

Fund to accelerate health technology startups

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Unitus Seed Fund, Pfizer, PATH, Manipal Hospitals, and Narayana Health have jointly launched StartHealth, an innovative program to provide up to Rs 10 crore (\$1.6 million) in grants and investments to very early-stage startups seeking to enhance access to affordable technology-driven healthcare products and services for the low-income masses in India.

The program offers for-profit healthcare startups non-dilutive capital, hands-on support, access to expert advisors, medical facilities, and seed venture capital, enabling them to more efficiently and effectively complete development and scale their operations in India. The partners expect to select up to 5 startups in 2015.

The announcement to this effect was made at the BioAsia 2015 conference being held in Hyderabad on February 02, 2015.

"Over the past 2 years, we have met more than 150 healthcare entrepreneurs in India who had interesting innovations but who were not yet ready for seed venture capital," said Mr Dave Richards, managing partner, Unitus Seed Fund. "Rather than telling them to come back when they've progressed more, we can now engage, invest and support them immediately to get them on the road to commercialization success and scale."

StartHealth Program Offers 2 plus Years of Funding & Expert Support

With StartHealth, each emerging healthcare startup selected can take advantage of the funding, expertise and assets of the

sponsoring parties, including upto Rs 50 lakh (\$85K) of non-dilutive capital to fund immediate pre-seed business progress for 6 to 12 months. It will also have hands-on support from PATH, Manipal Hospitals and Narayana Health's staff, drawing from a pool of hundreds of healthcare and health industry experts. Besides that there will be access to expert networks of Pfizer, PATH, Manipal Hospitals, Narayana Health and Unitus, in India and globally and also the facilities of Manipal Hospitals and Narayana Health for pilots and market testing. Average Rs 1 crore (\$165K) of seed venture capital and support from Unitus Seed Fund and its investing partners to prepare for growth and then to raise scale-up capital.

"We are excited to bring our healthcare experience to the impact investment community in India to address health inequities through new and innovative business models," said Ms Dipika Matthias, director of PATH's Global Health Innovation Hub initiative. "We look forward to working closely with health technology-driven startups that are emerging as critical players in the effort to transform global health." With broad representation from various sectors, "BioAsia is the ideal platform for announcing the launch of this innovative program that aims to combine the business savvy of the start-up community with the global health access mission of governments and NGOs," she added.

Taking Applications Now for Innovative Health-Tech Startups

Areas the StartHealth partners are particularly excited about include low-cost diagnostic and monitoring devices connected to the user's and/or doctor's smartphone to enable more timely diagnosis and treatment. The other area is that of affordable healthcare cloud IT solutions to overcome service constraints for consumers in low-resource healthcare settings. Apart from that there is appropriate micro-device innovations for use in labs or clinical settings to improve the quality of care at lower levels of the healthcare system, such as primary care clinics.

These are just a few areas where companies are innovating. The fundamental elements of success for a StartHealth company include an excellent entrepreneur with strong med/tech credentials, a concept that can reach lakhs, if not tens of lakhs of consumers/patients within about 5 years, and an opportunity for a strong financial return as the innovation scales over time.