**How to…. navigate the Canadian government system**

When you are advocating on an issue, it can sometimes be confusing trying to determine and gain access to the elected official who can help you. This guide is designed to demystify the political system so your message reaches the right person.

Canadian government is divided into three levels: federal, provincial and municipal. Many areas of responsibility are duplicated (such as transport), so it is important to really consider if the issue you are advocating on affects people with sight loss nationally, provincially or locally.

# **Federal government**

The federal parliament in Ottawa is divided into two parts, or ‘houses’: the House of Commons and the Senate. The House of Commons is made up of Members of Parliament (MPs) who are elected by constituents in the 338 constituencies or ridings across Canada. MPs introduce, debate and vote on bills that will become legislation. They also represent the views of their constituents on a national level. The head of the House of Commons is the Prime Minister.

The Senate is made up of Senators, who are nominated by the Governor General of Canada (normally under the advice of the Prime Minister). Senators play an important role in the legislative process and introduce debate and vote on bills. Bills must pass through both the House of Commons and the Senate before they become law.

MPs from the party in power can also be Cabinet Members who help develop policies, assist Cabinet Members as Parliamentary Secretaries, lead federal government departments and set priorities for the Government. MPs from the opposition party can serve as Opposition critics and ‘shadow’ roles that are the equivalent roles to the Cabinet but within their own party.

Some relevant areas for which the Federal government is responsible:

* Banking
* Health (e.g., Canada Health Act)
* Intergovernmental affairs
* Justice
* Labour
* Public Safety
* Public Works and Government Services
* Post Office
* Transport, Infrastructure, and Communities
* Veterans Affairs

To find who your MP is, you can search by your postal code at [www.elections.ca](https://www.elections.ca/) or [www.ourcommons.ca/members.](https://www.ourcommons.ca/members/en)

Please keep in mind that it’s not always the most effective strategy to ‘go to the top’ and approach a federal MP if the issue is not a national one.

# **Provincial government**

Like the federal government, Members of Provincial Parliament (MPPs) are elected by their electoral district or riding as representatives in the provincial Legislative Assembly. In some provinces, they are called Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) or Member of the House Assembly (MHA).

As with federal MPs, MPPs introduce, debate and vote on bills, and represent their constituents’ views at the provincial level. Provincial governments also mirror the federal government in that they have a Cabinet, Opposition Critics, and MPPs are appointed as leaders of provincial government departments. There are no Senates in the provincial governments.

Some relevant areas for which Provincial governments are responsible:

* Culture
* Education
* Health (including hospitals)
* Intergovernmental relations
* Social services
* Tourism, Parks and Recreation
* Transportation

To find out who your MPP is, you can search on your provincial legislature’s website:

Alberta

[www.elections.ab.ca](http://www.elections.ab.ca)

British Columbia

[www.leg.bc.ca/learn-about-us/members](http://www.leg.bc.ca/learn-about-us/members)

Manitoba

[www.electionsmanitoba.ca](http://www.electionsmanitoba.ca)

New Brunswick

[www.electionsnb.ca](http://www.electionsnb.ca) or [www.gnb.ca](http://www.gnb.ca)

Newfoundland & Labrador

[www.elections.gov.nl.ca](http://www.elections.gov.nl.ca) to find your riding and [www.assembly.nl.ca](http://www.assembly.nl.ca) to find your MHA

Northwest Territories

[www.electionsnwt.ca](http://www.electionsnwt.ca) to find your riding and [www.assembly.gov.nt.ca](http://www.assembly.gov.nt.ca) to find your MLA

Nova Scotia

[www.electionsnovascotia.ca](http://www.electionsnovascotia.ca)

Nunavut

Go to [www.assembly.nu.ca](http://www.assembly.nu.ca) and click on ‘Members’

Ontario

[www.elections.on.ca](http://www.elections.on.ca) to find your riding and go to [www.ola.org/en/members](http://www.ola.org/en/members) to find your MPP

Saskatchewan

[www.elections.sk.ca/voters/findmyconstituency](http://www.elections.sk.ca/voters/findmyconstituency)

Yukon

Go to [www.electionsyukon.ca](http://www.electionsyukon.ca) and click on ‘Electoral District Maps’ to find your riding and [www.yukonassembly.ca/mlas](http://www.yukonassembly.ca/mlas) to find your MLA

# **Municipal government**

Municipal government officials are called councilors or aldermen. As in the federal and provincial governments, they are elected collectively in the whole municipality or by ward/riding in the municipality. Councilors represent their constituents at the municipal level, pass by-laws, develop policies and deliver programs and services. The elected head of the council is the Mayor (or sometimes called Reeve).

Some relevant areas for which Municipal governments are responsible:

* Animal Control
* Business licenses
* By law enforcement
* Community accessibility
* Community support services
* Museums, libraries, and other cultural centres
* Parks and pathways
* Police services
* Public lighting
* Public transit
* Recreation programs and facilities
* Roads and streets
* Social Services

There are over 3,000 municipalities in Canada. To find who represents you, please refer to your municipality’s website.