



Liberal National Party's proposals for overhauling Queensland's  
child protection system

# Survey Findings

*On the proposal for random compulsory drug tests for  
people on Intervention with Parental Agreements (IPA)*

12 October 2020





Thank you to all who took time from their busy schedules to respond to our survey about the Liberal National Party's proposals for overhauling the child protection system. We trust that you have made a valuable and constructive contribution to the further development and refinement of the policy platforms of Queensland's political parties. We look forward to the informed discussion and debate the survey findings will generate. Following on from our report providing an overview of the survey findings, this is the fourth in the series of detailed reports that addresses the proposal for random compulsory drug tests for people on Intervention with Parental Agreements.



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## Introduction

Following the announcement on 17 June 2020 of the Liberal National Party's (LNP's) [plans for overhauling Queensland's child protection system](#), PeakCare Queensland Inc. (PeakCare) and the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak (QATSICPP) conducted a survey to gauge stakeholders' views about the plans. The survey was released on 19 June and closed on 10 July 2020.

PeakCare and QATSICPP will look for similar opportunities to seek feedback about the policy platforms of other political parties as they are released.

### About this report and the reports to follow

An [overview of the survey findings](#) was released on 24 August 2020. More detailed reports about the survey findings released since include:

- [On the question of re-naming the Child Safety Department, the Child Protection Force](#)
- [On the proposal to extend payments to Foster Carers until children in their care turn 21](#)
- [On the proposal to increase use of adoption through a new triage model with permanency order targets](#)

This report addresses the question included in our survey – *The LNP proposes that “the Child Protection Force will implement random compulsory drug tests for illicit substances like methamphetamine for people on Intervention with Parental Agreements”. Do you agree with this proposal?*

This report is best read in conjunction with the following reports that address related topics:

- [On the proposal that positive drug tests will require parents to participate in a drug rehabilitation service](#)
- [On the proposal that a second positive drug test will lead to children being placed in foster care under a no-second chances model](#)

### About the survey respondents

In total, 1,998 people responded to the survey from across 13 identified stakeholder groups including:

| Survey respondent stakeholder groups                 | No (%)       |
|--|--------------|
| Employees of non-government organisations including: | 811 (40.82%) |
| • PeakCare Member organisation employees             | 289 (14.54%) |
| • QATSICPP Member organisation employees             | 63 (3.17%)   |
| • Non-Member NGO employees                           | 459 (23.10%) |

|  |              |
|--|--------------|
| Employees of Government agencies   | 633 (31.86%) |
| Employees of peak bodies or other industry or representative groups                      | 56 (2.82%)   |
| Academics  | 38 (1.91%)   |
| Private consultants or employees of private consultancy or training organisations        | 42 (2.11%)   |
| Parents (or other family members) with a lived experience of the child protection system | 65 (3.27%)   |
| Young people (under 25) with a lived experience of the child protection system           | 15 (0.75%)   |
| Older people (over 25) with a lived experience of the child protection system            | 42 (2.11%)   |
| Foster Carers  | 121 (6.09%)  |
| Kinship Carers   | 35 (1.76%)   |
| Others   | 129 (6.49%)  |

Eleven survey respondents skipped the question requesting them to identify the group to which they belonged.

The 129 survey respondents who identified as belonging to the 'others' category described themselves as follows:

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Interested community member (e.g. parent, concerned citizen, “just an ordinary person”)                 | 39 |
| Retired, semi-retired or former employee of either a government or non-government agency or both        | 33 |
| Member of a particular professional or occupational group (eg. a barrister, allied health professional) | 18 |
| Member of two or more of the listed groups  | 14 |
| Relative or friend of a Carer or employee of a government or non-government organisation                | 13 |
| Non-specified connection with child protection system   | 6  |
| Former Foster Carer   | 4  |
| Friend of a person who was formerly in care   | 2  |

### About the strength of the survey

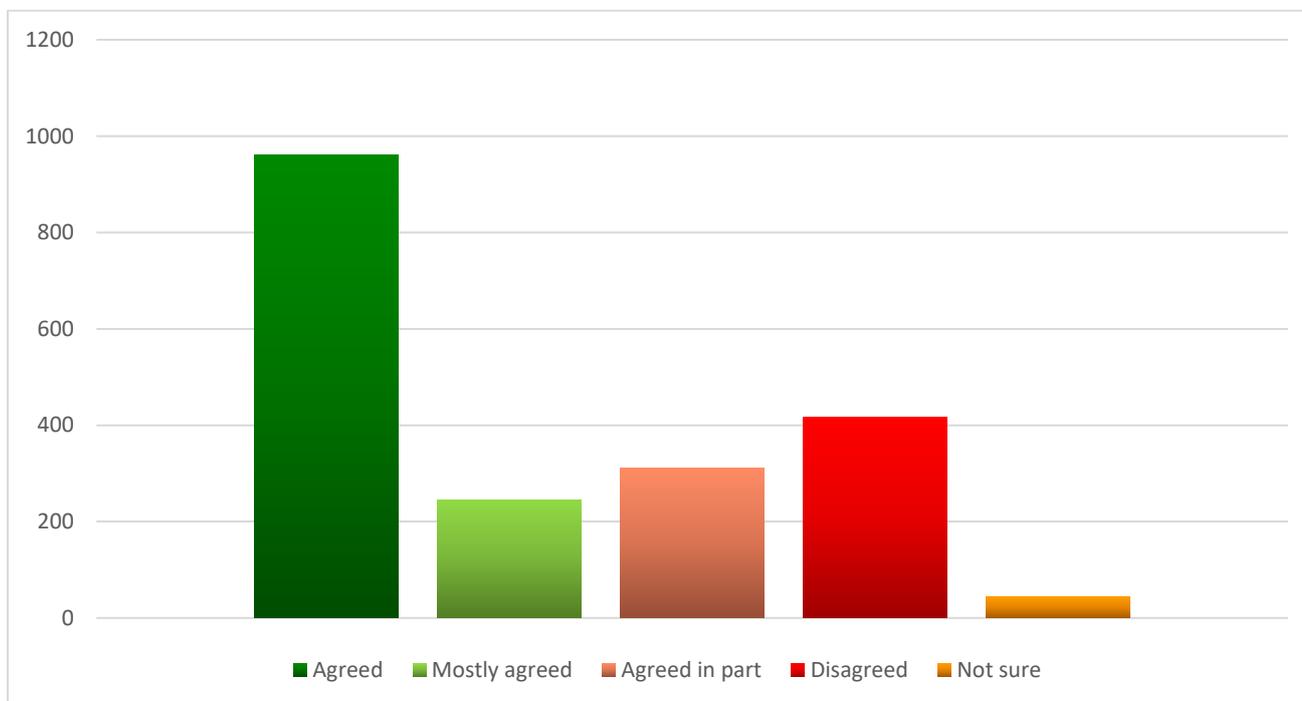
As noted in the overview report, the respondents to the survey are not a representative sample and therefore the results cannot be generalised to specific stakeholder groups or stakeholders as a whole. The strength of the survey and its findings lies in the diversity of views that have been collected from within and across stakeholder groups. This provides a rich source of data to generate debate about how to best protect children, promote their development and well-being, and support their families.

