The UK looks to healthtech startups as coronavirus pandemic puts spotlight on fast-growing sector

- Healthtech sector responses to coronavirus include free access to platforms, new digital assistant technologies, the distribution and sharing of vital resources and more
- Patients and doctors rapidly adopt telemedicine and other digital tools to deliver care
- The UK has more than 100 healthtech startups with the potential to become $1bn businesses, according to Tech Nation's Data Commons
- UK has seen the highest levels of investment in healthtech startups across Europe in six out of the last seven years
- UK healthtech is the second largest sector in the startup ecosystem, after fintech
- The sector employs more than 127,400 people across 3,860 companies in a market worth £36.41bn

LONDON 22nd April: The UK's healthtech sector has rallied its world-class talent and skills to help in the fight against coronavirus, as startups work side by side with big tech companies to provide new services and technology.

From tracking cases to supporting front-line staff; loaning vital equipment and resources; providing online patient care; and gathering and analysing data; tech companies large and small across the country are rising to the challenge to help the government and the NHS.

The UK healthtech sector has been able to step up because it is one of the strongest in the world, having attracted $7.7bn (£6.2bn) from global venture capital investors over the last five years, according to data from Tech Nation's Data Commons, provided by Dealroom.co. Healthtech is now the second biggest sub-set of the UK tech sector after fintech and there are more than 100 healthtech companies that are on track to become $1bn businesses.

The rapid switch to digital communication and tools across the sector, in the face of the crisis, is likely to have a profound impact on how quickly digital healthcare becomes part of the healthcare system in the next few years.

In six of the last seven years, investment in UK healthtech has been the highest in Europe and the number of companies in the sector has increased by more than 25% since 2015. During 2019 the sector received $2.3bn in venture capital backing, almost double that of France, the next highest recipient. The companies in the sector have a combined turnover of £24 billion[1] and employ more than 127,400 people across 3,860 businesses.

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[1] https://www.abhi.org.uk/

This comes as the Chancellor announced UK businesses driving innovation and development hit by coronavirus will be helped with a £1.25 billion government support package. This includes a £500 million investment fund for high-growth companies, made up of funding from government and the private sector to protect these businesses and enable the unicorns of tomorrow to thrive.

Caroline Dinenage, Minister of State for Digital, said: "Over the last month The UK's healthtech sector has shown why it is a global leader, quickly using its expertise to develop practical solutions to help the government and the NHS with innovative products and services to respond to those in need. These new technologies will not only help in the here and now but they will also shape the future of healthcare in the UK and indeed across the world. We owe a huge debt of gratitude to the startups and tech companies that have switched their entire focus to backing the national effort to tackle this health crisis."

Matthew Gould, CEO of NHSX: "Tech can help the country deal with coronavirus. Digital tools are vital, whether they work to collect data or to connect patients with clinical staff. I'm delighted that so many startups and innovative tech businesses have offered their skills, talent and ideas to help us."

Cindy Rose, CEO, Microsoft UK: "Supporting the NHS and the UK's healthcare system has never been more vital. We are proud to arm the most talented healthcare professionals in the world with safe, secure and robust technology solutions, empowering them to make the decisions required to deliver world-class care to those who need it."

Gordon Sanghera, CEO, Oxford Nanopore : "The scientific community has been quick to use sequencing technologies to understand the transmission of coronavirus, and whether the SARS-CoV-2 virus itself is changing, as well as the effect of other pathogens that are present alongside the virus. This information will also be a vital tool for public health authorities as they manage a responsible lifting of restrictions, in countries across the world. We are committed to supporting scientists using Oxford Nanopore's technology for this important work, and while we do that our R&D teams continue to innovate for coronavirus."

Dr Ali Parsa, founder and CEO of Babylon Health : "Our mission at Babylon is to put accessible and affordable healthcare into the hands of everyone on earth. Right now we are seeing huge demand for our services and have been given contracts to serve 8% of the population of England with our digital first coronavirus Care Assistant. We are determined to help play our part across all our communities globally. As we are seeing through the course of this pandemic, while the burden of healthcare is global, the solutions have to be localised to meet the specific needs and culture of each country."

