

Advancing Women's Health: Challenges and Opportunities in Investment



The women's health sector has seen notable progress, with increased federal funding and a broader focus beyond maternal health. However, as industry leaders discussed during a recent panel at the MedCity News INVEST conference in Chicago, significant challenges remain.

Navigating Early-Stage Investment Challenges in Women's Health

Melissa Lederer, Chief Experience Officer and Managing Partner of mHUB and mHUB Ventures, expressed her frustration with the cautious approach of many investors. Despite the emergence of promising companies in the women's health space, securing lead investors for early funding rounds remains a significant hurdle. Lederer highlighted the difficulty these companies face in attracting pre-seed and Series A investments, which are crucial for their growth and development.

Long-Term Investment in Women's Health Amid Short-Term ROI Pressures

Joe Connolly, Co-founder and CEO of Visana Health, shared his concerns regarding the short-term focus of health plans and self-funded employers. These entities often demand a one-year return on investment (ROI) based on medical costs, sidelining clinical quality considerations. Visana Health provides virtual care for various women's health conditions, including menopause, endometriosis, and polycystic ovary syndrome. Connolly emphasized the long-term health implications of conditions like menopause, which, if untreated, can lead to severe issues such as osteoporosis, dementia, and cardiovascular disease. He advocated for the integration of better quality metrics into health plans to ensure sustained investment in women's health. Connolly also pointed out the scarcity of robust research in women's health, particularly randomised controlled trials. This lack of strong evidence complicates the development of quality metrics, which are essential for comprehensive health planning and investment. The conflicting results from existing trials further hinder the ability to establish clear, evidence-based guidelines.

The Need for Increased Funding and Normalization of Women's Health Conversations

Melissa Dennis, Chief Medical Officer of Partum Health, echoed these sentiments, highlighting the slow pace of progress due to insufficient funding for innovation and research. Partum Health focuses on supporting families through fertility, pregnancy, and postpartum periods. Dennis stressed the importance of evidence-based practice in medicine, which requires substantial investment in early-stage research. Without this investment, advancements in women's health will continue to be slow and incremental. Dennis also underscored the need to normalize discussions around women's health issues, such as endometriosis and premenstrual syndrome (PMS). These conditions, though not glamorous, have a profound impact on women's lives, affecting their work and family life. By bringing these topics into mainstream conversations, the hope is to reduce the discomfort and stigma that often surround them, making it easier to secure investment and attention from venture capitalists.

The panellists collectively called for a paradigm shift in how women's health is perceived and funded. They advocated for long-term investment strategies, robust research, and open conversations about women's health issues. These steps are essential for driving meaningful change and improving health outcomes for women across their lifespans. As the industry continues to evolve, the commitment to addressing these challenges will be crucial in shaping a more inclusive and effective healthcare system for women.

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