

The Role of Deputy Ministers in Canadian Government

Chapter Summary

The role of the deputy minister (DM) is the main interchange between the political head of a department, the minister, and the public servants of the department. In an advisory capacity to the minister, the deputy minister serves primarily as the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of a department. The deputy minister is not subject to the merit system of the Public Service of Canada (PSC) but must follow most provisions as outlined in the *Public Service Employment Act*. A deputy minister's position can be made through a discretionary appointment, by designation or selection, or through an appointment process by the Governor-in Council on the advice and recommendation of the prime minister.

The powers of the deputy minister are not specified in any specific statute, except for several regulatory departments such as Revenue, Consumer Affairs, Justice, and Immigration. A DM is considered the manager of all of the financial and human resources of a department as well as serving as an accounting officer. In addition, the deputy minister implements the appropriate statutes for a department and can contribute to the drafting of rules and regulations and undertake related policy-making decisions.

The accountability of a deputy minister can be both challenging and difficult to understand. The DM is answerable to many different people within the political process. For example, a DM is responsible to parliament and its committees for the work of his or her ministry and ultimately to the PM, who made the recommendation to have them serve as DM for a specific department.

During the change of a political administration, the deputy minister's position can be compromised. In the Gomery Commission report of 2006, Judge Gomery recommended a number of different measures for DMs and their roles in federal government departments. The main proposal was that a DM would serve in their position for a minimum of three years, with the expectation that most appointments would last at least five years. Although the administrative

community seemed to support this recommendation, this proposal was generally understood as what typically already occurred as the normal tenured appointment for a DM.

Annotated Weblinks

- 1) <https://lop.parl.ca/Content/LOP/ResearchPublications/prb0560-e.htm>

The Gomery Commission, Phase 2 in 2006 reviewed and elaborated on the responsibilities and accountability of deputy ministers in the federal government, specifically addressing issues of tenure and disagreements between ministers and deputy ministers of a department.

- 2) <https://www.canada.ca/en/privy-council/services/publications/guidance-deputy-ministers.html>

This site offers information on a report by the Privy Council Office on issues of leadership, accountability and responsibilities of deputy ministers in the government of Canada.

- 3) <http://www.res.parl.gc.ca/Content/LOP/ResearchPublications/prb0548-e.htm>

The accountability of deputy ministers before Parliament addresses several recommendations for change, specifically related to accountability issues and an argument for and against proceeding with these changes to the deputy minister's role.