



Three Levels of Government

There are three levels of government in Australia:

- local,
- state, and
- federal.

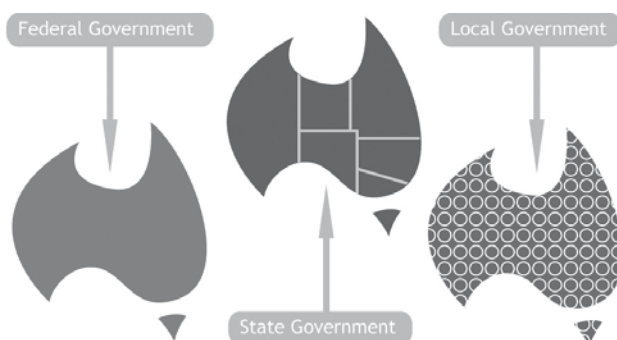
The federal and state governments are established under the Australian Constitution.

Every person forms part of a local community. Every local community is part of a state or territory and every state or territory is part of Australia. Representatives elected by their local community make decisions about the area they are elected to represent.

Rules are made by our parliaments to keep order and allow for fairness in our community. These rules are called laws.

Why do we need Governments?

Just like people, communities have basic needs that must be met. Imagine what it would be like if there were nobody to make sure that laws were obeyed, if there were nobody to help look after the sick and elderly, or to plan where buildings should go, and to keep the environment clean and safe.



A diagram showing the three levels of government in Australia: federal government, state government, and local government.

Each level of government is responsible for providing services and they each raise money through taxes or charges to pay for those services. Each level may be fully responsible for providing certain services, but often two or three levels of government share responsibilities.

What is Local Government?

Local government is sometimes called “grassroots” government because it is concerned with matters close to home. The decision making body at a local level is called the council. Representatives who are elected to that council are called Councillors and the leader is called the Mayor.

The council makes local laws that reflect community needs and ensures they can govern their area. Local laws can differ between local governments. These laws have to be approved by the State Parliament, because shires and councils are created by the State Parliaments, and they decide what duties the councils will perform. The council pays for its services with state and federal funding and also with charges (such as rates, licences and permit fees) that it collects from people who own land in the local area.

What does Local Government do?

Generally, the local council looks after the parts of the local community that are public property, such as local roads and parks, and decides where new local roads and buildings should go and which natural areas and historic places should be protected. The plans for all new buildings must be approved by the council.

Who's who in Local Government?

Queen's Representative	Not applicable to local government
Head of Government	Mayor, Lord Mayor or Shire President
Your Representative	Councillor



The council looks after aspects of public health such as arranging for garbage and recyclable waste to be collected, checking that restaurants and shops are clean, registering dogs and destroying vermin. It is also responsible for street signs and traffic control. Some councils run libraries, museums and theatres and provide public halls and swimming pools.

These are just some of the community services that a council may provide and your local newspaper is often the best place to find out information about these services.

What is State Government?

Each Australian state and territory has its own government and its own constitution. The decision making body for each state is the State Parliament which is located in each capital city.

What does the State Government do?

Under the Australian Constitution, the states are responsible for all the areas not listed as federal responsibilities. However, often both levels of government are involved and the federal government will give money to the states to carry out their programs.

State governments receive funding from a number of sources including revenue from the federal Goods and Services Tax and state-based fees, levies and charges.

Who's who in State Government?

Queen's Representative	Governor
Head of Government	Premier*
Your Representative	Member of Parliament (MP)

* In the two Territories, the Head of Government is called the Chief Minister.

State governments are responsible for education, health, the environment, transport, public works, primary industries, industrial relations, community services, sport and recreation, consumer affairs, police services, prisons, and water - to name just a few.

That means whenever you go to hospital or a police officer in your community takes action against someone breaking the law, your state government is at work.

What is Federal Government?

In 1901, Australia became a nation. This is known as federation. Prior to federation, each of the six states was a colony with its own government that made decisions for the people living in that colony. (The territories gained self government later.) However, some people thought it was a good idea for Australia to have a government that made decisions for all Australians.

The citizens were asked to vote 'yes' or 'no' on whether Australia should become a nation. (A yes or no vote on a particular issue is called a referendum.) A majority voted 'yes' and the colonies gave some of their power to a new level of government known as the Federal or Commonwealth Government.

Who's who in Federal Government?

Queen's Representative	Governor-General
Head of Government	Prime Minister
Your Representative	Member of Parliament (MP and Senator)

What does the Federal Government do?

The Australian Constitution lists the matters that the Federal Parliament can make laws about.

Some of these include the defence forces, pensions and family support, employment, immigration and customs, post and telecommunications, imports and exports, passports, the media, airports and air safety, income and company taxes. These services are paid for by the taxes collected by the federal government.