

# 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, public social services, community health, and education. As the Senior Executive Director at Merakey in Southeast Pennsylvania, she exemplifies strategic leadership by overseeing Adult Behavioral Health Services across six counties and guiding a team of Executive Directors to drive operational excellence, program growth, and loss mitigation.

Nicole excels in directing operational, fiscal, and strategic initiatives, ensuring compliance with local, state, and federal regulatory standards while fostering high-quality service delivery. Her approach with county officials, elected officials, and managed care organizations enhances service quality and strengthens partnerships. In 2024, she led the design and development of the Merakey Mental Health Walk-In Clinic, Philadelphia's first Adult Behavioral Health Urgent Care—a bold step toward reimagining access to care and transforming how behavioral health services are delivered. This initiative reflects her deep commitment to expanding access, evolving traditional service models, developing high-performing multidisciplinary teams, and meeting the urgent and changing needs of today's communities.

Managing a robust \$60 million portfolio, Nicole has successfully driven growth and loss mitigation in behavioral health services at Merakey, showcasing both her financial acumen and business development expertise. Her ability to align organizational goals with community needs reflects her deep understanding of the evolving healthcare landscape.

She previously held multiple executive roles with the City of Philadelphia's Department of Behavioral Health, where she led strategic initiatives, policy development, and served as a chief advisor to three former behavioral health Commissioners. Nicole's strategic planning and tactical execution skills are complemented by her capacity to build coalitions and manage collaborative relationships with key stakeholders across public organizations. She is adept at engaging elected officials, leading multidisciplinary teams, and facilitating transformative change within organizations and communities.

By leveraging predictive analytics, research, and community insights, Nicole is dedicated to enhancing quality of life and reducing inequitable access to resources that influence social drivers of health. Her extensive expertise in innovative community engagement and public health, along with her proven experience in operational leadership, positions her as a vital resource for systemic change.

Nicole is actively engaged in the Greater Philadelphia region through various committees and boards and holds memberships in several local and national professional organizations. A proud graduate of the Philadelphia High School for Girls, she earned degrees from Temple University and Eastern University, completed doctoral coursework in Public Administration, and is currently pursuing fellowship with the American College of Healthcare Executives—considered the gold standard of board certification in healthcare management. In recognition of her leadership, expertise, and dedication to the field, Nicole was named one of City and State Pennsylvania's 2025 "40 Under 40" and is an honoree in the Marquis Who's Who in America for 2025–2026.