

## Call for Startups & SMEs

### Hospital Innovation Challenge: *Bridging Clinical Needs with Startup Innovation*

#### 1. Overview

The **Hospital Innovation Challenge (HIC)** is an initiative organised by **Health Cluster Portugal (HCP)** and **Instituto Pedro Nunes (IPN)**, with the support of the TEF-Health and DigiHealthPT projects. This initiative connects real-world challenges identified by hospitals with startups and Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), providing a unique opportunity to develop and showcase innovative solutions addressing pressing healthcare needs. The 6 most promising solutions will be selected to pitch at the [Innovating Health Together Conference 2026](#), hosted by HCP, taking place on **27–28 October 2026** at ISCTE – University Institute of Lisbon, in Lisbon, Portugal.

#### 2. How does it work?

European hospitals have been invited to submit real clinical and administrative challenges. Now, it is time for startups and SMEs to select a challenge, develop a response, and submit a technology-driven solution.

The participating hospitals will evaluate all proposals and **select the 6 most innovative solutions**. On **27 October 2026**, the selected startups and SMEs will be invited to present their solutions at the Innovating Health Together Conference 2026. Each selected company will receive up to three complimentary conference passes, valid for both days of the event. During the session, each company will deliver a 6-minute pitch, and the three most promising solutions will be recognised with awards.

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### 3. Why attend?

All submitted proposals will be evaluated by a jury composed of hospital representatives. During the HIC session, participants will have the opportunity to engage directly with representatives from relevant hospitals. In addition to showcasing your solution, selected participants will be able to expand their network within the European health innovation ecosystem and will be eligible for the following awards:

- **First place**
  - Market Intelligence Service\* from **Health Cluster Portugal** &
  - KOL Service - **Instituto Pedro Nunes (IPN)**
- **Second place**
  - KOL Service - **Instituto Pedro Nunes (IPN)**
- **Third place**
  - Market Intelligence Service\*\* from **Health Cluster Portugal**

\*A complete market intelligence report, providing a detailed overview of the target sector, competitive benchmarking, device analysis, and market analysis.

\*\* A market intelligence report focused on competitive benchmarking.

### 4. Which SMEs and Startups are eligible?

Startups and SMEs are eligible to participate if they meet all the following criteria:

- Be a Startups or SMEs
- Present a solution with a Technology Readiness Level (TRL) of 4 or higher until 8\*;
- Relevance of the solution to address the challenge.

*\*Preference for solutions with TRL between 4 and 8. However, solutions with sufficient maturity that could be adapted to meet the specific needs of the challenge we also welcome.*

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## 5. How to submit a proposal?

This initiative is structured in three phases:

- **Phase 1 – Submission**  
Startups and SMEs must select a single challenge to address and submit their proposal via the provided [link](#). SME/startup should include in the form the contact details and a brief description about the solution.
- **Phase 2 – Eligibility Screening**  
After submission, HCP and IPN will review all proposals to verify compliance with the eligibility criteria. If a challenge receives more than three proposals, a preliminary screening will be carried out by HCP and IPN. Otherwise, the hospitals will directly select the most relevant proposals to proceed to the next phase.
- **Phase 3 – Virtual Pitching**  
A maximum of 3 SMEs or startups per challenge will advance to a virtual pitching session with the respective hospital. During this session, participants will present their solution in greater detail and address questions from the hospital. SMEs not selected in this phase will receive structured feedback from DigiHealthPT, outlining key development areas and identifying potential next steps to further strengthen their solutions.
- **Phase 4 - Showcase in the Innovating Health Together Conference**  
The six most promising solutions (one per challenge) will be selected to be showcased at the Innovating Health Together Conference 2026 on 27 October.

## 6. What are the key dates?

- Deadline for submission: **June 22 , 2026.**
- Announcement of selected solutions to virtual pitching: July, 2026.
- Phase 3 - Virtual Pitching with hospitals: July - August, 2026.
- Presentations at IHT Conference: October 27, 2026.
- Final Result: October, 30, 2026.

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## 7. What are the evaluation criteria?

All proposals will be evaluated by a jury composed of representatives from HCP, IPN, and the hospital that submitted the selected challenge.

The evaluation will be based on the following criteria:

- Alignment with the specific hospital challenge (40%);
- Relevance and level of innovation of the proposed solution (30%);
- Clarity and feasibility of implementation (20%);
- Technology Readiness Level (TRL) (10%).

## 8. What are the hospital challenges?

The challenges identified by TEF-Health partner hospitals are listed [here](#).

## 9. Do you need more information?

If you need more information about Innovating Health Together Conference, please access our website:

<https://www.ihconference.com/>

If you have any questions or need further clarification about Hospital Innovation Challenge, please contact us: [ihconference@healthportugal.com](mailto:ihconference@healthportugal.com)

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## 10. Do you have more questions? Read our FAQ!

### **Q1 - Who can apply to the Hospital Innovation Challenge?**

**A1** - Startups and SMEs legally established in a European Member State can apply, provided they meet the EU SME definition and other eligibility criteria outlined in the call.

### **Q2. Can I submit more than one proposal?**

**A2.** No, each SME/startup should respond to only one challenge.

### **Q3. Is it necessary to already have a product on the market?**

**A3.** No. Solutions under development are eligible, as long as they demonstrate sufficient maturity (TRL  $\geq$  4).

### **Q4. How do I submit my proposal?**

**A4.** You must select one challenge and submit your proposal through the official submission [form](#), including your contact details and a brief description of your solution.

### **Q5. What is the Virtual Pitching phase?**

**A5.** It is an online session where selected SMEs/startups present their solution to the hospital, clarify details, and answer questions.

### **Q6. What happens if my solution is not selected?**

**A6.** If you are selected for the Virtual Pitching (Phase 3) but your solution is not selected to move forward, you will receive a brief diagnostic from DigiHealthPT outlining development needs and potential support services.

### **Q7. Do I need to travel to participate?**

**A7.** In the case of Phase 4 - the showcase at the conference on 27 October, finalists are required to attend in person in Lisbon to deliver the final presentation. All earlier phases are conducted remotely.

### **Q8: If I were selected as a finalist, would I receive any support to travel?**

**A8:** No, finalists do not receive travel support. Service prizes are awarded only to the first-, second-, and third-place winners.

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