

CHARLIE BAKER
Governor



KARYN POLITO
Lt. Governor

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

April 24, 2019

CONTACT

Brendan Moss

brendan.c.moss@massmail.state.ma.us



Baker-Polito Administration Launches Digital Health 'Sandbox' Program for Innovative Startups

*Massachusetts eHealth Institute Commits \$500K to Open Doors to Innovative R&D Hubs Across State
Relaunched Mass. Digital Health Jobs Board Features 2,000 Open Job Opportunities*

WORCESTER – Governor Baker today announced a new grant program as part of the Administration’s Digital Health Initiative that will provide \$500,000 in funding to open doors for healthcare technology startups to access research and development “sandboxes.” Governor Baker made the announcement during a visit with Digital Health Council members at WPI’s PracticePoint, one of the facilities supported by the program, where healthcare startups will be able to test existing technologies and develop new products and services.

Over the next two years, the Massachusetts eHealth Institute at the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative (MeHI), will provide financial assistance to startups, allowing them to access sandboxes. WPI’s [Practice Point research, development and commercialization alliance](#) is the first sandbox approved under the program and a prior recipient of state funding.

“Our administration is committed to sustaining Massachusetts’ global leadership in healthcare technology, and by investing in these research and development centers, we can support the startups that are driving innovation in the digital health field,” **said Governor Charlie Baker**. “Massachusetts’ nation-leading healthcare and educational institutions give the Commonwealth an edge in digital health, and encouraging continued collaboration will spur even more growth.”

“Facilities like WPI’s PracticePoint are a prime example of the way in which the Commonwealth’s educational institutions are leading the way in research and development, and our administration is proud to support centers like this one,” **said Lt. Governor Karyn Polito**. “From our support of these

innovative start-ups, to efforts to expand STEM education the classroom, we are securing the Commonwealth's continued leadership in digital health."

Spearheaded by the [Massachusetts Digital Health Council](#), the Sandbox program aims to boost digital health across the Commonwealth by connecting digital health companies to innovative test beds that will bolster the research and development lifecycle. Managed by MeHI, the Sandbox Grant Program will expand to include additional sandboxes across the state, providing a variety of testing environments and services. The program will help match Massachusetts-based companies with the approved sandboxes and will provide funding directly to the sandboxes to cover the costs for companies to access their R&D services, supporting the product development of homegrown startups while also expanding the user base for these innovative sandboxes.

"The ability to test products outside of a busy hospital or active healthcare setting, yet in a facility that fully mimics these settings, is a game-changer for growing digital health companies looking to efficiently test their product and get to market quickly," **said Housing and Economic Development Secretary Kennealy, co-chair of the Digital Health Council.** "Worcester has grown its footprint in the life sciences sector and this new program, built around the top R&D facilities offered by PracticePoint, means the region can become a driver for growth of digital health startups as well."

"We've made tremendous progress in our efforts to position Massachusetts as the world leader in digital health care," **said Jeffrey Leiden, M.D., Ph.D., CEO of Vertex and Co-Chair of the Digital Health Council.** "The initiatives announced today will strengthen our thriving ecosystem and ensure our state's best and brightest have the tools they need to improve patient care, decrease health care costs and drive significant economic growth and job creation."

The Sandbox program will be managed by MeHI, along with an independent steering committee that will review submissions for new sandbox locations and make funding recommendations for tuition grants to support Massachusetts startups interested in accessing the approved sandboxes. The program will announce additional sandboxes on a rolling basis, expanding access to the variety of world-class R&D facilities that exist across Massachusetts. By increasing access to these sandboxes, the program aims to reduce the time, cost, and resources required to test and validate new products and services.

"We're excited to work with the Administration and the Digital Health Council to bring new startups to this world-class testing facility and to build on our original infrastructure investment in Practice Point," **said Carolyn Kirk, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative (MassTech).** "This type of collaboration and cross-over creates a multiplier effect on the impact of our investments. In addition to investments in R&D and digital health, we're also spearheading work for the Commonwealth around cybersecurity and advanced manufacturing – two areas where we bring expertise to bear to advance digital health. Altogether, digital health is an exciting sector and one where Massachusetts can truly play a global leadership role."

WPI's [PracticePoint](#) is aimed at *"improving healthcare and patient wellness through the development of medical cyber-physical systems,"* delivering a unique focus on the reliability, but also the security of digital health technologies. This emphasis will help establish Massachusetts as a leader in cybersecurity for digital health, while increasing the ability of startups to stress-test new devices, software, and systems to better guard against emerging threats. Located in WPI's Gateway Park, PracticePoint shares

floor space with new labs being developed under a separate advanced manufacturing award from the Commonwealth, an investment that will advance research in photonics.

