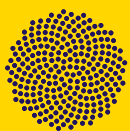


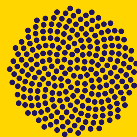
Ireland Where Digital Health Thrives



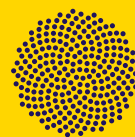
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EIT Health Ireland-UK has supported 100 startups in Ireland to foster innovation that improves patient care

Elaine Murray of EIT Health Ireland-UK talks about how their network of health partners is committed to advancing innovation and the quality of life for people across Europe



EIT Health, a part of EIT (European Institute of Innovation and Technology) is one of the largest health innovation networks in Europe made up of over 130 EIT Health partners. It aims to promote innovation and entrepreneurship in the healthcare industry, with a view to ultimately contribute to the affordability and sustainability of healthcare.

EIT Health Ireland-UK is a regional hub, part of EIT Health, which fosters a collaborative network that connects leading healthcare innovators, academic institutions, and industry partners from Ireland and the UK into Europe.

Elaine Murray, Communications and Public Affairs Lead, EIT Health Ireland-UK, says their team brings together health innovators from industry, academia, research, and Government to “accelerate the delivery of new health care products and services that are destined for the European market.” It achieves this through business accelerator programmes, education opportunities, and funding calls.

Elaine Murray, who joined the organisation back in 2021, says, “Everything we do is across borders for the benefit of patients in European countries. EIT as an organisation was established in 2005 and EIT Health, focusing on health innovation, was set up in 2015 and it has made a significant impact since.”

To date, EIT Health has enabled approximately 76 different innovative products and services launch to market via funding and collaboration opportunities.

“We have also been involved in the training and upskilling of approximately 36,000 students, graduates and entrepreneurs in Europe through our education programmes.”

The EIT Health Central Office is located in Munich, Germany, with a further seven co-location centres across Europe. These include the Ireland-UK branch and others in France, Spain, Germany, Belgium-Netherlands, Scandinavia, and Austria. Additionally, an Innostars cluster brings together organisations from more progressive regions in Southern and Eastern Europe.

EIT Health supports the delivery of health products and services through a range of business accelerator programmes. They facilitate around 20 different highly competitive types of programmes per year to startups, which vary from bootcamps to pitching competitions. The organisation has supported approximately 1,700 startups across Europe, and close to 100 startups in Ireland.

“Only a certain number of places are available on the programmes,” explains Elaine. “So those who get selected usually have a robust business plan, and have ambitions to scale into new European markets. The Irish companies that have participated so far have gone on to raise over €150 million in private investment.”

Scaling startups for success

EIT Health business accelerator programmes match startups with leaders, experts, labs, or investors from EIT Health’s approved network. Together, they plan how to access new markets in Europe quickly, how to tap into local networks of partners and clients, or how to navigate new regulatory systems.

Startups also have the opportunity to organise and execute a validation study in a lab, by testing their product or service with patients, clinicians, and medical staff in a European hospital or health centre.

“For example, Irish startup Akara Robotics joined one of our programmes last year,” says Elaine. “Akara has developed a platform and robotics solution to autonomously disinfect hospitals and healthcare settings. The team was paired up with Tartu University Hospital in Estonia, to gain feedback from their target user base. They continued their relationship even after the programme completed by signing an memorandum of understanding to commence clinical trials at the hospital. It is in ways such as this, startups gain access to new markets, insights, and knowledge.

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“We offer mentorship programmes and bootcamps too. For example, the Women Entrepreneurship Bootcamp, Patient Innovation Bootcamp, the Regulatory Pathways to Market Bootcamp, and the Medtech Bootcamp, which I think is particularly interesting for the Irish market. These help early-stage startups navigate complex business environments and regulations.”

EIT Health also offers programmes for scale-ups that create access to finance. High-potential startups avail of 1:1 coaching from experts and are connected with global investors and decision-makers at multinational pharma and device companies.

