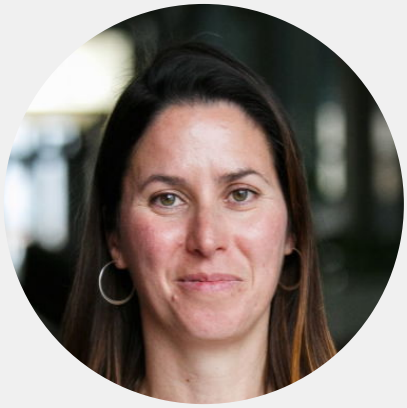
Judit Anido – CEO, CataloniaBio & HealthTech



Ultimately, CataloniaBio & HealthTech wishes to position Catalonia as one of the top health hubs in the world

07.02.2022

Tags: Spain, CataloniaBio & HealthTech, Catalonia, Investment, Hub, Inovation

CataloniaBio & HealthTech is an industry association representing the biomedicine and health sector in Catalonia. Its CEO, Judit Anido, explains how the region's entrepreneurial spirit is helping it lead Spain in research and innovation, and comments on regulatory changes needed to help small- and medium-sized companies grow into a competitive size.

Could you tell us how you ended up at CataloniaBio & HealthTech?

My background is in biology and following my graduation, I began my career as a researcher at the Vall d'Hebron Institute of Oncology (VHIO). In this 10-year period, I completed my PhD and post-doctorate working in different aspects of oncology at the Vall d'Hebron hospital and investigated the efficacy of drugs on certain patients and found new targets to develop novel drugs.

During this time, we were limited in our ability to develop this research beyond the pre-clinical setting and I wanted to move into the business side of the science to transform this research into drugs to treat the patients.

As a result, I studied a Master's in Business Administration (MBA) at Duke University with a focus on the pharmaceutical industry. Furthermore, I wanted the international experience to be exposed to the US market which is more mature than of Europe in terms of developing innovation in the health sector. During my second year, I met with my postdoc director and discussed the possibility of furthering these discoveries to develop drugs. Consequently, we decided to create a spinoff

company, Mosaic Biomedicals to bring these discoveries forward.

Following my MBA, I returned to Barcelona and started Mosaic, a startup in oncology aiming to develop personalized treatments for cancer. In 2016, this was merged with a Canadian company called Northern Biologics with a similar profile working in oncology with antibodies and personalized medicine. This created the team, knowledge, and experience to create a larger pipeline and enter clinical trials with the drug being developed at Mosaic since 2012. A phase one clinical trial was completed in 2020 and subsequently, our assets were acquired by two large pharmaceutical companies in Europe.

This closed the lifecycle for Mosaic Biomedicals. The area of specialization and competitiveness of the company was in early drug development, and we wanted to find a suitable partner to give these drugs all the potential and resources to complete the later stages of development.

During my last years at Mosaic, I was a member of the board of directors at CataloniaBio & HealthTech. This entity is key in helping the ecosystem become stronger and more competitive. I joined the organization officially in 2018 as I wanted to assist healthcare companies with my accumulated knowledge as I had been helped at Mosaic. In 2020, I became the president of the board, and then the CEO of CataloniaBio & HealthTech in 2021, helping the entity grow through a more executive role in implementing the strategic plan.

How does your work at CataloniaBio & HealthTech help to make the Catalan innovation ecosystem stronger and more competitive?

CataloniaBio & HealthTech is the organization that represents companies in the biomedicine and healthcare sector in Catalonia. Currently, there are almost 200 members leaders in research and development (R&D) and innovation including companies, research centres, and hospitals.

Therefore, CataloniaBio & HealthTech wants to capture the full health sector value chain. Most of the associates are companies from all areas within the health sector with those developing products in biopharma, MedTech, and digital health of all sizes. Approximately 80 percent of the companies are small and micro companies and this is reflected in the nature of the associates and the ecosystem itself.

Additionally, the organization represents service companies that support companies developing products. This includes firms in regulation, patent law, and scientific services. Furthermore, around seven percent of the associates are knowledge-generating entities such as hospitals and research

centres to help establish the entire value chain for CataloniaBio & HealthTech to move the discoveries through the process to the patient.

The main strategic line in which the organization is working is to defend and promote the interest of the associates and the ecosystem. CataloniaBio & HealthTech gives a voice to the needs of the companies and the ecosystem to make an impact in the country.

Moreover, the organization tries to boost the competitiveness and the size of the company to generate these products and improve the wellbeing of society. This is accomplished through extensive activity plans that promote the three pillars of CataloniaBio & HealthTech: innovation, entrepreneurship, and creating a network.

