Lord to utilize federal day-care dollars [CA-NB]

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EXCERPTS

After two days of focusing largely on the needs of seniors, Premier Bernard Lord turned his attention to New Brunswick's youngest citizens Wednesday.

It can't be said that those youngsters paid much attention to the premier - but perhaps their parents will.

Against the clamour of a bustling day-care centre, with toddlers babbling and playing with everything from bubbles to Play-doh, Mr. Lord announced plans to increase funding to day-care centres.

The \$5.8-million promise entails increasing the threshold at which families are cut off from publicly subsidized day care, and increasing the day-care rates the province will pay for those who qualify.

The threshold is being increased to \$22,000 of family net income, an increase of \$5,000. That means a family with a net income of \$22,000 will have their day-care costs covered by the province.

"Access to sufficient child care can be the difference between working and not working," Mr. Lord said. "This allows more people to go to work knowing that their child will receive the care they need."

The premier estimates the initiative will help about 1,000 families and help create an additional 1,500 places in licensed day-care facilities.

The promised increase to the subsidy threshold would be the first in the province since 1994.

Day cares will also receive higher payments from the province for subsidized spaces. The new levels will be \$22 a day for those under two years of age and \$20 a day for those older than two, which is an increase of \$3.50. The amount paid for after-school care will grow by \$1.50 to \$10 a day.

The early childhood investment is also part of an effort to improve early childhood literacy skills, said Mr. Lord.

The funding for the initiative comes from federal coffers, as the province received money from the most recent federal budget to help improve day-care offerings.

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