

Federal Government

Big Question

How does the federal government promote the common good?

Learning Goals

- assess the effectiveness of actions taken by the federal government
- gather and organize information
- describe the roles and responsibilities of the federal government



Hi, I'm Angelo.

I live with my family in Ottawa, Ontario. We moved here from the Philippines. My parents said that they used a lot of the federal government's services to help us settle in to Canada.

The first thing they did was apply for Social Insurance Numbers. Anyone who wants to work in Canada needs one of these numbers. Next, we needed a home. My dad found our apartment through a government service that helps newcomers to Canada find places to live. Once we got settled into our apartment, my parents took English lessons in one of the government buildings downtown. Now, they are studying for their citizenship tests. When they pass, we will all participate in a citizenship ceremony. I can't wait to become a Canadian!

My family had a lot of help from the Canadian government when we first came here. I wonder what other services the federal government has to help the citizens of Canada.



Immigration has a long history in Canada. The sign in this photo is from a display in the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21 in Halifax, Nova Scotia. It is a reproduction of the sign that hung in Halifax's immigration centre between 1946 and 1971. The greeting, "Welcome to Canada," is reproduced in seven languages: Polish, Dutch, Italian, English, French, German, and Ukrainian.

What Is Federal Government?

Think about the last time you went to the grocery store. Where did the food come from? Who made it, grew it, or raised it? And, most importantly, is it safe? You may have never considered these questions before, but the federal government has. The *Safe Food for Canadians Act* makes sure that food is grown, packaged, and prepared as safely as possible.



This photo shows a worker in Prince Edward Island preparing salmon for packaging. What rules do you think this worker must follow?

The word *federal* comes from *federation*. A **federation** is a group made up of smaller groups that agree to work together. Canada is a federation of provinces and territories. Each province or territory has its own government, but the federal government makes decisions that affect all of Canada.

In order to ensure that Canadians are governed fairly, the government follows a set of rules. These rules are written down in the *Constitution Act*. The *Constitution Act*, also known as the **Canadian Constitution**, is the most powerful set of laws in Canada.



This photo shows a Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) car in front of a federal government building in Ottawa, Ontario. Why do you think the car is there? What might be the difference between this federal police force and a local one?

Inquire and Apply

- 1 Why do you think food safety is a federal responsibility? Explain.
- 2 Look at the photo on page 48. If you were creating a sign to welcome immigrants to Canada today, how would it look different than the sign in the photo? Create your sign.

Asking Questions

As you read, ask yourself questions about the text to improve your understanding. For example:

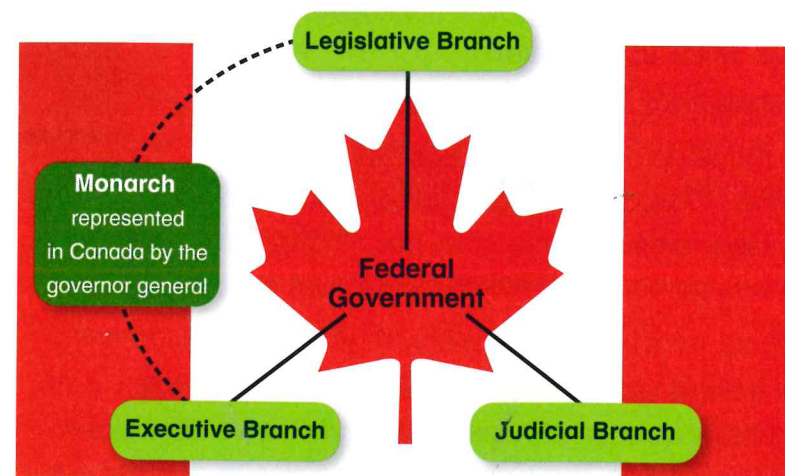
- What connection can I make?
- Does this make sense?
- What do I wonder about?

Representatives of the Monarchy in Canada

The British monarch (king or queen) is Canada's official **Head of State**. A Head of State is the person who holds the highest position in a country's government. Since the monarch does not live in Canada, a representative for the monarch is appointed. This representative is called the **governor general** and is part of the federal government.

How Is Canada's Federal Government Structured?

Canada's federal government has three branches that work together to govern Canada. The Canadian Constitution defines the powers of these three branches.



The Legislative Branch

The legislative branch has two parts: the House of Commons and the Senate. Together, they are often known as Parliament. The main job of Parliament is to propose bills and pass them into laws.

The Executive Branch

The executive branch executes, or acts on, the laws and policies passed by the legislative branch.

The Judicial Branch

The judicial branch is Canada's court system. It includes provincial courts, the Federal Court of Canada, and the Supreme Court of Canada. The courts are responsible for settling disputes according to Canada's laws.

