1. Executive Summary

Compassionate, effective and timely Palliative and End of Live Care (PEOLC) is fundamentally important for quality health care delivery. As an internationally-recognized leader, Covenant (Covenant Health, Covenant Care, and Covenant Living) is positioned to champion a future where every Albertan can make informed decisions about their end of life care, and where all caregivers are supported with knowledge, expertise and resources.

An increase in the number of seniors, and greater societal expectations for PEOLC services continue to challenge the overall health care system. With its history, mission and organizational structure Covenant has a unique opportunity to provide leadership in PEOLC, particularly in the areas of clinical practice and research.

The Covenant Health Palliative Institute coordinates and supports our efforts in this area by acting as a central body that crafts policy, collaborates with providers, conducts research, informs policy makers, and engages the public. These activities promote excellence in innovation, implementation, and evaluation of best practices in PEOLC.

Through its strong partnerships with providers, policy makers, and academic stakeholders—including Alberta Health, Alberta Health Services, universities and funders—Covenant will continue to transform palliative care in Alberta while positively influencing developments in PEOLC at the local, national and international level. At the same time, our work must acknowledge and respond to emerging developments and trends, which include early palliative care, non-cancer end of life care and medical assistance in dying.

This strategy identifies the following specific goals for our work in the area of PEOLC:

1. Increase Palliative and End Of Life Care capacity to address gaps in service within Canada.
2. Increase the use of Goals of Care and Advance Care Planning within all of Covenant.
3. Advocate for a national, robust palliative and end of life care system.

As we work to achieve these goals, we will be guided by a focus on quality, compassion and innovation; we will coordinate with partners and leverage existing work; we will strive to demonstrate value in all that we do; and we will promote multi-disciplinary collaboration to best meet the needs of our patients and their loved ones.
2. Introduction

Covenant (Covenant Health, Covenant Care, and Covenant Living) has an established legacy of serving those most in need, delivering the highest quality of care and service, working as a valued partner, and being at the forefront of innovation in the health care system. To ensure that 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 Palliative and End of Life Care Strategy aligns with the strategic direction to “Transform,” and is focused on helping us realize the following Strategic Objective:

“We will be leaders in robust palliative and end of life care and advocate for it as an essential part of the health system.”

3. Purpose

Reflecting an aging population, the number of Canadians dying each year will increase so that by 2026 there will be 40 per cent more people dying per year than there are today. Each death in turn will, as it does now, affect the well-being of five family members and loved ones.

The Palliative and End of Life Care Strategy outlines how Covenant will respond to this reality, working with our partners with a focus on enhancing our capacity to provide quality PEOLC care, promoting advance care planning and conducting cutting edge research with an orientation towards transforming practice.

Providing provincial and national leadership requires Covenant to continue and strengthen its relationship with organizations such as the Catholic Health Alliance of Canada, Canadian Hospice Palliative Care Association, Health Canada, the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research. Championing patient and public access to PEOLC through advocacy is paramount.
to influencing the direction of PEOLC in Alberta and Canada. The Palliative Institute will play a central role in moving forward Covenant’s PEOLC agenda. Its multi-disciplinary team is deeply committed to assisting in the processes of innovation, implementation, evaluation and communication.

Covenant’s patient-focused approach requires investments in communication and outreach. In a culture where death is neither a comfortable nor an easy topic of conversation, there is an ongoing need to engage care providers, patients and their families as well as the general public in a discussion about end of life care. This is particularly important in the context of emerging developments and trends, which include early palliative care, non-cancer end of life care and legalization of medical assistance in dying. As such, Covenant is committed to increasing and facilitating broad discussions about palliative end of life care and advance care planning.

4. Current State Analysis

Policy
Covenant is a valued partner in Alberta’s comprehensive, coordinated and integrated health care system. By working collaboratively with Alberta Health Services (AHS) and Alberta Health, Covenant has played a key role in drafting the provincial PEOLC framework. PEOLC is considered a “cross-cutting” initiative with Alberta’s Strategic Clinical Networks. Ongoing consultation and engagement with other health care providers continues to unfold and refine the provincial framework. Specifically, Covenant and the AHS PEOLC program work together on their respective strategic planning processes related to PEOLC, creating synergies and avoiding duplication of work.

