

Chapter 6

Dealing with Government Agencies

GOALS

We will learn about

- government agencies and services that assist citizens who need help.
- different remedies for citizens who are treated wrongly or unfairly by a government agency.
- the police complaint system and other 'watchdog' agencies that help protect citizens' rights.

Handout 6.1 Government Agencies and Us

Find someone here who:	Put that person's name in this box.
(1) pays rent	
(2) works overtime sometimes	
(3) asked a government agency for information (which one?)	
(4) talked to ICBC about a car accident	
(5) thinks their boss is unfair	
(6) was the victim of a robbery (what happened?)	
(7) knows how much the minimum wage is	
(8) asked a police officer for his or her name or badge number	
(9) has a complaint about a government agency	
(10) knows what the ombudsman does	

Handout 6.2A

Using Government Agencies
Vocabulary Word List

1. social programs (104)
2. federal department or provincial ministry (46)
3. government agency (103)
4. NGO: non-governmental organization (examples: MOSAIC, ISS, SUCCESS - pp 18 and 19)
5. Employment Standards Branch (105)
6. working conditions (104)
 - a. vacation allowance
 - b. overtime payment
 - c. maternity leave benefits
 - d. minimum wage
7. Residential Tenancy Office (105, 106)
 - a. damage deposit (105)
 - b. eviction (105)
8. victim services (106)
9. Victims of Crimes Act (106)

Understanding these words - and how they relate to one another - will help us see where government agencies fit into the structure of the government.

We will also learn how some agencies can help us in our everyday lives.

Handout 6.2B

Using Government Agencies
Vocabulary Resource

1. social programs (p 104)
government programs for people who need financial, medical or other assistance to help them meet their basic needs or participate fully in Canadian society.
Examples: the Canada Pension Plan, provincial health insurance, language and settlement programs for immigrants.
 2. federal department or provincial ministry (Ch 3, p 46)
the different sections of the federal or provincial governments that take care of special areas such as health, taxation, fisheries, immigration, etc. Some departments and ministries are in charge of social programs and create agencies to handle the work of these programs.
 3. government agency (p 103)
an organization set up by a government department or ministry to carry out social programs (or other programs) created by laws and government policies. *Examples:* see Chapter 6 in *The Citizenship Handbook*.
 4. NGO: non-governmental organization
a private organization set up to develop and present programs and activities approved by its Board of Directors and members. NGOs often get government funding for social programs, but they are not government agencies.
Examples: MOSAIC, ISS and SUCCESS (pp 18 & 19)
-
5. Employment Standards Branch (p 105)
a B.C. provincial agency that informs non-union employees and employers about their legal rights and responsibilities, and assists them in resolving their dispute
 6. working conditions (p 104)
all the different matters that affect your employment situation, from the arrangement of office furniture to financial issues such as those listed on the next page:

Handout 6.2B Vocabulary Resource (continued)

6. working conditions (p 104) (continued)

Some examples of working conditions: (p 104)

- *vacation allowance:* the length of vacation time during which you receive your salary, wages, or other benefits
- *overtime payment:* what you are paid for working longer than your usual or contracted time
- *maternity leave benefits:* the benefits a woman receives (pay, medical benefits, etc.) when she is off work during the weeks before and after she has a baby
- *minimum wage:* the lowest pay per hour that an employee can legally receive. In B.C. the minimum wage became \$8.00 per hour on Nov. 1, 2001.

7. Residential Tenancy Office (pp 105,106)

The B.C. provincial agency that helps educate tenants and landlords about their legal rights and responsibilities, and assists them in solving their disputes. Two related terms are below:

damage deposit: the amount of money a new tenant pays to cover any damage he or she might do to the place they are renting

eviction: the act of a landlord who forces a tenant to move out of a rented house, apartment, etc. before his or her lease is finished

8. Victim Services (p 106)

government programs to help families and individuals who are the victims of a crime (Victim Services are now co-ordinated and administered by the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, a change from the information given on page 106 of the *Handbook*.)