Inquire and Apply

- 1 Why do you think there is one branch of government to make laws and another branch to apply those laws?
- 2 Create a flow chart or other visual to show how the three branches of government work together.

Who Are Members of the Federal Government?

Just like in local, provincial, and territorial governments, some members of the federal government are elected. Others work to provide the services the government offers.

Members of Parliament

Like provincial governments, the federal government uses a party system. In a federal election, Canadians vote for the party member that they would like to represent them in decisions that affect the entire country. The party members who get elected are known as **members of Parliament (MPs)**. Every province and territory has at least one MP. The political party with the largest number of elected MPs usually forms the government. The leader of that party is the **prime minister**.

Public Servants

The government cannot function with MPs alone. It takes thousands of people to help deliver the services that Canadians use every day. These people are called public servants. There are more than 275 000 public servants in Canada.



Public servants include scientists, translators, inspectors, researchers, advisers, park rangers, and customs officers. Why do you think scientists, like the one in this photo, might be hired by the federal government?

Inquire and Apply

- 1 How does having MPs from all across the country serve the common good of Canadians?
- 2 Research the opinions of one of the political parties listed in the margin. Find a classmate who has researched another party. Compare both parties. Then, decide which party you would support if you could vote. Explain.



These logos represent the three political parties that had the most elected MPs in 2014. They are the Conservative Party, the New Democrat Party (NDP), and the Liberal Party. Each of these parties has different opinions about what actions the government should take to promote the common good in Canada.

Citizenship in Action



In 2012, students at Pine Grove Public School in Vaughan, Ontario, participated in Bring Your MP to School Day. Students had the opportunity to ask their MP questions. Grade 5 student Esha asked her MP what he would say if a student wanted to become an MP.

How Are Laws Created and Applied?

Each branch of the federal government plays a role in creating or applying Canada's laws.

The Legislative Branch

The legislative branch of the federal government creates laws in a similar way to provincial or territorial legislatures. Ideas for new laws are read, debated, carefully reviewed by committees, and voted on. Bills must be voted on by both the House of Commons and the Senate. Once Parliament votes to pass a bill, it is signed by the governor general. This is called **Royal Assent**. Once a bill receives Royal Assent, it becomes an act. This new act, or law, must then be upheld by the government and all of Canada's citizens.

Examples of Federal Laws

Canada Wildlife Act	The <i>Canada Wildlife Act</i> allows for the creation, management, and protection of wildlife areas for wildlife research activities, or for conservation or interpretation of wildlife.
Canadian Environment Week Act	Throughout Canada, in every year, the week that includes June 5 shall be kept and observed under the name of Canadian Environment Week.
Pest Control Products Act	The <i>Pest Control Products Act</i> protects human health and safety and the environment by regulating products used for the control of pests. (Pests include troublesome plants, animals, or insects.)
First Nations Control of First Nations Education Act (Bill C-33)	The <i>First Nations Control of First Nations Education Act</i> is a bill that was introduced in the legislature in 2014. It calls for First Nations to have more control over how their students' education is carried out.

Each of these acts fulfills or will fulfill a need in Canadian society. Choose one of the acts above and explain why you think it is needed.

The Executive Branch

Once laws have been created, the executive branch decides how they will be applied. There are several **departments**, or parts of the government, that govern different areas, such as the environment or immigration. **Cabinet ministers** are MPs who are chosen by the prime minister to lead these departments. They have to decide how their departments will apply new laws.

The Judicial Branch

Each of the courts that make up the judicial branch have different roles to play in ensuring that Canada's laws are followed.

The Supreme Court of Canada is Canada's highest court. It hears cases that are important to the whole country. It also decides whether a lower court has made the right decision. The Supreme Court's decisions cannot be overruled.



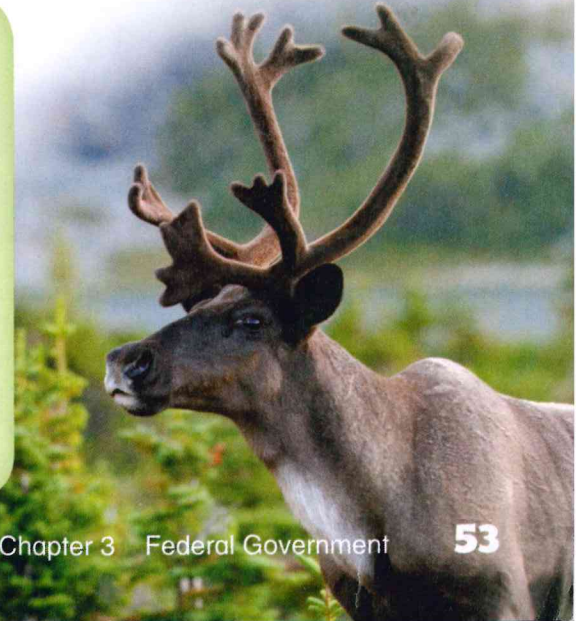
There are nine judges, or justices, on the Supreme Court. By law, three of the Supreme Court judges must be from Québec. By tradition, three are usually from Ontario, two from Western Canada, and one from the Atlantic provinces. Why do you think this law and tradition is in place?

