

NICOLE CONNELL, M.ED.

EXECUTIVE BIOGRAPHY

Nicole Connell is an accomplished healthcare and human services executive with more than 20 years of experience at the intersection of behavioral health, developmental disability services, public social services, community health, and education.

As Senior Executive Director at Merakey in Southeast Pennsylvania, Nicole provides strategic oversight of Adult Behavioral Health Services across multiple counties and states, leading a team of Executive Directors to drive operational excellence, innovative program development, and financial sustainability. She is known for aligning complex systems, strengthening infrastructure, and positioning organizations to respond effectively to evolving community needs.

Nicole leads with a strong command of operational, fiscal, and strategic execution, consistently ensuring compliance with local, state, and federal regulations while advancing high-quality, person-centered care. Her collaborative engagement with county leadership, elected officials, and managed care organizations has strengthened cross-system partnerships and enhanced service delivery across complex environments. In 2024, she spearheaded the design and launch of the Merakey Mental Health Walk-In Clinic, Philadelphia's first Adult Behavioral Health Urgent Care, introducing an innovative model that expands timely access to community-based care and reduces reliance on emergency departments.

Under her leadership, her executive team has secured millions of dollars in new business through successful competitive proposals and strategic program acquisitions, while consistently achieving exceptional regulatory outcomes, including OMHSAS audits with zero citations and full accreditations and commendations from CARF, the Department of Health Office of Licensing, and The Joint Commission. Overseeing a multi-million-dollar portfolio, Nicole has consistently delivered both growth and loss mitigation, demonstrating strong financial stewardship, rate negotiation, and business development expertise. Her ability to align organizational strategy and resources with community priorities reflects a deep understanding of the evolving healthcare landscape.

Prior to her role at Merakey, Nicole held multiple executive leadership positions with the City of Philadelphia Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual disAbility Services, a \$1.6 billion healthcare system. There, she led major strategic initiatives, advanced policy development, and served as a trusted advisor to three Commissioners. She is widely recognized for her ability to build cross-sector coalitions, engage elected leadership, and drive large-scale systems transformation. Her leadership is grounded in innovation, equity, and a commitment to expanding access to care for underserved communities.

She is actively engaged across Greater Philadelphia and South Jersey through board service and professional affiliations. A proud graduate of the Philadelphia High School for Girls, Nicole earned her degrees from Temple University and Eastern University and completed doctoral coursework in Public Administration. She is currently pursuing a fellowship with the American College of Healthcare Executives.

In recognition of her leadership, expertise, and impact, Nicole was named to City & State Pennsylvania's 40 Under 40 and recognized by Influential Women Magazine in 2025. In 2026, she was honored by the Philadelphia Business Journal as a Diversity in Business awardee, named among the region's top executives of color.