



Catholic Health Alliance of Canada
Alliance catholique canadienne de la santé

**DEFINING A BOLD & VIBRANT
VISION FOR CATHOLIC
HEALTH CARE IN CANADA:**

A NATIONAL CHALLENGE



Relentless, fierce, world-class, proud, unbreakable.

When the Canadian Olympic team members were asked to reflect on the terms that defined their character, these are the words they chose: Relentless, fierce, world-class, proud, unbreakable. These adjectives communicate the strength and personal conviction that each athlete carried with him or her throughout their training and into the 2014 Olympic Games. They chose these words at a moment in time when they had to make a fundamental commitment to changing everything in their lives in the pursuit of their own success, and that of the Canadian Olympic team.

For those of us committed to Catholic Health Care in Canada, this incredible strength of character – rooted deeply in our commitment to compassionate service to others – is what is required for us to make a monumental turn at the crossroads at which we find ourselves. And like them, the commitment requires a personal vow and a commitment to working together for the transformation and success of the team.



CONTEXT OF THIS NATIONAL CHALLENGE

Catholic Health Care has played a vital role in Canada from the very beginnings of this country. On August 1, 1639, Marie Guenet, Anne Cointre and Marie Forestier, three sisters of the Augustines Hospitalières, disembarked from their ship at the port of Ville de Québec. With them, they had a charter from Louis XVI with a mandate to care for the needs of the sick and disadvantaged in what was then, New France. From these humble beginnings, and often under harsh conditions, religious women and men from many Catholic congregations have carried out this healing ministry for over four hundred years.

Committed to stewardship of this four hundred year history, the Catholic Health Alliance of Canada (CHAC) Governing Council recently felt compelled to hold a retreat (March 20-21, 2014 in Edmonton) to discuss the modern context in which Catholic Health Care now operates in Canada. Leaders focused on positioning Catholic Health Care to continue its mission and vital role in light of a variety of factors and pressures in the Canadian health care system.

Pressures include:

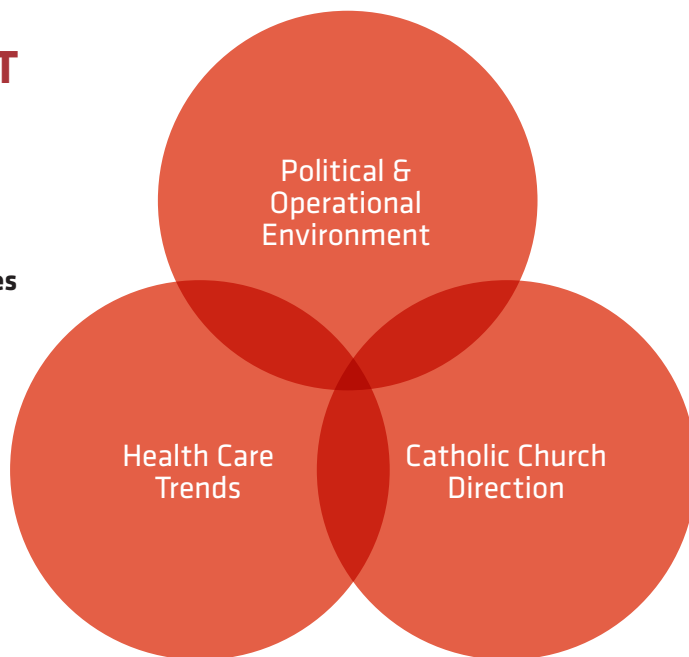
- Increasing integration and regionalization of health care across Canada;
- Increasing prescriptive direction from funders and difficulty for some smaller Catholic Health Care organizations to meet quality and financial expectations;
- Growing pressure of ethical issues within the acute care sector (e.g. genomics, stem cell research, harm reduction strategies, reproductive and end of life issues) which raise questions about whether Catholic Health Care organizations can remain relevant in the acute care sector and still align with the Church's teachings;
- Growing concerns that Catholic Health Care is not understood, valued, or even seen as a ministry within the Church itself;
- Growing concern that the expertise and collective resources of Catholic Health Care organizations are not being leveraged due to the lack of a strong national vision to plan and to sustain Catholic Health Care.



CURRENT ENVIRONMENT

During the Governing Council's retreat, members articulated that the operational environment of Catholic Health Care includes three dimensions:

1. trends in the health care system itself
2. political and operational environment in which it functions
3. the global and national direction of the Catholic Church.



Current health care trends include a shift toward the LEAN system; a focus on chronic illness management; seniors' health and mental health; a move towards single governance and management models; and systems transformation which is an amalgam of technology, system efficiencies and standardized models of care.

On the political/operating front, we must clarify any misconceptions about Catholic Health Care, communicate our role and value-add effectively and continually work at building positive partnerships in a complex and challenging environment. With a younger generation of patients, health professionals and health administrators who do not understand and fully appreciate the legacy of the Catholic Church, we need to diligently build meaningful connections to our history and create our own vibrant legacy faithful to the mission.

The direction of the Catholic Church impacts our work. In Canada, the Church's experience in sponsoring health care varies across the country. While the Church historically entrusted the Sisters with direct involvement in health care, that role has transferred to the faithful laity. Recognizing the diverse views of Catholics in Canada, there is ongoing tension in Catholic Health Care to remain faithful to the teachings of the Church in providing services to the general public. And yet, Pope Francis' message about caring for our society's most vulnerable people offers the opportunity for Catholic Health Care to be more relevant than ever. His pastoral leadership has touched the world, opening doors for Catholic Health Care and our story.

