1. Executive Summary

As Canada’s largest Catholic provider of health care – with a 150-year legacy of quality, compassionate care – Covenant (Covenant Health, Covenant Care, and Covenant Living) is uniquely positioned to strengthen the health system through its values-based culture and to influence, partner and lead efforts to achieve a bold vision for health care. Our vision calls for us to leverage our legacy to be an effective agent of change in the health system. Our mission of service is at the heart of our advocacy efforts, compelling us to give voice to the voiceless.

A clear understanding of Covenant’s contribution as a faith-based, mission-driven organization is foundational for our advocacy efforts. To be effective, we must engage those who are involved in and impact our mission across the continuum—from patients and families, to team members, to key partners/influencers to the public. As we face a difficult fiscal climate, changing demographics and the challenges of aging infrastructure in the years ahead, our ability to advocate to support our mission and advance our vision will be critical. Covenant has the opportunity to influence and shape health policy and address pressing social issues through effective advocacy. In doing so, we will build on our excellent reputation as a mission-driven organization, our high level of staff engagement, and our commitment to stakeholder engagement, thought leadership and growth.

The 2016-2021 Advocacy Strategy will help to build capacity, co-ordinate, animate and support our advocacy efforts. It is intended to achieve the following goals:

1. Enhance capacity and effectiveness in advocating with the marginalized to claim their voice;
2. Advocate for system improvement and transformation; and
3. Build public and stakeholder understanding and support for Covenant’s mission and our strategic contribution.

In pursuing these goals, the strategy will adhere to the guiding principles of promoting social justice, integration of efforts across the organization, meaningful engagement of stakeholders, collaboration with internal and external partners, and empowerment of the Covenant team.
2. Introduction

Covenant (Covenant Health, Covenant Care, and Covenant Living) has an established legacy of serving those most in need, delivering the highest quality care and service, working as a valued partner, and being at the forefront of innovation in the health care system. To ensure we are best able to carry out our mission and meet the health needs of Albertans, we recently renewed our Strategic Plan, including our organizational vision:

**Inspired by our mission of service, we will be leaders and partners in transforming health care and creating vibrant communities of health and healing.**

The Strategic Plan is oriented around four core strategic directions, as follows.

- **Serve** – We will strengthen our mission and live our values to meet the needs of those we serve through excellence in care, an engaged team and wise use of our resources.
- **Contribute** – We will leverage our legacy to maximize the strategic contribution of Catholic health care.
- **Grow** – We will seek out and respond to the needs of our communities, especially vulnerable and marginalized populations.
- **Transform** – We will create systems of care that enable people and communities to be healthy.

Within each strategic direction are several strategic objectives that will shape our priorities and guide our actions as we move forward.

This Advocacy Strategy aligns with the strategic direction to “Contribute” and is focused on helping us realize the following Strategic Objectives:

- **We will give voice to those who are vulnerable or voiceless through public engagement and advocacy.**
- **We will deepen the understanding of the strategic contribution of Catholic health care in Alberta and across Canada.**

3. Purpose

Effective advocacy is key to Covenant’s enduring mission to continue the healing ministry of Jesus, and our vision of transforming the health care system and creating vibrant communities of health and healing. The heart of all of our advocacy efforts is our mission, and it begins and ends with the people we serve: our patients, residents, clients and their families. Our 150-year legacy in Alberta is based on effective advocacy, and today Covenant carries on our founding Sisters’ tireless commitment to a just and caring society that embodies the gospel values of respect, dignity and compassion.

This strategy recognizes that trust is key to advocacy—at the bedside, in our collaborative system work, and through our public actions and accountability. It also recognizes that a clear understanding of Covenant’s contribution as a faith-based, mission-driven organization is

---

**Our Founding Sisters**

Living their mission of compassionate service, orders of Catholic Sisters were responsible for establishing the first hospitals, schools and social services in Alberta, including orphanages, soup kitchens, and care for the elderly. Religious missions played a key role in the founding of forty-nine towns and cities in the province.
foundational for our advocacy efforts. As a multi-site organization within an integrated provincial healthcare system, Covenant must position itself as a thought leader and trusted provider with unique strengths and advantages that add value to the system.