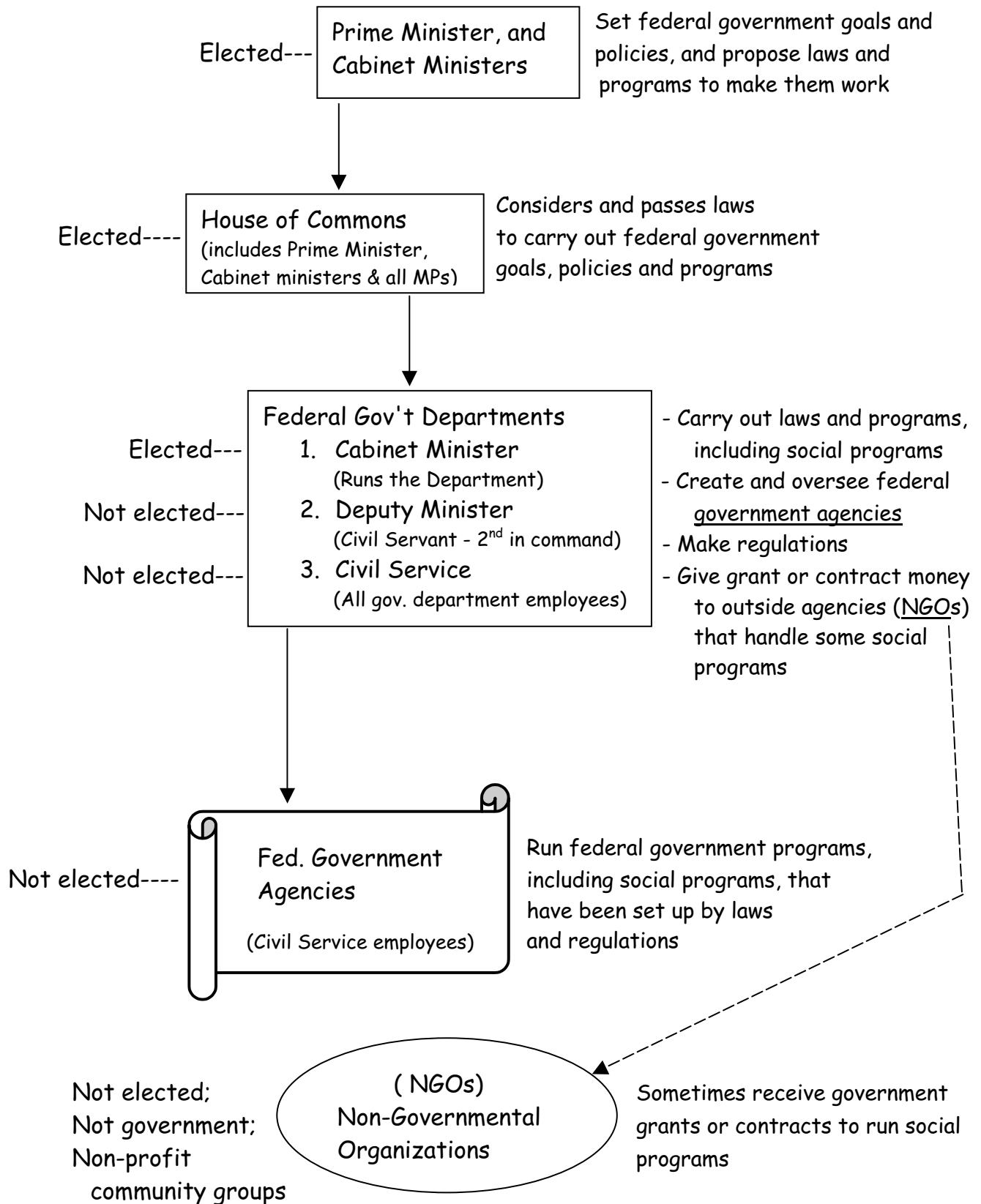
9. Victims of Crimes Act (p 106)

a law in B.C. that tells victims of crime what their rights are within the justice system. For example, victims of crimes

- are to be treated with courtesy and respect,
- can give a victim impact statement in court,
- can receive information about the justice system, relevant laws, and the status of the case
- are protected against intimidation and retaliation.

