



Health Innovation
Yorkshire & Humber

Empowered by innovation: Driving system-wide change for women in HealthTech

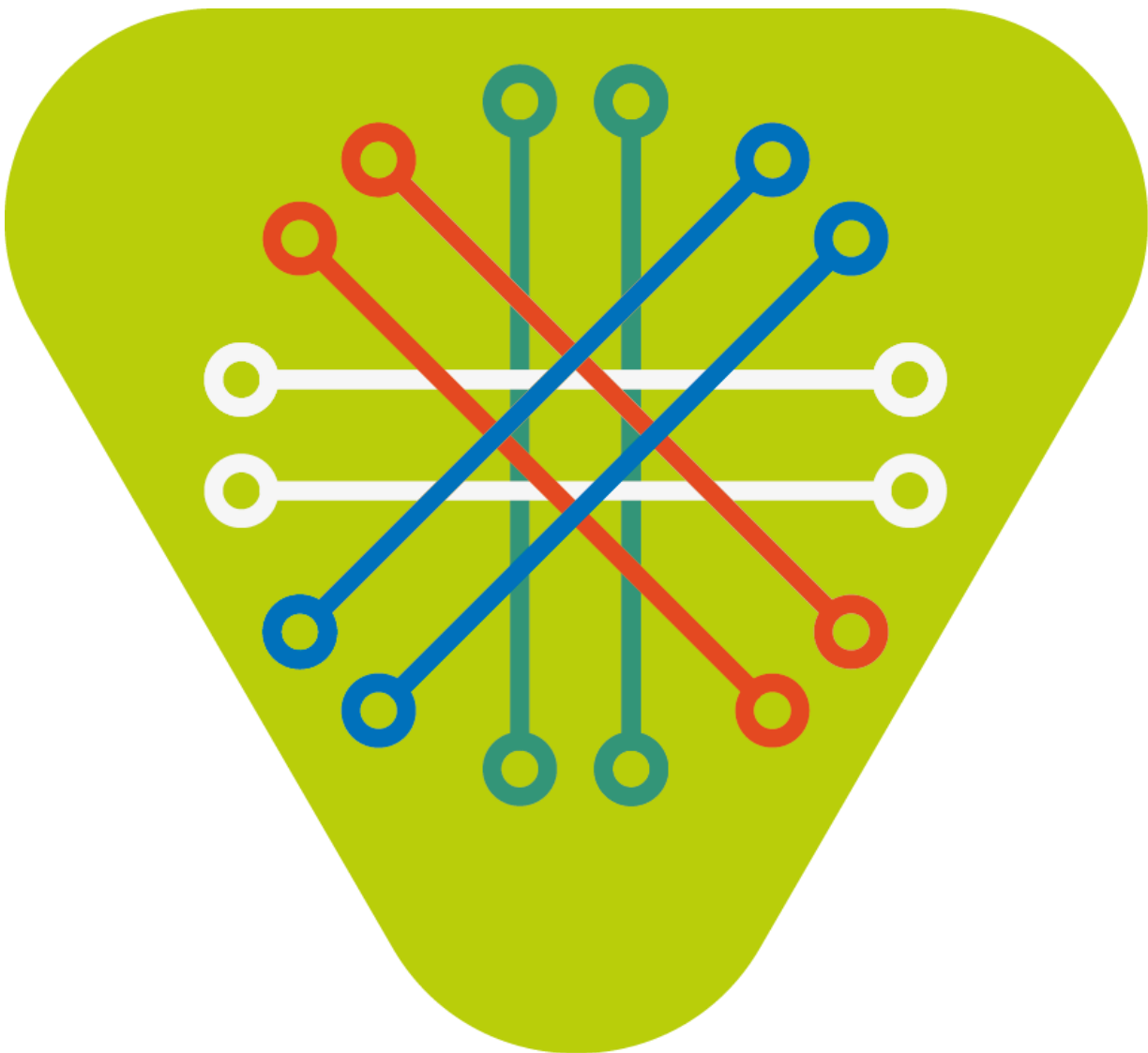


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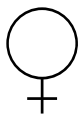
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Context

Women remain significantly underrepresented in health innovation and technology, facing barriers in funding, leadership, and career progression. Despite women-led startups delivering strong returns and fostering inclusive innovation, they receive less than 2 per cent of health-focused venture capital funding.



In 2022, only 16% of HealthTech entrepreneurs in the UK were women.



In the UK, female led businesses receive 96% less overall funding than their male counterparts.



Female founded health startups received 1.8% of venture capital funding in 2023.



Firms with a female founder performed 63% better than investments with all-male founding teams.



Women-led startups deliver double the returns per dollar invested compared to male-led teams.

Introduction

Health Innovation Yorkshire & Humber hosted 'Empowering Innovation: Women Shaping the Future of HealthTech', bringing together female-led start-ups, entrepreneurs, and industry leaders to explore how we can collectively support women working in HealthTech. The event convened key stakeholders to not only identify challenges, but drive actionable solutions.

What became clear through these discussions is that real change requires a unified, system-wide approach. By working together, we can drive meaningful progress, ensuring that women not only enter but thrive as leaders and innovators in HealthTech. The time to act is now, and this event is the first step towards accelerating equity, diversity, and inclusion within the sector.

This event marks the beginning of a broader movement, aiming to address the significant underrepresentation of women in this sector. At the current pace, it will take more than 130 years to close the economic gender gap world-wide—a stark reminder of the urgent need for action.

This paper outlines the event's key outcomes and presents clear recommendations for system-wide support to accelerate gender equity in HealthTech.

