

# Lesson 4

## Levels of Government



### GUIDING QUESTIONS

- 1 What is a representative democracy?
- 2 How is government structured in Canada?
- 3 How do the different levels of government affect me?

### OVERVIEW

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

In this lesson, students examine the different levels of government, including leadership roles, elected representatives and division of responsibilities. Afterwards, students contribute to a class bulletin where they use articles, images or social media posts to identify government services or decisions that influence their lives. In the *Consolidation* activity, students analyze which level of government has the most impact in their life and whether it is important to know which level of government is responsible for what.

### LEARNING INTENTIONS

By the end of the lesson, students can:

- describe our government system in Canada;
- distinguish between the levels of government; and,
- identify government responsibilities and explain how they relate to or directly affect their lives.

## Starter

*'Write the Room' activity:*

1. Post three pieces of chart paper around the room and label each one with the name of a level of government (federal, provincial, local or First Nations).
2. As students enter the classroom, ask students to write something they know about each level of government. Students can also write on sticky notes and post them on the chart paper.
3. Review students' existing knowledge as a class.

## Activities

1. Review the structure of government in Canada using the 'Levels of Government' video and/or Slide Deck 4.

Have students create a 'sketchnote' to summarize the information. Sketchnotes are rich visual notes created from a mix of handwriting, drawings, and visual elements like arrows, boxes, and lines. An exemplar provided on the project website under Lesson 4.

Alternatively, students could create a digital presentation (slides) with images and text.

2. Review Handout 4.1 and discuss the division of responsibilities as a class. Explain to students that the levels of government work together on many issues, such as healthcare. For example, the federal government focuses on providing funding to the provinces and territories (through the Canada Health Transfer), as well as health protection, disease surveillance and prevention, including approving and buying vaccines. The provincial government handles health-care delivery, including hospitals and doctors, health promotion and public health initiatives such as vaccination campaigns. Local governments focus on paramedic services, sanitation, disease control, as well as setting up vaccination clinics.
3. Create a class bulletin board where students can identify how government services or decisions influence their lives. Students can contribute by attaching photos, news articles, headlines, social media posts, and other related content for each level of government. Ask each student to make two contributions for each level of government.

## Consolidation

1. Ask students to write down a new piece of knowledge on a sticky note for each level of government and put it on the chart paper from the *Starter* activity.
2. Ask students to write a response to one or both of the following questions (Activity 4.2).
  - Which level of government has the most impact in my life, and why? Explain with two examples.
  - Is it important to know which level of government is responsible for what? Explain.

## Extended Learning

Ask students to pick an issue that matters to them and analyze how the government could take action to improve the conditions. Students should advocate for government action through a format of their own choosing. This could include writing a letter or email to the minister(s) in charge of their related issue or the elected representative at the appropriate level(s), or producing a rant, pitch slide deck or multi-media artwork.

For inspiration, watch one or more of the following videos about youth who have taken action on an issue of importance to them:

- Noah Irvine (Mental health): [www.youtube.com/watch?v=qDrEpcvCUEE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qDrEpcvCUEE)
- Alex Deans (Technology for the visually impaired): [www.youtube.com/watch?v=BY-FpX4bZSs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BY-FpX4bZSs)
- Levi Marshall (The Preservation Project): [www.youtube.com/watch?v=s7zfStwmMMg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s7zfStwmMMg)
- Arezoo Najibzadeh (Representation of women in politics): [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jlc-3gOXiXk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jlc-3gOXiXk)
- Denise Lee (Environmental sustainability): [www.youtube.com/watch?v=FT36epLUGDc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FT36epLUGDc)

## ADAPTATIONS AND SUPPORTS

<b>Language Learners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide students with terms and definitions in advance (e.g., elected representative, government, federal, provincial, territorial, local, First Nations, prime minister, premier, mayor, MP, MLA, councillor). Students can use a Frayer Model organizer to understand these terms.</li><li>• Share the lesson videos before class discussions and activities (“Levels of Government”).</li><li>• Ensure that subtitles are on during videos.</li><li>• Provide examples or photos for each area of responsibility.</li></ul>
<b>Culturally Responsive Pedagogy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review the demographic data of one or more elected bodies and discuss the need for more diversity in politics.</li><li>• Review the governance structure of a First Nations community you know about.</li></ul>
<b>Accommodations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• If working in pairs or small groups in the classroom is not possible, consider using Google Docs or Google Jamboard for collaborative activities and discussion. If students require further practice to consolidate understanding, assign a small group of students to create a review game such as Kahoot.</li></ul>



## BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

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 idea that the level of 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 concern, such as the armed forces, international relations and trade, 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 delivery, social welfare, transportation and highways.

**Municipalities and regional districts**, collectively known as **local governments**, receive their powers from their respective provincial or territorial governments. These governments handle local matters, such as garbage and recycling, water and sewage, public transit, local parks and recreation.

Some **First Nations** communities have their own systems of governance. These councils or governments share certain responsibilities with the provincial/territorial or federal government. A variety of treaties, agreements, and legislation outline who is responsible for providing services and decision-making in Indigenous communities.

For some issues, the different levels of government have to work together and share the responsibility. 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. Local governments are responsible for zoning, garbage disposal, and sewage and water treatment.

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

Representatives at the federal level are called **Members of Parliament** (MPs). Representatives at the provincial level in British Columbia are called Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs).

At the municipal level in British Columbia, elected representatives are called councillors. In unincorporated areas in British Columbia, elected representatives are called electoral area directors and they sit on the regional district board.

Most federal and provincial elected representatives belong to a political party, as well as some municipal officials in certain municipalities (e.g., Vancouver, Surrey, West Vancouver). A **political party** is a group of like-minded individuals with a shared vision and political ideology whose intention is to achieve power and create meaningful political change.

The leader of the federal government is called the **prime minister**, whereas **premier** is the title given to the leader of the provincial government. At both

levels of government, the leader of the political party with the greatest number of elected representatives in the legislative body usually assumes the role of the leader of that government. Therefore, we do not vote for the position of premier or prime minister directly.

In British Columbia municipalities, the head of council is called a **mayor**. The head of council is elected at large, which means by all the people in the municipality. The head of regional district board is called a chair and they are selected among the members of the regional district board.

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 terms. There is no sovereign representative at the municipal/local or territorial level.

In Canada's three territories, territorial commissioners serve a similar role to a lieutenant governor. Commissioners do not represent the sovereign, however. They are appointed by and represent the federal government.