



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Merck Digital Sciences Studio Expands with Second Innovation Cohort to Advance Biopharma and Digital Health Progress in North America

KIRKLAND, QC., March 13, 2026 – Merck, known as MSD outside of the United States and Canada, is proud to announce the second cohort of the Merck Digital Sciences Studio (MDSS) in Montréal Canada. MDSS is a collaborative digital health innovation accelerator dedicated to investing in, supporting and mentoring biopharmaceutical startups focused on developing cutting-edge digital technologies including artificial intelligence (AI) solutions. MDSS specifically targets innovations in the areas of preventive health, platforms for biologics research and development (R&D) and 3D translational disease models.

This second cohort for MDSS will start in March 2026 and features a mix of both Canadian and American companies participating in a nine-month acceleration program. This second cohort will provide 12 startups with access to mentoring from experts at both Merck and Centech, the operating partner for MDSS and a nonprofit that supports high-tech companies with high-growth potential. Each selected startup will receive \$100,000 USD total in funding from the Merck Global Health Innovation Fund, The Venture Collective (TVC), and CQDM. Selected participants will also benefit from tailored guidance, specialized sessions with industry leaders and increased exposure to Merck’s decision-makers, paving the way for potential long-term collaborations.

The second cohort represents a deepening of our commitment to cross-collaboration and the power of digital innovation to transform drug discovery and development. By bringing together startups from both Canada and the United States in Montréal—a globally connected city and thriving hub for AI, life sciences and technology—MDSS is helping to build an integrated North American ecosystem where ideas, talent and capital can move more freely and more quickly from concept to impact for patients.

The selected Canadian startups include:

- **Neiges Biotech** - Addressing poor predictiveness of gut-related drug discovery by replacing animal and oversimplified cell models with scalable, human-relevant intestinal tissues.
- **DropGenie** - Solving the challenge of performing meaningful genome engineering on scarce patient samples, which limits personalized medicine research.
- **Epiloid Biotechnology** - Tackling the high failure rate of neurological drug candidates caused by poor translation from animal models to humans.

- **NuvoBio** - Addressing the slow and error-prone discovery of peptide therapeutics for complex diseases.
- **Modulari-T Biosciences** - Solving the safety, durability, and exhaustion limitations of current CAR-T and cell therapies.
- **Focai** - Addressing incomplete drug distribution leading to poor therapy response.

The selected US startups include:

- **ExteRNA** - Addressing limitations of conventional biologics, which lack chemical precision and functional diversity.
- **Intero Biosystems** - Solving the low predictiveness and ethical issues of animal testing in drug development.
- **Fletcher Biosciences** - Addressing cellular heterogeneity in disease.
- **Forecast Bio** - Addressing the lack of predictive models in CNS drug development.
- **Whelix** - Addressing the scalability and variability challenges of research-stage cell culture.

“Launching a second cohort of the Merck Digital Sciences Studio in Montréal underscores our long-term belief in the strength of this ecosystem and in the potential of digital technologies to reshape how we discover and develop medicines,” said David Rubin, Managing Director at Merck Global Health Innovation Fund. “By uniting bright minds from the United States and Canada in a single program, we are creating a bridge between two innovation communities in a city that is uniquely positioned at the crossroads of biopharma, AI and data science to enable meaningful advances for patients.”

“Canada has both the ambition and the talent to lead in health innovation and responsible public policy, and this second MDSS cohort in Montréal is a powerful example of that potential,” said Jennifer Chan, Executive Director, Policy, Federal Affairs, Merck Canada. “Built on the leadership and support of the Québec government and Centech, MDSS in Montréal is now part of a broader North American platform that connects Canadian and U.S. innovators.”

“By welcoming a second cohort to Montréal, we are not only reinforcing Québec’s leadership in biopharma and AI innovation, but also accelerating the program’s expansion across Canada,” said Véronique Dugas, Chief Executive Officer, CQDM. “This new cohort allows us to support some of the country’s most promising startups—both in Québec and across Canada—by providing the tools, expertise and partnerships they need to scale globally, attract investment, and translate breakthrough science into tangible benefits for patients here at home and around the world.”

“TVC is proud to partner with MDSS, reinforcing our long-standing collaboration with Merck Global Health Innovation and our conviction in cross-border innovation,” says TVC Founding Partner, Nick Shekerdemian. “At TVC, we’re always aiming to support the early-stage bio ecosystem,” follows Chris Ghadban, TVC’s life science lead, “MDSS provides another opportunity for us to accelerate transformative platform companies from the earliest stage.”

