

# Ireland Where Digital Health Thrives



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# Actionable data making a meaningful impact on care

**David Dowling, Healthcare Systems Partner at Roche, speaks about how the company's insights-driven digital health solutions aim to help clinicians improve patient care**



"Throughout our 125-year history, Roche has grown into one of the world's largest biotech companies," says David Dowling. "We're also a leading provider of in vitro diagnostics and a global supplier of transformative innovative solutions across major disease areas."

Roche offers differentiated medicines in oncology, immunology, infectious diseases, ophthalmology, diseases of the central nervous system and rare diseases. It is also the world leader in in vitro diagnostics and tissue-based cancer diagnostics, and a frontrunner in diabetes management.

"Roche brings together different backgrounds, perspectives and experiences across the entire organisation, to foster innovative solutions for the benefit of patients. The patient is, and will remain, at the core of what we do. They are the reason we come to work every day."

There is also a real commitment to support patients and patient groups with strong and lasting partnerships with organisations such as the Irish Haemophilia Society and MS Ireland.

Since the company's founding in Basel, Switzerland in 1896, there has been a continuous focus on creating new medicines and diagnostics. More recently, the organisation has focused on establishing data-based insights, to evolve the practice of medicine and help patients live longer, better lives.

"We have a large core set of products which cover data analytics, personalised healthcare and connected medical devices," says David.

"Put simply, our approach to digital health solutions focuses on the right treatment, for the right patient, at the right time. Across Roche, our experts are continuously innovating in oncology, genomics, ophthalmology, and neurology care. These are the core focus areas that we provide medicines and solutions for."

## Informing clinical decisions

According to David, Roche's solutions bring many benefits for both patients and healthcare professionals. Solutions increase patient involvement in their care journey and support. Because in this changing healthcare environment, it is important patients feel empowered to manage their own medical conditions.

"For clinicians and caregivers, our solutions can better coordinate patient care planning and services. This is through the aggregation of longitudinal patient data, quick access to actionable insights, as well as enhanced multidisciplinary team collaboration and case management discussion."

For example, within oncology, David says Roche's solutions adopt genomic sequencing, which is a lab method used to determine the entire genetic make-up of a specific organism or cell type. "This can identify targeted treatments, and further assists with clinical decision-making in complex cases.

"Availability and interoperability of data are critical to timely decision-making and our approach is to ensure our solutions do just that. There is lots of data, but the real impact for patients and clinicians is in the curation of it. So that neither the clinician or patient is having to wade through disparate systems and data sets in order to extract the true value of their data."

Roche's products are supplied globally across all continents and David strongly feels the company is redefining the standard of care.

"Roche invests heavily in R&D. In 2022, this equated to over €14 billion. This is representative of our ambition to shift the dial forward for standard of care and, ultimately, achieve better outcomes for patients."

## Fostering data interoperability

Before his current role with Roche, David worked initially as a pharmacist, then in large-scale digital transformation across public and private health settings. He says that while patient care is changing, he has found that patients interacting with the Irish healthcare system have long been saying that the lack of integration is a major frustration for them.

"Ireland is home to the biggest pharma, medtech and technology companies, yet there is a noticeable gap in the level of access and integration within the Irish system. Data and innovative technologies should have a more integral role in the patient journey, but the absence of Electronic Health Records (EHRs) in the Irish health system limits the current potential for wide scale solution deployment here.

"The Department of Health recently brought forward the Health Information Bill, focusing on data usage, which should improve data interoperability and portability for patients. As should the National Genetic and Genomic Strategy for Ireland, which includes a working group to look at infrastructure and data. In the coming years, this should hopefully begin to position Ireland as a leader in healthcare, leveraging digital in the journey to realising Sláintecare."

Sláintecare is the 10-year programme to reform Ireland's healthcare to move away from a two-tier system and towards a system based on medical need.

