

Femtech 2022: International Women's Day - Putting Women's Health in the Spotlight

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Although women represent half of the planet's population, many health aspects relating specifically to women are still out of focus of general scientific research and underrepresented in clinical studies and medical recommendations, resulting in misdiagnosis and bias in research, diagnostics, and therapies for female patients. In recognition of the need to develop and promote technologies and tools that focus on the specific needs of women's health, the term "FemTech" is becoming a standard term. The FemTech landscape covers technological solutions as, *inter alia*, apps, trackers, digital tools and software solutions as well as the development of diagnostic and treatment options for women in respect of general diseases, such as cardiovascular conditions, for which women develop different symptoms and have been traditionally underdiagnosed or not properly treated.

On this basis, regulators and policy-makers in Europe, including in the UK, France, and Switzerland, have stated the need to destigmatize women's health and to ensure that clinical practice receives and reflects input by women. Policy-making proposals for women's health in European countries are focused on the following objectives to achieve equal representation of women within the ranks of the healthcare system:

- Health systems more broadly must create methodologies, such as joint commissioning systems, to establish equal access to sexual and reproductive health services.
- Accurate and timely diagnosis is a key area of improvement, as there is great disparity due to male-centered factors and outcomes being applied in the diagnosis of women, who may exhibit an entirely different set of symptoms from men for the same conditions.
- More targeted research can fill in the existing evidentiary gaps and inform the diagnostic criteria and monitoring.
- An important component of this mission will be not only to increase diversity within clinical studies, but also to create methodologies and analyses that focus on the differences due to ethnicity, age, sex, and geography.
- Where artificial intelligence and machine learning tools are used, these should be built and trained on equitable principles.

It is therefore no surprise that in some countries women's health has become a clear policy priority with announcements of upcoming changes. We set out some recent key initiatives below.

UK

The United Kingdom (UK) may be seen as a role model. On May 12, 2021, the UK Minister for Innovation held a roundtable on FemTech titled "Women's Health Strategy — Health Technology" following the UK government's [call for evidence](#) on Women's Health Strategy

that concluded in June 2021. The feedback received informed the Department of Health and Social Care's (DHSC) [Vision for Women's Health Strategy for England](#), which was published on December 23, 2021, with the full strategy set to be published in spring this year. It is based on nearly 100,000 consultation responses from individual women and over 400 responses from organizations and healthcare professionals in the sector. This is the first attempt of a "live" policy document in the space of women's health.

Akin to this initiative, the UK recently established the UK Menopause Taskforce, which is aimed to improving support for women experiencing menopause, notably in the workplace. The UK government commissioned a report titled "Menopause and Employment: How to enable fulfilling working lives," which was published on November 25, 2021, and will guide policy-making by the UK government.

Health education is another key area to address in order to facilitate better understanding of women's health issues. It has been suggested that digital resources available within the UK National Health Service (NHS) digital system can be used to deliver accessible digital information to patients and healthcare professionals alike. In turn, this information will spark conversations on the systemic changes that are required to offer support to women.

France

France's initiative regarding endometriosis is a further noteworthy example. In early 2022, the president announced a national strategy to combat endometriosis. Through allocating expert centers in endometriosis in each region and offering national funding, the plan aims to improve understanding and awareness of this debilitating condition and enhance diagnosis and treatment options.

Switzerland

In Switzerland, FemTech plays an important role in the life sciences industry. According to the [Global FemTech Industry Report](#) of the [FemTech Analytics agency](#), Switzerland is a hub for technology companies focused on women's health. According to the data, more than half of such firms from continental Europe are located in Switzerland. The Swiss market represents an excellent opportunity for the FemTech industry as it is highly developed in both technological and structural aspects. As a major pharmaceutical location, host to one of the most important medical devices industries and home to many pioneering technical universities, Switzerland is a valuable breeding ground for emerging FemTech companies. One of the globally highly recognized Swiss universities, the Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL), and a Swiss health insurance company, Groupe Mutuel, show how the cooperation between different players may influence women's health. EPFL and Groupe Mutuel joined forces to launch [Tech4Eva](#), the first startup acceleration program addressing women's health in Switzerland. This program aims to help selected startup companies to develop innovative solutions in order to improve technologies relating to women's health and to refine their business models accordingly.

Investment Outlook

According to the global consulting firm [Frost & Sullivan](#), the international FemTech market is expected to be worth US\$50 billion by 2025. However, FemTech is still an area of

underinvestment and, according to [PitchBook](#), only 4% of all healthcare research and development is targeted specifically at women's health issues. Thus, a lack of financing remains a main challenge for the FemTech industry. And although promising changes and activities are emerging, nascent FemTech companies still face challenges when communicating the value and purpose of their products within healthcare systems and when seeking investments.

Nevertheless, as both private investors and governmental organizations are involved in funding, the sector is expected to flourish in Switzerland. We were delighted to discuss with Loulia Kassem and Erick Garcia-Cordero, co-founders of the Swiss FemTech company REA, the hurdles they had to overcome during their young company's history and their visions for the future of FemTech (please watch our brief and insightful interview here: [FemTech in the Spotlight - An Interview with REA Co-Founders](#)).

With the existing high demand for technological solutions in favor of women's health, women spending an estimated [US\\$500 billion on health annually](#), and women, according to Frost & Sullivan, being up to [85% more likely to use digital tools in healthcare](#) than men, we expect this market to grow significantly in the coming years. Recognizing and targeting women's specific needs will broaden the understanding for the needs in female health, initiate social changes regarding stigmatized health topics, and enable women to take charge of their health. In short, in 2022, it's time to put women's health in the spotlight, and we are expecting investments to boost further research and development of treatments for women's health.