

LESSON 6

PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT

Canada is a **parliamentary democracy**. We elect members to represent us in our federal parliament and our provincial and territorial legislatures.

In a parliamentary system, government is separated into three branches: the legislative branch, executive branch and the judicial branch.

The legislative branch is composed of all elected representatives. In Ontario, these elected individuals are called Members of Provincial Parliament, or MPPs. Each MPP represents a different geographic area within Ontario called an electoral district or constituency, and most are associated with a political party.

Typically, the political party with the largest number of elected MPPs in the provincial legislature usually becomes the governing party and their leader then becomes the leader of the government (premier).

In our system of parliamentary democracy, governments must be supported by a majority of MPPs. This is called **responsible government**.

A **majority government** results when one political party wins more than half of all seats in the Assembly. Whereas, a **minority government** occurs when a governing party wins less than half of the seats, but is able to maintain the support of a majority of the MPPs.

Of the other parties in the legislature, the party that holds the largest number of seats becomes the **Official Opposition**.

MPPs meet at the Legislative Assembly in Toronto located at Queen's Park. Here, MPPs debate issues, pass laws and legislation, approve finances and scrutinize government activity.

The **executive branch** is responsible for developing policies, delivering programs and implementing laws. The executive branch is led by the premier and the **executive council** or **cabinet**.

Cabinet ministers are responsible for leading ministries, which deliver vital programs and services associated within one area of responsibility.

The provincial government currently has 30 ministries, including Children and Youth Services, Economic Development and Growth, Education, Energy, Francophone Affairs, Housing, Seniors Affairs, Tourism, Culture and Sport. The ministers of these government departments are chosen as advisors to the premier in their respective areas. The number and names of the ministries change over time and generally reflect the governing party's priorities.

The **judicial branch** is a group of independent courts that act separately from the other two branches. It is their responsibility to interpret and enforce laws, to protect citizens and discipline offenders.