Ultimately, CataloniaBio & HealthTech wishes to position Catalonia as one of the top health hubs in the world.

What are the strengths of Catalonia? Which type of companies in which type of sectors are you seeking to attract that would benefit the most out of the ecosystem?

It is still a young ecosystem and has been steadily growing for the past 10 to 15 years. There are approximately 1300 companies in the health sector with a rapid rate of creation of around one new company every week.

Recently, companies in digital health have become more present with a high rate of creation. In the last 10 years, the number of companies in the digital health space has multiplied by 10.

The health sector in Catalonia has a significant impact in the wellness of the country. It will represent 8.7 percent of the GDP in Catalonia. This is the second most important industry for innovation in the region following the automobile industry. The companies from the health sector generate EUR 20 billion in revenue per year and have over 57,000 employees.

In 2021, there was a record investment in the health sector with EUR 238 million surpassing the 200M threshold for the second year in a row. One factor for this increase among others is that COVID pandemic has put the focus on the sector with investors realizing the importance of the health sector for developing solutions to combat the crisis and have a positive economic impact.

The region is the birthplace of several big healthcare companies, what should this be attributed to?

It is a mixture. Historically, Catalonia has been entrepreneurial, and this mindset is in the DNA of the region. Furthermore, the Catalan health ecosystem has a high level of science developed in the region and is competitive in the number and quality of publications for its size and population.

Additionally, the region is competitive for attracting finance from across Europe with high quality hospitals for clinical trials. These pieces combine to create an ecosystem that has the potential to create and attract large pharmaceutical companies.

Nevertheless, CataloniaBio & HealthTech wants to see more of these larger sized companies from the region and it is one of the challenges of the ecosystem to give the small and micro-sized companies the resources needed to grow.

What is component is missing for this jump from the startup phase to the mid cap and then large company?

It is a growing ecosystem and many of the companies that have been created in the last five to ten years will be able to grow into midsized companies.

However, there is space to improve the support for these businesses such as the

public policies from the Government to shift the economic model of the country to turn it into a more robust and resilient system for startups, in which

these companies with a regulatory environment that is clear and stable enough to support them to make long term plans to grow into a competitive size.

What is your position on the plans to fund healthcare within the region and which are you allocating most of your time?

Legislation is needed to set the basis for the country to establish its strategic lines and develop the health sector in a stronger way. The pandemic highlighted that the health sector could play a key role in becoming more resilient and competitive as a society. The development of a new vaccine based on innovative technology was the culmination of private and public sectors collaborating. This created a solution to face the worldwide health crisis translating as well in an economic crisis.

As a result, the health system can give back to society in three ways. By keeping the society healthy, creating knowledge, and creating wealth. These plans to invest further in healthcare globally are great initiatives, however, the plans need to be defined for the funding to be used efficiently and to the greatest effect.

The plans for funding align with sectors identified by CataloniaBio & HealthTech that require further innovation and funding such as personalized medicine, advanced therapies, digitalization of systems, and increasing the resilience of the sector.

These parts have been captured in the PERTE “Salud de Vanguardia” created by the Spanish Government, however, this should be further defined to use these funds to create a project that is truly transformational and captures the entire value chain.

What are the sectors in Catalonia that you believe need to be reinvested in and industrialized?

For this ecosystem to mature, the smaller companies in the region need to grow into midsize companies.

CataloniaBio & HealthTech is taking specific steps to help these companies size up. For example, in 2021, the organization started a five-month program called BIOMED ScaleUP that provides companies associated with our entity the tools and knowledge to make their companies grow.

In the medium- to long-term, what milestones would you like to reach?

CataloniaBio & HealthTech wants to continue growing the number of associates and become more visible as an organization that voices both the potential of these companies, and the challenges they face in order to build solutions.

On the other hand, the organization needs to more closely communicate with the government and other public entities to determine the needs of the health ecosystem to strengthen it.

Which sort of company would you found in Catalonia if you could travel back five or 10 years?

The beauty of the health sector is that it is heterogeneous and there is no specific area that would solve all the challenges within the health system or the health of society. There are different solutions required to address different unmet medical needs.

Catalonia has a breadth of knowledge with companies developing solutions and innovations in different areas. Over the last few years, some have become more dominant such as those related to digital health that flourished during the pandemic.

However, there is no single solution, and the diversity of knowledge and technologies must be maintained in order to overcome the different health related challenges facing society.

Do you have any final messages for our readers?

We need to take advantage of the last 18 months to work together efficiently between public and private sectors to move forward innovations. Additionally, the European funds need to be designed and implemented to become a transformational plan that oversees the entire value chain and creates synergies to become more resilient as a society.

See more interviews