



Digital Health and the biopharmaceutical sector

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) - 2025

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What are the benefits of collaborating with the biopharmaceutical sector?

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Digital health refers to medical devices and software designed to address the challenges facing the Belgian healthcare system. This field covers a broad spectrum of innovations, including mobile health (mHealth), health information technology (IT), wearable devices, telehealth and telemedicine, as well as personalised medicine.

For startups, partnering with the biopharmaceutical sector can unlock numerous opportunities, such as:



Improving your product and value proposition



Increasing your network and open doors towards stakeholders



Learning from the expertise of the sector to strengthen your business model in healthcare

However, keep things simple and do not forget these important points:



Manage expectations in creating net-profit



The relationship might evolve over time: from pilot to client or even investment



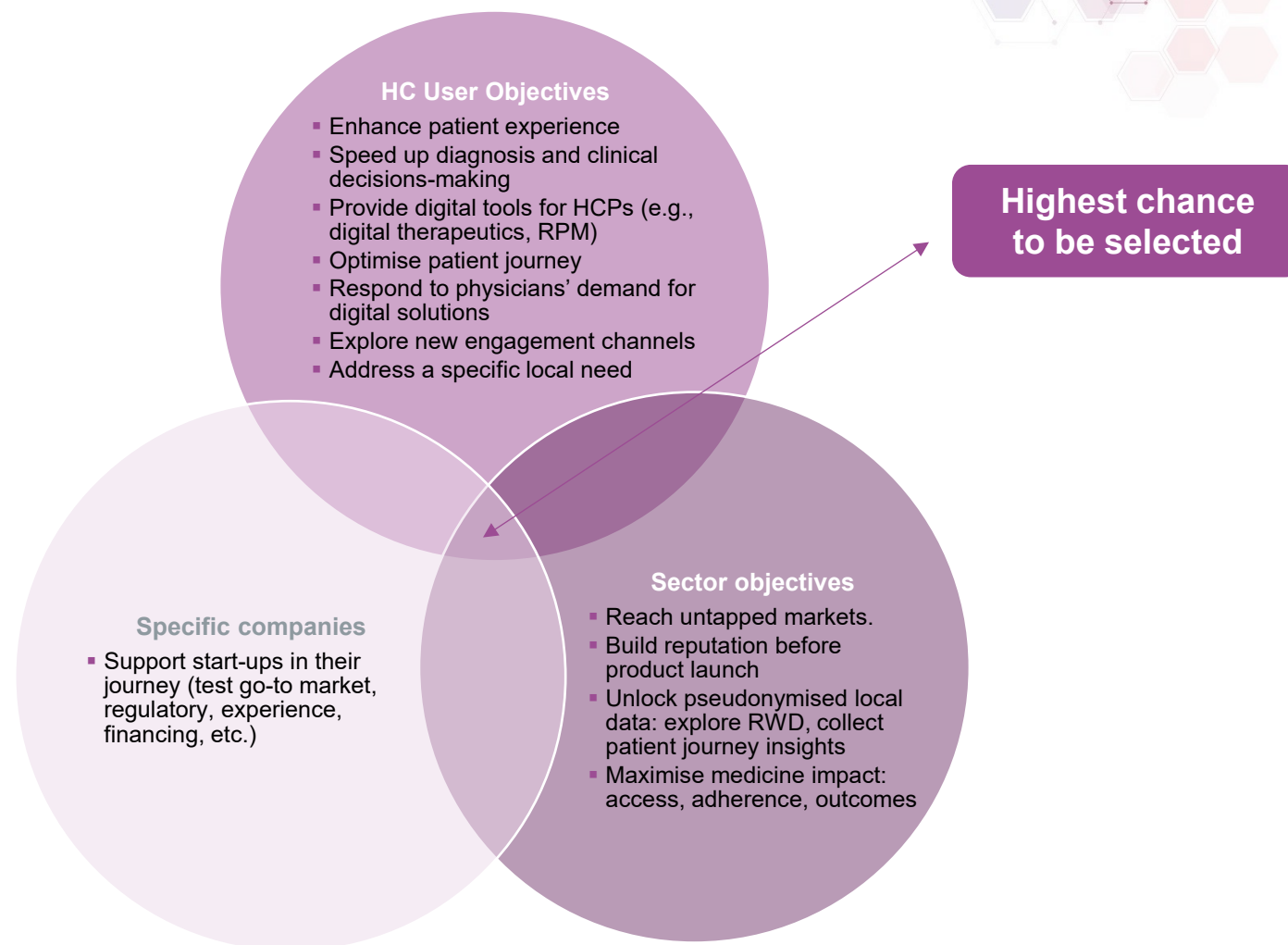
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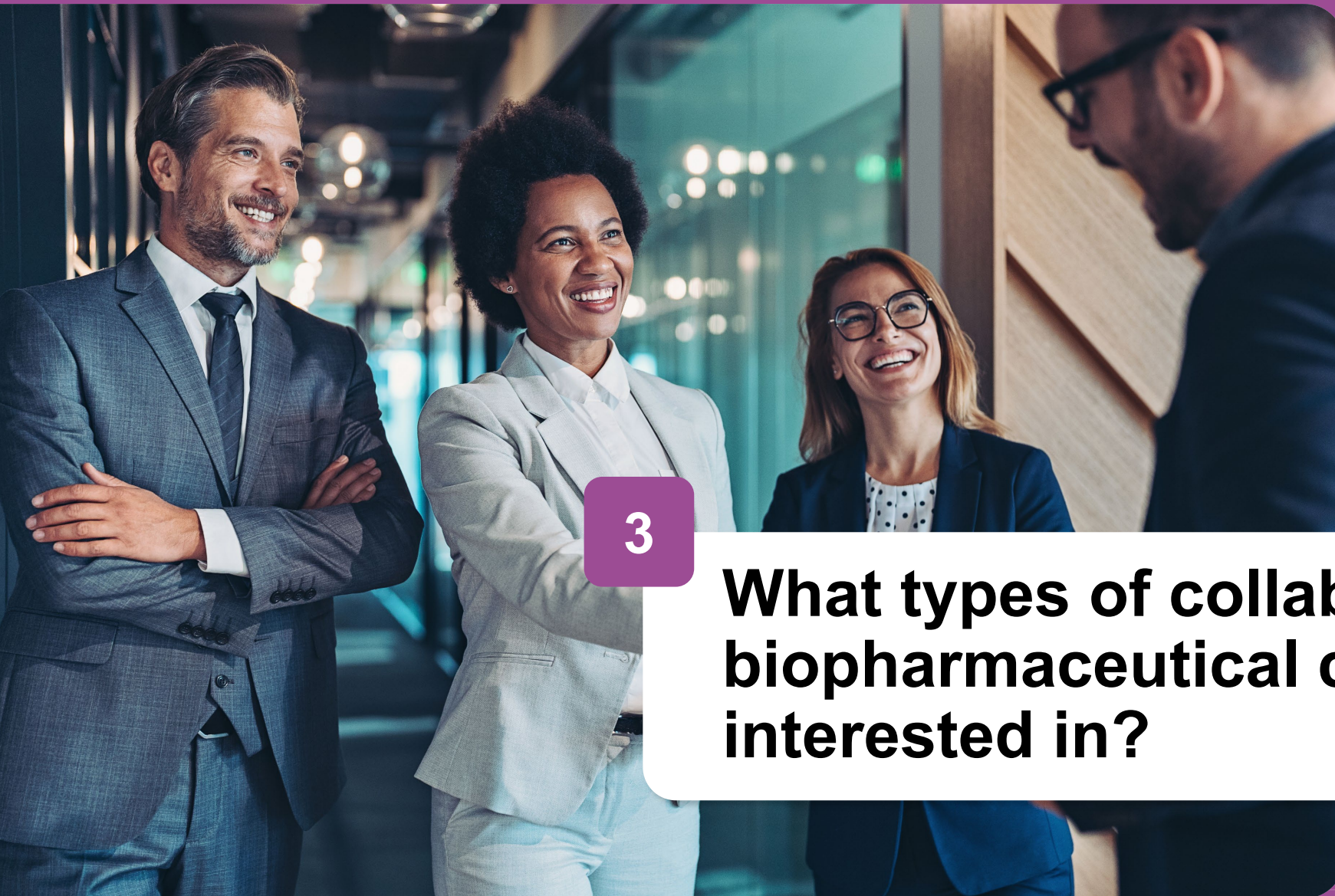
Why do biopharmaceutical companies partner with startups?

