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Press release

Important preventive measures for heart health

Preventing heart attacks and strokes: with cholesterol measurement in children, digital heart management and data use



Want to continue shaping the future of medicine together at the DigiMed Bayern Symposium 2024: Dr. Jens Wiehler, Managing Director of DigiMed Bayern and Digital Health Lead at Bio^M, Prof. Dr. med. Heribert Schunkert, Scientific Director of DigiMed Bayern, Bavarian Health Minister Judith Gerlach and Prof. Dr. med. Dominik Pförringer, organizer of the Digital Health Summit 2024 (from right to left). © Bio^M / Bert Willer

- *Familial risk of cardiac death: 28,000 children and adolescents screened in VRONI study. 250 cases with a genetic increase in risk of early heart attack identified and now undergoing treatment*
- *HerzFit app: 150,000 users use DigiMed Bayern tool for their heart health*
- *Secure IT infrastructure “DigiMed Bayern Secure Cloud” created as the basis for new, data-based medicine*
- *Continuation of the DigiMed Bayern lighthouse project for improved prevention and data-based healthcare for atherosclerosis planned until the end of 2027*

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- *Bavarian Health Minister Gerlach honors successes and paves the way for data-driven digital medicine in the indications of cancer and rare diseases as well*

Munich, 7 November, 2024 - Cardiovascular diseases are the most common cause of death worldwide and also in Bavaria. This is why Bavaria is setting new standards in prevention and treatment: 150,000 people are already using the HerzFit app created by DigiMed Bayern together with the German Heart Foundation to digitally monitor and improve their heart health. 28,000 children were screened for dangerously high blood lipid levels as a result of the hereditary disease familial hypercholesterolemia (FH). As a flagship project in atherosclerosis research, DigiMed Bayern pursues a “P4 medicine” approach (predictive, preventive, personalized, participatory), which is also supported by molecular big data and digital technologies. The DigiMed Bayern Secure Cloud, launched in 2023, has also created an IT infrastructure that is unique in Germany to securely use health data for AI-supported research and further advance precision medicine. These successes have now been honored at the DigiMed Bayern Symposium on 6 November by Bavarian Health Minister Judith Gerlach, who also announced the planned continuation of the project.

Over the past six years, DigiMed Bayern has made a significant contribution to improving cardiovascular care with total funding of around 24.5 million euros. With the aim of establishing predictive, preventive, personalized and participatory (P4) medicine, the flagship project has developed and implemented significant measures for heart health based on the world's most common disease, atherosclerosis.

HerzFit app: 150,000 downloads

An interdisciplinary team led by leading cardiologists developed the HerzFit app, which has been available free of charge in the app stores since April 2022. HerzFit enables users to digitally monitor and improve their heart health while sharing data for research. With 150,000 downloads, the HerzFit app is impressive proof of its success.

VRONI study: Heart attack at 35? Without me!

In the ongoing VRONI study, which was led by the TUM University Hospital, German Heart Center Munich, 28,000 children in Bavaria have been screened for the genetic disorder “familial hypercholesterolemia (FH)”. More than 250 affected families have been identified. The hereditary disorder leads to severely elevated cholesterol levels and, if left untreated, to a high risk of early cardiac death in young adulthood. The VRONI study was extended to northern

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Germany last year and, according to the “Healthy Heart Act”, is to be integrated into German healthcare in the future.

Secure cloud for AI-supported research and personalized medicine

The DigiMed Bayern consortium also developed a secure and data protection-compliant cloud IT infrastructure under the leadership of the Leibniz Supercomputing Center of the Bavarian Academy of Sciences and Humanities. On this basis, health data can be used jointly for research and linked to the genome, proteome, transcriptome and metabolome data, which were also collected in high-throughput in the project. This database is used for AI-supported research in order to further develop personalized treatments and therapies and thus advance precision medicine. The scientists involved in the project have gained valuable insights into disease-relevant mechanisms, laid the foundations for the development of biomarkers and drug approaches and created a wealth of data that will remain important for cardiovascular research and medicine for many years to come.

Minister of Health informs about intended further funding at DigiMed Bayern Symposium

The success of the DigiMed Bayern projects was recognized at this year's symposium by Judith Gerlach, Bavarian State Minister for Health, Care and Prevention. She also announced that the Free State of Bavaria intends to support the existence and further development of DigiMed Bayern Secure Cloud 2.0 with around 3 million euros for a further three years until the end of 2027. This secure IT research environment is also a basis for the future Bavarian Genome Computing Center, which aims to improve care for cancer and rare diseases as part of the national research network. Care and research are intended to be integrated.

