



Why does provincial government matter?

Responsibilities of Provincial Government

Governments have responsibilities to the people who elect them. These responsibilities were set out in the *Constitution Act of 1867*. The *Constitution Act* says that provinces are responsible for:

- Health
- Child welfare
- Municipal government
- Transportation
- Labour
- Property and **civil rights** (these include rights that citizens are entitled to – for example, freedom of speech, religion, equality and security)
- Education

Each provincial government decides how to carry out these responsibilities. This is often done by establishing **government ministries**, or departments, that look after each area of responsibility.

The provincial government also takes responsibility for its environment and resources. It has to look after its own **finances**, like taxes and budgets. The provincial government also provides many different services for the residents of the province, such as issuing birth certificates, making sure the public is safe and enforcing the laws.

ministries
 constitution
 responsibilities
 provinces
 rights



Pause and Reflect

What do you remember learning about the importance of the *Constitution Act of 1867*?



Find Out More

Find out more about the responsibilities of the provincial government on the **Building Future Voters** elementary webpage.

Go to www.buildingfuturevoters.ca and explore the information, images and examples in **Government Matters**.



How does government affect your daily life and experiences? Answer each of the questions in the questionnaire. Under each question, you will find some items. Beside each item, identify which level or levels of government you think influences it!

	Always	Occasionally	Never
1. Do you use an alarm clock to wake up? Radio programs _____ Power _____			
2. Do you eat cereal for breakfast? Bilingual food labels _____ Grain crops _____			
3. Do you take a bus or get a ride to school? Traffic signs, sidewalks and roads _____ Licenses on cars or buses _____			
4. Do you visit the doctor's office for a check-up? Health care _____			
5. Do you use a recreation centre in your community? Recreation programs _____			
6. Do you go camping in parks? Provincial park _____ National park _____			
7. Do you play on a sports team? Playing fields _____ Arena _____			
8. Have you ever had a part-time job? Workplace safety laws _____			
9. Do you visit with seniors or Elders? Seniors' Centre _____			
10. Have you ever seen an election held in your school or community league? Elections _____			



The webpage below shows a list of Alberta government ministries in 2016. What do you think each government ministry is responsible for? Write the government ministry beside its area of responsibility in the chart.

Alberta Provincial Ministries in 2016

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the 'Government' tab selected. A search bar is visible in the top right corner. The main content area lists the following Alberta Provincial Ministries in 2016:

- Advanced Education
- Agriculture and Forestry
- Culture and Tourism
- Economic Development and Trade
- Education
- Energy
- Environment and Parks
- Health
- Human Services
- Indigenous Relations
- Infrastructure
- Justice and Solicitor General
- Labour
- Municipal Affairs
- Seniors and Housing
- Service Alberta
- Status of Women
- Transportation
- Treasury Board and Finance

Responsibility	Government Ministry	Responsibility	Government Ministry
Health		Property and Civil Rights	
Child Welfare		Education	
Municipal Government		Environment and Resources	
Transportation		Finances	
Labour		Services for Residents	



Find out more about the responsibilities of two government ministries. Record and organize your research using a **Triple T-Chart** graphic organizer like the one below.

In the middle column of the chart, answer the following questions. Add some of your own questions.

1. What is the main purpose of this government ministry or department?
2. What are two to three of the most important responsibilities of this ministry or department?
3. What are examples of services, facilities or programs that this ministry provides to residents of Alberta?
4. What does this ministry or department have to do with your daily life?
5. _____
6. _____

Find Out More



Find out more about the responsibilities of the provincial government by exploring what each ministry does in Alberta.

Go to the Alberta government website and search for government ministries. Find this information at www.alberta.ca/ministries.cfm.

Government Ministry	Purpose and Responsibilities Services, Facilities or Programs	Source of Information

Responsibilities of a Representative

Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) have full-time, important jobs. MLAs represent all of the people who live in the electoral division in which they were elected, whether or not those people are eligible to vote, voted for another candidate or did not vote at all. MLAs are responsible for helping their constituents with problems or concerns.

