

Digital health ecosystem gets a boost with the Novartis Biome ^[1]

Discovery ^[2]

A digital health revolution is underway. Technologies ranging from wearable sensors that gather physiological data to algorithms that predict who will develop a disease are rapidly emerging. Many of these technologies – arising from a growing ecosystem of digital innovators, investors and other future-focused entrepreneurs – could change the way that pharmaceutical companies discover, develop and distribute medicines, making it possible to deliver therapies to people faster and at a lower cost.

But promising digital inventions often fail to impact human health due to a gap in the ecosystem. Nascent technologies are not typically supported and shaped by the companies that can ultimately harness them. Enter the Novartis Biome, a digital innovation lab and series of open innovation initiatives.

“The idea is to give the health tech ecosystem a boost and clear ‘on-ramp’ to work with Novartis,” says Robin Roberts, Head of Innovation and Strategy of the Novartis Biome and one of its co-founders. “It’s clear to anyone who works in digital health that the vast majority of disruptive technologies are not going to come from big pharma companies. But we can engage and work with startups and innovators, and together make something bold, sustainable and scalable.”

Video of Introducing the Novartis Biome

The Novartis Biome connects with external innovators in multiple ways, including issuing challenges through an initiative called the HealthX World Series, proactively scouting for technology, and tapping a large network for referrals. Program teams work with Novartis mentors who have identified a potential application for their technology at the company. Together, they may design and execute a validation study to test the concept. Novartis has the option to invest in the technology after evaluating the results.

The Novartis Biome offers the state-of-the-art workspace, mentorship and resources that startups have come to expect at incubators. But it also brings an important twist for digital health innovators: They have the opportunity to use vast Novartis datasets in validation studies that they can run in real clinical settings to further shape and design their proof-of-concept study. A 12-month curriculum tailored to the innovator’s growth needs is also offered to participating companies to help advance their ideas and solutions.

“Another big differentiator is that we don’t require entrepreneurs to give us an ownership stake in their company to participate,” says Mohanad Fors, Head of the Novartis Biome and co-founder.

The Novartis Biome promises to accelerate the digital evolution of Novartis and to advance health tech overall. While the company’s technologists have made progress in open collaborations with digital startups and innovators, these alliances have been made sporadically. The Novartis Biome aims to scale up and coordinate efforts to harness some of the best brains in digital from inside and outside Novartis, complementing and enhancing the progress made by data scientists and health innovators.

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