

# POWER100

[#82 Joanna Frank](#)

President and CEO at Center for Active Design

By Cathy Cunningham

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COVID-19 necessitated an immediate and urgent focus on certain industry innovations, and the movement toward healthier buildings was one that simply could not wait. In the face of a fast-moving health crisis, the titans of real estate were soon scrambling to get their portfolios up to scratch.

Enter Joanna Frank.

The healthy-building guidance and certification offered by Center for Active Design (CfAD) was in demand pre-COVID, but nothing could have prepared its leader for the deluge of panicked, inbound calls when the pandemic hit. And, while Frank once had to argue the return on investment that investors would reap with healthy buildings, the conversation soon shifted to one of rapid scale and how those same investors could ensure their entire portfolios were healthy.

CfAD, launched in 2012, partners with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to translate public health research into practical design and operational strategies for real estate owners.

And while infectious disease — a subset of public health — wasn't CfAD's particular area of expertise pre-COVID, Frank and her team jumped into action as a response to an industry-wide cry for help. CfAD assembled a team of experts in the field, as well as experts on the mental health and behavioral challenges that come with a pandemic. And it partnered, too, with real estate heavy hitters, including BentallGreenOak, Boston Properties, Brookfield Properties, Hudson Pacific Properties and Nuveen Real Estate.

It launched its Fitwel Viral Response Module — an add-on to Fitwel, its healthy-building certification system — to provide annual, third-party certification of policies and practices informed by the latest

research on combating infectious diseases within buildings, and set a clear standard for what a healthy building should look like.

Fitwel registrations in the fourth quarter of 2020 increased by 644 percent over the fourth quarter of 2019.

“I’ve been amazed at how agile the industry has been,” Frank said. “Folks have completely redone their policies and reprioritized staffing in addressing how to mitigate infectious disease. And they’ve changed so much so quickly. The industry has really met the moment. The fear is that if you don’t respond, that you’re going to have difficulty competing for tenants in the future. So, there’s real motivation around responding.”—C.C.