

Shirley McClellan

JOINS THE COVENANT HEALTH BOARD

Board Chair John Brennan is pleased to officially welcome former Minister of Health Shirley McClellan to Covenant Health's Board of Directors.

"Shirley has played a pivotal role in advancing faith-based health care in this province," he says. "We are pleased to have the gift of her wisdom and leadership on our Covenant Health team."

While Minister of Health, Shirley led efforts to establish the Master Agreement that articulates the role of voluntary organizations (including Covenant Health) in Alberta's health system. "One of the proudest things I accomplished in my time in health was seeing the successful conclusion to that agreement," says Shirley.

One of Alberta's most respected politicians, Shirley served as a Member of the Legislative Assembly for the Drumheller-Stettler constituency from 1987 to 2007. During her six terms in office, she served in a variety of high-profile cabinet roles—including Deputy Premier and Finance Minister.

During her 20 years in government, Shirley's commitment to faith-based health care grew strong. "When you understand the history [of the province] and you see the contribution that voluntaries have made over the years—the quality contributions and the values they brought with them into the system—it just makes sense. It was [primarily] the faith-based groups that brought health care to this province and in particular to rural communities," she says.

"Our facilities have a proven performance record over the years. You just have to look at the 16 Covenant Health facilities that we operate across the province and look at the services they provide, and you'll see that its true."

Retired from political office since 2007, Shirley lauds the role of Catholic sisters in shaping our health care system and is proud to help carry their legacy into the future on the Covenant Health Board.

"The sisters left an indelible imprint of how health services should be delivered," she notes. "They brought compassion and interest in the whole person—the body, the mind and the spirit. I believe personally so strongly in the importance of providing health care in this way, and in compassion for people—from the very poorest to the wealthy. Those values haven't changed over the years."

She is also happy to leave the rigorous pace of her former political life behind to spend more time with her four grandchildren, and help lead Covenant Health through these early years of growth and change. Though optimistic about our future, Shirley is clear that the winds of change are still blowing and that we will continue to meet many challenges along the way.

"When I was health minister, the average age of a person in long term care was 75, and now it's about 86. That's not many years. More important than the years you can add to someone's time on earth is the quality of that time."



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That is where we are making such strides—including in rehabilitation, and in therapy that we can provide. Medications are new and emerging, as well as ways of treatment that are more humane, kinder."

In the midst of tremendous change and progress, she stresses that one thing must remain constant. "It comes down to this: putting the person in need of services first," she says. "If we approach every decision about provision of health care services in that way we won't be too far wrong. You have to have a system and you have to have some order to it, but you can never lose sight of who we are there to serve."

The University of Lethbridge will award Shirley McClellan an honorary degree for her esteemed service to Albertans at its Spring Convocation this June.



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