

# Commonwealth Youth Parliament

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P8

November 6-10, 2016  
Victoria, British Columbia, Canada

## Characteristics of Commonwealthland

**Government:** The unicameral Parliament is based on the Westminster system. Each Member of the Legislative Assembly is elected from a single-constituency riding. Parliaments are for a fixed term as elections are held every four years.

**Head of State:** Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II is the Head of State. She is represented by His Honour, the Honourable Rick Hansen, Lieutenant Governor. This is a non-political position with a conventional term of five years.

**Head of Government:** The Government is led by a Premier who is the leader of the political party that holds the most seats in the Legislative Assembly.

**Recent Political Developments:** A new Parliament is about to be formed following peaceful multiparty elections. Their first sitting day will be November 7, 2016. Despite relative stability and a sustained period of economic growth, there are concerns the economy depends too highly on the mining, energy and forest products sectors and needs to diversify to provide greater employment in the faster growing services and information technology sectors. The jurisdiction has a high rate of population turnover and a high cost of living.

**Population:** 4.7 million

**Capital City:** Centenary City

**People:** Commonwealthland is ethnically diverse. While the majority of the population report their ethnic origin as European, over 30% identify as a visible minority, with the largest communities being Chinese and South Asian. There is also a significant Aboriginal population at just over 5%. The average age is 42.

**Languages:** English is the common language, but there are many different languages spoken in the home, with the most common being Cantonese, Mandarin and Punjabi. 25% of the population indicate that English is not their first language.

**Geography:** Commonwealthland covers a broad geographical area of nearly 950,000 square kilometres. The population is concentrated in the southern coastal areas. While only 14% of the population resides in the capital, Centenary City, located on an island off the south coast, more than half of the country's population lives in the Lower Mainland area (53%). There are a number of sizeable communities in the southern interior, with the rest of the land being sparsely populated.

**Economy:** Commonwealthland has a history of being a resource dominated economy based on mining, energy, forestry, fishing, and agriculture. While these sectors continue to be important, service industries are now the largest and fastest growing sector of the country's GDP.



Some of the main service industries include: retail trade; tourism and recreation; health care and social assistance; accommodation and food services; professional, scientific and technical services; and information technology. International trade is a major economic driver for all parts of the economy, accounting for approximately one quarter of GDP.

**GDP per capita:** \$48,000 CAD

**Annual Growth in Real GDP:** 3% (2016 forecast)

**Unemployment Rate:** 6% (2016 forecast)

**Major Trading Partners:** USA, Mexico, China, India, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan.

**International Relations:** Commonwealthland has wide global engagement, reflecting its important international trade, and a population with extensive connections around the world. Commonwealthland is a member of many international organizations, an important contributor to international peacekeeping forces, and a generous international development and humanitarian assistance donor.

**Health:** There is a universal healthcare system; however residents pay a small fee, based on income. Residents of Commonwealthland experience overall good health. Primarily as a result of an aging population (nearly 20% of the population is over the age of 65), government experiences challenges maintaining a sustainable healthcare system. Particular areas of concern include: end-of-life care; community, and home care; mental health and addictions programs; and healthcare services in rural areas.

**Education:** All children between the ages of 6 and 16 must attend school or study at home. Public school education is universal and free, and provided from Kindergarten (age 4 or 5) to Grade 12 (age 17 or 18).

Commonwealthland is home to many internationally recognized universities and educational institutes. Government funds the bulk of post-secondary education costs, but annual tuition fees average approximately \$5,000 annually.

**Human Rights:** There is a Human Rights Code which protects individuals from discrimination and harassment, and an independent tribunal for dealing with complaints under the Human Rights Code.

**Environment:** Commonwealthland has legislation that sets a target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least 33% below 2007 levels by 2020, but is not on track to meet this target. Residents remain concerned about pollution and continuing dependence on fossil fuels.

**Current Issues:** Housing affordability and cost of living are an increasing concern in the Lower Mainland and Centenary City areas. Recent legislation has been passed to impose taxes on foreign buyers and those who leave their homes vacant.

While Commonwealthland enjoys a high level of GDP per capita overall, it faces challenges in meeting public expectations for improvements in health care, education, social services, and advancing its economic competitiveness in an era of globalization. An important issue is how to balance the development of mining and energy resources with a commitment to the

environment. An additional public priority involves building and maintaining relationships and partnerships with Aboriginal peoples which recognize constitutional and treaty obligations, support their cultures and heritage, and contribute to sustainable, healthy, and resilient communities.