## Overall response

Of the 1,998 survey respondents, 1,981 answered, and 17 'skipped', this question. Most who answered the question agreed (48.56%) or mostly agreed (12.37%) with this proposal.

Specifically, of the 1,981 respondents who answered this question:

- 962 (48.56%) agreed with the proposal
- 245 (12.37%) mostly agreed
- 312 (15.75%) agreed only in part
- 417 (21.05%) disagreed, and
- 45 (2.27%) indicated that they were not sure



A majority of respondents (i.e. 50% or more) within 11 of the 13 stakeholder groups agreed or mostly agreed with the proposal.

More employees of QATSICPP Member organisations agreed or mostly agreed (47.62%) than those who disagreed or agreed only in part with the proposal, but they were less than 50% of the total number of respondents within this stakeholder group.

A majority of academics disagreed or agreed only in part with the proposal (60.52%).

Noting that not all respondents provided additional comments, a review of the comments that were entered into the survey identified the following key themes.

### ***Drug testing already occurs for parents where drug use is identified as a risk***

Concerns were raised about drug testing 'ALL' parents who were placed under an IPA, specifically about human rights, associated costs and lack of services to complete the testing.

### ***Punitive not collaborative***

A significant number of comments were made regarding the purpose of the IPA to work collaboratively with families to address the child protection concerns. These respondents commented that mandatory drug testing is a draconian measure that would hinder efforts to build trusting relationships and discourage parents from entering into an IPA which may then lead to more children coming into the care system that is already struggling to cope with the number of children requiring placements.

### ***Drug testing does not create safety for children.***

An overwhelming number of respondents who did not agree or agreed only in part with the proposal highlighted that drug testing does not create sustained change and that drug use needs to be addressed holistically; looking at the reasons behind the drug use. Many respondents noted the complexities surrounding drug use and that a multi-faceted approach is required to create sustained

change and address the reasons for the misuse of substances.

### ***Early Intervention***

Across all stakeholder groups, whether they agreed with mandatory drug testing or not, comments were made that early intervention and sufficient support services were required to address Queensland's 'drug problem'. It was highlighted that the lack of rehabilitation facilities, in-home services and ongoing support services is the greatest barrier to reducing drug use within families encountering the child safety system.

### ***Alcohol and prescription medication and Inequality of lower socio-economic demographic***

Many respondents commented that alcohol and prescription medication were just as significant a concern to them as use of methamphetamines. Alcohol was stated by some respondents to be the greatest trigger for domestic and family violence. There were also many comments regarding the inequality in respect of the socio-economic groups who are reported to Child Safety with wealthier families either not being reported or held to the same standard as others or forced to submit to random drug testing.

Whilst it is noted that the majority of respondents agreed with mandatory testing for people subject to an IPA, the majority of respondents appeared to not support mandatory drug testing for all people or to only support mandatory drug testing for people where drugs were an identified/reported concern.

The remainder of this report sets out the responses of each of the stakeholder groups.

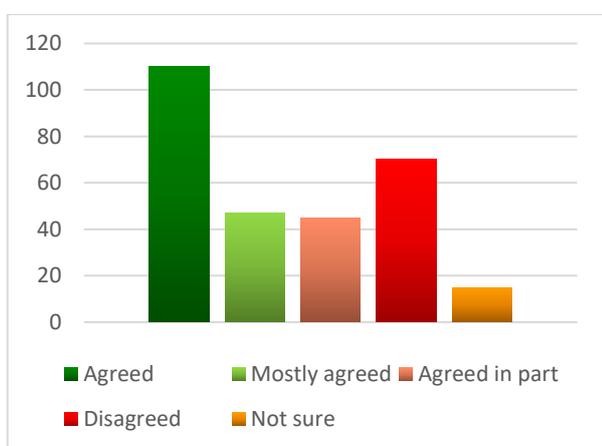
## Responses by stakeholder groups

### Employees of PeakCare Member organisations

Of the 287 employees of PeakCare Member organisations who answered this question:

- 110 (38.33%) agreed with this proposal
- 47 (16.38%) mostly agreed
- 45 (15.68%) agreed only in part
- 70 (24.39%) disagreed, and
- 15 (5.23%) indicated that they were not sure

Two respondents skipped this question.



108 of the respondents within this stakeholder group commented on their responses.

#### **Complexities of drug use and support**

Many respondents highlighted that drug issues are very complex and enforcing drug testing would not create sustained change for children assessed at high risk. Many comments were made regarding the lack of support services and the systemic issues in seeking treatment options for families:

- *Drug taking and substance misuse issues are highly correlated with histories of significant and complex trauma histories. Mandatory random drug testing for all parents on IPA will further stigmatise these individuals, and has the potential to re-traumatise parents and set them up to what feels like unachievable goals*
- *It is one thing to undertake drug testing and another to have the appropriate services to manage these entrenched behaviours and addictions. We need sufficient places/services*

*for people to medically detox and receive rehabilitation*

- *Latest research suggests trauma-informed responses are more successful, given it is mostly trauma that causes people to take drugs in the first place. For example – childhood sexual abuse, domestic violence, family violence, family breakdown and mental health*
- *We need to engage with people and get them to change why they are doing; there needs to be the support services in place to help people who are trying to manage addictions and address the reasons why they are addicted (often because of their own challenging backgrounds or family situations such as family violence). Additionally, we need much more by the way of rehabilitation (and mental health) support. Where is the evidence and research to back this proposed approach?*

#### **Purpose of drug testing and how this relates to parental capacity as drug testing already occurs under IPA's**

Many respondents commented that drug testing is already being requested of parents as part of an IPA. Respondents emphasised that drug screening results do not equate to children always being placed at risk and was used as part of a holistic assessment:

- *The testing alone makes no sense to me – what are we trying to achieve here? What is the response to a positive test, what even does a positive test mean to safety and parenting?*
- *That already happens – it's clearly not addressing the addiction issues of the community*
- *The emphasis should be on the capacity to provide care not just on whether substance use is occurring or not*
- *I believe the department already has the ability to implement drug testing in cases where it is appropriate to do so. Child protection is not a one size fits all system. Mandatory responses limit good case work*
- *Drug testing can be an important part of an investigation and assessment process however, as a stand alone measure drug testing does not increase safety of children. Drug usage also does not ALWAYS equate to risk of harm for children. If drug testing is used in IPA's, it will be*

*imperative that the results are included as part of a broader conversation about safety, experience of addiction, readiness to change in accordance with the transtheoretical model*

### **Human rights and Inequality**

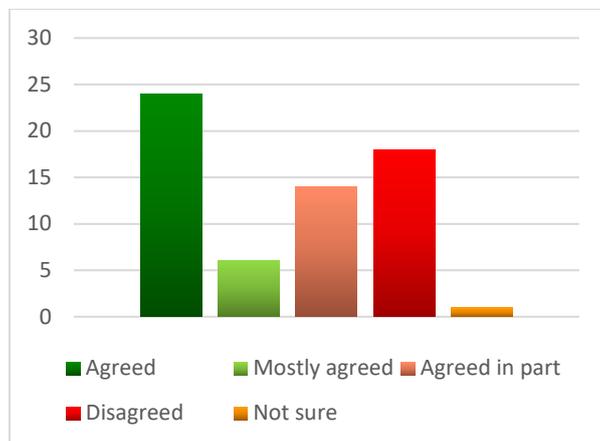
Some respondents held concerns that drug testing all parents subject to an IPA is a breach of human rights and will also further stigmatise vulnerable members of society:

- *The focus of this department is Child Safety, not drug use. The noted lack of action to fund or create more rehabilitation services in this proposal speaks to the real concerns of the LNP. This also feels like an effective way to ensure that families do not agree to work with the department, resulting in invention without parental consent, more children being removed and more power and control to be executed by the state. I don't think I need to bring up the history of removal of children from their families in this country to show that this is a truly insidious way for the government to show who they find undesirable*
- *IPA's are in their nature voluntary, so this would be interesting to see how it translates against upholding parents' human rights*
- *These are processes aimed at supporting vulnerable children and their families on a VOLUNTARY basis. Drug screening may be considered where there is an identified risk, but to use it on an indiscriminate basis is to shame and marginalise a group and will likely lead to a reduction in help seeking behaviours*
- *If it is part of the case plan, otherwise this is an invasion of their human rights*

### **Employees of QATSICPP Member organisations**

Of the 63 employees of QATSICPP Member organisations who answered this question:

- 24 (38.10%) agreed with the proposal
- 6 (9.52%) mostly agreed
- 14 (22.22%) agreed only in part
- 18 (28.57%) disagreed, and
- 1 (1.59%) indicated that they were not sure



23 of the respondents within this stakeholder group commented on their responses.

### **Drug use and parenting capacity**

A number of respondents noted that not all children whose parents/carers use drugs have been placed at risk:

- *This is Child Safety, not drug court. Why would you test every IPA family? What if drug use does not impact their ability to parent, what if they only use when the children are not around? Who is going to consider the context?*
- *A one-off drug test does not equally measure the capacity of parents'/carers' protective skills*
- *I don't have a problem with drug testing as it is a comorbidity of so many issues that place children at risk and it's good to know the full picture. But...I am concerned about rigid responses, lack of flexibility and children removed when they haven't necessarily been harmed due to arbitrary legal reasons that social workers are more flexible with*

### **Support for parents**

Some respondents stated that substance issues are a health issue and treatment options are required to support parents in addressing this issue:

- *There needs to be things in place to support people if they test positive to illicit substances. Substance use is a health issue, so people should be able to access support if they test positive, not be punished*
- *Drug use is a symptom of trauma – stop punishing families for their trauma, start funding healing instead*

- *This is already done when necessary. Drug addiction is a public health issue and needs to be addressed as such*
- *Will you also provide drug and alcohol counselling and support for families, support with parenting, finances and community building?*

### **Equality for families involved with Child Safety**

A number of respondents held concerns for the rights of families involved with Child Safety:

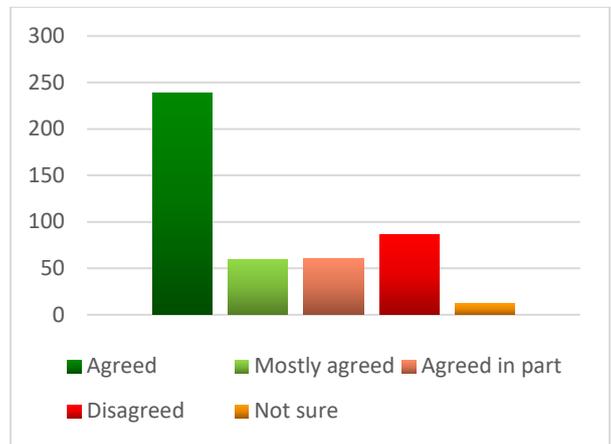
- *I would only agree if the same standard was taken with all drugs and all people. For instance, lawyers should be tested, particularly for cocaine. Families that enter the child protection system are not second-class citizens, nor should we treat them without the liberties all Australians expect and deserve*
- *Child protection workers should be tested as well*
- *There needs to be legal checks and balances in place to ensure that Police powers are not abused*

### **Employees of non-Member non-government organisations**

Of the 456 employees of non-government organisations that are not members of either PeakCare or QATSICPP who answered this question:

- 239 (52.41%) agreed with the proposal
- 59 (12.94%) mostly agreed
- 60 (13.16%) agreed only in part
- 86 (18.86%) disagreed, and
- 12 (2.63%) indicated that they were not sure

Three respondents skipped this question.



150 of the respondents within this stakeholder group commented on their responses.

