

Members of Parliament

Selection Process

There are normally 308 Members of Parliament (MPs) in the Canadian House of Commons.

They are elected in a general election, which is usually called every four or five years, or in a by-election when a seat in the House of Commons becomes empty due to resignation or death.

Roles and Responsibilities

1. Representing constituents in Parliament

MPs represent the regional and local concerns of the constituents in their ridings (also called electoral districts) in the House of Commons.

MPs solve problems for constituents on a wide variety of federal government matters from checking on individual problems with federal government departments to providing information on federal government programs and policies.

MPs also maintain a high profile in their ridings and take part in local events and official functions there.

2. Making laws

While it is public servants and cabinet ministers who have direct responsibility for drafting new legislation, MPs can influence legislation through debates in the House of Commons and during all-party committee meetings to examine legislation.

Votes on legislation in the House of Commons are usually a formality following party lines, but during a minority government, the votes can be of strategic importance.

MPs can also introduce legislation of their own, called private member's bills, however it is rare that a private member's bill passes.

3. Watchdogs on government

MPs can influence federal government policy by participating in House of Commons committees that review federal government department activities and spending, as well as legislation.

MPs also raise policy issues in caucus meetings of MPs of their own party and can lobby cabinet ministers.

MPs in opposition parties use the daily Question Period in the House of Commons to raise issues of concern and bring them to the attention of the public.

4. Party supporters

An MP usually belongs to a political party and plays a role in the operation of the party.

A few MPs may sit as independents and do not have party responsibilities.

5. Offices

MPs maintain two offices with corresponding staff—one on Parliament Hill in Ottawa and one in the constituency.

Cabinet ministers also maintain an office and staff in the departments for which they are responsible.