

3.1.1 The Executive

The Crown. The British North America (BNA) Act of 1867 (Sect. 9) provides that "the Executive Government and authority of and over Canada is . . . vested in the Queen". The functions of the Crown (that is, the formal executive represented by the Queen), which are substantially the same as those of the Crown in relation to the British government, are discharged in Canada by the Governor General.

The Sovereign. Since Confederation Canada has had six sovereigns: Victoria, Edward VII, George V, Edward VIII, George VI and Elizabeth II. The present sovereign, Queen Elizabeth, is not only Queen of Canada but of several other countries in the Commonwealth. Her Majesty's title for Canada was approved by Parliament and established by a Royal proclamation on May 28, 1953: Elizabeth the Second, by the Grace of God of the United Kingdom, Canada and Her other Realms and Territories Queen, Head of the Commonwealth, Defender of the Faith.

From time to time the Queen personally discharges the functions of the Crown in respect of Canada on occasions such as the appointment of the Governor General, which Her Majesty does on the recommendation of the Prime Minister of Canada. On the occasion of a Royal visit, the Queen may participate in those ceremonies that are normally carried out in her name by the Governor General, such as the opening and dissolution of Parliament, the assent to bills passed by the House of Commons and the Senate, and the granting of a general amnesty.

The Governor General is the representative of the Crown in Canada. The present incumbent, The Right Honourable Jules Léger, is the 21st Governor General since Confederation. He was appointed by Queen Elizabeth on October 5, 1973 and took office on January 14, 1974. Constitutionally, the Queen of Canada is the Canadian head of state but the Governor General fulfils her role in this regard on her behalf. The letters patent revised and re-issued under the Great Seal of Canada on October 1, 1947 authorized the Governor General "to exercise on the advice of his Canadian ministers, all Her Majesty's powers and authorities in respect of Canada".

Following are the Governors General of Canada since Confederation, with dates of appointment:

The Viscount Monck of Ballytrammion, June 1, 1867
 The Baron Lisgar of Lisgar and Bailieborough, December 29, 1868
 The Earl of Dufferin, May 22, 1872
 The Marquis of Lorne, October 5, 1878
 The Marquis of Lansdowne, August 18, 1883
 The Baron Stanley of Preston, May 1, 1888
 The Earl of Aberdeen, May 22, 1893
 The Earl of Minto, July 30, 1898
 The Earl Grey, September 26, 1904
 Field Marshal HRH The Duke of Connaught, March 21, 1911
 The Duke of Devonshire, August 19, 1916
 General The Baron Byng of Vimy, August 2, 1921
 The Viscount Willingdon of Ratton, August 5, 1926
 The Earl of Bessborough, February 9, 1931
 The Baron Tweedsmuir of Elsfield, August 10, 1935
 Major General The Earl of Athlone, April 3, 1940
 Field Marshal The Viscount Alexander of Tunis, March 21, 1946
 The Right Honourable Vincent Massey, January 24, 1952
 General The Right Honourable Georges P. Vanier, August 1, 1959
 The Right Honourable Roland Michener, March 29, 1967
 The Right Honourable Jules Léger, October 5, 1973.

One of the most important responsibilities of the Governor General is to ensure that the country always has a government. If the office of the Prime Minister becomes vacant because of death, resignation or defeat of the government in the House of Commons, the Governor General must see that the office of the Prime Minister is filled and that a new government is formed.

As the representative of the Queen — one of the three elements of the Canadian Parliament, the others being the Senate and the House of Commons — the Governor General summons, prorogues and dissolves Parliament on the advice of the Prime Minister. He signs Orders in Council, commissions and many other state documents, and gives his assent to bills