### **Inequality and support**

Many respondents commented that drug use is a health issue and parents require support to reduce or cease their drug use. Respondents further commented that the enforcement of mandatory drug testing will further stigmatize parents working with Child Safety:

- *There is little point to drug testing unless services are in place to support parents who return positive tests. Testing is bound to further criminalise those parents who are already likely to be the most vulnerable, disadvantaged and in need of support. Substance misuse is often linked to exposure to trauma and abuse both historical and ongoing. Parents who are captured by the 'policing' net are likely to have penalties such as fines levied against them which will only serve to further disadvantage them and their children*
- *What message are we sending these people if we subject them to compulsory drug testing? Furthermore, what message are we sending society about people in this situation? There is already a high level of shame in society around child safety intervention*
- *Drug use is proven to be caused by underlying issues such as trauma and poverty. Address the issues why people use drugs and provide support to make people's lives better so they cease drug use*

### **Parental capacity.**

A number of respondents made comments relating to drug use and the ability of parents to be able to care

for their children. There was a range of views that were conflicting:

- *This is an insane suggestion. What on earth with that achieve? It does not tell you anything about whether or not the parent is a good parent or the nature of their drug use and whether they need supports around drug use*
- *Might be a great political decision but is has nothing to do with child protection. This is very unhelpful and leads to unnecessary removals. It's not important whether parents are using drugs. It's only relevant if it has an impact on their parenting. A drug test does not evidence a person's level of functioning*
- *Criminalisation; stigmatisation. The assumption that drug use = bad parenting. What are the consequences and how will this affect families? The longstanding policy work of the AOD sector in messaging the need for a health response to AOD issues is at high risk*
- *Drugs impact a person's ability to make safe decisions*
- *Parental/caregiver drug use is one of the main worries raised with children protection and currently is being 'safety planned' around. This is NOT appropriate, especially in the case of methamphetamine use, as these types of illicit drugs do not lend themselves to the idea of 'functional drug user/functional parent'. These drugs destroy parent's ability to parent, and destroy children's lives*
- *No-one under the influence of illicit substances is capable of responsibly caring for children*

### **Parental accountability for their drug use**

A number of respondents commented that parents should be held accountable for their action of taking illicit substances:

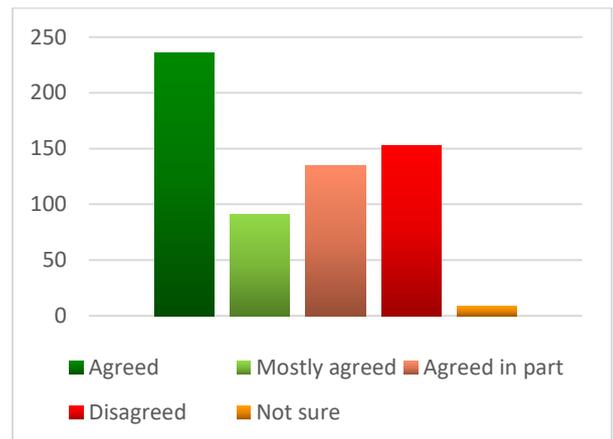
- *I think this is a great idea! Families need to take responsibility for their own actions and understand the consequences of their use*
- *Absolutely parents need to be held accountable for their actions in trying to get their children back and any breach, deem them unfit to do so, as you are continually re-traumatising these kids if they are sent back and then come into care again*
- *It is not about 'parent protection', it's about 'child protection'!*

## **Employees of Government agencies**

Of the 624 employees of Government agencies who answered this question:

- 236 (37.82%) agreed with the proposal
- 91 (14.58%) mostly agreed
- 135 (21.63%) agreed only in part
- 153 (24.52%) disagreed, and
- 9 (1.44%) indicated that they were not sure

Nine respondents skipped this question.



291 of the respondents within this stakeholder group commented on their responses.

### **Purpose of drug testing and how this relates to parental capacity as drug testing already occurs under IPA's**

Most respondents commented that drug testing is already being requested of parents as part of an IPA. Respondents emphasised that drug screening results do not equate to children always being placed at risk and was used as part of a holistic assessment:

- *We are largely already doing this, however we physically cannot force parents to complete urine screens. Further, parents returning drug screens where there is drug use detected, in and of itself does not provide evidence of impact on their ability to care for their children in all circumstances*
- *We need to use testing at times but assessing the harm and impact on the child is the most important part*
- *Clear procedures for drug testing are already in place and used for IPA cases. Drug testing is a small part of the work – understanding the impact of drugs on safe parenting practices is*

*the assessment knowledge and skills required, not what drug/s are in a person's system*

- *Drug testing procedures already exist for IPA families where drug use is impacting the safety of children. Drug tests are one of a suite of options and tools the CSO has at their disposal to assist in making solid practice decisions around risk. Making this mandatory has unintended consequences that again do not add to the safety and well-being of children*

### **Complexities of drug use and support**

Some respondents highlighted that drug issues are very complex and enforcing drug testing would not create sustained change for children assessed at high risk. Many comments were made regarding the lack of support services and the systemic issues in seeking treatment options for families:

- *Given the volume of cases whereby there is unaddressed childhood trauma, mental health, domestic and family violence coupled with drug misuse amongst the vast majority of parents that come in contact with the child protection system, I think that compulsory drug testing would be of benefit particularly when children remain in the home through an IPA*
- *It certainly is one tool which could help to clarify actual usage but, if done, there still needs to be all the corollary services (not only testing but therapeutic as well) which would make a difference for people. Of itself this also does nothing to address what are the societal issues behind illicit substance use nor does it address those people within our communities who misuse prescription drugs or alcohol but who do not necessarily come to attention because of the focus in the illicit sphere, and people are generally seen as high-functioning with the impacts on the children may be unseen/hidden*
- *I don't think that drug testing is effective – I feel that drug use is a symptom of a number of issues, and I don't see how testing fixes the problem. I think there should be more available drug rehabs*
- *While drug use is one risk factor, the intersection of different vulnerabilities and factors in families is rarely just one thing. Just as some people with mental illness can care for their children, some people who use drugs are also able to look after*

*their children sufficiently. The issues are much more complex than this*

- *The best place for children is with family, some families need education and programs to assist with the wider issues they face including poverty, trauma and inter-generational issues. Punishing parents who know no better and are having problems coping with their own issues is not the answer*

### **Agreement with 'mandatory testing' vs 'agreement for mandatory testing for parents with concerns relating to drug misuse'**

Some respondents were very passionate around mandatory testing for all parents who are working with Child Safety under an IPA whilst others believed this to be a waste of resources:

- *I agree, but I don't think it should be a clear-cut assessment that parents using meth immediately have their children removed*
- *This would be beneficial, however would only be able to be implemented if there were adequate staff employed to ensure that testing could occur*
- *Drugs are prolific in child safety clients and cause so much more risk than some other risk factors. We shouldn't let drug users consent to IPA's*
- *If the concerns related to drug use then it is appropriate, if they do not it is a breach of power and a waste of resources*
- *If there are indication that this was necessary. There are many cases though where drugs are not involved and this would be unnecessary and invasive....for example, for a woman escaping a domestic violence situation this would be demonising for her and appear to blame her for the situation*
- *It should only be done when relevant and necessary. This would also negatively impact the trust between Child Safety and the families/parents*