This strategy will build our capacity as an organization to give voice to those who are voiceless, and enhance trust with stakeholders through a deeper understanding of Catholic health care and our role in the health care system. The strategy will focus our efforts through coordinated and integrated corporate advocacy for greater impact on key issues and opportunities for our mission. It will establish tools and supports for engagement and ambassadorship, and address the need to build public awareness and a reputation based on our mission.

This strategy frames advocacy as a spectrum, or continuum of effort—from communications with those we serve, to board-to-board interactions, to specific advocacy activities with local and provincial governments, to public relations and partnership work within our communities. The figure below represents this continuum as a series of concentric circles.

This strategy holistically addresses efforts across the continuum, and identifies the distinct roles and opportunities for all members of the Covenant team as ambassadors and advocates. While advocacy efforts at the inner rings of the spectrum have a direct impact on care, the outer rings represent circles of influence where advocacy efforts will support our goals to grow our contribution, and transform the system.

Those We Serve: patients, residents and families

Covenant Family: staff, physicians, volunteers, Board, Community Board, Foundation Boards, Patients, Resident and Family Advisory Councils

Funders and Sponsors: Alberta Health Services, Alberta Government, Catholic Church

Local and Provincial Stakeholders: public, media, donors, community leaders, other service providers, educational institutions, professional associations, unions, parishes, suppliers

National Stakeholders: Canadian government, public, media, professional associations and advocacy groups
4. Current State Analysis

Reputation as a mission-driven organization
Covenant has been recognized for its commitment to its mission and values. Recently, Covenant Health was named one of Canada’s Top 10 Corporate Cultures. Accreditation Canada surveyors consistently note strong evidence of our mission and values as drivers in the quality of our care and teamwork. Our Mission Discernment Tool has been recognized by Accreditation Canada as Best Practice.

Internal engagement
Regular engagement surveys and mission assessments indicate employees and volunteers show a strong alignment to the mission of the organization and a high potential for advocacy and ambassadorship. However, Covenant Health’s Employee Engagement surveys over the past six years indicate that there is room for improvement in creating a culture of open communication, and ensuring staff feel that they have a voice in the organization and in their work. Both open communication and employee voice are necessary for internal advocacy. At the same time, employees indicate there are clear processes for bringing ideas forward. Covenant Health’s 2014 Physician Engagement survey reveals a high desire for and commitment to patient advocacy, with some frustrations regarding internal communications and ability to influence decisions.

Community and stakeholder engagement
Covenant is demonstrably committed to community engagement. Our governance structures ensure a strong connection to the communities we serve. Over 100 Community and Foundation board members in 14 communities are an important local voice, participating in strategic planning, and engaging their communities in identifying needs and building support. A robust Engagement Framework has been adopted by the organization to guide engagement plans and activities, based on international standards for best practice in public participation. We have also launched a social media presence, and continue to develop our efforts in online engagement.

Thought leadership
Covenant has established itself as a thought leader in key areas of health care serving marginalized or at risk populations. Providers of these services face complex challenges with shifting demographics, rising public expectations, changing practice, policy changes, increasing demands and economic pressures. Drawing on our academic and clinical expertise and resources, and our Catholic tradition of ethical reflection and discernment, Covenant is uniquely positioned to be a strong voice on issues and challenges facing Canadians. Key resources include the following:

- Network for Excellence in Seniors Health and Wellness;
- Palliative Institute;
- Unique programs serving the vulnerable, such as Angel Cradle, Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) Clinics, Healing Connections, Butterfly Project, Mental Health Day Program, Geriatric Psychiatry, Institute for Reconstructive Sciences in Medicine (iRSM) and more;
- Mission Discernment Tool; and
- Ethics Centre.

Multiple advocacy and engagement efforts
In support of our efforts to positively influence the health of Albertans, Covenant has initiatives aimed at engaging key stakeholders to increase awareness of and support for Covenant and Catholic health care, involve patients, residents and families in decision making, develop relationships and partnerships, discuss important issues in health care and build trust in the organization and the system. To date, these
Advocacy Strategy 2016-2021

Initiatives have largely operated in isolation, raising the risk of gaps, duplication, confusion and lost opportunities.

