



Gaurav Upadhy is a top executive at Foresters Financial, serving as Global Chief Actuary and Chief Risk Officer for the international life insurance and financial services provider that was founded in 1874. Upadhy's expertise in finance, risk and actuarial science makes him a natural fit to sit on a corporate Board of Directors.

Yet it was only in 2021 that Upadhy, who has walked using crutches and leg braces since he contracted polio at the age of three, became a director, joining the Amex Bank of Canada Board.

"There are so many highly qualified Canadians with disabilities who could make a significant contribution to a corporate board," says Honourable Vim Kochhar, Chairman of CFPDP. "They make up 22% of our country's population but, according to our research, hold only 0.3% of Canadian corporate board seats. We have been challenging corporate Canada to diversify their boards by recruiting candidates from the significant pool of talent that exists in our disability community from coast to coast."

Expanding the diversity of corporate boards is at the heart of CFPDP's "A Seat at the Table" initiative, which was created in 2019 to secure board seats for Canadians with disabilities. At the time, CFPDP was unable to find a single person who identified as being disabled on a corporate board.

So, the organization got to work. CFPDP began building a database of disabled business leaders with the backgrounds and qualifications that corporations seek for director appointments. In parallel, Kochhar put together an impressive Selection Board of 13 senior executives and CEOs who would be tasked with choosing the candidates that CFPDP would market to corporate Canada.

Then, after firing up CFPDP's public awareness engines, the applications began pouring in.

There was a world-leading lawyer who is a frequent guest on BNN Bloomberg and a former Environmental Commissioner of Ontario.

A three-time Paralympic champion who co-founded a design and engineering corporation.

A first-round NHL pick and 13-year league veteran who is today a college dean.

And an international commodities mogul who founded a Canadian golf association and served as chair of a major hospital.

These are only four of almost 150 board candidates with disabilities, each with impressive professional credentials, who have since reached out through CFPDP's application process.

"Our Selection Board has reviewed the qualifications of many applicants. So far, they have chosen 15 in three sessions," says Kochhar. "We are continuing to reach out to show Canada's business community how their boards can benefit from the broader perspective that these candidates can bring. They have different lived experiences and different viewpoints based on those experiences. Their insights are extremely valuable because they can enable companies to better understand and serve a sizeable percentage of our country's population. Ultimately, our goal is to increase representation so that at least 1% of corporate directors in Canada identify with a disability."

By the end of 2020, CFPDP had identified six corporations that reported having a person with a disability on the board. These companies include BluMetric Environmental, Cenovus Energy, Flyht Aerospace Solutions, Loblaw Companies, OpenText and Tormont Industries. Upadhy became the eighth known director with a physical disability when he was appointed to the Amex Bank of Canada Board of Directors in July 2021.

Other important metrics after CFPDP's successful, ongoing campaign to promote its "A Seat at the Table" initiative include:

- 23 full-page ads in the Globe and Mail.
- 600+ personal letters written to CEOs of Canadian corporations encouraging them to appoint qualified people with disabilities to their Boards of Directors.
- 300+ personal letters to CEOs of Associations of Chartered Accountants, lawyers, engineers, architects and doctors in every Canadian province, and to non-profit organizations dealing with disabilities to encourage qualified members to apply to CFPDP.

"It may take the efforts of many to raise awareness about the benefits of appointing a person with a disability to a corporate board," says Kochhar, "but it only takes one director with a disability to begin making a significant difference for a company, its customers and its bottom line."

To learn more about "A Seat at the Table" or recommended board candidates, visit <https://aseatatthetable.cfpdp.com/>.