Clinical Care
Covenant has a long history of innovation and leadership in PEOLC. This has included the development, implementation, and evaluation of assessment tools and clinical pathways that provide protocols for the best care for patients Covenant models the effective use of advance care planning and implementation of the Goals of Care Designation. With the Grey Nuns Community Hospital Tertiary Palliative Care Unit, five hospices, as well as acute and continuing care sites throughout the province, Covenant is a leader in PEOLC for Alberta.

Advance Care Planning
This is a process that involves reflecting, discussing, and making plans about future health care decisions, in the event that individuals are no longer able to speak for themselves.

Goals of Care Designation
This is a medical order that provides instructions to health care providers about the kind of care a patient wishes to receive (or not receive). It may be completed as part of an individual’s advance care planning process, described above.

Research
Covenant is well aligned with academic partners through the Palliative Institute. Alberta is fortunate to have organizations such as Alberta Innovates Health Solutions and the Alberta Cancer Foundation, whose goals and mandates
align well with Covenant’s Strategic Plan. Moreover, our research agenda is enhanced through our leadership and participation in national and international research. For example, Covenant has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the European Association of Palliative Care Research Network. Finally, we simultaneously contribute to and benefit from systematic appraisals and reviews of the research literature, which inform best clinical practices.

Other Partners
Building on longstanding relationships with other Catholic health care centers, programs and educational centers, Covenant and its partners continue to identify gaps, innovate, evaluate and set direction for research and education. Covenant is closely aligned with national advocacy organizations such as the Catholic Health Alliance of Canada, Canadian Partnership Against Cancer, and Canadian Hospice Palliative Care Association.

Current Trends
Early introduction of palliative care into chronic disease management
There is a growing evidence base for a “Palliative Approach” in primary, secondary, and long-term care. A palliative approach requires health care providers to adopt best supportive practices for patients and their families along the entire continuum of care.

The challenge of providing PEOLC to non-cancer populations
Differences in the way diseases present themselves and progress lead to uncertainty in predicting patient outcomes. Addressing the needs of non-cancer patients requires a coordinated response from both the palliative and chronic disease clinical communities. Currently, the Palliative Institute is collaboratively developing supportive care end of life pathways for patients with chronic kidney disease.

Medical Assistance in Dying Legislation
The recent Supreme Court of Canada ruling that struck down criminal code provisions prohibiting medical assistance in dying presents a sobering opportunity to reflect on expectations for PEOLC services. It provides a significant opportunity to engage and initiate broader discussions between and among health care providers and the public, bringing together various stakeholders to help position and advocate for PEOLC.

Our capacity and opportunity
Several factors uniquely position Covenant Health to lead innovation in PEOLC, including the following.

- The legacy of leadership and advocacy in PEOLC, dating back to our founding congregations of nuns, including the Grey Nuns Sisters;
- Strategic alignment between priorities of Covenant, Alberta Health and Alberta Health Services;
- Establishing and operating the Palliative Institute, which serves as a palliative and end of life care knowledge broker for academics, clinicians, policy makers, patients and families, leading informed public discourse on end of life issues;
- Strength and focus in whole-person-centered supportive care (physical, spiritual, psychological and social care);
- Covenant’s multiple sites and settings of care throughout Alberta; and
- Covenant’s organizational structure and support which allows it to operate as laboratory for innovative practice that can respond rapidly to emerging needs and possibilities.
5. Strategic Alignment

