

# LESSON 5

## LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT

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 for general purposes and separate local governments 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**.

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 (e.g., electoral districts, wards). Elected representatives are responsible for proposing, studying, debating and voting on bills (potential laws), and raising issues put forward by their constituents.

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 affiliated with 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 council is usually called a **mayor** or **warden**. Mayors are elected at large by all the people in the municipality during a general election. Wardens are selected among elected council members after the election.

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 five-year term. There is no sovereign representative at the municipal or local level.