“Two years ago, when we launched PracticePoint with the administration’s support, we had a vision of bridging the gap between medical device R&D and clinical applications by providing a place where we and our partners could test, evaluate, refine, and test again,” **said WPI President Dr. Laurie Leshin.** “WPI is focused on impact, on the application of innovation to quickly benefit real people and real patients who need help now, and it is so rewarding to stand here today in the nearly completed suites and know that WPI will have a multiplied impact by partnering with Sandbox startups that have their own visions of developments that can help patients, as well.”

As a membership alliance, PracticePoint is [open to all companies interested in joining their research network](#), both companies already located in Massachusetts or those looking to establish an R&D site in the state. PracticePoint members gain access to state of the art equipment, clinical partners within the university’s ecosystem, and WPI’s own in-house experts, including PracticePoint’s director, [Dr. Greg Fischer](#), an expert in the area of medical robotics and computer-integrated surgery. Startups involved in the Sandbox program will have access to PracticePoint’s benefits, including:

- Point-of-practice clinical care suites embedded in an engineering setting to accelerate the development of medical devices and cyber-physical systems;
- A home, rehabilitation, and assistive care environment comprising a state-of-the-art motion capture suite, and a highly instrumented residential care suite;
- A hospital environment including a hybrid operating suite, magnetic resonance imaging suite, and a critical care suite;
- Flexible testing and work spaces to allow for a multitude of experiments;
- Manufacturing spaces co-located with the testing facilities, including CNC manufacturing, laser cutting, electronics assembly and testing equipment, and 3D printers;
- Access to research-grade equipment to obtain ground-truth measurements;
- An existing Institutional Review Board (IRB) for user studies and focus groups;
- A flexible wireless networking infrastructure in a realistic setting;
- Ability to conduct cybersecurity development and testing at device, networking, and data storage levels;
- Collaborative research opportunities with WPI faculty experts in areas including: user design / user interface; assessing cognitive load; medical robotics; biomechanics; sensor design and medical IOT; image-guided robotic interventions; smart prosthetics;
- Clinical partners within the WPI ecosystem, including hospital administrators, doctors, surgeons, and nursing care staff; and
- Multi-modality cross-validation of new designs with industry standards.

PracticePoint was supported by a \$5 million infrastructure grant from the Commonwealth’s [Collaborative Research Matching Grant program](#) managed by the Innovation Institute at the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative and [announced by the Lt. Governor in April 2017](#). Slated to be fully operational later this year, PracticePoint offers access to four “[point-of-practice clinical suites](#)” including a residential home suite and rehabilitative care suite that are currently open, as well as a surgical imaging suite and controlled care suite that are expected to be completed later this year. In addition to MassTech, founding members of PracticePoint include GE Healthcare, The MITRE

Corporation, and the University of Massachusetts Medical School, a roster that was updated through the recent addition of [Boston Scientific](#) as a member.

“I want to thank Governor Baker and Lieutenant Governor Polito for their continued commitment to Worcester and congratulate President Leshin of Worcester Polytechnic Institute,” **said Mayor Joseph M. Petty**. “This is a great addition to the entrepreneurial and innovation landscape of our City. I look forward to this space at WPI fostering the ideas of the next economy that will move our city and our Commonwealth forward.”

The [Massachusetts Digital Health Initiative](#), or Mass Digital Health, is a comprehensive public-private partnership launched in January 2016 that is working to establish Massachusetts as a leading ecosystem for digital health innovation, driving economic impact, and improving healthcare costs and quality. Governor Baker signed an executive order in January 2016 which established the [Massachusetts Digital Health Council](#) to advise the Commonwealth on the emerging industry and to develop a growth plan to create the leading global ecosystem for digital health.

MeHI is the lead state agency on the Initiative, spearheading investments in the sector and managing the digital front page for the effort, [MassDigitalHealth.org](#). During the event, the Initiative’s newly [revamped jobs board was highlighted](#), an interactive portal that features nearly 2,000 open digital health jobs at 300-plus companies across Massachusetts, highlighting the career opportunities that exist within the sector.

About the Massachusetts eHealth Institute:

MeHI, or the Massachusetts eHealth Institute at the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative the Commonwealth’s entity for healthcare innovation, technology, and competitiveness, and partners with industry, government, and healthcare organizations to support the Massachusetts Digital Health Initiative on behalf of Governor Charlie Baker. MeHI also helps all the Commonwealth’s providers harness the benefits of electronic health records and the Mass HIway, the statewide health information exchange. For more information, please visit <https://mehi.masstech.org> and follow @MassEHealth. Learn more about the Massachusetts Digital Health Initiative at www.massdigitalhealth.org.

###