Handout 6.2C

Where Do **Federal Gov't. Agencies** Fit?

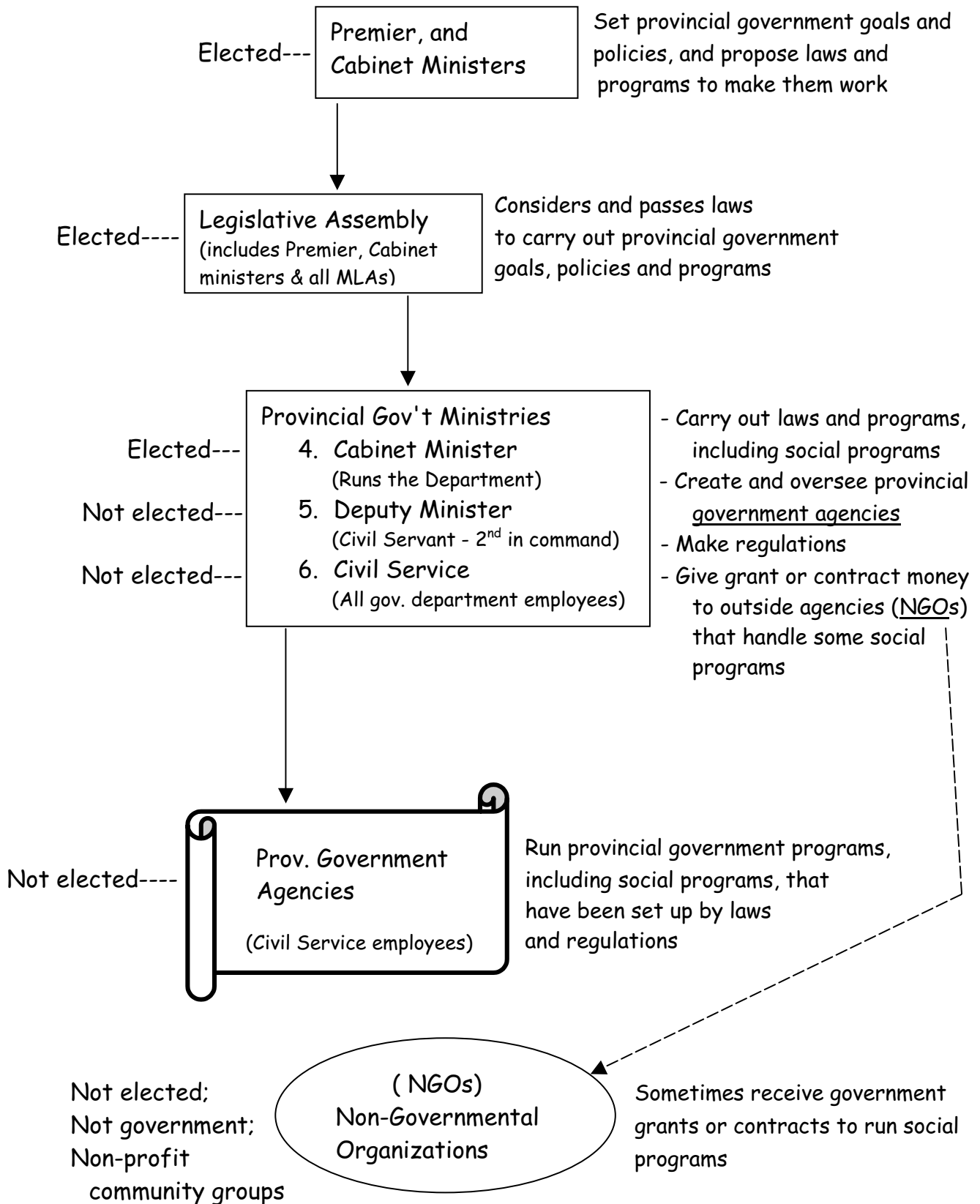


Handout 6.2C

Where Do

Provincial Gov't. Agencies

Fit?