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YEARS DAYS HRS

Message from our leaders

Addressing gender inequities in HealthTech and innovation is critical to fostering innovation, improving diversity, and unlocking the full potential of HealthTech. The challenges for women entrepreneurs are real and well known, we now need to move to understanding what we can collectively do to remove these barriers and help level the playing field.

This month, we hosted our first event in this space which brought together people from across health, innovation, academia, funding, legal and local government to identify actionable solutions. We heard incredible success stories and ongoing initiatives which help to address some of the issues surrounding access to funding, understanding what's available across the system and delivering a good pitch.

“
The challenges for women entrepreneurs are real and well known, we now need to move to understanding what we can do collectively to remove these barriers and help level the playing field.”

**Kathy Scott, Deputy Chief Executive
Health Innovation Yorkshire & Humber**



“
This is not just one event; it is the start of a cultural shift. Individually, we can move molehills, but together, we can move mountains. I will use my platform, my voice, and my position to drive real change for those who don't have the same opportunities.”

**Kimberley Frost, Lead for Women in HealthTech
Health Innovation Yorkshire & Humber**



Key outcomes

During the event, attendees shared insights into the specific challenges they face, while allies in the room listened and collaboratively explored potential solutions. Key themes that emerged included:

1

Funding disparities

Women founders often encounter closed investment networks and unconscious bias, making it challenging to secure funding. Many investors do not fully recognise the value of innovations addressing women's health, leading to systemic underinvestment in FemTech and female-led health start-ups. Additionally, a significant barrier is the focus on return on investment. Female founders frequently aim to create societal impact rather than simply commercialise a device or product, which may not generate immediate financial returns, further excluding many women from investment opportunities.

2

Limited networks for women in HealthTech

Without a dedicated platform, women struggle to find the mentorship, resources, and connections needed to navigate the HealthTech sector effectively. Existing networks often emphasise networking over learning, with few opportunities for training and professional development. Many training courses are either based in London or do not accommodate flexible lifestyles, particularly for those with caring responsibilities. This lack of a structured support system makes it difficult for women to access legal guidance, connect with accelerators, and gain visibility as role models and contributors.

3

Limited pathways into HealthTech

There is low visibility of HealthTech careers for young women, with a lack of structured pathways, mentorship, and accessible networks. Many aspiring female founders and leaders find it difficult to navigate the sector without clear entry points or guidance, which limits the talent pipeline and stifles innovation.

4

Systemic inequalities and cultural barriers

Women in HealthTech often face a triple burden of career demands, caring responsibilities, and gender biases. The system is not designed to support flexible career pathways, which disproportionately affects women. Systemic hurdles, including rigid career structures and limited workplace flexibility, create barriers to career advancement and reduce the diversity of leadership within the sector.

Recommendations

The data and figures highlighting the disparities women face in HealthTech and innovation have seen little progress. To change this, we need collective action across the entire system to enhance access, support women to remain and thrive in the sector, and promote pathways into leadership roles. Achieving equity, diversity, and full representation at all levels requires a unified approach.

The following recommendations outline the key actions needed to drive this change:

1	Establish a specific network for women in HealthTech Create a formal network to support women in the sector through mentorship, investment guidance, peer collaboration, and dedicated learning workshops that cover specific themes such as pitching or bid-writing. This should include regular events, access to investors, and structured leadership pathways.
2	Develop targeted funding and investment strategies Work with investors, venture capital firms, and funding bodies to create dedicated funding streams for women-led HealthTech start-ups, including coaching for investment readiness.
3	Increase visibility of female-led innovation Showcase the successes of female innovators through national platforms, case studies, and industry events, ensuring that women-led contributions are widely recognised and celebrated.
4	Strengthen career pathways into HealthTech Introduce structured entry routes into HealthTech, engaging schools, universities, and accelerator programmes to raise awareness of opportunities and provide clear guidance for aspiring women leaders.
5	Embed gender equity into system strategy Ensure that HealthTech funding, innovation strategies, and workforce policies actively address gender disparities, creating a more inclusive and equitable innovation ecosystem.

Next steps

While there are certainly individual actions that we can all take to support women in this space, the greatest impact will come from working together. By taking coordinated, strategic steps, we can challenge the status quo, break down systemic biases, and create a more inclusive and equitable environment for current and future female innovators and leaders.

Health Innovation Yorkshire & Humber is committed to leading this movement for change, collaborating with stakeholders to develop a sustainable framework that drives system-wide transformation. Now is the time to act—together, we can reshape the future of HealthTech, where gender is never a barrier to innovation, leadership, or opportunity.

Conclusion

The event highlighted the significant challenges women continue to face in health innovation and technology, from funding disparities and limited networks to systemic inequalities and cultural barriers. Despite their proven impact and leadership potential, women remain underrepresented and underfunded, stifling innovation and diversity within the sector.

These insights underline the need for a comprehensive approach to addressing gender inequity in HealthTech by improving funding access, building dedicated support networks, creating clearer career pathways, and dismantling systemic barriers.

To drive meaningful change, we must move beyond conversations to collective action. The recommendations outlined in this report provide a clear roadmap for achieving equity, diversity, and inclusion across the HealthTech ecosystem. By building supportive networks, creating structured career pathways, and embedding gender equity into system strategies, we can ensure that women not only enter but thrive in this space.

Acknowledgements

A **huge** thank you to everyone who worked tirelessly on the 'Empowering Innovation: Women Shaping the Future of HealthTech' event, and to those who collaborated and brought this paper to life.

The time for action is now.

Whether you're an innovator, an investor, or someone who believes in the power of diversity to drive better healthcare, we'd love for you to be part of this drive! Let's build a future where innovation knows no barriers, [contact the team](#) if you want to learn more.