Wais Shaifta, Chief Executive Officer, Push Doctor: "Push Doctor is and always has been passionate about supporting digital technology throughout the NHS. Our partnership and collaborative approach with the NHS over the past few years has allowed our partners to see

the benefits of telemedicine and digital healthcare overall. I am proud to see a number of digital providers collectively coming together to support the crisis and ensuring our heroic NHS staff are exposed to the virus as little as possible."

Baroness Joanna Shields, CEO, BenevolentAI: "Life sciences and technology companies have a duty to mobilise resources for the public good in this global health emergency that has already claimed so many lives. That's why we turned our AI drug discovery and development platform toward understanding the body's response to coronavirus and exploring existing medicines with the potential to address the life threatening complications of the disease. We're pleased that the Eli Lilly drug we identified as a potential treatment for its anti-viral and anti-inflammatory properties has already been moved forward to clinical testing in America and we look forward to the results."

Gerard Grech, Chief executive of Tech Nation: "We are seeing scaleups making huge leaps that would normally take months or years, in just a few weeks. The UK's healthtech sector has grown in size and value in recent years and has taken an increasing level of investment from venture capital backers. That puts the sector in a strong position right now and it is brilliant to see the sector using its resources to step up to the challenge."

Julia Hawkins, partner at LocalGlobe: "For a long time we have been talking about the potential for better use of data and AI in healthcare and digital delivery of care and tools to support front-line clinicians. Now we are getting the chance to use these for real on a mass scale. The crisis is giving healthtech companies the chance to show what they can do and the response from the many companies who have got involved demonstrates that we do have the talent and skills here to build globally significant healthtech companies."

Jacob Haddad, CEO & Co-Founder, accuRx: "NHS staff need to have safe, reliable and intuitive ways of communicating with patients and colleagues, and the crisis has made this need more acute than ever. Building a video consultation product over a weekend was one of the first ways that we were able to achieve that and we have already released a range of other features to support frontline staff. GP practices and hospitals are being forced to make these changes to stay safe and maintain routine services. When the pandemic is over, we will have seen a decade of digital transformation take place."

Tech and healthtech companies responding to coronavirus

- Microsoft has given all users of NHSmail in England and Scotland access to Teams, its workplace collaboration platform, for three months
- Microsoft, Google, Palantir, AWS and Faculty are supporting NHSX and NHS England's technical teams to develop a data platform that provides safe, secure, reliable and timely data
- Siemens Healthineers - working with WHO to develop a fast-acting test to identify patients with coronavirus

- Facebook - producing heat maps of coronavirus spread in real time, helping promote high quality information
- Doctor Care Anywhere - free training for GPs in the UK to help them manage and conduct video consultations.
- Temporary staffing platforms Patchwork and OnCare make their systems free for NHS Trusts, and care workers.
- Unmind, the British workplace mental-health platform, and meditation app Headspace offer NHS staff free access.
- Big Health is offering over 1 million NHS staff the Sleepio and Daylight apps free
- Healthtech unicorn Babylon's 24/7 GP at Hand app and coronavirus Care Assistant app, a symptom tracker, are relieving pressure on 111 services
- AccuRx, a trusted tool for UK GPs to send text messages to patients, built a video consultation product over a weekend and is now used by over 90% of GP practices and for online appointments.
- Oxford Nanopore Technologies has provided its suite of sequencing products to countries worldwide, to help with the research and genetic epidemiology of the SARS-CoV-2 virus.
- Blue Prism has donated 'robot workers' to the NHS to help Trusts automate manual processes from hiring staff to increasing video patient consultations.
- Intelligent Ultrasound, a simulation tool to teach healthcare workers to look for signs of respiratory disease, was released to customers for free and is being used to teach staff how to use it at the temporary 4,000-bed NHS Nightingale Hospital at London's Excel.
- Faculty is working with the NHS creating a new NHS AI lab that will set standards for the safe and effective use of AI across the health service
- Triscribe's hospital analytics team has shifted its focus to gathering and tracking data related to coronavirus, including the track of drug use and medicine stocks.
- Medopad, for example, is working with clinicians from Imperial College and John Hopkins University, to develop a remote patient monitoring platform for chronically ill patients and the vulnerable.