Handout 6.3 Government Agencies and Their Programs

Vocabulary Review

In each sentence, a question appears in [brackets]. Find the best vocabulary word in the list at the bottom of the page to answer the question and to replace the bracket. Put the correct letter in the () at the end of each sentence. The first one is done for you.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A tenant can go [where?] to argue that her landlord raised her rent more than the law allows. (K) 2. The Canada Pension Plan is a [what kind of program?]. () 3. Dan's landlord kept \$200 of the [which money?] to repair the damage Dan did to the carpets in his suite. () 4. The Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner is a [what?] in B.C. () 5. When they work longer than their usual 8 hour day, the technicians earn twice their usual wage in [what?]. () 6. A [which part?] of a government often sets up agencies to handle social programs. () 7. [What service?] includes volunteers who work with justice system employees to give victims of crime information about court procedures. () | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Non-union workers can get help from the [what?] if they have a dispute with their employer. () 9. Office temperature, salary, overtime policy, training opportunities, and health and maternity benefits are all examples of [what?]. () 10. The [what law?] gives victims of crimes the right to present a victim impact statement in court. () 11. Even though a couple paid 6 months' rent, the landlord forced them out after only 3 months because they did much damage to the apartment. This is called an [what?]. () 12. [What organizations?] help newcomers by providing language and settlement programs with funding they get from the government. () 13. On 1 Nov. 2001, the [what?] was raised to \$8.00 an hour in B.C.. () 14. Female employees usually receive [what?] if they become pregnant. () |
|---|---|

A minimum wage
 B eviction
 C social program
 D department/ministry
 E overtime payments
 F Victim Services

G working conditions
 H Employment Standards Branch
 I Victims of Crimes Act
 J government agency

K Residential Tenancy Office
 L damage deposit
 M non-governmental organizations: NGOs
 N maternity benefits

Handout 6.4 Using a Government Agency Role-Play and Discussion

Directions:

1. Go to pages 103-107 of *The Citizenship Handbook*. Underline the laws, government agencies and programs that your teacher or group leader points out to you.
2. Read the story given to your group.
3. Identify the problem in the story and decide what each person in the story thinks about it.
4. Find the law, agency or program in *The Citizenship Handbook* that relates to the problem in your story
5. Create an ending for the story that solves the problem and uses the information you found in the *Handbook*.
6. Plan and present a role-play of the story with your ending.

Your role-play should help everyone understand what the government agency or program does and who it helps.

Handout 6.4 Using a Government Agency

Story 1:

Laura rented an apartment with venetian blinds in the living room windows. When she moved in, she discovered that the blinds were old and broken. They didn't close, and they didn't go up or down.

Laura asked the landlord to repair the blinds, or to replace them with something else. He said he would, but he never did anything. Laura asked him four times, but nothing happened. She finally bought some curtains and threw the blinds away.

Now Laura has found a better place to live, and plans to take the curtains with her. The landlord is upset. He wants her to leave the curtains. "After all", he argues, "the windows were covered when you moved in." He told Laura that he would keep her whole damage deposit to buy window coverings if she takes the curtains when she moves out.

Handout 6.4 Using a Government Agency

Story 2:

Tim and Gurdeep do demolition and clean-up work for Mr. Robbins in his small non-union construction business. When they began working for Mr. Robbins three years ago, their wages were \$8.00 per hour. They have not had any wage increase since then. Now \$8.00 per hour is the minimum wage in B.C..

Tim and Gurdeep think they should get more than the minimum wage because they have three years experience and are good reliable workers. Mr. Robbins promised them a raise last year. But later he told them he could not give them the raise because business was not good enough.

Tim and Gurdeep know that business is slow. They think Mr. Robbins is a good boss in general. They want to keep working for him. But they think he is unfair to keep their wages so low without any other benefits. They are planning to quit if Mr. Robbins can't offer them something better.