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The success of a collaboration often lies at the intersection of shared objectives among healthcare users (HC), including professionals, patients, and care institutions who benefit from digital solutions that enhance clinical and organisational practices, biopharmaceutical companies, and digital health innovators.

When all these elements align, the partnership is positioned to thrive.





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What types of collaborations are biopharmaceutical companies interested in?

What types of collaborations are pharmaceutical companies interested in?

Biopharmaceutical companies seek partnerships that create mutual value for themselves and for their customers (patients, healthcare professionals, etc.). The type of collaboration depends on the objective. Various approaches are possible, and each case is assessed individually.

Below are some of the most common collaboration models:

- Consultancy projects
- Patient programs
- Research projects
- Strategic partnerships (with clear definitions and roles for each stakeholder)
- Time-bound initiatives with a long-term vision beyond the initial project
- Early-stage partnerships are less common; companies typically prefer partners with at least a product or a minimum viable product (MVP)
- Etc.

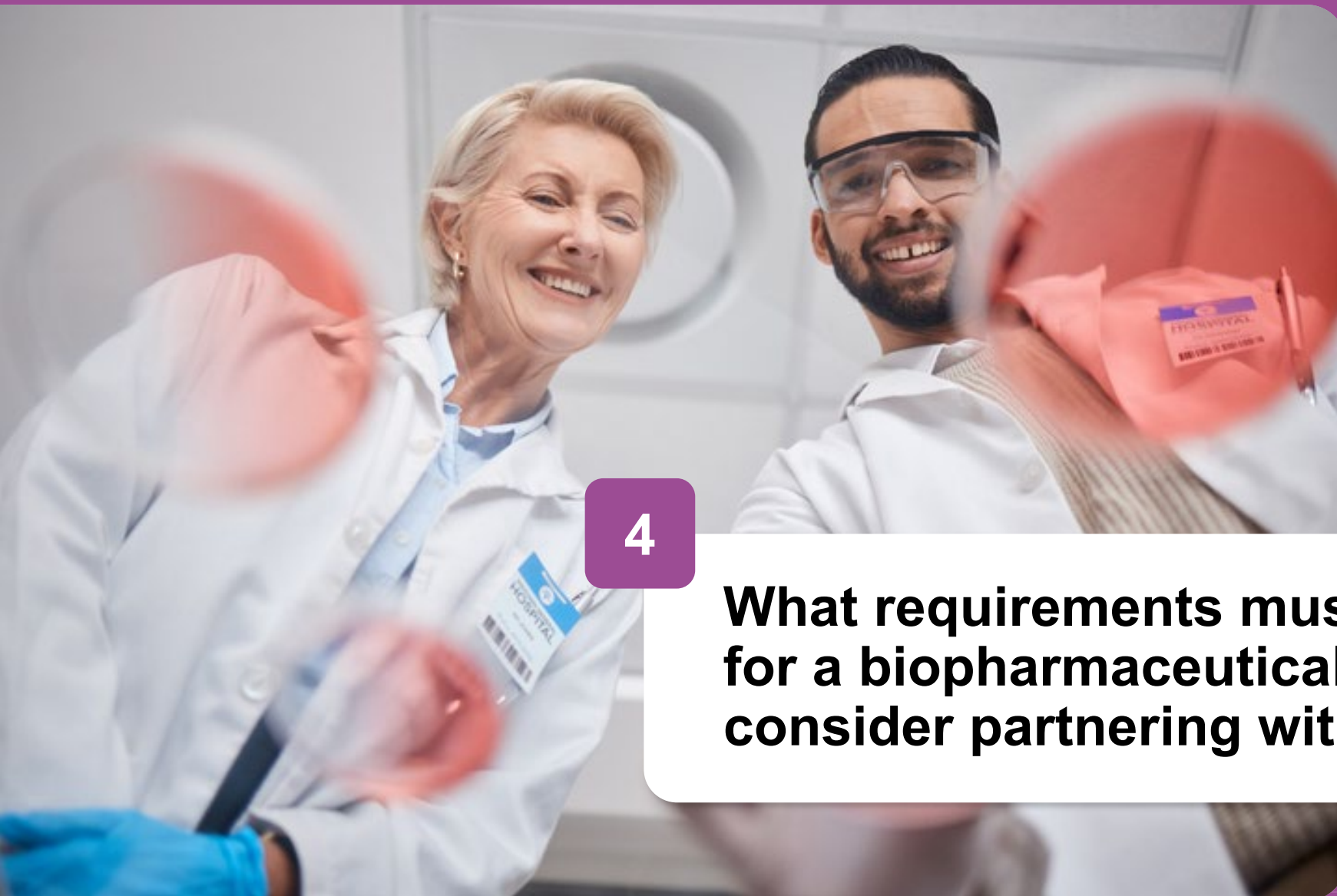
To improve the chances of success, startups should clearly define:

- The type of collaboration they are seeking
- Their current development phase (e.g., clinical validation, product deployment)

This ensures alignment on feasibility. Collaboration can start as a pilot, evolve gradually, or launch as a large-scale, high-impact initiative. It may also take the form of recurring contracts aligned with the company's strategic priorities.

However, collaborating with the sector is a long-term process. The focus is on scalable projects that can expand across multiple healthcare settings and deliver lasting value for patients.

It is **NOT** a simple sponsorship or purely financial support.



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What requirements must a startup meet for a biopharmaceutical company to consider partnering with them?

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Although prerequisites may vary between companies, the following elements are generally recommended:

Essential

- **Strategic fit**
Alignment with the company's corporate strategy and the target population where we aim to make an impact.
- **Mutual investment**
Commitment of resources and financing—whether in time, personnel, cash, or a combination of these.

