

3

GOVERNMENT IN CANADA



Canada is a federal state, parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy.

A **federal state** brings together a number of different political communities with a central government (federal) for general purposes and separate local governments (provincial/territorial) for local purposes.

The division of powers is based on the principle of **subsidiarity**, in which the government closest to the issue governs it. The distribution of responsibilities is found in Sections 91-95 of the *Constitution Act, 1867*.

The **federal government** takes responsibility for the whole country and matters of national and international concern, such as the armed forces, relations and trade with other countries, currency, fisheries and oceans, criminal law and public safety.

Provincial and territorial governments are responsible for their own province or territory and issues such as education, health care, social welfare and transportation.

Municipal and local governments receive their powers from their provincial or territorial governments. These governments handle local matters, such as garbage and recycling, libraries, public transit, local parks and recreation.

For some issues, the different levels of government have to work together and share the responsibility. This is called **concurrency**. For example, federal, provincial and municipal governments are concurrently responsible for the environment. The federal government enforces the *Canadian Environmental Protection Act* and regulates waterways used for fishing and shipping. Provincial governments regulate land use, mining, manufacturing and harmful emissions. Municipal governments are responsible for zoning, garbage disposal, and sewage and water treatment.

There are also other forms of government in some Indigenous communities or First Nations reserves. **Indigenous governments** often share certain responsibilities with the government in their province or territory and the federal government.

Each level of government has locally elected officials to represent the people (constituents) living in their designated areas. Elected representatives are responsible for proposing, studying, debating and voting on bills (potential laws), and raising issues put forward by their constituents.

LESSON 3: GOVERNMENT IN CANADA

Federal representatives are called **Members of Parliament** (MPs), provincial representatives in Ontario are called **Members of Provincial Parliament** (MPPs), and municipal level representatives are called **councillors** or aldermen. MPs and MPPs are often belong to political parties. Municipal representatives in Ontario do not have a party affiliation.

The leader of the federal government is called the **prime minister** and at the provincial level, a **premier**. In both of these cases, the leader of the party with the greatest number of elected representatives in the legislative body usually assumes the role of the leader of that government.

At the municipal level in Ontario, the head of local municipal council is usually called a **mayor** or **reeve**. Mayors and reeves are elected at-large, which means they are elected by all the people in the municipality.

As a constitutional monarchy, Canada's head of state is a hereditary sovereign (queen or king) who reigns in accordance with the Constitution. The sovereign is represented in Canada by the **governor general**, who is appointed by the sovereign on the advice of the prime minister. In each of the ten provinces, the sovereign is represented by a **lieutenant governor**, who is appointed by the governor general on the advice of the prime minister. Usually, the governor general and lieutenant governors serve a five-year term. There is no sovereign representative at the municipal or local level.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

Why should I know how government in Canada is structured? How do the different levels of government in Canada impact me personally?

SUMMARY

Canada has different levels of government; each with its own elected representatives and areas of responsibility.

In this lesson, students compare the federal, provincial and municipal levels of government, including leadership roles, elected officials and division of responsibilities. For each level of government, students will identify issues or areas of responsibility and explain how it affects their life. Afterwards, students reflect on why is important to know the division of responsibilities among different levels of government and their elected representatives.

LEARNING GOALS

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Develop an understanding about how government is organized in Canada and how political institutions affect their lives (Citizenship Education Framework – Structures);
- Distinguish between levels of government and their areas of responsibility (Concept of Thinking — Political Significance);
- Analyze how political decisions impact local, national or global communities (Concept of Thinking — Objectives and Results).

SUCCESS CRITERIA

- I can describe how government is organized in Canada;
- I can explain how government affects my life;
- I can assess which level of government or elected representative I would contact regarding a social issue important to me or my community;
- I can provide several examples that demonstrate the impact of a particular government decision or service on a particular community.

CURRICULUM LINKS

CHV20 – Overall Expectations

A1. Political Inquiry: use the political inquiry process and the concepts of political thinking when investigating issues, events, and developments of civic importance
A2. Developing Transferable Skills: apply in everyday contexts skills developed through investigations related to civics and citizenship education, and identify some careers in which civics and citizenship education might be an asset
B2. Governance in Canada: explain, with reference to a range of issues of civic importance, the roles and responsibilities of various institutions, structures, and figures in Canadian governance

CHV20 – Specific Expectations

A1.1 formulate different types of questions to guide investigations into issues, events, and/or developments of civic importance
A1.5 use the concepts of political thinking when analyzing and evaluating evidence, data, and information and formulating conclusions and/or judgments about issues, events, and/or developments of civic importance
A2.3 apply the concepts of political thinking when analysing current events and issues involving Canada and the world
B2.2 explain, with reference to issues of civic importance, the roles and responsibilities of different levels of government in Canada and of key figures at each level

LESSON 3: GOVERNMENT IN CANADA

B2.3 describe, with reference to both the federal and provincial governments, the functions of the three branches of government in Canada and the roles/responsibilities of key positions within governments, and explain how the branches help ensure political and social stability in Canada

B2.5 identify Canada's form of government and demonstrate an understanding of the process of electing governments in Canada

MINDS ON

1. Review the concept of government: governments manage the land, resources and people living within their borders.

2. Ask students what they know about how government is organized in Canada. Students should write down their thoughts in the K column in the KWL chart on Activity 5.1. (What do I KNOW about government in Canada?).

3. Now ask students to write down their next set of thoughts in the W column on Activity 5.1 (What do I WANT to know about government in Canada?).

4. Review the levels of government in Canada. In column format, write the following on the board, or in an equivalent forum:

federal / provincial or territorial / municipal

5. Ask students to consider which level of government they would contact in the following scenarios:

- You and your friends would like a skate ramp added to the local park
- You think there should be more financial aid available to help youth pursue post-secondary education or skills and training programs
- The streetlight near your home is broken and needs to be replaced
- You are traveling to a foreign country and require documentation
- The hospital in your town is in need of a new X-ray machine
- You would like your community to welcome more refugees

6. Discuss the impact and relevance of government as a class. Questions to prompt discussion: Do you think government affects your life? Why or why not? If you needed to, how would you go about contacting each level of government?

ACTION

1. Review the different levels of government in Canada. Use the following questions and support tools to review this information [Slide Deck 3, 'Levels of Government' video (2:36 min) and/or Handout 3.2].

- Canada is a representative democracy. What does this mean?
- What is the role of our elected representatives?
- What is the title given to the elected representative at each level?
- What is the title given to the leader at each level? How are they chosen?
- What are the areas of responsibility of each level of government?

2. Divide students into pairs and have them fill out the graphic organizer to compare the levels of government in Canada (Activity 3.3). Afterwards, have each pair peer edit the graphic organizer of another pair and provide relevant feedback.

3. For each level of government, ask students to identify three issues or areas of responsibility and explain how it relates to or directly affects their life (Activity 3.4). Ask students to select relevant pictures to represent the issue or area of responsibility. Students may also use pictures that they take themselves or find a current article or social media story that shows how the issue is affecting their life.

CONSOLIDATION

Have a brief closing discussion about the levels of government in Canada, or ask students to write a reflection on one or more of the following questions:

- Why is it important to know which level of government is responsible for what?
- Why is it valuable to know your elected representatives?

ASSESSMENT

After the lesson and activities are complete, ask students to write down what they learned about government in Canada in the L column on Activity 3.1 (What did I LEARN about government in Canada?).