

# Levels of government in the ACT

This topic explainer walks through what levels of government are, what's unique about the levels in the Australian Capital Territory, and includes two classroom activities.

## 🎯 Learning goals

- Australia's three levels of government are federal, state and territory, and local
- The ACT Legislative Assembly combines the functions of territory and local government together

## ☰ Curriculum links

- Year 4 AC9HS4K08  
 Year 6 AC9HS6K06  
 AC9HS6K07

## What are the levels of government?

Australia has three levels of government that work together to help provide services for all Australians. Look at the table below to learn more about each level of government and what it does.

	Federal	State and territory	Local
<b>Where are they based?</b>	Australian Parliament House in Canberra	Each capital city has a state or territory parliament. There are 8 in total across Australia	Over 550 councils around Australia (except in the ACT)
<b>Who is their leader?</b>	Prime Minister	Premiers (states) or Chief Ministers (territories)	Mayors or Lord Mayors
<b>What do they do?</b>	Look after issues that affect all Australians including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• immigration</li> <li>• money</li> <li>• defence, and</li> <li>• marriage</li> </ul>	Look after issues that affect people in their state or territory, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• schools</li> <li>• hospitals</li> <li>• public transport, and</li> <li>• utilities (electricity, water)</li> </ul>	Look after issues that affect people in their local communities including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• rubbish collection and recycling</li> <li>• pet registration</li> <li>• libraries, and</li> <li>• parking</li> </ul>

## What is unique about the ACT?

The ACT does not have local councils. Instead, the ACT Legislative Assembly (the territory parliament) looks after both territory and local issues. That means the 25 Members of the Legislative Assembly—or MLAs—are responsible for making decisions on issues such as education and health, as well as rubbish, recycling, and pet registration.

One reason for the combination of these two levels of government is that the ACT is a geographically small territory. It takes less than two hours to drive from the top of the ACT to the bottom. Members can access all parts of the ACT relatively easily compared to all other states and territories.

The Northern Territory – which is also a territory – is much larger geographically. In fact, the NT is 571 times larger than the ACT! It would be difficult for representatives in Darwin to make local decisions for people down in Alice Springs which is almost 1500km away.

## Classroom activities

There are two print-out worksheets associated with this topic available on our website:

- [Worksheet: Federal or territory: Who's responsible? \(PDF 130KB\)](#)
- [Worksheet: Memory: Levels of government \(PDF 177KB\)](#)

### Other resources

There are a range of other helpful resources available on this topic, the best of which we have compiled below:

- [\[ACT\] Poster: Australia's three levels of government \(PDF 783KB\)](#)
- [\[ACT\] Factsheet: The ACT in Australia's three levels of government \(PDF 233KB\)](#)
- [\[Federal\] Resource page: Three levels of government \(peo.gov.au\)](#)
- [\[Federal\] Interactive game: Three levels of government \(peo.gov.au\)](#)