Organizational Expansion
Covenant Care, which provides non-profit supported living, will continue to grow in the years to come. The new Covenant Foundation (formed from Caritas Foundation and several Covenant affiliate foundations) will expand its scope and activity to meet the fundraising and philanthropic needs of Covenant. Covenant Living will continue to develop in the independent living market. This Advocacy Strategy will leverage the strength of each member of the Covenant family and advance our collective efforts to achieve the vision.

Fiscal challenges and population demands
Covenant is entering a time of fiscal restraint due to the economic challenges Alberta faces, with a significant drop in resource revenues and deficit budgets projected into the coming years. At the same time, population growth and shifting demographics place great pressure on shrinking resources. Covenant’s three-year plan to achieve a balanced budget presents opportunities to advocate for system change and increases the need for strong ambassadorship.

New provincial government
Alberta’s new government was elected on a platform strongly committed to publicly-funded and delivered health care and informed by a social justice and public participation philosophy. Covenant’s values are closely aligned with these elements, and as the government begins to tackle the most pressing challenges in the system, there will be opportunities to inform and influence public policy and advocate for transformation in health care delivery.

Federal election and national policy
Federally, the 2015 election and the 2016 legislation on Medical Assistance in Dying present an opportunity to shape national approaches to health care. Covenant has worked with the Catholic Health Alliance of Canada and other Catholic health care providers across Canada to develop a clear position and response to medical assistance in dying, and is well-positioned through the Covenant Health Palliative Institute to generate public dialogue.
5. Strategic Alignment

For the Advocacy Strategy to be successfully implemented and effectively achieve its goals, it is critical that it be well coordinated and aligned with other key corporate strategies and initiatives, as indicated in the following graphic.

![Diagram of Strategic Alignment]

- **A.** Alberta Health Services Partnership Plan
- **B.** Government of Alberta Collaboration Plan
- **C.** Employee, Physician and Volunteer Engagement Strategies
- **D.** Catholic Community Awareness Strategy
- **E.** Community Board Development Plan
- **F.** Covenant Foundation Change Plan
- **G.** Social Media Strategy

6. Strategy Goals and Measures

This section identifies the principal goals to be pursued under this Advocacy Strategy, along with the key milestones that will indicate progress towards each.

The strategy will be directed toward achieving the following three goals.

1. **Enhance capacity and effectiveness in advocating with the marginalized to claim their voice;**
2. **Advocate for system improvement and transformation; and**
3. **Build public and stakeholder understanding and support for Covenant’s mission and our strategic contribution.**
The table below outlines some of the key measures that will be used to track progress toward each goal.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Measures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Enhance capacity and effectiveness in advocating with the</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>marginalized to claim their voice.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Advocate for system improvement and transformation.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Build public and stakeholder understanding and support for</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Covenant’s mission and our strategic contribution.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7. Guiding Principles

**Social Justice**
In keeping with the rich social justice tradition of the Church, we are called to work in partnership with others to build healthy communities, recognizing that health is defined more broadly than treating disease. Our Advocacy Strategy will be guided by the aims of social justice: to focus on serving those most vulnerable, to give voice to those who need to be heard, and pursue the common good in our decision-making and action.

**Integration**
This strategy recognizes advocacy as a continuum of efforts across the organization and takes an integrated approach to ensure major advocacy efforts and corporate advocacy priorities are aligned and leveraged. Integrated and coordinated advocacy is key to strong branding and effective stakeholder relations.

