
Women's Health Investment: A Promising Opportunity, But Challenges Remain



According to a report from Deloitte, women's health seems to finally garner the attention it deserves, signalling a promising shift in healthcare investment trends, particularly in the realm of health technology. Despite an overall decline in venture funding in the healthcare technology market, investments in innovators focused on women's health have grown by 5% between 2022 and 2023, highlighting a significant divergence. However, it's notable that despite the potential for innovation, companies in this sector only attract a mere 2% of venture funding allocated for the entire healthcare industry.

Charting the Course: Trends and Resilience in Women's Health Investment

Deloitte's analysis of health innovation trends reveals a complex landscape, shaped by various factors such as interest rates, global conflicts, and changing investment strategies. Despite a 50% drop in funding for health innovators between 2021 and 2023, investments in this space have maintained a steady proportion of around 25% of the overall venture capital market. This resilience underscores the continued belief among investors in the potential for innovation within healthcare.

Investments in health tech companies specifically focused on women's health have seen fluctuations, with a peak in 2021 followed by a slight decline in 2022 and a rebound in 2023. Notably, more than 60% of women's health-focused companies were founded in the six years leading up to 2022, indicating a growing interest and entrepreneurship in addressing women's health needs, but this trend has yet to be confirmed.

Overcoming Challenges: Funding Disparities and Women Health Understanding

However, challenges persist, particularly concerning funding disparities and the underrepresentation of women-led companies in venture capital decisions. Despite comprising 76% of women's health companies, female-led health companies often struggle to secure adequate funding compared to their male-led counterparts. Moreover, women's health issues have historically been viewed as niche, leading to underinvestment and neglect in research and development: just 4% of all biopharma research and development spending goes to female-specific conditions. Identifying symptoms specific to women can pose a challenge for clinicians, often due to a gender-agnostic approach ingrained in medicine. Consequently, health conditions unique to or more prevalent in women often incur higher out-of-pocket costs compared to those affecting men, hindering access to necessary care. Gender bias further compounds these challenges, leading to delays in treatment and poorer health outcomes for women. Historically, women's health has been narrowly viewed through the lens of reproductive health, leaving significant gaps in overall healthcare, well-being, and policy. Addressing these disparities requires a concerted effort to educate investors about the breadth of women's health issues, from defining its scope to using inclusive language, ultimately fostering increased funding and support in this vital area of healthcare. Recent initiatives, such as the White House Initiative on Women's Health Research, aim to drive interest and investment in this crucial area.

More steps are needed to unlock the benefits of an equitable representation of women in healthcare

Addressing women's health comprehensively requires a shift in perspective, investment strategy, and collaborative effort. Healthcare executives can play a pivotal role by identifying and prioritizing women's health opportunities, developing innovative solutions, and advocating for equitable funding and research. By investing in women's health, not only can healthcare executives promote equity but also unlock economic benefits, given the significant role women play in both the paid and unpaid workforces. Women are often the primary health care decision-makers in family units.

Deloitte advocates healthcare leaders to consider the following tactics to close the gaps:

- Assessing the current landscape of women's health investments and service provision within their organization.
- Crafting a comprehensive strategy to address women's health opportunities and unmet needs, integrating product, service, and innovation perspectives.
- Prioritizing women's data privacy concerns within the framework of strategic planning.
- Identifying therapeutic areas in women's health that are underfunded and align with organizational priorities.
- Evaluating build or buy options for advancing initiatives in key women's health areas.
- Establishing a robust measurement and evaluation framework to track strategic investments, pinpoint areas for improvement, and address remaining gaps in women's health services and innovation.

Prioritizing women's health presents a promising opportunity for healthcare stakeholders to drive innovation, address unmet needs, and create a healthier and more equitable future for all women. Through strategic investments and collaborative efforts, the healthcare industry can break barriers and lead to transformative advancements in women's health.

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