The Federal Court hears cases that involve the federal government or areas controlled by the federal government. For example, it might settle disputes between provinces or territories, or between a province and the federal government. It also hears cases relating to citizenship.

In 2014, environmental groups challenged a government department in Federal Court. The environmental groups were concerned that Environment Canada was not acting quickly enough to protect at-risk wildlife, including the southern mountain woodland caribou shown below. Do you think there should be a time limit for government actions?

Inquire and Apply

- 1 Read the list of laws on page 52. How do you think that these laws serve the common good of Canadians? What can you do if you think that an act passed by government doesn't serve the common good?
- 2 Choose an issue that you are interested in, such as protecting fish or providing housing for the homeless. Find an example of a federal law that was created to help solve the issue. Do you think the law is having an effect on your issue? Explain.



What Services Does the Federal Government Provide?

In addition to making and applying laws, the federal government is responsible for providing services to all Canadians. The photos on these pages are just a few examples of services the government provides.



This photo shows a migrant farm worker in British Columbia. **Migrant workers** come to Canada for short periods of time to do seasonal work, such as planting or harvesting. In 2014, the federal government revised the rules that govern how migrant workers are hired. The new rules mean that more employers will hire Canadian citizens before hiring migrant workers.



In 2013, the federal government introduced a new plan to reduce homelessness. Its first goal is to work with communities to provide homeless people with permanent homes.



Mail delivery is the responsibility of the federal government. In 2013, Canada Post began eliminating door-to-door mail delivery in many communities. This affects everyone, but is of particular concern to seniors or those with disabilities. Why do you think the government changed the service it provides?



The federal government is responsible for printing Canada's currency, or money. A tactile feature on Canadian bills helps people who are blind or partially sighted to identify each bill through touch. In what way does this feature serve the common good?



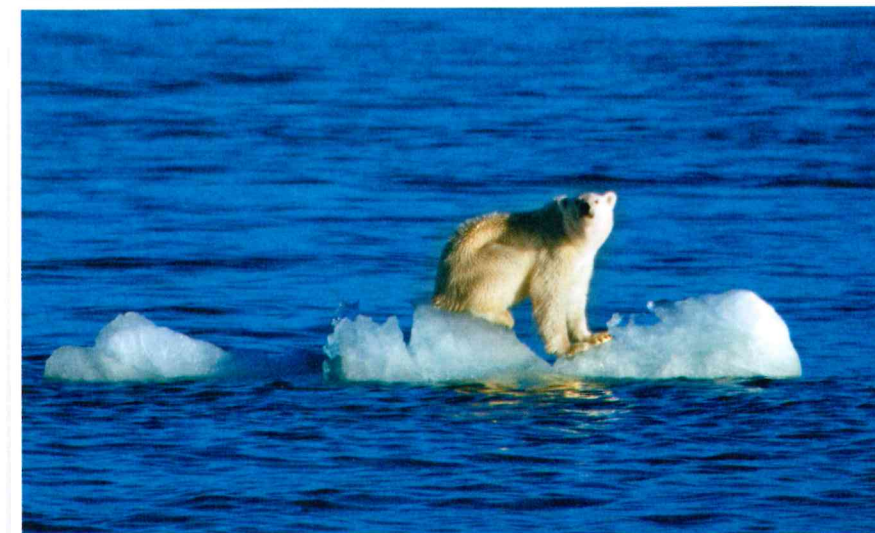
The federal government provides many services for new immigrants. For example, it provides help with learning English and French, finding a job or a place to live, and filling out forms. It also provides newcomers with information about living in Canada and about community services.



The federal government is responsible for ensuring that all Canadians are safe from violence and can live in peace. The Canadian Armed Forces and the RCMP are two services that exist for that purpose.



The federal government is responsible for soldiers after they leave Canada's Armed Forces. This photo shows Master Corporal Paul Franklin with physical therapist Bev Agur. Since returning home from Afghanistan in 2006, Franklin has worked to bring attention to how Canadian veterans are treated.



This photo shows a polar bear on a melting iceberg in Canada's Arctic. Climate change is causing sea ice to melt. The federal government released a plan to help Canadians adapt to the effects of climate change. Do you think the government should be finding ways to adjust to climate change or looking for ways to slow it down? Explain.

Inquire and Apply

- 1 Why do you think that the services described on this page are offered by the federal government and not a local government?
- 2 Gather information on one of the services shown on page 54 or 55 or another federal service of your choice. How would you assess whether the service is meeting the needs of Canadians?