

Understanding Ontario's Provincial Government

While Canada's federal government is generally responsible for matters of national interest, the various provincial legislatures oversee issues of a more regional nature. In Canada, the field of veterinary medicine is governed provincially by laws such as the Veterinarians Act in Ontario.

Canada is a constitutional monarchy, meaning that governing powers are vested in the Crown (personified by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II). In practice, the Crown's powers are entrusted to Parliament and the government federally, as well as in each province.

Parliament: The Crown's legislative power is entrusted to Parliament, which is the law-making body responsible for debating, updating, and passing laws on behalf of the people of Ontario. "Parliament" refers to Ontario's 124 elected MPPs, as well as the Lieutenant Governor. The Lieutenant Governor is the representative of The Queen in Ontario. This individual is responsible for granting Royal Assent, which is the final step before a bill passed by MPPs in the Legislative Assembly becomes law.

Parliament is responsible for holding the government accountable.

Government: The Crown's executive power is entrusted to the government. The government is the administrative body responsible for developing policies and introducing bills in the Legislative Assembly for debate so that these policies eventually become law.

The Government of Ontario consists of the Premier of Ontario, their Cabinet, and the departments managed by each Cabinet minister. The government is formed by the political party from which the most MPPs were elected in the most recent election.

Roles of MPPs, Cabinet Ministers and the Premier

There are currently 124 seats in Ontario's Legislative Assembly, each representing an electoral district (riding) of the province with a roughly equal population size. At election time, one MPP for each riding is elected to represent citizens in their region, called their constituents, within Ontario's Legislative Assembly.

MPPs are most often elected as members of a particular political party. Each political party differs in its priorities and its approach to governing. The most common political parties in Ontario are the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario, the New Democratic Party of Ontario, the Ontario Liberal Party, and the Green Party of Ontario. The Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario is the governing party currently with a majority government.

Depending on whether the political party they represent forms the government, an MPP may also hold additional duties. A breakdown of the roles of MPPs, Cabinet ministers, and the Premier is on the next page.

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MPP: The main duties of an MPP are to participate in Parliamentary debate, to represent their riding and their political party, and to understand and respond to the needs of their constituents.

While most MPPs do not have a direct say in the regulation of the veterinary profession in Ontario, they do have a keen interest in learning about the concerns and needs of their constituents, and in representing these interests to Parliament. MPPs also have working relationships and easy access to many of the most important decision-makers in government, including the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, and the Premier.

MPPs may be assigned additional duties by their party leader. For example, MPPs from the governing political party may take on the additional role of Cabinet minister or parliamentary assistant (MPPs that assist Cabinet ministers with their duties). MPPs from opposition political parties are often assigned "critic" or "shadow cabinet" portfolios, dealing with a particular subject matter (such as agriculture, natural resources, or environment). Opposition critics are responsible for developing their party's position on their assigned policy area, and for holding the relevant Cabinet minister in government accountable.

MPPs from all parties also participate in legislative committees, which are small subject-specific working groups of MPPs tasked with reviewing bills or other specific issues.

Cabinet Minister: Cabinet functions as an executive council to the Premier to advise in the setting of public policy. Cabinet ministers are selected by the Premier and are usually MPPs from the political party that forms the government. Each Cabinet minister heads a department focused on a particular policy area. Cabinet ministers are also typically the ultimate decision-makers on issues within their areas of concern. The Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs is responsible for oversight of the veterinary profession in Ontario.

As a collective, Cabinet is responsible for government policies. While disagreement can occur behind closed doors, in public all Cabinet ministers must be united behind the government's decisions.

Premier: The Premier is the head of government in a province, and is the leader of the political party with the most elected MPPs. The Premier is the "first minister" in the provincial government, in the sense that they have the final say on the government's policy direction and management. The Premier is viewed as a figurehead for the provincial government and regularly speaks on behalf of the Cabinet or government as a whole.