“Centech is proud to continue our collaboration to help build a stronger, more connected innovation pipeline between Québec, the rest of Canada and the United States,” said Marjorick Foisy, General Director of Centech. “By combining our deep experience in scaling high-potential tech companies with Merck’s leadership and global reach, this second MDSS cohort will give

entrepreneurs the environment, tools and partnerships to validate their technologies faster and bring impactful health innovations to patients around the world.”

About Merck Digital Sciences Studio

The Merck Digital Sciences Studio is an accelerator program providing mentorship, coaching, training, support, community, and investment to enable the next generation of innovative technologies for drug discovery and development. We invest in disruptive and innovative startups in digital biopharma via a SAFE (Simple Agreement for Future Equity). The MDS Studio’s unique design and network empowers startups to engage with industry leading partners, who take an active role in development. Learn more by visiting www.mds.studio.

About Merck

At Merck, known as MSD outside of the United States and Canada, we are unified around our purpose: We use the power of leading-edge science to save and improve lives around the world. For more than 130 years, we have brought hope to humanity through the development of important medicines and vaccines. We aspire to be the premier research-intensive biopharmaceutical company in the world – and today, we are at the forefront of research to deliver innovative health solutions that advance the prevention and treatment of diseases in people and animals. We foster a diverse and inclusive global workforce and operate responsibly every day to enable a safe, sustainable, and healthy future for all people and communities. For more information about our operations in Canada, visit www.merck.ca and connect with us on [LinkedIn](#) @MerckCanada.

About CQDM

CQDM is a not-for-profit biopharmaceutical research consortium whose mission is to support and facilitate collaborative multi-stakeholder research and development aimed at accelerating the translation or transformation of innovative technologies into solutions to unmet medical needs, while generating significant benefits for the Québec and Canadian economy. For more information, consult our website <https://cqdm.org/en/> and join us on [LinkedIn](#).

About The Venture Collective

[The Venture Collective](#) (TVC) is an early-stage venture firm backing ambitious scientific and technical founders solving the world’s biggest problems. We invest our time, networks, and capital to support transformational platform companies focused on life sciences, healthcare, and industrial transformation. The TVC team is distributed across San Francisco, New York City, and London, backing founders across Europe and North America.

About Centech

Centech is a leading nonprofit incubator and accelerator dedicated to supporting high-potential technology companies from early development through commercialization and market readiness. Founded 30 years ago by [l'École de technologie supérieure](#) (ÉTS) and based in Montréal, Centech provides entrepreneurs with access to a robust ecosystem of experts, mentors, industry partners, and investors to help transform cutting-edge innovations into successful, globally competitive businesses. Recognized as one of the world’s leading accelerators, Centech focuses on deep-tech innovation across high-impact sectors, including

artificial intelligence, digital health, medical technologies, advanced engineering, and next generation industrial technologies. Centech also serves as the operating partner for the Merck Digital Sciences Studio (MDSS), supporting collaboration between startups and global industry leaders. For more information, visit <https://centech.co> and follow Centech on [LinkedIn](#).

Forward-Looking Statement of Merck & Co., Inc., Rahway, N.J., USA

This news release of Merck & Co., Inc., Rahway, N.J., USA (the “company”) includes “forward-looking statements” within the meaning of the safe harbor provisions of the U.S. Private Securities Litigation Reform Act of 1995. These statements are based upon the current beliefs and expectations of the company’s management and are subject to significant risks and uncertainties. There can be no guarantees with respect to pipeline candidates that the candidates will receive the necessary regulatory approvals or that they will prove to be commercially successful. If underlying assumptions prove inaccurate or risks or uncertainties materialize, actual results may differ materially from those set forth in the forward-looking statements.

Risks and uncertainties include but are not limited to, general industry conditions and competition; general economic factors, including interest rate and currency exchange rate fluctuations; the impact of pharmaceutical industry regulation and health care legislation in the United States and internationally; global trends toward health care cost containment; technological advances, new products and patents attained by competitors; challenges inherent in new product development, including obtaining regulatory approval; the company’s ability to accurately predict future market conditions; manufacturing difficulties or delays; financial instability of international economies and sovereign risk; dependence on the effectiveness of the company’s patents and other protections for innovative products; and the exposure to litigation, including patent litigation, and/or regulatory actions.

The company undertakes no obligation to publicly update any forward-looking statement, whether as a result of new information, future events or otherwise. Additional factors that could cause results to differ materially from those described in the forward-looking statements can be found in the company’s Annual Report on Form 10-K for the year ended December 31, 2025 and the company’s other filings with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) available at the SEC’s Internet site (www.sec.gov).

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