Justice Callaghan—who chided⁶⁵ the government days after his injunction for not providing sufficient facts—changing his mind.

In spite of Justice Callaghan's injunction, nine of the ten sites (including the site⁶⁶ of the Leslieville shooting) shut down anyway,⁶⁷ as they opted⁶⁸ for the government's carrot of increased HART hub funding over the uncertainty of future litigation. The only site of the ten that remained open is operated by the Neighbourhood Group⁶⁹ in Toronto, which initiated the litigation.

⁶¹ Brown v Alberta, 2025 ABKB 179, <https://canlii.ca/t/kbrwn>.

⁶² Brown v Alberta, 2025 ABCA 146.

⁶³ Not found

⁶⁴ The Neighbourhood Group et al. v. HMKRO, 2025 ONSC 1934, <https://canlii.ca/t/kbckj>.

⁶⁵ Liam Casey, "Judge seeks more clarity on facts in supervised consumption site legal challenge," *cbc.ca*, April 7, 2025, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/lawyers-recalled-supervised-consumption-site-case-1.7503483>.

⁶⁶ Muriel Draaisma, "Leslieville drug consumption site closes doors for good in response to Ontario law," *cbc.ca*, March 22, 2025, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/south-riverdale-community-health-centre-drug-consumption-site-closes-early-1.7490536#:~:text=Show%20More-,A%20supervised%20drug%20consumption%20site%20in%20Toronto%27s%20east%20end%20closed,SRCHC%29%2C%20955%20Queen%20St>.

⁶⁷ Casey, "9 Ontario supervised consumption sites to close despite injunction, minister says."

⁶⁸ Canadian Drug Policy Coalition, "Despite Ontario Superior Court Injunction Recognizing Irreparable Harm, Most Remaining Supervised Consumption Sites Still Facing Forced Closure," media release, March 31, 2025, <https://drugpolicy.ca/despite-ontario-court-injunction-consumption-sites-still-facing-closure/>.

⁶⁹ "The Neighbourhood Group Community Services Files Charter Challenge Against Community Care and Recovery Act," *TNG Community Services*, March 28, 2025, <https://tngcommunityto.org/News/Articles/Featured/The-Neighbourhood-Group-Community-Services-Files-C>.

Media Portrayal of Supervised Consumption

The Ontario judicial injunction provides an opportunity to assess how the media covers consumption sites during a time of heightened scrutiny. I conducted a content analysis of coverage from seven mainstream media outlets—CBC, CTV, Global News, the *Globe and Mail*, the *National Post*, the *Toronto Star*, and the *Toronto Sun*—from March 28 to April 10, 2025, a period covering the two weeks following the decision (and which happened to coincide with a federal election).

Using the search terms “supervised consumption” and “safe injection,” I found 32 unique articles with a detailed discussion of the Ontario judicial decision or supervised consumption sites more broadly. Hard news pieces (30) dominated coverage, with only two opinion pieces discussing consumption sites (by the *Sun*’s⁷⁰ Brian Lilley and the *Globe*’s⁷¹ André Picard).

Of the 32 stories, eleven (34 percent) focused on the judicial decision or the Ontario policy fallout, with an additional seven (22 percent) featuring a closer look at specific supervised consumption sites in several Ontario cities, several⁷² of⁷³ which⁷⁴ were about to shut down.

The remaining articles were related to Pierre Poilievre’s opposition to consumption sites (6), Alberta’s decision to close down a Calgary site (2), the opening of Ontario’s HART Hubs, (2) data on overdose deaths dropping (2), the sentencing⁷⁵ hearing for the Leslieville SCS worker (1), and a follow-up story about the Ontario judge seeking greater clarity on facts in the Charter case (1).

As the Table below shows, the CBC had the most stories, with 14 over two weeks, four of which were written by Canadian Press authors. This is in keeping with CBC’s extensive⁷⁶ and generally positive⁷⁷ coverage of consumption sites. More surprising was the relative absence of stories from the *National Post*, which only featured two news articles during this period (about Poilievre’s opposition⁷⁸ and the injunction

⁷⁰ Brian Lilley, “Pierre Poilievre slams ‘insane’ Liberal drug policy,” *Toronto Sun*, March 30, 2025, <https://torontosun.com/opinion/columnists/pierre-poilievre-slams-insane-liberal-drug-policy>.