Desired

- **Desirability**
Is the problem clearly defined, and is there proven demand for a solution?
- **Feasibility**
Stage of development: Is there already a minimum viable product (MVP)?
Is the technology existing or new?
Does the company have the capabilities, expertise, skills, and footprint to deliver on its promise?
- **Viability**
Is there a clear path to market (business model, financing, etc.)?
- **Scalability**
Projects with scalability are preferred. Multi-Stakeholder
- **Collaborations**
These collaborations tend to be more effective, create greater impact, and can help facilitate internal approval.
- **Certification**
If certification exists (e.g., the BeMedTech pyramid), it can be helpful.

Red Flags

- Not highlighting differentiation from competitors.
- Positioning the sector solely as a sponsor for your technology.
- Viewing the sector only as a commercial channel for your product.
- Collaborating with companies that have non-sustainable values or projects misaligned with your principles.
- Relying on a single biopharmaceutical company as the sole source of funding.



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How can a startup navigate your organisation best?

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Before Initiating Contact

- Read this FAQ carefully before reaching out to any offices.
- **Start locally**
Connect with the local office first. They can help you navigate the organisation and identify the right contacts based on your product's target customer.
- Ensure the idea or medical need is supported by a Key Opinion Leader (KOL).
- Start small and local to validate the approach before scaling up.

Engagement tips

- **Storytelling is key**
Build a strong connection with an internal sponsor who can pitch your product to the right stakeholders.
Clearly answer:
 - What is in it for the biopharmaceutical company?
 - Why your company and not a competitor?

Adapt your approach to the company's specific strategy and priorities.

Develop key arguments to support your idea internally and secure buy-in from decision-makers.

Key ingredients for a successful partnership

- Dedicated manpower resources for the project
- Clear governance and decision-making structure
- Defined budget, milestones, and timelines
- Strong follow-up and reporting, supported by solid project management skills
- A clearly identified project lead

Important note

- Job titles vary across companies and may not reflect the same roles or responsibilities. Titles such as: Innovation Lead, Digital Care Transformation/Project Lead, Value Solution Manager, Digital Engagement Manager, or Digital Manager can differ significantly from one company to another and new roles are constantly emerging.
- To navigate this, refer back to the contact person provided.



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How are the needs for digital innovation or solutions determined within a company?

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It must address a medical need and demonstrate strategic fit (aligned with corporate strategy and the population where impact is intended):

- Recruitment for clinical trials
- Early diagnosis and detection
- Patient and outcome monitoring
- Closing gaps in the patient journey
- Implementation of international clinical guidelines into routine practice
- Clinical decision support tools
- Time to market considerations
- Corporate digital strategy (reviewed annually):
 - Core research
 - Innovation
 - Care transformation
- Focus for the next 5 years:
 - Care transformation
 - Artificial Intelligence (AI)
 - Patient needs





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How do you manage and prioritise innovation projects?

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To ensure a successful collaboration, it's essential to evaluate how well your project aligns with the pharmaceutical company's needs and expectations.

Key considerations include:

Which therapeutic areas is the company you want to collaborate with focusing on?

Additional points to keep in mind:

- Every company operates with **limited resources and feasibility constraints**.
- They can only engage in a **limited number of partnerships**, with **ring-fenced budgets tied to specific goals**.
- There is a strong **preference for multi-stakeholder collaborations** (e.g., biopharma company + startup + HCPs + patients), ideally coordinated by a trusted third party. These collaborations tend to be **more impactful in the long term**. Example: *MyLungs tool*.
- Many companies collaborate through a **third-party structure**.



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What compliance checks are typically required and how long does it take to initiate the collaboration?

What compliance checks are typically required and how long does it take to initiate the collaboration?

Large pharmaceutical companies operate in a highly regulated environment, meaning collaborations must follow strict procedures and cannot be fast-tracked. Be prepared for an assessment, supported by the company, which typically includes:

- A designated contact point to guide the process
- Investment in time and planning

While each company has its own standard procedure, often depending on the nature of the project, possible compliance checks include:

- Anti-bribery and corruption checks
- GDPR and data privacy compliance
- Pharmacovigilance requirements
- IT risk assessment
- EU MDR compliance
- Procurement checks
- Financial audits
- Specific laws governing pharma and patient communication
- Etc.

Partnerships can take time to establish, as there is no standardised process across companies. Timelines vary based on project complexity, contracting, and scale, typically ranging from 6 months to a year, though this is not guaranteed and may be longer. In some cases, procedures can run in parallel.

The clearer your value proposition and the more transparent and accurate your company is about the tool in development, the faster the process can move. Likewise, the biopharmaceutical pharma company must clearly define its needs for digital health solutions.

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