For the Palliative and End of Life Care Strategy to be successfully implemented and effectively achieve its goals, it is critical that it be well coordinated and aligned with other strategies and initiatives, including the following.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic Objective (from Covenant’s Strategic Plan)</th>
<th>Alignment Considerations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We will design, implement and share high performing systems of care and service based on integration, innovation and evidence.</td>
<td>The strategy addresses gaps in palliative care services, including clinical pathways and implementation of Advance Care Planning/Goals of Care.</td>
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<td>We will enable seniors to live to the fullness of their capacity as active and connected members of their communities.</td>
<td>The Palliative Institute is working collaboratively with the Seniors Strategy, and the Network of Excellence in Seniors Health and Wellness in addressing seniors’ capacity in the community.</td>
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<tr>
<td>We will give voice to those who are vulnerable or voiceless through public engagement and advocacy.</td>
<td>Covenant’s mission to transform care, and to serve and give voice to vulnerable populations supports a focus on PEOLC. Although those who require palliative care represent a vulnerable population in themselves, evaluation of inner city populations and visible minorities are examples of the specific needs we are working to address. Moreover, the Palliative Institute works closely with individual programs and the Covenant Health Network of Excellence for Seniors’ Health and Wellness to transform care to dementia patients, address the needs of caregivers and investigate social supports for isolated seniors.</td>
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<tr>
<td>We will partner with patients, residents, families, communities and key contributors to achieve health and healing.</td>
<td>Fostering strong collaboration is critical for Covenant and the Palliative Institute to achieve this and other strategic objectives</td>
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6. Strategy Goals and Measures

This section identifies the principal goals to be pursued under the Palliative and End of Life Care Strategy, along with the key measures that will indicate progress towards each.

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

1. Increase Palliative and End Of Life Care capacity to address gaps in service within Canada.

2. Increase the use of Goals of Care and Advance Care Planning within all of Covenant.

3. Advocate for a national, robust palliative and end of life care system.

The table below outlines some of the key measures that will be used to track progress toward each goal.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Measures</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Increase Palliative and End Of Life Care capacity to address gaps in service within Canada.</td>
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7. Guiding Principles

The following principles will guide the work of Covenant in palliative and end of life care.

- Focus on quality, compassion and innovation;
- Coordinate with partners and leverage existing work;
- Demonstrate value; and
- Promote multi-disciplinary collaboration.
8. Risk

Holistic, quality health care is unimaginable without a commitment to compassionate, effective and timely palliative and end of life care. Covenant’s objective to lead in and advocate for PEOLC brings with it the promise to increase capacities for providing care in this area.

PEOLC impacts all areas of Covenant. There is a need to address the vast range of aspects pertinent to improving palliative care – clinical support, education, research support, public outreach and administrative support in a coordinated manner. Without this coordination, efforts to improve care will not be sustainable. This strategy provides focus and clarity on the path towards making the best use of existing resources, thereby contributing to building a more sustainable health care system.

Engaging staff, patients and families in discussions about PEOLC can be challenging and requires a variety of approaches. Covenant needs to ensure patient and family needs are at the centre of this strategy. Through work on clinical pathways, advance care planning and accreditation, Covenant has the opportunity to move these needed conversations forward.

Covenant sites extend into five AHS zones within Alberta, and multiple providers, all with respective PEOLC programs. There is a risk that care will be uncoordinated without clear collaboration with zone operations to ensure knowledge translation for PEOLC. The absence of consistent messaging in areas such as Advance Care Planning and Goals of Care Designations could undermine the process of improving the care of patients and families as well as the training of staff. For this reason, Covenant will adjust our educational information to be consistent with Alberta Health Services.

9. Conclusion

Covenant works in collaboration with individuals, communities, partners and funders to alleviate the suffering of patients and their families through excellence in palliative and end of life care. Caring for the whole person – body, mind and soul – at every stage of life, Covenant’s 2016-2020 Palliative and End of Life Care Strategy will continue to help transform health care for Albertans through leadership, research, knowledge translation, advocacy and outreach.
Palliative and End of Life Care Strategy 2016-2021

Strategic Direction
TRANSFORM

Strategic Objectives
We will be leaders in robust palliative and end of life care and advocate for it as an essential part of the health system.

Why this matters
Given population aging, and related ethical issues, our mission-driven focus is vitally important.

Goals
• Increase Palliative and End Of Life Care capacity to address gaps in service within Canada.
• Increase the use of Goals of Care and Advance Care Planning within all of Covenant.
• Advocate for a national, robust palliative and end of life care system.