⁷¹ André Picard, “Overdose deaths are falling across North America. But why?,” *The Globe and Mail*, April 1, 2025, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-overdose-deaths-are-falling-across-north-america-but-why/>.

⁷² Mike Hodges, “Downtown Guelph welcomes Homelessness and Addiction Recovery Treatment Hub,” *Global News*, April 2, 2025, <https://globalnews.ca/news/11111311/downtown-guelph-welcomes-hart-hub/>.

⁷³ Jeff Pickel, “Kitchener CTS site closing despite injunction,” *CTV News*, March 31, 2025, <https://www.ctvnews.ca/kitchener/article/kitchener-cts-site-closing-despite-injunction/>.

⁷⁴ Liam Casey, “‘People don’t judge you’: Inside the final days of a safe consumption site in Toronto,” *cbc.ca*, April 11, 2025, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/inside-toronto-consumption-site-last-days-1.7508180>.

⁷⁵ Betsy Powell, “‘Mama was doing her own thing’: Convicted staffer apologizes as dad recalls telling girls of mom’s shooting death outside Leslieville safe-injection site,” *Toronto Star*, March 28, 2025, https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/mama-was-doing-her-own-thing-convicted-staffer-apologizes-as-dad-recalls-telling-girls-of/article_ff70c07f-9387-4aa3-90f2-d66d43818146.html.

⁷⁶ “(intitle:“supervised consumption” OR intitle:“safe injection” OR intitle:“injection site” OR intitle:“consumption site”) site:cbc.ca/news after:2025-01-01 before:2025-08-22,” Google Search.

⁷⁷ Dan Taekema, “Kingston site where inmates can use smuggled drugs under supervision has only seen 1 visitor,” *cbc.ca*, June 19, 2025, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/kingston-prison-overdose-prevention-service-one-drug-user-1.7562358>.

⁷⁸ Rahim Mohamed, “Poilievre promises to fund 50,000 addictions recovery spaces,” *National Post*, April 7, 2025, <https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/poilievre-50000-addictions-recovery-spaces>.

judge gathering⁷⁹ facts for the subsequent full hearing). *The Post* has published more than⁸⁰ half a⁸¹ dozen⁸² pieces⁸³ critical⁸⁴ of consumption sites, safer supply, and judicial⁸⁵ activism⁸⁶ in 2025 alone, but an activist judicial decision preventing the Ontario government from shutting down the sites flew under the paper's radar—presumably because its coverage was focused on the ongoing federal election.

VENUE	STORIES
CBC News	14
Toronto Star	9
CTV News	8
Global News	5
Globe and Mail	5
Toronto Sun	3
National Post	2
TOTAL	46

March 28 – April 11, 2025. Total (46) is higher than number of unique stories (32) due to identical Canadian Press wire stories published across several venues.

To see how the judicial injunction was portrayed, I focused on the 11 stories about the judicial decision and/or the Ontario policy fallout. I coded every person or organization quoted in the articles, separating them into *supporters* of the injunction and supervised consumption sites on the one hand, and *opponents* of the injunction/sites on the other (excluding quotes from government officials and from the injunction itself).

⁷⁹ Liam Casey, "Ontario judge recalls lawyers in supervised consumption site case," *National Post*, April 7, 2025, <https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/ontario-judge-recalls-lawyers-in-supervised-consumption-site-case>.

⁸⁰ Adam Zivo, "Leak hints at extent of corruption within B.C.'s safer supply program," *National Post*, February 13, 2025, <https://nationalpost.com/opinion/leak-hints-at-extent-of-corruption-within-b-c-s-safer-supply-program>.

⁸¹ Adam Zivo, "Carney's platform a failure on crime and drugs," *National Post*, April 22, 2025, <https://nationalpost.com/opinion/adam-zivo-carneys-platform-a-failure-on-crime-and-drugs>.

⁸² Derek Finkle, "Consumption sites ruining neighbourhoods by increasing public drug use, overdoses," *National Post*, July 30, 2025, <https://nationalpost.com/opinion/consumption-sites-ruining-neighbourhoods-by-increasing-public-drug-use-overdoses>.

⁸³ Christopher Dummitt, "The drug-addict zombies are coming for your neighbourhood," *National Post*, July 24, 2025, <https://nationalpost.com/opinion/the-drug-addict-zombies-are-coming-for-your-neighbourhood>.