RELENTLESSLY MEETING THE CHALLENGE OF CHANGE

Like the Olympic athletes, the time for us to make a commitment to change cannot wait. We need to make a fundamental shift – as a Catholic Health Care community – to create a bold, new vision for ourselves and communicate it to our stakeholders and partners in health care. We need to ask ourselves a series of fundamental questions and challenge ourselves to precisely define our value, our unique qualities and distinct capabilities – or risk withering to extinction.

Our leaders are suggesting three strategic directions that we must pursue. But before we can achieve them, each require that we delve deeply into the heart of our mission, and determine that which makes us uniquely “Catholic Health Care” and relevant to the current health care system.

As Catholic Health Care providers, we must work together on a fundamental shift to a refreshed vision and focused direction to steward the ministry and make the health care system stronger.

We must speak with one voice about the importance of Catholic Health Care to those who make decisions in Government, in our health regions and in our communities.

And we must renew our commitment to sharing our knowledge and resources to make each member stronger and to bring thoughtful leadership and innovation to the Canadian health care system.



During their retreat, the Council articulated the following Vision:

We are called upon to lead, collaborate, innovate and influence to improve health care in Canada and serve where the needs are greatest—especially the poor, vulnerable and marginalized.



STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

PROCLAIM	SERVE	INFLUENCE
<p>Tell the story and ensure the people understand our strategic contribution – not only historically but the current/ future critical role of Catholic Health Care in Canada.</p>	<p>Advocate for social justice, the vulnerable and the voiceless; ensuring that we give voice to those that are in need.</p>	<p>Innovate within the entire system by working collaboratively across the Catholic Health Care system to leverage the strengths that exist in our many charitable works.</p>

We know that our Catholic Health Care providers have many, many strengths. We operate some of the best and largest facilities in the country. With strong cultures and values, we attract talented and committed staff. We provide quality care and service – fulfilling our mission with skill and commitment. We have a national scope and proud histories. We have strong relationships and strong reputations. We span the spectrum of health care – from birth to death, from basic community care to complex acute care – providing many opportunities to influence and shape the health care system

We have a calling. We serve in operating rooms, emergency departments, seniors’ centres, hospices, clinics and maternity wards across the country. Our founding stories of innovation and resourcefulness, risk-taking and adaptability have shaped our culture. We are flexible and nimble, able to respond when others are unable or unwilling. We fill in the gaps in seniors care, care of chronically ill or frail individuals, and care of those with mental health challenges.

And we have each other – a network of mission-driven individuals and groups that have the potential to make a difference as we share knowledge and expertise, take collective action and speak with one voice. Together, we are a healing presence in the nation and in the lives of Canadians.





“The thing the church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness, proximity. I see the church as a field hospital after battle. It is useless to ask a seriously injured person if he has high cholesterol and about the level of his blood sugars! You have to heal his wounds. Then we can talk about everything else. Heal the wounds, heal the wounds...”

**Pope Francis Interview with Antonio Spadaro, S.J.,
August 2013**

**How do we address challenges that might stand in our way?
Our proposed strategic directions require us to reflect on some important questions, to contribute our insights and possible solutions, and to collectively agree to a solid course of action.**

Questions for Discussion:

- 1.** How can we leverage the strength of our works across Canada and build on our legacy of the past four hundred years of exemplary work to be leaders in excellence and quality in health services today?
- 2.** How does our commitment to social justice move us to a unique role in Canadian health services? How can we leverage that strength?
- 3.** How can we remain humble and still communicate our unique and beneficial qualities to our stakeholders, funders and partners?
- 4.** How can we continue to meet the unprecedented challenges in our own communities and still make time and energy to do the work necessary to bolster Catholic Health Care across Canada?
- 5.** How can we become so articulate and unbreakable, that we can be a force for change in the health care system?





YOUR CALL TO ACTION

Consider these questions in your health care organization, your community, your region, and your diocese. Commit yourself, like the Canadian Olympic team, to achieving your hopes and dreams for Catholic Health Care as well as contribute to your “national team” to help us all achieve an outcome that will sustain our mission.

Ultimately, we want our partners and Canadians to understand that Catholic Health Care in Canada makes a significant contribution to the publicly funded health care system in Canada. And that Canadian Catholic Health Care providers influence the health of all Canadians by providing quality services led by gospel values and advocating for social justice, the vulnerable and the voiceless.

We want Canadians to know that Catholic Health Care is positioned to be a powerful force for positive change in the health care system through innovation, integration and the sharing of knowledge of resources. And finally, we want to ensure that Catholic Health Care providers are an employer of choice, contributing to the health and economies of communities, strengthening the health care system and fostering an engaged and skilled workforce.

The leadership of the Alliance intends to aggressively pursue these directions over the next year and develop a concrete plan over the next few months on which to act upon. We will use your feedback to inform our actions and therefore strongly urge you to have the debates in your communities and respond to us with your ideas.

By meeting this challenge now, in 2014, we can remain faithful to the Gospel call to be both salt and light – truly living Jesus’ healing ministry of hope and healing in our complex, changing modern world.

An electronic version of this document will be emailed to all conference participants as well as widely throughout the Catholic Health Care community. We invite your response and input through the link that will be provided in that email.