

More than \$38 million to be invested in early childhood services

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News release

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FREDERICTON (GNB) - The provincial government unveiled today a new, three-year \$38-million action plan, Putting Children First, which will better prepare young children for the future.

"We are making history in our province by changing the system as we know it into an innovative model for early childhood services that is unique in Canada," said Education and Early Childhood Development Minister Jody Carr. "Our goal is that as we implement this plan, each child and his or her family will receive the support they need, regardless of the location in New Brunswick. This integrated network, which will provide a learning continuum from birth to high school graduation, is based on a child-centred approach, a common vision and existing strengths and leadership in our communities."

The integration of early childhood services and the school system will enable the provincial government to provide more timely and specialized transition and intervention services, running from birth to eight years of age.

"Our decision is guided by the knowledge and research that this is a time of remarkable brain growth, laying the foundation for subsequent learning and development," said Carr.

More than \$38 million will be allocated to this initiative over three years that will address the provincial government's commitment to improve the quality, affordability, accessibility and inclusivity of early childhood services. Highlights:

- \$16.7 million to create new early learning and childcare spaces, bringing the total increase to 10,000.
- \$850,000 to build capacity for inclusion in early learning and childcare facilities.
- \$1.26 million to increase in the number of support workers by 50 to make early learning and childcare facilities more inclusive.
- \$4.11 million to support wage subsidies for childcare workers. The trained staff wage top-up will increase to \$5 per hour from \$4.50. The action plan also provides for the re-establishment of wage subsidies of \$2.75 per hour for untrained staff. This initiative supports the pay equity activities for early learning and childcare staff.
- \$4.4 million to be invested in the Day Care Assistance Program to enhance affordability of childcare for families. Enhancements include: increasing the ceiling for maximum day care subsidy to an income of less than \$30,000 a year; raising the annual income limit to \$55,000; and increasing the daily maximum subsidies to \$4 per day for infants and \$1.75 per day for preschoolers.
- \$2.25 million to establish a new early childhood services director in each school district.
- \$5.25 million to support the training in Early Childhood Education for childcare staff.
- \$250,000 to run an awareness campaign for the creation of new childcare spaces; to provide materials to support parents in choosing quality early learning and childcare services; and to promote workplace childcare strategy to employers.
- \$3 million to provide services for preschool children with autism spectrum disorders.

The changes will be supported by measures based on the co-ordinated, ongoing collaboration of all early childhood partners, designed to offer support services and provide a continuum of learning for children and their families from the time the child is born until he or she completes high school.

Carr said the provincial government will provide "strong, committed leadership" to undertake the following actions to integrate early childhood services and education to enhance support to vulnerable children and their families:

- A broadening of the mandate of early intervention agencies from zero to five years to zero to eight years in co-operation with the school system.
- The development of two provincial networks of early childhood services, one for each linguistic community, which will be tasked with implementing the strategic framework for early childhood.
- A new early childhood services director in each of the seven school district boundaries. These persons will work closely with the school district management team and their partners for management and integration of early childhood services in the various locations.
- The development of local early childhood service networks operating in the same areas as the school districts, which will work together to identify and respond to the needs of families in their communities.

"With Putting Children First, we will build a model to enable early childhood and education partners to work together toward a single

objective," Carr said. "I extend my sincere thanks to all stakeholders who helped us develop this action plan, especially the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Early Learning and Childcare and Action Group for the Commission on Francophone Schools. Together with our partners, we will put together a system of which our province can be proud."

-reprinted from the press release

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