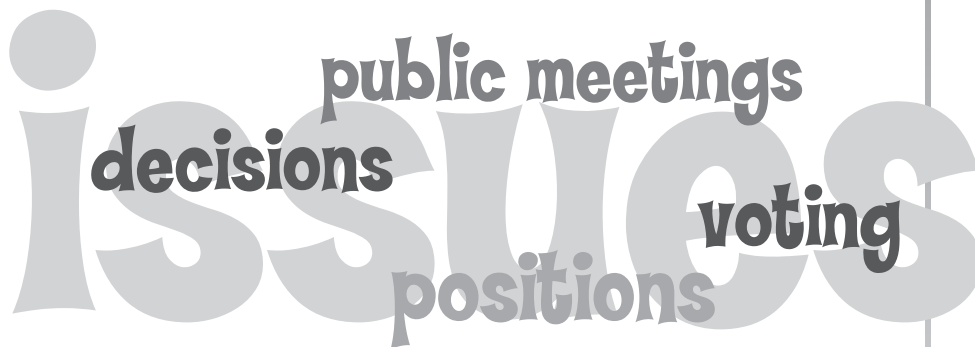
In the Legislative Assembly, MLAs share the views of their constituents by introducing bills and debating and discussing concerns with other MLAs. An MLA communicates with other elected members and various government ministries. MLAs perform most of their duties in their constituencies. Here they listen to the problems, questions, ideas and opinions of the people who live in the electoral division they represent.

MLAs also deal with **special-interest groups**, which are organizations and groups that promote specific views and actions. Do you know of any groups in your community that are concerned about the environment, child care, health, drunk driving, education or any other important issue? These groups can meet with an MLA, who may support their cause by proposing a new law or resolution in the Legislative Assembly or by writing a letter to a government ministry.

In addition to meeting with their constituents, MLAs spend time becoming informed about matters of public interest, preparing speeches and going to meetings to talk about policies and issues.

■ Making Decisions

MLAs often have to take a stand on issues and decisions, and the perspective or view they support depends on the platforms of the political party to which they belong, their constituents' points of view and their own personal beliefs. Through public meetings, day-to-day contact and local media forums, MLAs gather information from as many constituents as possible. They then discuss the issue in private meetings, called **caucus meetings**, with other MLAs from the same party.



The caucus members decide as a group what their party's position will be. Voting in the Legislature tends to be along party lines, according to what the caucus decided beforehand. However, MLAs may vote as they see fit, rather than according to the position of their caucus. If some MLAs feel that the position of the caucus does not reflect what their constituents want or that it would not be beneficial to the people who live and work in their electoral division, they can and sometimes do speak against it.

Cabinet ministers are MLAs who are in charge of specific government ministries and can influence ministry policies and programs. Ministers may remain as ministers but not MLAs when the Legislative Assembly has been dissolved for an election. As well as representing their constituents, ministers are ultimately responsible for the policies and actions of the ministry they lead.



Did You Know

There are many different individuals and groups that a Minister has to deal with. For example, the Minister of Energy must be responsible to constituents as well as deal with all matters related to that ministry. Below is a partial list of people who the Minister of Energy might have to deal with:

- Technical staff in the Department of Energy and the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board
- Natural gas, oil, electricity, mineral and petrochemical developers, producers and retailers
- Transporters of energy (e.g., pipelines, electrical transmission)
- Environmental and other nongovernment organizations
- Advocates of alternative energy sources
- Technical experts in industry and academia
- Committees and other groups formed to address energy matters
- MLAs from opposition parties, particularly the critics of the Energy department
- Energy and mining representatives from federal, provincial or territorial and municipal governments
- People in the energy field from other countries
- Representatives from the media
- Individual consumers and taxpayers from across the province

Private Government Members

Private government members are often called **backbenchers** because in the Legislative Assembly they sit in the back rows, behind the cabinet ministers. However, the correct term for any member who is not in cabinet is "private member." A private government member is an MLA who belongs to the governing party.

Private members sit on cabinet policy committees and can sponsor government **bills**, proposals for laws that will be discussed and debated before becoming law.

In addition, private government members, as well as opposition members, introduce their own bills. These are called **private bills**.

The role of an **opposition party** is to analyze and critique government activity, propose improvements and present itself to the public as an alternative to the party in power. Opposition parties often assign some of their MLAs to be critics of specific departments. Together, opposition critics are called a **shadow cabinet**. For example, an environment critic discusses issues with the Minister of Environment, suggests alternative policies and priorities and keeps these issues public. Opposition critics, like the ministers they shadow, hear concerns and ideas from various persons and interest groups from anywhere in the province.

■ Committees of the Legislative Assembly

MLAs also serve on **committees**. Committees of the Legislative Assembly are made up of MLAs from various parties. During session, the whole Legislative Assembly, which includes all MLAs, meets as a committee to study the details of proposed laws and spending programs.



Why does provincial government matter? Choose **one** of the following two questions to respond to. Write your response to the question in the top section of the box below. In the bottom, create a drawing, symbol, icon or poem that supports your response.

The provincial level of government can influence your daily life in many ways. As a grade 6 student, what is most important to you about the provincial level of government? Why?

Even though you are not old enough to vote, your provincial representative or MLA is still responsible to you. If you could write a letter to your MLA about current issues that concern you, what would you say?
