

# In Alignment with the White House 'Clean Air in Buildings Challenge,' The Center for Active Design's Fitwel Viral Response Module Safeguards Building Occupant Health



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**Center for Active Design** →  
Apr 13, 2022, 13:51 ET

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*Growing list of real estate industry leaders including BentallGreenOak and Unico Properties continue to optimize their portfolios to safeguard occupant health and well-being*

NEW YORK, April 13, 2022 /PRNewswire/ -- The Biden Administration's recently released [National COVID-19 Preparedness Plan](#) underscores the need to apply federal funding from the [American Rescue Plan](#) and [Bipartisan Infrastructure Law](#) to improve indoor air quality and ventilation in schools, universities and public buildings across the country, as a critical component to combat COVID-19.

[The Center for Active Design](#) (CfAD), which operates the Fitwel healthy building certification, commends the White House's recognition of the role the built environment plays in human health. The National COVID-19 Preparedness Plan, including the Clean Air in Buildings Challenge, makes indoor air quality a major focus for how federal funding can be used to support facility improvements.



In 2020, Fitwel unveiled its Viral Response Module (VRM), developed with input from health experts and industry leaders and which provides certification of policies and practices informed by the latest public health research on mitigating the spread of infectious respiratory diseases. The VRM is aligned with the White House's efforts to improve indoor air quality and prevent contamination of diseases, including COVID-19. All buildings and communities, no matter their age, location, or asset type, can be optimized to meet the needs and demands of their occupants.

Fitwel is a rigorous, third-party healthy building certification system that sets the industry standard for evidence-based strategies to promote human health and well-being through the built environment. Originally created by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and U.S. General Services Administration, CfAD is the sole, licensed operator of Fitwel and the CDC remains the research and evaluation partner for Fitwel.

As the White House continues to place an emphasis on improved indoor air quality to prevent the spread of infectious respiratory diseases, so too are a growing number of real estate properties. Within the past year, BentallGreenOak, Unico Properties, and JBG SMITH represent some of the latest major real-estate owners to qualify their operational policies and safeguard occupant health.

Anna Murray, Managing Director and Global Head of ESG, BentallGreenOak, said, "Across BentallGreenOak's North American portfolio, the Viral Response Module has become a critical source of guidance for our operators and tenants as we confidently welcome people back to our properties. In our mission to apply the highest standards of safety and wellness to mitigate the spread of viral infection, Fitwel provides us with an important framework to uphold a healthy and resilient environment for all who enter our buildings."

Keren Eichen, Unico Properties Director, Real Estate Services, stated, "VRM has allowed us to maximize trust with our tenants. Before the pandemic, our tenants rarely asked about how our buildings functioned, from the technical or operational perspective. Some had LEED initiatives as a leasing priority, but the vast majority were concerned about views, amenities, location, and a landlord that mostly left them alone to focus on their business. During the pandemic, we pursued Fitwel VRM because it aligns with our efforts to prioritize wellness in the workplace. We also pursued it based on our hypothesis that when our tenants ultimately returned to work,

they'd have many questions about how our systems supported their safety. We were right: as our tenants have come back to work, they've been filling our inboxes with questions about how we're managing viral transmission. Not only have we been able to answer affirmatively that we've been performing indoor air quality testing, increasing surface hygiene protocols, and filtering air with MERV-13 filters, we've also been able to provide information about VRM's third-party certification of these data-driven strategies."

"Given our mission to prioritize public health across the built environment through our products including the Viral Response Module, which mitigates the risk of infectious respiratory disease transmission, we are excited that the built environment has taken center stage in the conversation about health and support the White House's focus on safeguarding health by optimizing buildings," says Joanna Frank, President and CEO of CfAD, operator of Fitwel.

Kimberly Pexton, Vice President of Sustainability at JBG SMITH, said, "The health and well-being of our customers is of utmost importance to JBG SMITH. We continue to maintain our entity and asset level Fitwel VRM certifications to enhance the return to office experience."

"CfAD's research team is responsible for investigating, analyzing, and reporting on healthy building trends to help drive adoption of the most impactful strategies that result in measurable outcomes, and has spent thousands of hours researching the key trends steering the healthy building movement," says Sara Karerat, Director of Applied Research, CfAD. "The White House's clean air initiatives outlined in the Clean Air in Buildings Challenge align with our vision by prioritizing the holistic health of the occupants and communities that they serve."

For more information about the Fitwel VRM, visit [www.fitwel.org/viral-response-module](http://www.fitwel.org/viral-response-module)

## **About Fitwel**

Fitwel is the world's leading certification system committed to building health for all. Generated by expert analysis of 5,600+ academic research studies, Fitwel is implementing a vision for a healthier future where all buildings and communities are enhanced to strengthen health and well-being. Fitwel was originally created by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Prevention and U.S. General Services Administration. The CDC remains the research



and evaluation partner for Fitwel. The Center for Active Design (CfAD), a global not-for-profit organization, maintains the Fitwel standard and conducts objective third-party assessments that lead to certified projects. CfAD's new business unit, Adai (pronounced "a-DAY"), is charged with expanding Fitwel to the global market, administering the program while providing best-in-class customer service and technical support. To learn more about Fitwel, please visit: [www.fitwel.org](http://www.fitwel.org).

SOURCE Center for Active Design