

The Employment and Assistance Act

Format: For my unessay, I chose to do 2 case notes to highlight how the Employment and Assistance Act, as well as the how the Income Assistance Program within that Act affects individuals who are struggling with income. The case note style shows how different personal circumstances affect if and how much individuals can access income supports in BC. My unessay focuses on the Employment and Assistance Act, however, with a case note style, I was able to include other factors such as barriers and pathways to receiving income supports in BC.

Social Problem: The Employment and Assistance Act (BCEA) is a targeted poverty reduction strategy that assists individuals who require financial support and employment assistance (Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction, 2025). My unessay addresses this by highlighting the robust benefits available for some individuals while also showing how other individuals are essentially left behind.

Historical Context: My unessay shows the historical context of BC income assistance by comparing Robert and Julia, who are essentially viewed as deserving and undeserving poor, which can be traced back to the Elizabethan Poor Laws of 1601 (Stokes and Hicks, p. 47). Although Robert will receive assistance from EI, it is not a sufficient amount to cover his basic expenses and this describes how, “the state would always ensure that the minimum was lower than the minimum wages that workers were receiving. This principle of less eligibility ensured that those in work would always be terrified to lose their employment and forced to live an unspeakable miserable life” (Stokes and Hicks p. 48). On the other hand, single parents and families (if eligible) are likely to be approved for income assistance, and the many supplements that are included. Workplace training and funding are linked to

collecting Income Assistance (IA). Individuals who are not involved in IA (or without children) do not have access to government-provided training through IA programs, making this an unequitable policy.

Summary: My unessay shows how the BCEA Act is the legal framework that governs the BCEA Policy, which delivers various forms of assistance. The Act specifies that individuals must pursue all other forms of income prior to applying for income assistance. This is shown by contrasting how Robert has another form of income (EI) and will therefore be denied, even though the EI is not sufficient. Julia has no other form of income, and is agreeable to entering into an employability plan which is a requirement of Income Assistance. The policy's goal is to transition individuals from relying on income support toward sustainable employment (Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction, 2025). I also included the income support amounts related to each scenario and included the many supplements available in the program, for those who qualify.

Equity, Inclusion and Social Justice: The unessay shows how income assistance for single parents is a well developed and thorough program that has long term goals and truly sees the value in providing work and education assistance, while collecting income assistance. However, because of extremely limited eligibility criteria, and confusing processes, many single individuals 19-64 are overlooked. I focused on employable individuals, aged 19-64 to streamline the assignment, however there are varying degrees of income assistance and supplements based on family size, living arrangements and employability. The Act does not apply to persons with disabilities. I did not include persons with persistent multiple barriers, as they are exempt from entering into an employability plan.

Personal Experience: I positioned myself as a caseworker in the essay, showing that I am personally outside the realm of relying on income support, but I am deeply impacted by my clients. I highlight my frustration related to the barriers of income support, as well as my gratitude for the

program which is helpful to many. The client thoughts represent my own thoughts, if I was in their position. I feel the government expects certain individuals to hit rock bottom before collecting income assistance as "...the system is not tailored to help single employable adults without children. This is a group for whom there appears to be little direct help, which is particularly concerning given issues with the coverage rate in the EI system" (Green et. al, 2021 03). This is a simplified version of the benefits and drawbacks of the BCEA policy, with many personal variations that contribute to eligibility.

Opinion and Recommendations – The unessay I believe clearly shows my opinion of the policy. I believe for some individuals, it is a remarkable policy which shows a strong safety net and was designed with long term success in mind. I also believe that this policy overlooks vulnerable populations as well as the working poor. With the income exemption thought bubbles I explained that, "program designs that create barriers to employment are problematic because individuals cannot unilaterally improve their financial circumstances, an important step towards building financial resiliency that will help them break the cycle of poverty" (Petit et al., 2020). The income exemptions and supplement eligibility criteria is a barrier as well as "single adults who transition off TA (temporary assistance) due to increased employment income and lose all their supplements may not receive sufficient workplace coverage for services such as optical or dental. This reduces IA's ability to break the cycle of poverty" (Petit et al. 2020). Finally, I would recommend that income benefit period should be extended beyond finding employment because, "knowing that they can work flexibly over the course of a 12-month period and not have to worry about hours or earnings is a straightforward system that allows recipients to work without any fear of losing benefits, an oft-stated reason for not working or working illicitly" (Petit et al 2020).

What I learned - Through my research on the Employment and Assistance Act (BCEA), I gained a thorough understanding of how this targeted poverty reduction strategy operates in British Columbia. I also showed my comprehension of how federal and provincial income assistance programs operate together. The most profound takeaway I had regarding the BCEA policy is that while extremely beneficial for some individuals, there is a large unseen group of single, technically employable individuals who, by no fault of their own can find themselves upon challenging times and have very limited safety net available from the government. These individuals need more support during their time of crisis and barriers including previous income, earning exemptions, eligibility requirements and discontinuation of income assistance after employment must be re-examined. The BCEA is a patchwork program that is a carrot for some (single parents) and a stick for others (single individuals) which leaves many in the cycle of poverty.

References:

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