⁸⁴ Derek Finkle, "Controversial drug injection sites among Carney's first challenges," *National Post*, May 14, 2025, <https://nationalpost.com/opinion/controversial-drug-injection-sites-among-carneys-first-challenges>.

⁸⁵ Adam Zivo, "When unelected judges invent rights to bike lanes and drug dens, something's wrong," *National Post*, May 5, 2025, <https://nationalpost.com/opinion/doug-fords-criticism-of-judicial-activism-is-perfectly-warranted>.

⁸⁶ Jamie Sarkonak, "Judges usurp government for drug addicts and cyclists," *National Post*, May 6, 2025, <https://nationalpost.com/opinion/jamie-sarkonak-judges-usurp-government-for-drug-addicts-and-cyclists>.

In total, supporters were quoted 28 times, an average of 2.5 times per article. These quotes typically came from leaders of non-profits and public health organizations and often used stark language, such as: “Today’s decision means people will be allowed to stay alive at least a little bit longer” (quoted by the Canadian Press⁸⁷) and “the 200-metre rule, which will close the sites, will cause people to die” (quoted by CBC⁸⁸).

On the other hand, only three opponents of consumption sites were quoted (0.3 times per article)—all in the same Toronto Star story⁸⁹ that also quoted three supporters of consumption sites. These quotes came from materials presented at the hearing itself from a government lawyer, a criminologist, and an intervenor factum.

The contrast was most prominent in pieces written by the CBC and the Canadian Press (the latter separated out in the table below), which collectively contained quotes from 14 proponents of consumption sites and zero opponents. In these 14 stories, the only mild criticism of consumption sites came from the same Ontario government spokesperson, who typically offered a brief statement⁹⁰ such as “Our priority is to protect children and families from violent crime and dangerous public drug use occurring at drug injection sites located near schools and daycares.”

VENUE	STORIES	SCS PROPONENTS QUOTED	SCS OPPONENTS QUOTED	GOVERNMENT SPOKESPERSON QUOTED
Canadian Press	2	7	0	2
CBC	2	7	0	2
CTV News	1	3	0	0
Globe and Mail	2	3	0	1
Global News	2	1	0	1
Toronto Star	2	7	3	2
TOTAL	11	28	3	8

⁸⁷ Liam Casey, “Supervised drug consumption sites win injunction, can stay open for now amid Charter challenge,” *cbc.ca*, March 28, 2025, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/injunction-ontario-consumption-site-1.7496602>.

⁸⁸ Sarah Petz, “Despite injunction, advocates worry Ontario drug consumption sites risk closing without funding,” *cbc.ca*, March 29, 2025, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/supervised-consumption-sites-injunction-reaction-1.7497159>.

⁸⁹ Omar Mosleh, “Ontario supervised consumption sites can remain open as judge grants reprieve, citing ‘significant harm’ of closures,” *Toronto Star*, March 31, 2025, https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/ontario-supervised-consumption-sites-can-remain-open-as-judge-grants-reprieve-citing-significant-harm-of/article_e6593668-5e3f-4f4f-be2b-c9cd8a6a6964.html.

⁹⁰ Casey, “Supervised drug consumption sites win injunction, can stay open for now amid Charter challenge.”

It is worth noting one final thing about the media portrayal: the nuanced position of Neighbourhood Group CEO Bill Sinclair, whose organization launched the legal challenge and remains firmly opposed⁹¹ to closing down consumption sites. Sinclair himself was quoted in seven of the 11 articles, primarily praising the judicial decision and defending the importance of consumption sites. Yet in two stories—both from *Global News*—Sinclair also praised the Ontario government’s creation of its recovery-focused HART hubs, saying⁹² “HART Hubs are important ... It’s more doctors, more nurses, more treatment, more housing” and⁹³ “I am so glad [the province] were so generous and that there are going to be so many” new hubs. The journalists at Global News and Sinclair both deserve praise for presenting a more nuanced view than was typically present in the media coverage of the consumption sites.

⁹¹ “The Neighbourhood Group Community Services Files Charter Challenge Against Community Care and Recovery Act.”

⁹² Isaac Callan and Colin D’Mello, “Ontario supervised consumption sites get reprieve through injunction,” *Global News*, March 29, 2025, <https://globalnews.ca/news/11103592/ontario-supervised-consumption-sites-granted-injunction/>.