### **Human rights and inequality**

A number of respondents identified concerns relating to the inequality that they felt would be faced by families engaging with Child Safety and the breach to human rights by mandating that all parents under an IPA participate in drug screening if this has not been an identified concern:

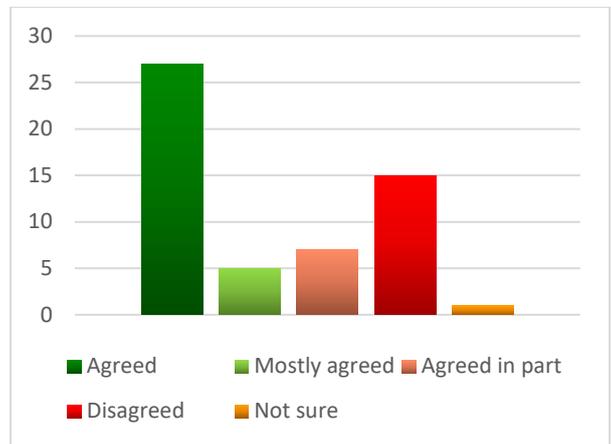
- *This does not focus on the impact on a child and focuses on punishment rather than intervention and solutions. It impacts the disadvantage in our society. What about the 'rich' parents who take drugs but don't come to the attention of QPS or Child Safety?*
- *Does that mean a parent's human right to decline participating in drug testing is not important? It is not just about a positive or negative result when it comes to drug testing – a worker has to have an assessment as to how the parents drug use is impacting on the safety of the child and their ability and willingness to care for the child*
- *Invasion of liberty and privacy – this is not the answer, these parents need more practical in-home supports who can model parenting behaviours and strategies in the homes*
- *It's a voluntary intervention – where are the human rights here??*
- *If the concerns are relating to drug use, otherwise this is a breach of power and a waste of resources*
- *The IPA cases are with agreement. They say though that if you don't agree Child Safety may consider more intrusive intervention, e.g. Child protection orders, so it is really a forced agreement so that something worse doesn't happen. Let's be real about that. The risk does not become greater just because they didn't do a drug test*

## Employees of peak bodies, industry and representative groups

Of the 55 employees of peak bodies, industry and representative groups who answered this question:

- 27 (49.09%) agreed with this proposal
- 5 (9.09%) mostly agreed
- 7 (12.73%) agreed only in part
- 15 (27.27%) disagreed, and
- 1 (1.82%) indicated that they were not sure

One respondent skipped this question.



22 of the respondents within this stakeholder commented on their responses.

### **Agreement with 'mandatory testing' or 'agreement for mandatory testing for parents with identified substance misuse issues'**

Most respondents either agreed with the proposal of mandatory testing for all parents working with an IPA or agreed that mandatory testing should occur for parents that have known substance misuse issues:

- *Ice is a scourge on our society, leading to aggressive and unhealthy behaviour and where kids are involved, must be eradicated*
- *There is some merit to this proposal but the ramifications of such a measure need to be clearly articulated*
- *Certainly and should continue for two years after*
- *If substance use is not identified as a factor for an individual – forced drug testing is a wasted intervention technique*
- *Should be relevant to only those families who are impacted by drug use*

### **Support**

Some respondents commented that drug testing is ineffectual and parents working with Child Safety need to be supported to reduce identified risk for their children:

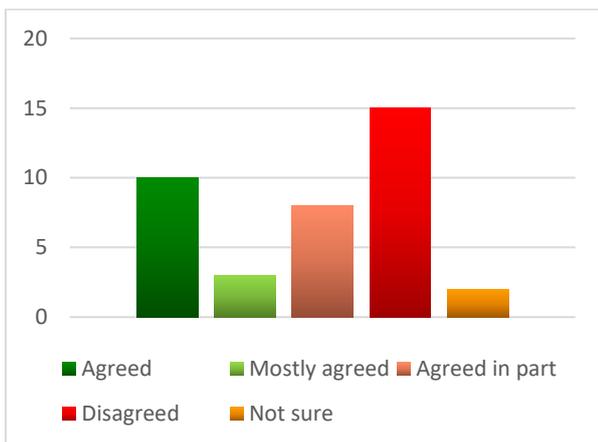
- *Extensive drug and alcohol research show that harm minimisation programs are effective in treatment for people struggling with substance abuse. We must consult extensively with medical experts and research in approaching this*

- *Random or mandatory testing would be ineffectual and unhelpful. Ready availability of rehab services is preferable*
- *There needs to be more harm minimisation and supportive programs for parents*
- *Support is required, not threats and punitive treatment*

## Academics

Of the 38 academics who answered this question:

- 10 (26.32%) agreed with this proposal
- 3 (7.89%) mostly agreed
- 8 (21.05%) agreed only in part
- 15 (39.47%) disagreed, and
- 2 (5.26%) indicated they were not sure



12 of the respondents within this stakeholder group commented on their responses.

### **Lack of purpose and support for vulnerable parents**

Most respondents commented that drug testing is not evidenced to cease drug use, and therapeutic support is required to create change and keep children safe:

- *The use of drugs from alcohol to illegal substances does not necessarily reflect of someone's ability to parent. Compulsory drug testing for what I ask. Evidence showing actual harm should be required to remove children*
- *Drug testing does not stop drug use, therapy does. Drug testing would just be another means to pathologise and disempower parents*

- *This road has been travelled and does not produce results. Child protection is not about substance misuse, if we were to randomly drug test all of society, there would be many, many children removed from homes of all classes where removal is completely unnecessary*
- *Waste of money; tests are expensive; and child protection workers' time will be taken up with testing, not helping vulnerable children and their families. Focus on children – are they safe, how are they being cared for, what services are needed to keep them safe? Punishment of parents is not the role of child protection*