Handout 6.4 Using a Government Agency

Story 3:

Wong is 57 years old, and has a part time job delivering community newspapers. He is very happy about the job. It is good exercise. And he earns enough money to pay for what he needs and to help his son's family, with whom he lives.

Yesterday, however, a large dog chased Wong into a lane. It jumped at him again and again, and then bit him in the leg. Two people in a nearby garden heard Wong yelling and came to his aid. They scared the dog away, helped Wong onto their patio, and called his family. His son's wife came to get him and took him to a clinic. He needed shots, antibiotics, and 12 stitches to close the wound.

Wong still cannot walk well, and he is nervous walking very far from home. He can't work yet, and his job had no health benefits. The city pound cannot find the dog, and no one nearby has seen it again. Wong is the victim of a crime, but who is the criminal? His family does not know how to get help for him.

[The B. C. government has made changes to the services discussed on pages 106 and 107 of the *Handbook* for victims of crimes. Victim Services (p 106) are now administered by the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, and the *Criminal Injury Compensation Act* (p 107) has been replaced by the *Crime Victim Assistance Act*. Ask your teacher or settlement counselor how you can find out more about these changes. June 2002]

Handout 6.5A **Challenging Government Agency Decisions**
Vocabulary Word List

Learning these words will help us understand how we can challenge a government agency decision that we think is wrong or unfair.

We will also learn about the process we might go through while making such a challenge.

1. to challenge (108)
2. to appeal (108)
3. a dispute (104, 105)
4. internal complaint procedure (103)
5. arbitration (106)
6. Ombudsman (114)
7. time limit (109)
8. an interview (111)
9. to investigate (112)
10. to retaliate (111)

Handout 6.5B

Challenging Government Agency Decisions
Vocabulary Resource

1. to challenge (108) to question or express doubt about an action, decision or opinion because you think it is untrue, not based on fact, or otherwise wrong
2. to appeal (108) to make a formal request to an agency, asking it to reconsider and change a decision you think is wrong
3. a dispute (104, 105) a disagreement or difference of opinion between two or more people or groups. These people or groups are called the '*parties*' to the dispute'.
4. internal complaint procedure the process you can use, or the steps you can take, within a government agency when you want to complain that the agency treated you unfairly
5. arbitration (106) formal meetings in which the two parties to a dispute explain their opinions to a third party, the 'arbitrator', who then decides how to end the dispute
6. Ombudsman (114) a special office set up by the B. C. government to look into complaints from citizens who think a provincial government agency has treated them unfairly
7. time limit (109) how much time you have to make a complaint about unfair treatment or to appeal an agency decision
8. an interview (111) a formal meeting in which one person is asked a series of questions so that the other person(s) can gather information
9. to investigate (112) to examine a situation thoroughly in order to find out the truth about what happened or to resolve a dispute about it
10. to retaliate (111) to harm or punish someone who has harmed you or done something you dislike or are angry about

Handout 6.6 Making and Challenging Agency Decisions

Vocabulary Review

Read each paragraph and choose the term from the bottom of the page that best describes what the paragraph is about. Put the correct letter in the [] after each paragraph.

The first one is done for you. Your Vocabulary Resource 6.5B may help you do this activity.

5. The director of the training program met with Indira. She asked Indira about her work experience in Sri Lanka, her education, and her hopes for future employment. [H]

6. The owner of the textile mill told the women to wear skirts to work in order to impress customers. The women were angry. They said that customers do not enter their workroom and that skirts are harder to take care of and less safe around the machinery. []

7. ICBC staff members interviewed people who saw the accident. They sent relevant photographs to experts for analysis, and asked ICBC specialists to measure and analyze skid marks and other evidence at the accident site. []

8. When Rosa's child care payment was reduced, she took her financial records to the appeal board and asked them to reconsider their decision. []

