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Spring 2025 Edition – Driving Healthcare Innovation Through AI Challenge



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European
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REPUBLIC of CROATIA
Ministry of Economy

AI4HEALTH.CRO NEWSLETTER NO. 6

Let's stay in touch!



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ADVANCING HEALTHCARE

AI4Health.Cro is a European Digital Innovation Hub (EDIH) designed to transform healthcare through the power of artificial intelligence (AI).

Managed by the Ruđer Bošković Institute (RBI) and supported by €2.9 million in funding from the Digital Europe Program and Next Generation EU, AI4Health.Cro is a non-profit, public-private consortium made up of 16 expert partners from both the private and public sectors.

WE PROVIDE SOLUTIONS

AI4Health.Cro is dedicated to leveraging AI technologies to address some of the most pressing issues in healthcare, such as staff shortages, long waiting times, and the growing demand caused by an ageing population. The integration of AI is a critical step toward controlling rising healthcare costs, enhancing patient care, and ensuring the sustainability of healthcare systems across Europe.

AI-driven solutions have the potential to free up 1.659 to 1.944 million man-hours annually and save 380,000 to 403,000 lives every year.

TEST. LEARN. NETWORK. GROW

The hub acts as a one-stop-shop, providing four main services:

Test-before-invest: Opportunity for AI innovators to test their technology in a clinical setting during the incubation phase of product research and development

Education and Training: We offer educational workshops and access to healthcare and AI experts.

Networking: We link startups to the European AI and digital health ecosystem, promoting collaboration and innovation.

Financing Support: Connecting startups and innovators with incubators, venture capital funds, and EU funding experts

OUR TEAM IS OUR STRENGTH

The consortium, coordinated by the Ruđer Bošković Institute, includes the Croatian Artificial Intelligence Association - CroAI, Ministry of Health of the Republic of Croatia, Magdalena, Clinic for Cardiovascular Medicine, Dom zdravlja Zagreb Centar, Croatian Institute of Public Health, Croatian Health Insurance Fund, University of Split School of Medicine, Faculty of Engineering of the University of Rijeka, Zagreb Innovation Centre - ZICER, Croatian Healthcare Employers Association, Mreža, FeelsGood Capital Partners, and companies like Ericsson Nikola Tesla, IN2, and NEWTON Technologies Adria.

The project partners from the private and public sectors provide users with access to multidisciplinary expertise in assessing the digital maturity of technologies, supporting technology development and adaptation to user needs, supporting technology transfer, incubator expertise in creating and managing projects, access to funding programs, and expertise in ethical and legal regulations.

**If you are an SME,
startup, or organisation
interested in digital
transformation or
developing innovative
digital solutions with
applications in
healthcare or medicine,
contact us and let us
know how we can help!**

Let's stay in touch!

- ➡ website: www.ai4healthcro.eu
- ➡ linkedin: [@AI4Health.Cro](https://www.linkedin.com/company/AI4Health.Cro) - European Digital Innovation Hub
- ➡ X (formerly Twitter): [@Ai4healthCro](https://twitter.com/Ai4healthCro)
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What to expect?

EDITORIAL FORM THE TEAM

A recap of AI4Health.Cro's recent milestones, covering international collaborations, innovation competition successes, and exciting upcoming opportunities.

AI4HEALTH.CRO NEWS

A closer look at AI4Health.Cro's national AI innovation challenge, uniting 14 teams in the fight against breast cancer through cutting-edge technology.

EDIH NETWORK NEWS

An update on the EDIH network's strategic expansion welcoming 18 new hubs across the EU's neighborhood and strengthening Europe's digital integration.

SUCCESS STORIES

From voice-to-text tools like Newton Dictate to patient-support chatbots like Megi, Croatian hospitals are showing how AI is already improving care and efficiency in practice

EVENT CALENDAR

Don't miss these upcoming online events, from expert talks on EU health data regulations and synthetic data to key sessions on the future of the EDIH network and funding opportunities in 2025.



AI in Healthcare: The Moment of Momentum

Artificial Intelligence is no longer just an emerging technology, it's becoming a foundation of future-ready healthcare systems. In hospitals, clinics, research centers, and public health authorities, AI is already proving its ability to reduce errors, shorten waiting times, and support medical professionals in making faster, more informed decisions.

Here at AI4Health.Cro, we believe that technology should be a tool of empowerment. Our mission is to ensure that healthcare professionals and innovators across Croatia and Europe have the resources, data, and infrastructure they need to implement AI safely and effectively. Whether through training programs, proof-of-concept testing, or competitions that push the limits of innovation, we are laying the groundwork for a healthcare system that is not only smarter but more humane.