### **Ethical practice and human rights**

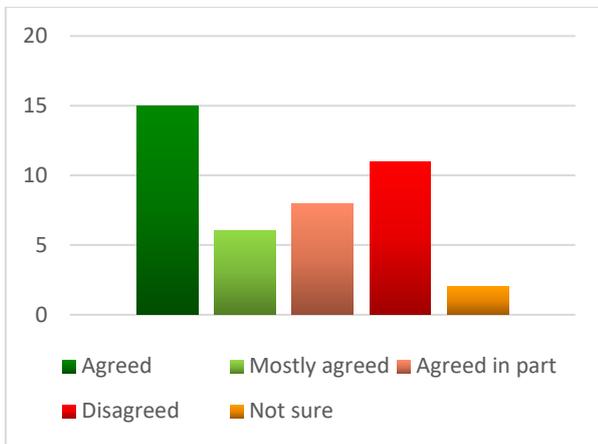
Some respondents made comment regarding parents' human rights and how they felt mandatory drug testing was unethical and punitive against clients:

- *This is demeaning, inappropriate and punitive. It should not be something that anyone other than a judge, with sufficient evidence to warrant the intervention, is able to prescribe*
- *Is that legal? And ethically do we have the right? I completely agree with the benefits, but what is the point in paying for the testing if it isn't legal and ethical. For it to be ethical you have to provide easy to access drug rehab that they can actually get into then and there.... Addressing another problem!*
- *This will breach fundamental human rights as per our new legislation and is totally uncalled for, it brings back the bad old days of demonizing all parents*

### **Private consultants and employees of consultancy or training organisations**

Of the 42 private consultants and employees of consultancy or training organisations, who answered this question:

- 15 (35.71%) agreed with the proposal
- 6 (14.29%) mostly agreed
- 8 (19.05%) agreed only in part
- 11 (26.19%) disagreed, and
- 2 (4.76%) indicated that they were not sure



16 of the respondents within this stakeholder group commented on their responses.

### Drug testing is already occurring

Many respondents made comments relating to drug testing already occurring within the IPA space:

- *Currently the Department of Child Safety do make requests (via GP/Pathology referral processes) for random drug testing for illicit substances or those on Intervention with Parental Agreements. While those involved can decline/resist it is not looked upon as favourable for their case*
- *Parents can already be required to have drug tests under current policy and legislation*
- *This occurs currently. But the department DOESN'T HAVE ADEQUATE FUNDING to implement this across the board. Child Safety is not specifically funded for IPA cases/children only those subject to out of home care orders*
- *Issue is parents cannot afford tests so department needs to be responsible for the costs*

### Agreement with mandatory drug testing

Some respondents agreed with mandatory drug testing for all parents with an IPA:

- *Drugs are like fuel to a fire*
- *Absolutely!*
- *These kids are worth the effort. They deserve good role models*
- *Sounds good in theory but lots more details would be needed*

### Purpose and effectiveness of drug testing

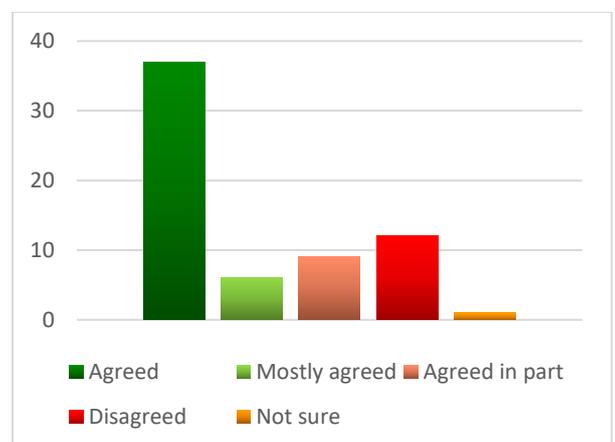
Some respondents made comments regarding the purpose and effectiveness of drug testing:

- *Absolute violation of Human Rights! If there is no drug concerns for that family, they should not be subjected to the humiliating process of random drug tests. Disgusting. It also gets in the way of forging positive working relationships. There might be some families where you might like to access a legal power to invoke random, compulsory drug tests. I'm thinking of families where there is an ICE addiction. I would like to see the research that would support this measure – if there is any!*
- *Not sure what this will achieve except a waste of money*
- *Drugs are a symptom of the problem and in isolation without adequate risk assessments this strategy does little to protect children*
- *Where is the evidence that this model works?*

### Parents (and other family members) with a lived experience of the child protection system

Of the 65 parents (or family members) with a lived experience of the child protection system who answered this question:

- 37 (56.92%) agreed with the proposal
- 6 (9.23%) mostly agreed
- 9 (13.85%) agreed only in part
- 12 (18.46%) disagreed, and
- 1 (1.54%) indicated that they were not sure



16 of the respondents within this stakeholder group commented on their responses.

### **Support for Parents testing Positive**

Some respondents made comments regarding the benefits of working with families to address the drug issues:

- *I know that people have their problems and addictions and that children are harmed being in this environment. However, it does impinge on their human rights. I would like to see people being helped with their issues with a peer lived experienced worker who can help them to keep sober and keep their children in their care. Anyone who then identifies with having substance abuse issues and is on an IPA could then be supported to access these services as part of the agreement*
- *How about the people they know are on these substances are provided with appropriate levels of appropriate wrap around services that will facilitate the person not needing drugs to start with. It will cost less in the long run! Get some social workers in there PLEASE! People use for complex reasons, find out what they are!*
- *If this is to be enforced we need better rehabilitation support services*
- *Working with parents is far more beneficial than the removing of kids from their family*

### **Types of testing**

Some respondents made comments regarding the types of drug testing and the frequency:

- *Hopefully not just urine tests as people can buy clean urine*
- *Parents can be addicted to prescription drugs also and this can be as bad as methamphetamines*
- *Include alcohol*
- *I know a case at the moment where the mother agreed to random testing and it has been over 3 months since her last test*
- *Drugs like methamphetamine, cocaine, MDMA etc definitely. Cannabis should not be treated the same, especially as there are many who need it for medical reasons and in a large amount of cases does not impact capacity to protect and attend to their children's needs*

### **Drug testing for those who have reported drug issues**

A number of people commented that mandatory drug testing should not be put in place for people who do not have reported drug concerns:

- *??!! Seriously?! How offensive!!! Not every parent on an IPA or involved with Child Protection has a drug issue!! As someone who is mentally ill and never touched drugs I have been through the humiliation of submitting to these tests for no reason other than ignorance and it is dehumanizing*
- *Where substance abuse has been an issue reported for the children going into child protection, but I don't think this should be applied to everyone*
- *Only those parents with a history of substance misuse. Not all parents*