Judith Gerlach explained: “DigiMed Bayern has impressively demonstrated that molecular and digital-based solutions, such as the HerzFit app and the VRONI study, not only improve diagnosis and treatment, but also strengthen the prevention of cardiovascular diseases. Big data and digitization in medicine create measurable added value for the healthcare system. In order to continue these successes on the basis of the wealth of data and IT infrastructure developed, including contributions to the European Health Data Space, we support the continued existence and further development of DigiMed Bayern Secure Cloud 2.0. Patients will continue to benefit from this.”

Prof. Dr. Heribert Schunkert, Scientific Director of DigiMed Bayern and Director of the Clinic for Cardiovascular Diseases at the German Heart Center Munich, says: “In order to prevent and treat diseases in a targeted manner, we need to better understand how they develop - data is essential for this. DigiMed Bayern has achieved great success with its molecular big

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data, the VRONI study and the HerzFit app. The integration and analysis of relevant data helps us to understand disease processes at the level of molecular correlations and individual life situations and, ultimately, to save lives. The expansion of this use will provide even deeper insights in the future and thus enable the further development of personalized prevention, diagnosis and therapy.”

Dr. Jens Wiehler, Managing Director of DigiMed Bayern and Digital Health Lead at Bio^M Biotech Cluster Development GmbH, adds: “The secure, efficient and scalable processing of health data, including the use of artificial intelligence, is essential for medical research and for the implementation of evidence-based medicine. DigiMed Bayern has made a relevant contribution to this with its access to large, relevant data sets, the resulting findings and measures as well as the development of a secure cloud-based research environment. These findings, structures and data will also have a lasting impact beyond cardiovascular diseases, for example in cancer and rare diseases. This will improve the health of many, also as a contribution to the future European Health Data Space (EHDS).”

About DigiMed Bayern

The DigiMed Bayern flagship project was launched at the end of 2018 with around 22 million euros in funding from the Bavarian State Ministry of Health and Care (StMGP) as part of the BAYERN DIGITAL II master plan. The aim of the project is to integrate P4 medicine (predictive, preventive, personalized, participatory) in the specific indication and widespread disease of atherosclerosis into everyday clinical practice. The ultimate aim is to improve the prediction of disease risks, targeted prevention, diagnosis and treatment. To this end, extensive health data from patients with atherosclerosis will be collected and analyzed. The scientific director of DigiMed Bayern is Prof. Heribert Schunkert from the German Heart Center Munich. Bio^M Biotech Cluster Development GmbH is responsible for the management and coordination of the project. Leading global consortium partners from Bavaria such as clinics, patient organizations and research institutions are also involved in the project. More information at: www.digimed-bayern.de.

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Bio^M Biotech Cluster Development GmbH

For 25 years, Bio^M has been the networking organization for the biotechnology industry in Munich and Bavaria, acting on behalf of the Bavarian Ministry of Economic Affairs. Bio^M supports the Bavarian biotechnology and pharmaceutical industry with an extensive network in establishing new business contacts. The cluster management offers interested parties from Germany and abroad central access and a wide range of information about the industry. Especially for prospective company founders, Bio^M offers comprehensive advice and specialized coaching, training and mentoring programs. Bio^M 2024 also opened its incubator MAXL (Munich Accelerator Life Sciences & Medicine) for pre-seed projects and early start-ups in the biotech and healthtech sector. Since 2011, Bio^M has been coordinating the m4 Award pre-seed competition in the field of biomedicine, which is funded by the Bavarian Ministry of Economic Affairs with a total of 2.5 million euros. In total, Bio^M has supported over 250 start-ups. Bio^M also organizes a wide range of training courses, events and network meetings. More information: www.bio-m.org

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About the TUM University Hospital, German Heart Center Munich

Cutting-edge medicine of the future under one roof: Since August 2024, the Klinikum rechts der Isar and the German Heart Center Munich have formed the TUM University Hospital. The newly founded TUM University Hospital combines patient care, research and teaching at the highest level and offers a unique range of services in the field of cardiac medicine. As part of the TUM University Hospital, the German Heart Center Munich is an internationally renowned hospital with 1,400 employees, offering specialist medicine at the highest level and treating heart patients of all ages.

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About the LRZ

The Leibniz Supercomputing Centre of the Bavarian Academy of Sciences and Humanities has been the competent IT partner of Munich's universities and colleges as well as scientific institutions in Bavaria, Germany and Europe for over 60 years. It provides the full range of IT services and technology as well as consulting and support - from e-mail and web servers to internet access, virtual machines, cloud solutions and the Munich Scientific Network (MWN). With the supercomputer SuperMUC-NG, the LRZ is one of the leading international supercomputing centres and focuses in the field of future computing on emerging technologies, artificial intelligence, machine learning and quantum computing.

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