9. After receiving complaints about unfair decisions by some staff members at a certain provincial agency, this Office investigated the agency, and recommended changes to make agency decisions more fair. []

10. When the three parents learned that their children were not eligible for ESL classes, they went directly to the school official to question his decision, and to find out if he had the correct facts. []

6. At the meeting, an official decided that (1) Digby must pay for the damage he did to the original drapes in his suite, but (2) he can keep the new drapes he bought for himself and does not have to leave them in the suite when he moves. []

7. After Roger mailed a notice to say that he would appeal changes to his disability benefits, he had three weeks to complete the appeal forms and get them to the appeal board. []

8. Mai told her boss about two typists who discussed confidential agency files in public. After that, all the agency typists waited until the last minute to type Mai's reports. []

9. A written complaint about police conduct usually goes from the Chief Constable to the internal investigation section. After they investigate, you will receive a written response. You can ask for a review if you are not satisfied. []

- A. a challenge
- B. an appeal
- C. a dispute

- D. internal complaint procedure
- E. an arbitration
- F. the Office of the Ombudsman

- G. a time limit
- H. an interview
- I. an investigation
- J. retaliation

Handout 6.7 Challenging an Agency's Decision

Read pages 108 - 113 of *The Citizenship Handbook* to find out what you can do if you think an agency made the wrong decision or treated you unfairly. Then read the statements below and decide if they are T rue or False. Circle the right answer. Here is an example:

'Government agencies usually treat people fairly.'

T

F

- | | | |
|--|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. If you think an agency decision is wrong, there is nothing that you can do about it. (108) | <input type="radio"/> T | <input type="radio"/> F |
| 2. You can complain if the police treat you unfairly, just as you can complain about other government agencies. (108) | <input type="radio"/> T | <input type="radio"/> F |
| 3. If your complaint is a very serious one, you may want a lawyer to help you. (109) | <input type="radio"/> T | <input type="radio"/> F |
| 4. You can ignore time limits that are part of a complaint system because they don't mean anything. (109) | <input type="radio"/> T | <input type="radio"/> F |
| 5. Many organizations work with new Canadians and can help them understand an agency's complaint system. (110) | <input type="radio"/> T | <input type="radio"/> F |
| 6. A written complaint will get the best response if it sounds angry and threatening. (110) | <input type="radio"/> T | <input type="radio"/> F |
| 7. If you think agency staff are punishing you for making a complaint, you should get help immediately. (111) | <input type="radio"/> T | <input type="radio"/> F |
| 8. If you believe you have been mistreated by an RCMP officer, you should complain to the nearest Chief Constable. (111) | <input type="radio"/> T | <input type="radio"/> F |
| 9. In a letter of complaint to the police, tell them clearly what happened and how you and witnesses can be contacted. (112) | <input type="radio"/> T | <input type="radio"/> F |
| 10. You will probably get a written reply to a police complaint in a day or two. (112) | <input type="radio"/> T | <input type="radio"/> F |
| 11. If you don't agree with the decision made by an ICBC claims adjuster, you can speak to the Claims Manager. (113) | <input type="radio"/> T | <input type="radio"/> F |
| 12. If you are treated unfairly in an agency that has no complaint process, you should just give up and go home. (113) | <input type="radio"/> T | <input type="radio"/> F |

Handout 6.8A Navigating an Internal Complaint Process

Story:

Slava went to a government agency. The first staff person he talked to was very rude. She called him the wrong name several times, even after he tried to correct her. She interrupted him often, and told him he needed an interpreter. She refused to look at his documents. She said it was a waste of her time. She told him he needed more documents. But she was wrong as well as rude.

When he talked to someone else in the agency, Slava learned that he had all the documents he needed. His problem was quickly solved, and he was very happy. But he was still upset about how badly the first staff person treated him. She made him feel stupid, and embarrassed him in front of many people. And what she told him was wrong! He decided to complain and to ask for an apology.

Slava did everything described in the sentences below.

Put the sentences in the right order. What he did first is already numbered for you.
(You can get help from pages 108 through 111 of *The Citizenship Handbook*.)