Elaine says, “Ochre Bio, Oxford-based biotech company co-founded by Athlone native Jack O’Meara, and Quin Wills in 2019, joined EIT Health’s Gold Track accelerator programme in 2020. Ochre Bio later closed its Series A funding round to the value of \$30 million, with EIT Health contributing €500,000 as part of the investor syndicate. The funds will enable them to further the development of therapies for liver diseases.”

The programmes facilitate and introduce these high-potential startups to key investors and experts in the area. They gain access to a large network of key opinion leaders, and it is an incredible opportunity for entrepreneurs.

“We also introduce researchers at universities interested in a particular health area to those working within R&D in industry. We create opportunities for them to collaborate on funded innovation projects focused on their clinical area at different matchmaking events and via online platforms. We help bring together the fields of research, academia, and industry to work together on innovation projects to make patients’ lives easier.

“Collaboration is at the core of everything we do.”

Navigating the digital health journey

One of the key areas of focus for EIT Health is digital health. The organisation recognises the potential of digital technologies to transform healthcare delivery. It supports the development of innovative digital health solutions that can improve patient outcomes and reduce costs.

Elaine says EIT Health encourages cross-disciplinary collaboration between healthcare professionals, engineers, and data scientists to drive innovation. And they have plenty of ideas and areas they are developing for the future.

Elaine says, “The technologies being developed are continuously evolving, particularly in the area of remote patient monitoring. At EIT Health, we are currently focusing on several flagship areas such as New Models to Deliver Healthcare. This advocates for value-based healthcare - measuring value based on patient outcomes and moving from treatment to prevention.”

The second area is called Facilitating the Uptake of Digital Medical Devices in Europe.

“Within this, we are helping health innovators overcome financial and regulatory hurdles that can often slow down the process of getting a digital health solution to market. For example, that could be navigating the medical device regulation, or pathways to getting your solution reimbursed such as through the Digital Health Care Act passed in Germany in 2019.”

This is legislation for the reimbursement of digital health technologies. For example, in Germany a certified health app or web-based platform could be prescribed by a clinician to a patient to support at-home treatment. The legislation enables clinicians to prescribe the apps, and the developers of the apps have an official way to be reimbursed by insurers.

“Several programmes we offer help smaller companies and startups as they work to get their solutions certified and CE-marked, so that they can start the process of getting reimbursed. EIT Health Ireland-UK recently published a white paper on the topic of reimbursement for digital health technologies and examined whether this type of model could be feasible in Ireland.”

Another area EIT Health is focusing on is Harnessing the Full Potential of Health Data for Innovation. In May 2022, the European Commission proposed regulation for creating a European Health Data Space. This would mean that there would be less fragmentation across Europe in terms of data sharing for health, and help to set up infrastructure across the European states.

“The proposed regulation aims to ensure people’s data is safe, and that patients have access to their own health data, which is planned to come into effect in 2025. We are working with the Commission to make Member States more aware of this regulation and engage with key stakeholders early on to assess readiness for implementation.”

Ireland’s ecosystem’s role in shaping healthcare

EIT Health is playing a key role in driving healthcare innovation and entrepreneurship in Europe. And a regional base in Ireland has made it well-positioned to be a leading force in the healthcare industry for years to come.

“EIT Health has developed a strong base in Ireland through partnerships with organisations such as Medtronic, Trinity College Dublin, and University of Galway through its BioInnovate Ireland Fellowship programme. In 2021, the operations of the hub moved from London to Dublin, and we have been building our presence, and developing the network, across all of Ireland.”

Ireland is an important region to EIT Health, in terms of medtech, biopharma, and digital health and the Ireland-UK office just signed a collaboration agreement with West Pharmaceutical Services.

Elaine adds, “Health innovation in Ireland is thriving with an array of Government incentives and funds available for research and development. There is also an exciting digital health cluster on the east coast emerging. With so much happening here, Ireland plays a key role on the journey to enable healthier lives for patients in Europe.”

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