

# Industry Expert Insights



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 **NOVARTIS**

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## What impact do you expect Covid-19 to have on the adoption of digital therapeutics?

I think what has changed most rapidly is the broad acceptance for digital ways to access the health care system. This created a tremendous opportunity for digital therapeutics on their way to patients. It's just a logical step: If you speak with your doctor digitally – why don't use software for the treatment?

We see that trend over a range of indications and medical professions. I think in the short run the focus of digital therapeutics here in Germany will be on cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) but in ophthalmology, for example, we see exciting developments as well. Another significant factor in favor of digital therapies, of course, is the growing digital savvy of the general public.

## What have we learnt from current national reimbursement schemes and how can we take these learnings forward to complete DTx coverage?

In Germany, the Digital Healthcare Act (Digitale-Versorgung-Gesetz, DVG) which was passed in 2019, paved the way for the reimbursement of digital therapeutics – called DiGA. The criteria to be listed as DiGA are in line with the Medical Device Regulations as well as other guidelines and allow innovators to timely release DiGA, which can be prescribed by physicians and are covered by statutory health insurances in Germany. Currently, there are 15 DiGA approved. Developers can

provide evidence regarding the value of the product when the DiGA is launched but they can also use the first 12 months after the launch to gather this evidence. Not only does this make Germany an attractive market for developers but it also allows for a comparatively fast approval process. The German government has been particularly proactive in pushing this regulation.

What we at Novartis have learned is that for tech companies and developers it is often difficult to navigate through the complex and highly regulated healthcare market in Germany. That is where our recently launched Biome Germany comes into play. Biome is the bridge between tech- and health tech community and Novartis. We aim to combine our deep scientific experience and our know-how on how to bring innovations to patients. What is extremely exciting about the Biome is its global presence. Our goal is to use this global network to scale solutions.

## How should digital therapeutics companies be working with patients to ensure that these products truly deliver for those with unmet medical needs?

It is essential to not only work side by side with partners but also together with patients and patient organizations. Patients know best where the obstacles in their daily lives are (e.g., visually impaired patients) or which points need special attention to ensure access to our solutions. Patients simply know best what they need and how to improve healthcare solutions to make their lives easier. Taking the patients perspective, digital therapeutics companies can ensure the transformation of well-advanced technologies into user-friendly digital solutions to

improve patient care and create a real added value. The launch of Novartis Biome Germany marks one highlight of our continued investment in collaborations with both tech community partners and healthcare systems on our mission to reimagine medicine to improve and extend people's lives.

## Let's dream: what does the future of digital therapeutics look like?

We see that the healthcare sector overall is in the midst of a transformation. The digital solutions we currently see are very promising. But we can only guess what the health industry's Tesla will be. We do not know which innovative business model or which technology will change our healthcare system as Amazon has transformed the retail sector. I am sure that our industry will experience transformation, but I am certain it will not be one big bang but many small steps.

## What are you most looking forward to at DTx Europe 2021?

For DTx Europe 2021, I am looking forward to the exchange of ideas and experiences on an international level. In Germany, with the Digital Healthcare Act, we have established a new approach on reimbursement of DiGA and gained first experiences. But other countries have exciting solutions as well. I think that it is essential for our industry to get together to share insights and, thereby, benefit from each other's experiences. Of course, also with an eye on international scalability. If we want to grow internationally, we need to understand and evaluate the requirements of other markets early on.