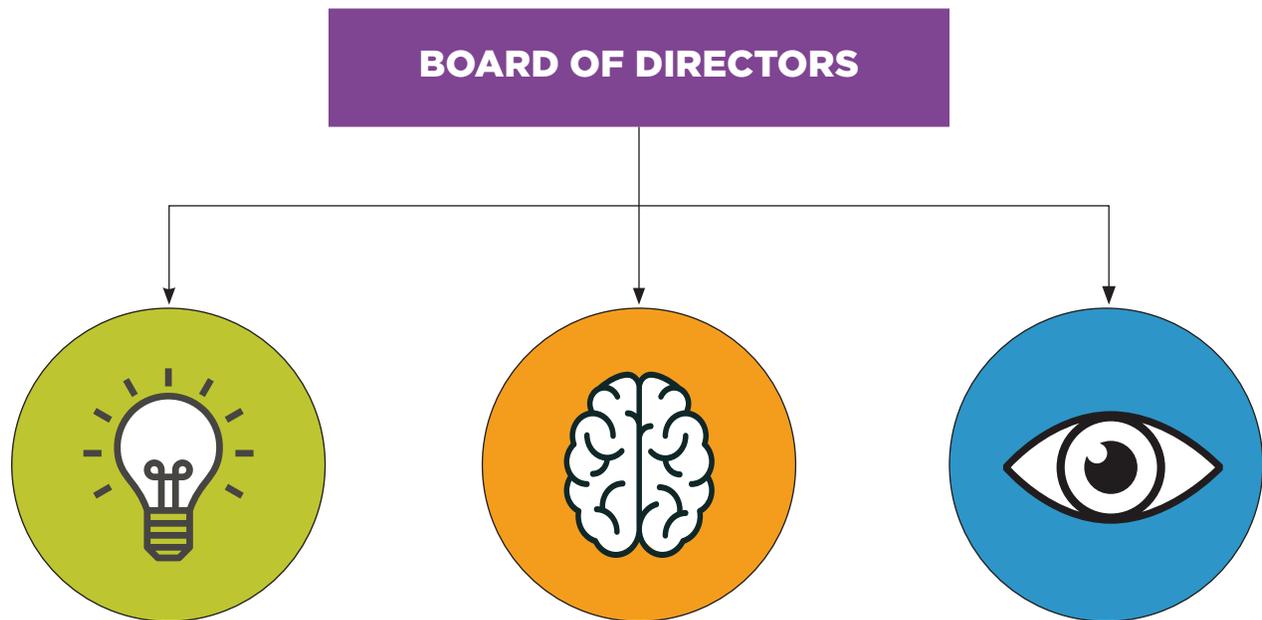


# Bringing Youthful Insight to Board Leadership



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**F**or community health centers, the Board of Directors plays an important role in governing the organization. There are federal requirements regarding the composition of the board, including that it must be comprised of at least 51 percent of people who use the center's services. Each health center board member's unique background and perspective as a patient and/or community stakeholder are integral to the board's role in overseeing fiduciary and operational management, personnel policy, program priorities, community affairs and outreach, and other governance areas at the health center. In this article, we meet three young board members who are helping to pave the way for future generations of health center board leaders.

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## Jeffrey Brown Lansing, Michigan

Jeffrey Brown's involvement in public health began with years of involvement in his community and with social services. Inspire Care, the company he created and leads, is a social organization that makes living at home possible for people with chronic illnesses and disabilities. He came to community health centers because he realized they were the primary care providers for many of the people he was serving.

"I wanted to be a part of systemic change," he says. He was able to accomplish that goal through his involvement on the Board of Directors for **Ingham County Community Health Center**, where he helps address challenges like access to and quality of care.

"I have been a very strong advocate for the treatment of people, as well as for creating an environment that fosters quality care," he says.

Two keys to attracting younger board members, Brown says, are "inclusion and fostering an environment that says, 'Hey, you have value and we want to hear what you have to say.'" Training and development are essential as well. Another factor is outreach — letting people know about community health centers and their availability and promoting them on social media.

"That opens up dialogue for further conversation and relationships — saying, 'Hey, we're doing active events. Come and see what community health centers are about,'" he says.

Working on the board's membership committee, Brown has helped bring in some younger and more diverse members in recent months. He takes care to explain the vision and the impact to the new members — noting the more than 25,000 people served by the health center each year; the 70,000 annual patient visits; and board members' roles in helping to make things better, increase funding, and expand access to care. Sharing that vision and showing them the impact leads to greater exposure and interest.

"Now you have the passion and drive because they've become aware and they understand the importance of the position to sit at the table, to have a voice and know that they matter," Brown says.

Looking to the future, Brown sees the Health Center Movement being "the patriarch of primary care for individuals who are socially and economically disadvantaged." Political support is essential, he says, as is bringing the acumen and expertise of the private sector to community-based or public care.



## LaTisha McClam Conway, South Carolina

LaTisha McClam came to community health center board involvement with a banking and financial background. After she was approached to be a member of the board, she dug a little deeper and found that it struck a particular

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interest for her. Having been born and raised in the area where **Health Care Partners of South Carolina** is located, she was familiar with the community and knew how important the center's services are to residents and how essential it is for families in the region to have access.

"I have a passion for making sure we keep our community healthy," she says.

For future board members, McClam says publicity is key. It is important, she says, to get out into the community and let people know about the health center. Before she was asked to be on the board, she says she was not aware of health centers and how much they had to offer the community.

"Letting the community see who we are and what we're doing will get more young people interested in becoming a board member, and show what a health care center can do in our community," McClam says. With her professional skills, McClam helps Health Care Partners with its finances, though she admits she is still learning about the health care side of the organization. "Hopefully," she says, "with my

educational background and my experience, I can help the board and the health center grow financially."

McClam says that on a local level, she would like to see health centers provide a form of transportation for clients who cannot get to the center – a bus or a van, perhaps, to transport the elderly, youth, and others who do not have the means to make it there, particularly in rural areas. On a national level, she says the Health Center Movement is promising, particularly with all they have to offer. She compares community health centers to one-stop shops, with physicians, pharmacy, dental care, lab services, and more all under one roof.

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### **Charles O'Connell New Haven, Connecticut**

Charles O'Connell, Founder and Chief Executive Officer of the digital health company FitScript, had an unusual introduction to community health centers – as a patient. About a decade ago, O'Connell – who has type 1 diabetes – found himself unemployed and uninsured. **Cornell Scott-Hill Health Center** was the only place where he could get an appointment.



"Without that service being available to me at that time in my life, we wouldn't be sitting here today," he says. O'Connell was able to get care at the health center, and eventually went on to realize his dream: the creation of FitScript, which uses diabetes experts, fitness professionals, and digital engineers to help people around the world take control of their diabetes.

"When you provide the actual foundational elements of health care to those in need, you are raising the floor for the entire society – and when you raise the floor for society, you raise the ceiling," says O'Connell. ♦