### **Inequality**

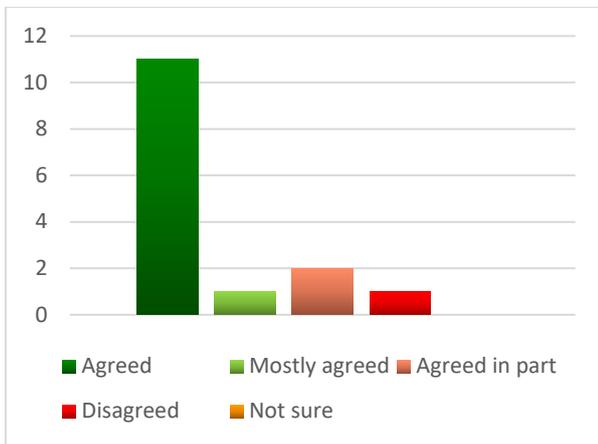
A number of respondents held concerns for the inequality of drug testing and held issue that the lower socio-economic parents would be disadvantaged:

- *Are you going to test private school mums as well and footballer dads?*
- *All child protection staff should be drug tested including foster parents and parents of children in foster care*
- *Some parents party but don't abuse drugs on a daily basis. People will be inclined to blackmail parents and fear that they will lose their children with these new rules*

### **Young people (under 25 years) with a lived experience of the child protection system**

Of the 15 young people (under 25 years) with a lived experience of the child protection system who answered this question:

- 11 (73.33%) agreed with this proposal
- 1 (6.67%) mostly agreed
- 2 (13.33%) agreed only in part, and
- 1 (6.67%) disagreed



3 of the respondents within this stakeholder group commented on their responses.

### **Drug use and parenting**

All three comments addressed the respondents' beliefs regarding the effectiveness of the proposed policy:

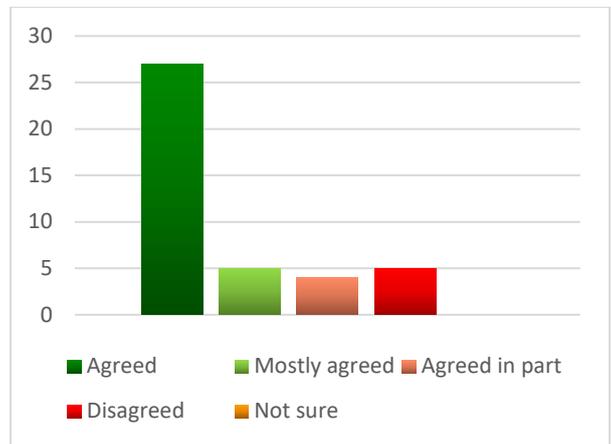
- *I know parents that can keep their children safe and do methamphetamines and parents that are chronic marijuana users and absolutely abuse and put their children at risk. Obviously, it's more likely a parent on meth will not be acting protectively, however, I think focusing just on drugs that some random persons with no life experiences in a high up role chooses to focus on is ridiculous*
- *It already happens, they are just tooting their horn*
- *Testing for narcissistic personality disorders and family scapegoat dynamics is perhaps more cost effective*

### **Older people (over 25 years) with a lived experience of the child protection system**

Of the 41 older people (over 25 years) with a lived experience of the child protection system who answered this question:

- 27 (65.85%) agreed with this proposal
- 5 (12.20%) mostly agreed
- 4 (9.76%) agreed only in part, and
- 5 (12.20%) disagreed

One respondent skipped this question.



6 of the respondents within this stakeholder group commented on their responses.

### **Agreement of Mandatory drug testing**

Many respondents agreed with mandatory drug testing for all parents with an IPA:

- *Illicit and illegal drugs are a huge concern when it comes to child protection*
- *If parents of at risk children are to change they need to understand the severity and commitment of the 'Force' to the safety of children at any cost*
- *Agree entirely, substance abuse clearly affects reasonable parenting*

### **Multiple factors influencing safe parenting**

Many respondents made comment regarding the complexities of the issues facing families within child protection and that a multi-faceted approach is required to achieve the safety of children:

- *Parents subject to IPA's have multiple complex factors which impacts their capacity to care for the children safely, with the main issues being significant increases in substance misuse including ICE, significant increase in the frequency and intensity of domestic and family violence and mental health. This approach is not addressing the issue but a symptom of a wider issue*
- *Drug use is often a symptom of a person's inability to deal with anxiety, mental health issues and trauma. Random testing creates more anxiety and does not stop the addiction. Coming down hard on a drug user simply causes more problems. If it did our society would be free from drugs. We have to go the long and slow road with parents, encouraging and building hope for*

them, through acceptance and relationships to make them feel they are worthwhile, not treating them as if they are not

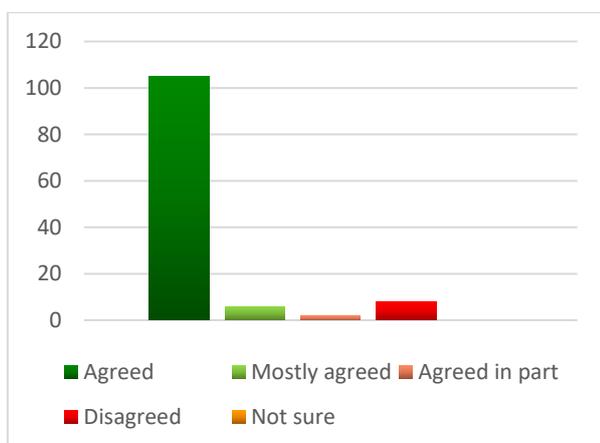
- This should be part of a whole raft of strategies

## Foster Carers

Of the 121 Foster Carers who answered this question:

- 105 (86.78%) agreed with this proposal
- 6 (4.96%) mostly agreed
- 2 (1.65%) agreed only in part, and
- 8 (6.61%) disagreed

One respondent skipped this question.



36 of the respondents within this stakeholder group commented on their responses.