- () At the interview, Slava answered questions about his complaint, and told the people how upset he was by the staff person's actions.
- () After Slava read the information from the agency, he decided he could start the complaint process by himself without a lawyer's help.
- () Slava wrote the letter. First he described what happened to make him upset.
- () After a few weeks, he got a reply to his letter. The agency asked him to come in for an interview about his complaint.
- (1) Slava called the agency to find out how to make a complaint.
- () When the interview was over, the agency staff told Slava to expect a letter from them in about two weeks.
- () The staff person who answered the phone told Slava that the agency had an internal complaint procedure. Slava asked her to mail him information about it.
- () Then he asked the agency to review the actions of the staff member who had been rude and disrespectful.

Handout 6.8A Internal Complaint Process (continued)

- () Slava was worried about the interview and asked his brother and an immigrant settlement worker from the Immigrant Services Society to go with him.
- () In fact, after his interview, Slava got two letters from the agency. The first one explained that they believed his story and were sorry that he had suffered discomfort and embarrassment. They also said that the staff member would take a training course on working with ESL clients.
- () Slava told a friend that he planned to write a letter of complaint. She asked him if there was a time limit for making the complaint. He didn't want to be too late!
- () And last, he asked for an apology and a promise that the staff member would take some training courses on working with ESL clientel.
- () Slava checked the information again. He found a time limit, but it was still several days away. He wrote the letter, reviewed it with his friend, and mailed it in plenty of time.
- () According to the information from the agency, all Slava had to do to start the complaint process was to write a letter to the agency with the details of his complaint.
- () The second letter was a personal apology from the staff member who had been rude and offensive in her actions toward Slava. He was very pleased. The apology sounded genuine and the woman admitted she had learned a lot from this whole incident.

Handout 6.8B

Navigating an Internal Complaint Process

Slava went to a government agency. The first staff person he talked to was very rude. She called him the wrong name several times, even after he tried to correct her. She interrupted him often, and told him he needed an interpreter. She refused to look at his documents. She said it was a waste of her time. She told him he needed more documents. But she was wrong as well as rude.

When he talked to someone else in the agency, Slava learned that he had all the documents he needed. His problem was quickly solved, and he was very happy. But he was still upset about how badly the first staff person treated him. She made him feel stupid, and embarrassed him in front of many people. And what she told him was wrong! He decided to complain and to ask for an apology.

Slava's journey through the complaint system is described in the sentences on the strips of paper given to your group.

Put those sentence-strips in the right order.
What Sasha did first is already numbered for you.

(You can get help from pages 108 through 111 of *the Citizenship Handbook*.)

Handout 6.8B

... Internal Complaint Process

(continued)

At the interview, Slava answered questions about his complaint, and told the people how upset he was by the staff person's actions.

After Slava read the information from the agency, he decided he could start the complaint process by himself without a lawyer's help.

Slava wrote the letter. First he described what happened to make him upset.

After a few weeks, he got a reply to his letter. The agency asked him to come in for an interview about his complaint.

#1 Slava called the agency to find out how to make a complaint.

When the interview was over, the agency staff told Slava to expect a letter from them in about two weeks.

The woman who answered the phone told Slava that the agency had an internal complaint procedure. He asked her to mail him information about it.

Then he asked the agency to review the actions of the staff member who had been rude and disrespectful.

Handout 6.8B

. . . Internal Complaint Process

(continued)

Slava was worried about the interview and asked his brother and a settlement worker from the Immigrant Services Society to go with him.

In fact, after his interview, Slava got two letters from the agency. The first one explained that they believed his story and were sorry that he had suffered discomfort and embarrassment. They also said that the staff member would take a training course on working with ESL clients.

Slava told a friend that he planned to write a letter of complaint. She asked him if there was a time limit for making the complaint. He didn't want to be too late!

And last, he asked for an apology and a promise that the staff member would take some training courses on working with ESL clientel.