**Engagement**
All of our advocacy and ambassadorship are forms of engagement. In our efforts, we will clearly identify the level of engagement—from the provision of information for shared understanding to full participation in decision-making—according to the following engagement framework adopted by Covenant.

| Level of Engagement—from lesser degrees of participation and influence to highest |
|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| **Level 1** Inform/Educate | **Level 2** Listen/Gather Input | **Level 3** Discuss/Involve | **Level 4** Collaborate | **Level 5** Partner |

**Objectives for Participation—to guide the level of involvement**

- **Level 1 Inform/Educate**
  - To provide information that will help people understand
- **Level 2 Listen/Gather Input**
  - To gather information or obtain feedback
- **Level 3 Discuss/Involve**
  - To work with people to understand and consider concerns, needs and hopes
- **Level 4 Collaborate**
  - To work together to discuss and agree on common ground for action and solutions
- **Level 5 Partner**
  - To come together as partners to delegate decision-making and/or work towards a goal

**Level of Commitment—the promise to those involved**

- **Level 1 Inform people**
  - To inform people
- **Level 2 Listen to people and acknowledge feedback**
  - To listen to people and acknowledge feedback
- **Level 3 Exchange information, ideas and concerns**
  - To work together to exchange information, ideas and concerns
- **Level 4 Seek advice and identify steps to take towards a common goal**
  - To seek advice and identify steps to take towards a common goal
- **Level 5 Implement agreed-upon decisions**
  - To work with people to implement agreed-upon decisions
Collaboration
Advocacy and ambassadorship is a shared responsibility and leaders play a vital role in shaping a positive climate. Our team members are both partners and ambassadors in our work. Each of us brings unique perspectives, experience and wisdom in discerning how best to respond to the health needs of the people we serve. We are called to collaborate not only with those external to Covenant, but also with those across our own programs and services, disciplines, geographic contexts, and cultural realities. In our calling to work with external partners, we commit to working collaboratively to ensure effective advocacy and ambassadorship and opportunities for engagement.

Empowerment
An organization’s true character is expressed by its people—board members, employees, leaders, volunteers, and medical staff. The strongest opinions—good or bad—about an organization are shaped by the words and deeds of its team members. Individual ambassadorship is key to effective stakeholder engagement, community building and trust. Each team member has a voice and a part to play in fostering relationships and building trust. Strategic advocacy and ambassadorship advice, mentorship, planning and tools will be used to build capacity and enhance effectiveness.

8. Risk
The following table identifies key risks pertaining to the Advocacy Strategy that will need to be acknowledged and managed as the strategy is implemented.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk/Opportunity</th>
<th>Impacts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Multiple advocacy and engagement strategies developed and implemented in isolation | • Missed opportunities to enhance awareness and understanding overall  
• Lack of support due to lack of awareness of Covenant Health and its mission  
• Duplication of efforts; ineffective use of limited resources  
• Missed opportunities to leverage activities to achieve multiple goals |
| Key challenges to Covenant Health’s mission, such as aging infrastructure, and fiscal constraints | • Challenges impact care environment and quality  
• Challenges impact staff morale, engagement and potentially bedside advocacy  
• Opportunities to influence key decision-makers |
| Lack of general public awareness of Covenant Health                               | • Reduced access to fundraising and other support  
• Inability to withstand difficult developments  
• Lack of public trust and confidence  
• Impact on patient and family confidence |
9. Conclusion

Astute and coordinated advocacy with all key stakeholders will be key to Covenant’s ability to live its mission and continue the legacy of the Sisters as we enter a time of economic challenges and shifting societal needs and demands. Covenant’s investments in building a strong culture with mission-driven leaders, physicians and employees focused on patient and resident-centred care provides a strong foundation for ambassadorship and advocacy. This unique advantage is further supported by our strong values of collaboration and social justice, coupled with our commitment to building relationships and trust through engagement. Focusing on enhancing our capacity internally and our reputation externally, this strategy will help Covenant improve patient-centred care, use our engagement efforts to maximum impact, build public trust and confidence, inform and influence public policy, and advocate for transformation in health care delivery.
We will give voice to those who are vulnerable or voiceless through public engagement and advocacy.

We will deepen the understanding of the strategic contribution of Catholic health care in Alberta and across Canada.

To fulfill our mission, we must influence and shape health policy and address pressing social issues.

- Enhance capacity and effectiveness in advocating with the marginalized to claim their voice.
- Advocate for system improvement and transformation.
- Build public and stakeholder understanding and support for Covenant’s mission and our strategic contribution.