

Regione Lombardia participates in the UNITE project launched in Brussels with €20 million investment to bridge Europe's digital health divide

Brussels, 17 September 2024 - EIT Digital is proud to announce the official launch of UNITE, a major pan-European project aimed at transforming healthcare through digital deep tech innovation.

Selected as part of the European Commission's Regional Innovation Valleys initiative under the New European Innovation Agenda, the 4-year project was kick-started with a meeting of all consortium partners at the EIT House in Brussels, at the presence of EISMEA's Project Officer Christina Nanou, Magdalena Cymerys, Policy Officer of the Directorate-General for Research and Innovation of the European Commission, and Christine Kriza, project advisor EISMEA.

As healthcare systems across Europe face growing challenges, **from aging populations to healthcare workforce shortages**, there is an urgent need for innovative digital solutions. The UNITE consortium, led by EIT Digital, brings together a diverse group of partners to address these pressing issues.

"The healthcare challenges Europe faces today require a unified, innovative response. Through the UNITE initiative, we are empowering regions and companies to develop and scale deep tech solutions that will enhance the efficiency, accessibility, and quality of healthcare systems across the continent," says Federico Menna, CEO of EIT Digital.

The group of partners includes **Region Sjælland** in Denmark, **Thüringer Ministerium für Wirtschaft, Wissenschaft und Digitale Gesellschaft** in Germany, the **Region of Central Macedonia** in Greece, **Regione Lombardia** in Italy, **Malopolska Voivodeship** in Poland, **Unitatea Executiva Pentru Finantarea Invatamantului Superior, a Cercetarii, Dezvoltarii si**

Please contact Federico Guerrini

T: + 39 393 4747231

E: federico.guerrini@eitdigital.eu

For Regione Lombardia please contact Gessyca Golia

T: + 39 0267652602

E: gessyca_golia@regione.lombardia.it

Inovarii (UEFISCDI) in Romania, the **Ivano-Frankivsk Regional State Administration** in Ukraine, and **Scottish Enterprise** in the United Kingdom.

UNITE will activate **open calls for proposals** to cascade funding to highly innovative European companies in the digital health domain. These calls will support startups, scale-ups, and SMEs in delivering deep tech solutions that can bridge regional innovation gaps, enhance Europe's global competitiveness, and secure equal access to healthcare for all.

A key objective of the project is to **streamline public procurement processes** and **sharing of health data across partner regions**, ensuring that innovative solutions can be integrated into regional healthcare systems more efficiently. Furthermore, UNITE will **activate online training programs** tailored to key stakeholders in the digital health ecosystem, establishing a baseline of knowledge across regions and fostering a deeper understanding of the innovations that are shaping the future of healthcare.

The importance of the UNITE programme is underpinned by **significant financial support** from the European Commission. The budget for the consortium's activities is close to €20 million. At least half of the programme's budget will be allocated to supporting 3-5 interregional innovation projects focused on the development and deployment of next-generation digital health solutions.

By 2028, the consortium will also provide **policy recommendations** to decision-makers at both regional and European levels, ensuring that the lessons learned from the UNITE programme can be integrated into future initiatives.

Regione Lombardia is the Italian most developed region in the Life Sciences leading in **genomics, biomedicine and healthcare management**. It has been working intensively to accelerate digitalization of its healthcare ecosystem, foster the adoption of telemedicine services, and supporting health and social workers in the complex process of treatment and assistance. Its efforts **to support the digitalisation of the healthcare sector**, including by promoting technology transfer, supporting medtech start-ups, industrial innovation and collaboration between the public and private sectors. It will take part in the Work package WP3 – **Consolidating and Advancing the Regional Ecosystems Services and Capabilities** as Lead Partner for the Task 3.5 - **Advance capabilities in joint Health Data Spaces**. The task oversees Health Data Spaces activities in the project, collecting the

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inventory of available health data services in partner regions and placing it in UNITE Cloud, for promoting the use of these data opportunities in the JIP open calls. In this respect the contributions of Lombardy in the project will be mainly focused to investigate the Health data storage systems in use in each European Region and the capability of each regional healthcare system to access, exchange, integrate and use the data. At the same time, Lombardy Region will take part actively in 7 different Ecosystem Working Groups (EWG) in particular in the **EWG-Startups&Scaleups** with two main objectives:

- Connect the startup service ecosystems and service providers between regions;
- Support the development of *UNITED* Startup Growth Services following activities;

The approach of Regione Lombardia to the EWG is to engage **25 experts** providing 8 names per region (one woman and one man) representing **academia, government, private sector and civil society**, the 4 sectors of the 4 helix model.

The 2 main actors that will cooperate with Regione Lombardia in the project are:

- **Federated Innovation @MIND** <https://www.federatedinnovation-mind.com>
- **Il Cluster Lombardo delle scienze della vita** <https://lombardialifesciences.it>

The core ecosystem of **Federated Innovation @MIND** is formed by 3 key Anchor Institutions: a university, a research hospital and a research center excelling in the national life sciences ecosystem (the **University of Milano Statale**, the **Galeazzi Research Hospital** and the **Human Technopole**), and by 4-helix large companies in the pharmaceutical and healthcare industries. Its purpose is to offer more opportunities for technology development and networking to companies in the sector, supporting their interactions with external players.

The final purpose of the project is to set up a portfolio of Joint International Projects, each of which is to develop new and innovative digital products and solutions for health. It refines the Innovation Challenge on Health Data Spaces to meet the timely regulation and other European and regional developments on Health Data Spaces.

The initial themes for the open calls and the priorities Lombardy Region proposes are :

- **Alert systems** to anticipate pandemic risk, using the analysis of the data collected in the working group;
- A customized **health guide** for an efficient access to the healthcare system both for tourists and local cronic patients supported by AI;
- The implementation of a **digital twin system** for the pysical health status.

The potential applicants for the open calls will be universities and research hospitals which are already collaborating on health-data exchanges through specific projects such as, for example, MUSA (ecosystem for the urban regeneration), also through the support of **specialised public sector organisations** such as ARIA or Fondazione Regionale per la Ricerca Biomedica and innovative start-ups and scale-ups are developing in the field, together with established companies such as Sapio's Advice Pharma.

The total estimated amount for the UNITE project assigned to Regione Lombardia will be equal to 2.640.000,25€ co-funded by Regional Lombardy resources up to **1.320.000,12€** for the period 2024-2027.

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T: + 39 393 4747231
E: federico.guerrini@eitdigital.eu

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