Slava checked the information again. He found a time limit, but it was still several days away. He wrote the letter, reviewed it with his friend, and mailed it in plenty of time.

According to the information from the agency, all Slava had to do to start the complaint process was to write a letter to the agency with the details of his complaint.

The second letter was a personal apology from the staff member who had been rude and offensive in her actions toward Slava. He was very pleased. The apology sounded genuine and the woman admitted she had learned a lot from this whole incident.

Handout 6.9

Writing a Letter of Complaint

Ravi started working at a Vancouver restaurant on 3 October 2000. Two weeks later, he left work at 10 p.m. and started to jog home. Going past a nearby park, he saw three men coming towards him. As they got nearer, they started swearing at him and calling him names. He tried to jog past them, but they circled him and started pushing him into the park.

Ravi saw porch lights come on at a house across the street. He tried to run toward the house, but the men wouldn't let him. Ravi was scared and angry. He hit out with his fist and struck someone hard in the chest. As Ravi turned toward one of the others, he saw the man had a knife. Very frightened, Ravi backed away.

At that moment, the attackers stopped. They turned away from Ravi and ran farther into the park. Ravi stared after them, surprised and still upset. Then he saw three police officers in the street. He hadn't even heard their car. So that was why his attackers ran away!

Ravi tried to tell the police to go after his attackers. He was still out of breath and not speaking clearly. He pointed to the men running across the park, then tried to run after them himself. But he was grabbed by the officers, pushed to his knees, and handcuffed.

Ravi tried to tell the officers they had the wrong man. But they didn't listen to him. Instead, one of the officers picked up a knife near Ravi and said: "You mean this isn't yours, you fool? What gang do you belong to?"

Ravi was so angry that he swore at the officer and struggled to his feet. When he swung his cuffed hands around to get free, he hit one of the officers. In the struggle that followed, Ravi was knocked to the ground. He felt a sharp pain in his shoulder. The police put him into their cruiser, took him to the police station and charged him with resisting arrest and assaulting a police officer.

At the station, a doctor was called to take care of Ravi's shoulder, which was sprained. Ravi was able to call a lawyer and to tell his side of the story. He was soon out on bail and with his family.

Later, both the police and Ravi's lawyer spoke to people who were near or in the park that night. Two strongly supported Ravi's version of events. The man who had turned on his porch lights saw the three men attack Ravi. He called 911 and asked for the police. He had been upset when they took Ravi away, but didn't chase the attackers. And a young couple in the park had seen Ravi's attackers run away. They heard them laughing about pushing a 'dumb Paki' into the arms of the police. The police never found the attackers, but they did drop their charges against Ravi.

Handout 6.10

Matching Agency and Complaint

Match the agencies on the right with the complaints on the left. Put the appropriate agency's letter in the () after the complaint. The first one is done for you.

When I want to complain about:Which Agency Do I Call?

1. working conditions in my non-union office (C)
2. the contents of a newspaper article or advertisement ()
3. the actions of a B.C. police officer ()
4. the behaviour of a doctor ()
5. the behaviour of a lawyer ()
6. discriminatory actions by almost anyone ()
7. an unfair decision or policy of a provincial government agency ()
8. the contents of a radio or TV broadcast ()
9. the wages I lost when I could not work for six weeks after an assault. ()
10. my landlord's refusal to make necessary repairs ()

- A. Ombudsman (108)
- B. College of Physicians and Surgeons (109)
- C. Employment Standards Branch (105)
- D. B.C. Human Rights 'Commission' (if still operating) or 'Tribunal' (if the Commission named on page 108 is gone.) *
- E. Canadian Radio and Television Commission (109)
- F. Crime Victim Assistance Program (replaced the *Criminal Injury Compensation Act* - page 107 -in June 2002)*
- G. B.C. Press Council (109)
- H. Residential Tenancy Office (105 and 106)
- I. Office of the Police Complaint Commissioner (108)
- J. Law Society (109)

* The B.C. government made many changes to administrative agencies during 2002. Ask your teacher or settlement counselor about them.