

# **AN ANALYSIS OF PUNITIVE INCOME SUPPORT POLICIES AND THE IMPACTS ON BIRTHING PARENTS WHO USE SUBSTANCES**

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## **Background:**

Birthing people who use substances (BPWUS) in Canada face increasingly high levels of poverty, stigma, and interaction with child protective services (CPS). When CPS removes a child from the home, income supports associated with that child are also removed. BPWUS are then expected to mitigate the risk identified by CPS, with fewer financial resources, while dealing with the trauma of having their child apprehended.

## **Methods:**

The current policy analysis, told within the context of fictional, albeit realistic, story, highlights how punitive regulations within income support programs, (i.e., Canada Child Benefit, Social Assistance, etc.) further destabilize families at a time when they need additional support to achieve reunification.

## **Results:**

Jamie was a mother to two young children, whom she adored. A single relapse led to her children being removed from her care. Jamie lost access to the Canada Child Benefit, which was redirected to the province to pay for the children in foster care, and her Social Assistance income was reduced. Since her rent subsidy was linked to her previous income, she was now left with almost nothing for food and other bills. She lost her Public Housing unit shortly before the pandemic hit, which also halted her visits with her children indefinitely. Jamie soon relapsed, became homeless, and later died of cardiac arrest unrelated to an acute use of substances.

## **Conclusion:**

Canada needs policy reform that prioritizes reunification and keeping families together. The removal of income supports following child apprehensions is a punitive approach that increases hardship and does not value the dignity of the family or the best interests of the child. Further, income insecurity exacerbates BPWUS's risk for various psychosocial outcomes. A harm reduction approach to child protection and income support could prevent devastating consequences ultimately saving lives and keeping families together.

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