### Positive results and contact with children.

A number of respondents held concerns for children who still have contact with parents who have drug dependency issues. Comments were made that children should not have any contact with their parents until the drug use has ceased:

- Absolutely, if a person can't give up the drugs, they should not have any contact with the child
- Drug testing is essential. Why would you ever let a parent see their child who they have done wrong to if they are not in control of their addiction
- Could not agree more!!! I'd add to that, they should be drug tested before every single contact visit with their child too!!!
- This would prevent further trauma and exposure to the children while at contacts

## Effectiveness of Drug Testing and impacts on Children

A number of respondents made comments regarding the use of drug testing. There were some mixed views around if drug testing will create safety for children or set children up for entering care:

- Parents will refuse to partake in voluntary intervention if this is implemented
- We need to help, not punish
- Will they offer ways for parents to come off drugs? It's an addiction and not something easily changed. It's also a symptom of deeper problems that don't go away us because they are to be drug tested
- Parental drug use does not tell you clearly whether or not they can care for their children. Much more comprehensive assessments of parental capacity are needed
- More compulsory testing just creates fear and reduces compliance and cooperation in improving care for children. This will push children into care, rather than help parents into healthier lives
- It will ensure the safety of children

### Agreement with mandatory drug testing

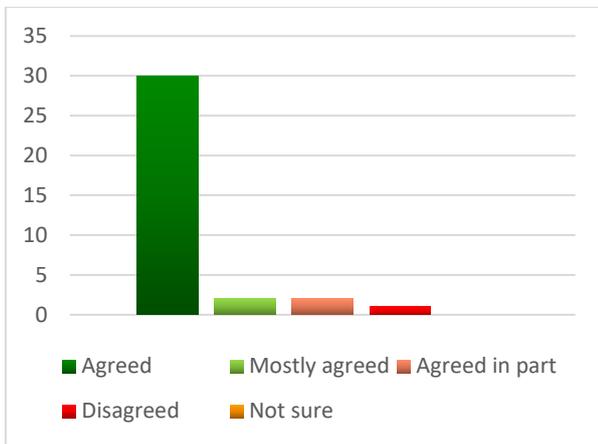
Many respondents agreed with mandatory drug testing for all parents with an IPA:

- Being a drug addict is incompatible with being an adequate parent. Children deserve that as a minimum
- Absolutely! People get booked for using drugs while driving a car but not while looking after children????
- Parents need to be responsible and children need to come first. We need some tough decisions made to stop the trajectory we are currently on
- Make sure they produce the specimen in front of you. How many bring in someone else's urine?

## Kinship Carers

Of the 35 Kinship Carers who answered this question:

- 30 (85.71%) agreed with the proposal
- 2 (5.71%) mostly agreed
- 2 (5.71%) agreed only in part
- 1 (2.86%) disagreed



9 of the respondents within this stakeholder group commented on their responses.

### Support for parents

Many respondents, whilst agreeing that mandatory drug testing should occur for parents working with Child Safety on an IPA, acknowledged that support was required to assist these families:

- *Drug testing where they know it is happening and have agreed to this is fine, but what supports will there be for them if they test positive?*
- *Drug testing will be helpful but these parents need intensive support along the way*
- *If there were changes perhaps the 'random' part could be more emphasised. What happens after they have a positive result?*

### Agreement of mandatory drug testing

Many respondents agreed with mandatory drug testing for all parents with an IPA:

- *Absolutely, about time!*
- *I absolutely agree*
- *Also ALL FOSTER PARENTS*

### Drug testing and parenting

A number of respondents made comments regarding parenting whilst using drugs:

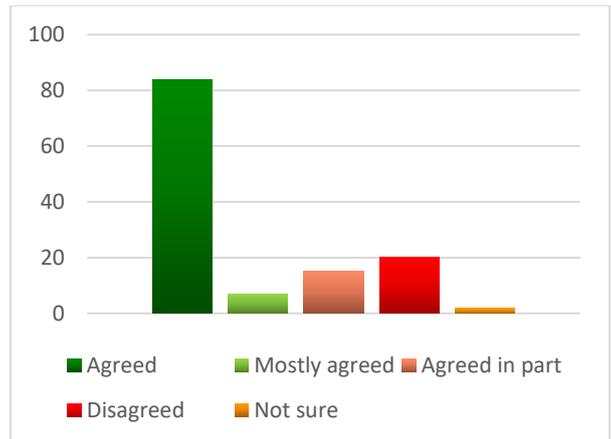
- *Drug addicts are incompatible with being parents*
- *Child Safety frequently tell me that parents under the influence of drugs or alcohol can still parent effectively. Crap!!*

## Others

Of the 128 survey respondents who indicated that they did not belong to one of the aforementioned groups or who identified with multiple groups:

- 84 (65.63%) agreed with the proposal
- 7 (5.47%) mostly agreed
- 15 (11.72%) agreed only in part
- 20 (15.63%) disagreed, and
- 2 (1.56%) indicated that they were not sure

One respondent skipped this question.



48 of respondent within this stakeholder group provided comments.

### Inequality and human rights of parents

Some respondents were concerned for the rights of the parents and inequality that may result from drug testing all parents working with Child Safety under an agreement:

- *It is an unsubstantiated assumption that drugs are a major issue. It will stigmatise and reinforce inequality in an already highly vulnerable group*
- *So the people who live on Hamilton Hill are allowed to be full of fine wine and cocaine while they care for their children but those people living further down that hill will be criminalised for using cheap meth and alcohol?*
- *That authority should remain with the court. Judicial oversight of any curtailing of civil rights is essential*
- *Substance abuse testing has a place but making it mandatory is unconstitutional*
- *The CP Act is about harm not black and white morals*

### **Support for parents**

A number of respondents highlighted the need for parents to be supported should they have an issue with drug addiction.

- *If people's drug and alcohol use is detrimental to the care of their children, they should be given support and assistance to modify their use and behaviours*
- *All referral pathways to help the parents with their addictions, we all know that children love their parents, even the abusive parents, so let's work together to assist the family unit without leaving the child in a vulnerable situation*
- *Church and community organisations need to be approached and equipped to help with supporting these children and their parents*
- *There needs to be support put in place for the person and their family and when they have been drug tested and no other supports are provided, the situation often goes backwards and the person returns to drug use as a self-medicating option*

### **Impacts of the policy on children**

A number of respondents made comment on the impact that mandatory drug testing would have on children. The views were varied regarding drug testing increasing safety:

- *We drug test as required. Compulsory drug testing would not provide any extra safety to children who are in need of protection*
- *Too many children living in drug houses with parents and not being cared for*
- *I absolutely agree with this as this is something that is well overdue. A lot of our little ones are exposed to drugs being taken around them. Studies have shown that if the drug ICE has been used/cooked in a house the remnants can last for years and requires a full chemical clean in order to eradicate the drug from the house. What is being done to their little bodies and brains?*
- *One case a baby was handed over to his parent, who at the time was heavily involved in drug use, however was not tested, case managed or strict guidelines implemented to ensure the safety of the baby. Sadly, the baby was neglected and was placed back into care*



