

News story: £86 million funding announced for new medicine and technology

The government has announced new funding of up to £86 million for UK firms to develop medical breakthroughs.

The package will allow small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) to develop and test new technologies in the NHS. This could include innovations such as digital technologies to help patients manage their conditions from home instead of a hospital, or to develop new medicines.

Access to this funding will also speed up the time it takes to get new technologies from the lab to patients in the NHS.

The announcement is the first step in taking forward the Accelerated Access Review (AAR) – an independently chaired review, which made recommendations to government on speeding up patient access to new technologies.

Technologies that have previously received support are already bringing benefits to patients. For example, MyCOPD is an online system that helps people with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) better manage their condition. It has helped over 32,000 patients by helping them improve their breathing, manage flare-ups and track medicine use. This reduces reliance on GP and hospital appointments.

Health Minister Lord O'Shaughnessy said:

The government's ambition is that NHS patients get world-leading, life-changing treatments as fast as possible.

That can't happen unless we support medical innovation and tear down the barriers – like speed to market and access to funding – that can get in the way, especially for SMEs.

Our investment in innovation shows how much we value the UK life sciences sector.

The funding is split into 4 packages. These include:

- £39 million of funding to the Academic Health Science Networks (ASHNs), enabling them to assess the benefits of new technologies and support NHS uptake of those that deliver real benefits to patients according to the local need
- £35 million Digital Health Technology Catalyst for innovators – this will match-fund the development of digital technologies for use by patients and the NHS

- up to £6 million over the next 3 years to help SMEs with innovative medicines and devices get the evidence they need by testing in the real world, building on existing opportunities such as the Early Access to Medicine Scheme (EAMS)
- £6 million Pathway Transformation Fund, which will help NHS organisations integrate new technologies into everyday practices – this will help overcome more practical obstacles such as training staff on how to use new equipment

Business Minister Lord Prior said:

The government has an important role to play in driving innovation that will increase economic growth and support businesses across the country. Through this funding we will quicken the pace of scientific discovery and innovation in the UK. Our Industrial Strategy will boost our status a global hub for life sciences.

Association of British Healthcare Industries (ABHI) CEO Peter Ellingworth said:

ABHI welcomes the announcement as a further commitment to supporting the UK medical technology sector. These additional funding initiatives will complement work already in place on Innovation Tariff, NICE processes and horizon scanning as part of the overall Accelerated Access Review. The measures could significantly enhance the UK as a destination of choice for MedTech companies, in turn, benefiting patients, the health system and the wider economy.

Ben Moody, Head of Health and Social Care at techUK, said:

The UK is a world leader in health tech but we must not be complacent. The Digital Health Technology Catalyst will be a great boost for innovators in the sector.

The announcement also recognises that the resources needed to generate evidence to show that a technology is worth reimbursing can be prohibitively difficult for SMEs – so the fund to support evidence generation for innovative devices is particularly welcome.

British In Vitro Diagnostics Association (BIVDA) Chief Executive, Doris-Ann Williams MBE, said:

BIVDA very much welcomes the government's announcement about funding towards practical support for the introduction of new medical technologies into the NHS.

It is a constant source of frustration that implementation of new tests takes years to achieve. It means that not only are people not benefiting from improved diagnosis and disease management but also that the NHS is losing the chance to gain cost efficiencies along clinical pathways.

We would like to congratulate the Department of Health and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy on pulling together these funding streams ahead of the Industrial Strategy to show practical support of their intent to foster healthy and vibrant Life Sciences industries in the UK.