*UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Releases Landmark Observations Urging Canada to Embrace Safe Supply and End Coercive Drug Treatment*

This past April, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Committee) called on Canada to support safe supply programs**, marking** **the first time that a** **UN human rights treaty body explicitly called on a State Party to do so.**

The [Concluding Observations](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRPD%2FC%2FCAN%2FCO%2F2-3&Lang=en) of the Committee, shared on April 15, 2025, address Canada’s implementation of the [*Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*](https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-persons-disabilities) (Convention) and

highlight a range of concerns with Canada’s current drug laws and policies, particularly those which impact the liberty and security of persons with disabilities.

The Committee’s **explicit endorsement of harm reduction and safe supply programs which respond to the intersecting identities of people who use drugs** comes at a moment when key programs, including supervised consumption services, needle and syringe programs, and safe supply programs in Canada are under attack from all levels of government. In recent months, for example, the province of Ontario has forced numerous supervised consumption sites to close, [while banning safe supply and needle and syringe programs](https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/1005722/ontario-opens-first-nine-homelessness-and-addiction-recovery-treatment-hubs) from operating at drug treatment ‘hubs.’

This recommendation by a UN human rights body — which explicitly situates harm reduction and safe supply programs within a broader **continuum of voluntary, rights-based care** — is critical at this time.

The report also expressed concern with calls for involuntary detention and treatment in Canada, and identified specific practices such as the continued use of drug treatment courts and the rise in involuntary hospitalization. These concerns were also raised by the HIV Legal Network in a [2025 shadow report](https://www.hivlegalnetwork.ca/site/submission-to-the-un-committee-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-review-of-canada-at-32nd-session-march-3-21-2025/?lang=en) to the Committee, pointing to troubling developments in the provinces of British Columbia, Alberta, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick that further authorize involuntary care and detention of people who use drugs. More recently, Ontario government officials have also indicated that they will be [introducing legislation that will mandate treatment for people who use drugs in jail, on probation and on parole](https://globalnews.ca/news/11158803/ontario-involuntary-addiction-treatment-people-jail-parole-probation/). Despite acknowledging that there is [no evidence that forced treatment works](https://globalnews.ca/news/11210887/forced-addictions-treatments-federal-government-not-intervening/), Canada’s Federal Health Minister Marjorie Michel has said the Canadian government will not intervene in provincial affairs,

The Committee noted that Canada’s legal and policy frameworks allowing for involuntary detention and treatment of people who use drugs raise serious concerns under **Article 14 of the Convention,** that protects the right to liberty and security of the person. As such, **the Committee unequivocally called for the repeal of all such federal, provincial, and territorial mental health and substance-use treatment laws and policies** — confirming again that such approaches are clear violations of international human rights law, as the [UN Special Rapporteur on Torture](https://www.refworld.org/reference/themreport/unhrc/2013/en/90541) and the [UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention](https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/ahrc4740-arbitrary-detention-relating-drug-policies-study-working-group), among others, have recognized.

The Committee further expressed concern about over-policing and its adverse impacts on Indigenous, Black, and racialized people, persons with disabilities in situations of homelessness, and persons with psychosocial disabilities. This has led to their frequent contact with the criminal legal system, incarceration, and the overrepresentation of persons with disabilities in prisons, which lack culturally appropriate, gender-sensitive health services, including mental health and drug treatment options.

To rectify rights violations, the Committee recommended **investments** in rights-based, culturally appropriate, voluntary community-based mental health and substance-use supports and treatment options that include peer-led options, as well as the implementation oflaws and policies enabling access among prisoners with disabilities to culturally appropriate and gender-sensitive mental health and drug treatment options. Crucially, the Committee stressed the need for **regulatory oversight** and **human rights monitoring** to ensure that these supports genuinely uphold the autonomy of the diverse peoples accessing them.

At the same time, the Committee called on Canada to take all measures to address the overrepresentation of persons with disabilities in the criminal legal system and prisons, including by addressing the social determinants of incarceration, such as poverty, ableism, racial injustice and gender inequality. Throughout the Observations, the Committee was clear that all proposed recommendations must be developed and implemented **in close consultation with,** and active involvement **of, persons with disabilities**.

The Committee’s decisive **rejection of forced treatment approaches, calls for** meaningful **investments in voluntary, rights-based alternatives, and** embrace of harm reduction and **safe supply** programs underscore the urgent need for Canada to realign its drug policies with its obligations under the Convention. Grounded in the principles of **liberty, autonomy**, and the **active participation of persons with disabilities, the Committee** has provided a vital roadmap for Canada to preserve and scale up essential components of a rights-respecting approach that **is responsive** to the diverse identities of people who use drugs.

By centering their voices, Canada can do better and uphold the human rights of all.

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