⁹³ Isaac Callan and Colin D’Mello, “Nine supervised consumption sites in Ontario switch to addiction recovery hubs,” *Global News*, April 1, 2025, <https://globalnews.ca/news/11106886/ontario-new-hart-hubs-open/>.

Key Takeaways

For two decades, Canadian supervised consumption sites have benefitted from a strong elite consensus that they presented a life-saving public health intervention. That consensus is starting to crack,⁹⁴ with a growing chorus of opposition towards harm reduction, safer supply, and the sites themselves.

My analysis leads me to four conclusions. First, even in the face of provincial opposition, the federal government continues to promote a highly sanitized and “clinical” narrative on supervised consumption sites. Drug users are referred to as “clients,” while the sites themselves provide⁹⁵ “a safe, clean space for people to bring their own drugs to use in the presence of trained staff.” As the evidence for harm reduction is increasingly contested,⁹⁶ Canada’s federal government remains undeterred.

Second, supervised consumption proponents continue to have a firm ally in the courts. Fourteen years after the Supreme Court of Canada found that Vancouver’s supervised consumption site had “no discernable negative impact on the public safety and health objectives,” an Ontario court declared that consumption sites provide such “lifesaving and health benefits” that government cannot even prevent them from operating near daycares or schools. In recent years, provincial superior courts have issued injunctions or declared rights violations when governments have tried to evict people from encampments,⁹⁷ prevent public drug use,⁹⁸ ban panhandling,⁹⁹ and even remove bike lanes.¹⁰⁰ It is no surprise that consumption sites were next on the list.

Third, mainstream media reporting on Ontario’s judicial injunction was far more likely to cite supporters than opponents of supervised consumption sites, leading readers to believe that the only opposition to such sites comes from conservative provincial governments. This is especially notable insofar as the op-ed pages of the *National Post*¹⁰¹ and even the *Globe and Mail*¹⁰³ have been increasingly likely to feature criticism of harm reduction. However, the combination of a strong advocacy community, a judicial ruling, and a federal election meant that criticism of Ontario’s judicial injunction was almost entirely absent from media coverage.

Finally, recent events show that politicians opposed to supervised consumption sites can find clever ways around adverse judicial decisions. The judicial injunction required the Ontario government to permit the ten consumption sites to remain open, yet nine of them closed anyway.¹⁰⁴ The Ford government has encouraged the sites to transition towards treatment and recovery by restricting funding to non-consumption activities. While some have proposed using the stick¹⁰⁵ of the notwithstanding clause, it turns out the carrot of government funding may—for now—be sufficient to thwart an activist judiciary.

⁹⁴ Zivo, “Canada’s harm reduction regime is collapsing as disillusionment grows around decriminalized drugs.”

⁹⁵ Supervised consumption sites – Dashboard.”

⁹⁶ Nguyen, et al. “Safer Opioid Supply, Subsequent Drug Decriminalization, and Opioid Overdoses.”

⁹⁷ The Regional Municipality of Waterloo v. Persons Unknown and to be Ascertained, 2023 ONSC 670, <https://canlii.ca/t/jv6dc>.

⁹⁸ Harm Reduction Nurses Association v British Columbia (Attorney General), 2023 BCSC 2290, <https://canlii.ca/t/k1xn8>.

⁹⁹ Fair Change v. His Majesty the King in Right of Ontario, 2024 ONSC 1895, <https://canlii.ca/t/k3vgk>.

¹⁰⁰ Cycle Toronto et al. v. Attorney General of Ontario et al., 2025 ONSC 4397, <https://canlii.ca/t/kdk2t>.

¹⁰¹ Finkle, “Consumption sites ruining neighbourhoods by increasing public drug use, overdoses.”

¹⁰² Zivo, “Leak hints at extent of corruption within B.C.’s safer supply program.”

¹⁰³ Mallet, “We must end the unwitnessed safe supply of opioids.”

¹⁰⁴ Casey, “9 Ontario supervised consumption sites to close despite injunction, minister says.”

¹⁰⁵ Adam Zivo and Josh Dehaas, “Four ways to solve our growing crime crisis,” *thehub.ca*, August 7, 2025, <https://thehub.ca/2025/08/07/adam-zivo-and-josh-dehaas-four-ways-to-solve-our-growing-crime-crisis/>.

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