David adds that data democratisation is essential to delivering better patient outcomes which requires continued investment in IT infrastructure to allow data to support clinical and operational processes. "For a relatively small population, base registries can become incredibly powerful indicators for research and access to new treatments, particularly when it comes to rare diseases."

David says Ireland has a bright digital health future, and the country is well-placed to become a leader in digital health.

"Ireland has a globally recognised, innovative workforce, with a strong focus on entrepreneurship. In relation to digital health specifically, the pandemic really challenged the status-quo with solutions being implemented and scaled quickly. It has been great to see data and digital health solutions being incorporated into clinical pathways where the patient benefit is clear.

"Irish companies are having a huge impact within the medtech and digital health space globally. It can be seen across the board, from individual clinicians to companies, even some of the medtech hubs that are located around Ireland. Ireland as a population has always shown an innovative and entrepreneurial mindset. And I think that's been key to Ireland's success."

David adds, "Also, from a geographical context, Ireland is a gateway to the US and EU markets, making it a great place for pursuing digital health activities."

## Ireland's ambition to transform health

The support available in Ireland also plays a huge part in centring Ireland as a global hub for digital health, "Ibec, the Irish Government, the Department of Trade, Enterprise and Employment, and agencies like IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland, have a strong track record of supporting innovation in the sector, making Ireland an attractive location to operate in. This, coupled with our highly skilled workforce, further reinforces this innovative mindset."

David says the impact of data and digital technologies is growing, bringing opportunities that are improving healthcare today.

"Over my career, I've definitely seen a huge change in healthcare in terms of the innovative solutions that are coming forward. And it's fantastic to see. But we can do much more. More for patients. More for healthcare providers. More for health authorities.

"Digital health, including digital diagnostic solutions, can empower people to better manage their health. They allow healthcare providers to confidently diagnose and treat disease. And they help healthcare institutions to unlock greater efficiency.

"That's where Roche's ambitions moving forward will always be."



📍 **Ibec Head Office**  
84/86 Lower Baggot Street,  
Dublin 2.  
T: + 353 1 605 1500  
E: [membership@ibec.ie](mailto:membership@ibec.ie)  
[www.ibec.ie/membership](http://www.ibec.ie/membership)

📍 **Galway**  
Ross House,  
Victoria Place,  
Galway.  
T: + 353 91 561109  
E: [galway@ibec.ie](mailto:galway@ibec.ie)  
[www.ibec.ie/west](http://www.ibec.ie/west)

📍 **Cork**  
2nd Floor,  
Penrose One,  
Penrose Dock,  
Cork.  
T: + 353 21 4295511  
E: [cork@ibec.ie](mailto:cork@ibec.ie)  
[www.ibec.ie/cork](http://www.ibec.ie/cork)

📍 **Limerick**  
Gardner House Bank Place,  
Charlotte Quay,  
Limerick.  
T: + 353 61 410411  
E: [midwest@ibec.ie](mailto:midwest@ibec.ie)  
[www.ibec.ie/midwest](http://www.ibec.ie/midwest)

📍 **Donegal**  
3rd Floor,  
Pier One Quay Street,  
Donegal Town, Donegal.  
T: + 353 74 9722474  
E: [northwest@ibec.ie](mailto:northwest@ibec.ie)  
[www.ibec.ie/northwest](http://www.ibec.ie/northwest)

📍 **Waterford**  
Waterford Business Park  
Cork Road  
Waterford  
T: + 353 51 331260  
E: [southeast@ibec.ie](mailto:southeast@ibec.ie)  
[www.ibec.ie/southeast](http://www.ibec.ie/southeast)

📍 **Brussels**  
Avenue de Cortenberg, 89,  
Box 2,  
B-1000 Brussels,  
Belgium.  
T: + 32 (0)2 512.33.33  
E: [europe@ibec.ie](mailto:europe@ibec.ie)  
[www.ibec.ie/europe](http://www.ibec.ie/europe)