This issue brings you key highlights from the start of 2025: an exciting national competition to revolutionize breast cancer diagnostics, new member hubs joining the European EDIH network, real-world success stories of AI in Croatian hospitals, and a robust calendar of events bringing together the brightest minds in digital health. Together, we're moving from potential to practice.

– ***Editorial Team, AI4Health.Cro***



Smart Algorithms vs. Breast Cancer: 14 Teams to Develop AI Solutions for Enhancing Breast Cancer Diagnostics

February 5, 2025 – In a powerful demonstration of how science, innovation, and public health can align, AI4Health.Cro has launched one of its most ambitious initiatives yet: a national competition to create artificial intelligence solutions that will assist in the early detection of breast cancer. The challenge has brought together 14 selected teams from a pool of 34 applicants, representing over 100 tech experts, data scientists, healthcare professionals, and university researchers from across Croatia.

Each team will be working with anonymized mammographic images and structured patient data to tackle a set of four demanding tasks, designed to mirror real-world diagnostic challenges. These include developing AI models that classify lesions based on the BI-RADS standard, highlighting suspicious areas on images (a task typically performed by radiologists), creating explainable AI components to demystify model outputs, and designing user interfaces that allow doctors to interpret AI results quickly and confidently.

The project is deeply rooted in clinical application. Thanks to a partnership between AI4Health.Cro and several Croatian hospitals, teams have access to high-quality, real-life medical imaging data—securely anonymized to ensure patient privacy. The aim is to produce not just impressive prototypes, but functional tools that can be piloted in healthcare institutions.



"The fact that we had over 100 applicants for this niche AI4Health.Cro innovation competition confirms a strong interest and desire to contribute to the healthtech sector", said Frane Šesnić, Director of ZICER. "We are proud to support a challenge that not only encourages AI excellence but may lead to genuine breakthroughs in breast cancer diagnostics in Croatia."

Dr. Tomislav Šmuc, science and technology coordinator of AI4Health.Cro and head of the Department of Electronics at the Ruđer Bošković Institute, outlined the strategic depth of the competition: *"This isn't just about training neural networks. It's about understanding how AI can enhance trust, interpretability, and usability in real clinical workflows. The teams must not only build accurate models but also explain how they work and show that doctors can use them with confidence."*

This level of scientific rigor is supported by the formidable computing power provided by the Ruđer Bošković Institute and the University Computing Center (SRCE), ensuring that even the most complex models can be trained and tested efficiently.

The challenge will culminate in **April 2025**, when the three top-performing teams will present their solutions at the **AI4Health.Cro Annual Conference**, in front of an audience of health professionals, policymakers, and technology leaders. With a €9,000 prize pool and the chance to pilot their solutions in real-world settings, this competition is more than just a contest—it's a national call to reimagine diagnostics with the help of AI.

Participating teams include: Breast Friends, BreastQuestAI, Code to Heal, D308, Dereglarizatori, GANga, Guard(AI)ns of Precision, JMM Kronos, MDT, MediSense, OncoVision, ProtostarLabsTeam, and SCIOm—each bringing a unique approach, diverse technical skills, and a shared ambition to change lives through smarter medicine.

EDIH Network Expands into the Western Balkans, Türkiye, and Ukraine

The European Digital Innovation Hubs (EDIH) network has entered a new chapter in 2025 by welcoming 18 new hubs from Albania, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Türkiye, and Ukraine. This strategic enlargement, which took effect on 1 January 2025, is designed to accelerate digital transformation in the EU's enlargement region—bringing innovation, training, and AI expertise closer to startups, SMEs, and public administrations.

This move is not only symbolic of digital solidarity but a practical step toward broader economic integration. These new hubs will offer targeted support in sectors such as smart manufacturing, AI, agritech, and cybersecurity, helping regional players keep pace with Europe's digital ecosystem.

Each new EDIH will provide services such as:

- Digital maturity assessments
- Test-before-invest infrastructures
- Access to funding and business support
- Training in emerging digital technologies

This expansion also aligns with the EU's broader digital and geopolitical strategy: by giving countries in the Western Balkans and Eastern Europe earlier access to the digital single market, the EDIH initiative promotes shared standards, faster innovation, and smoother pathways to full EU integration.

Alongside these additions, 16 hubs from associated countries received the Seal of Excellence, a mark of their strong proposal quality and readiness to deliver impactful services.

Together, this enlarged network forms a critical backbone for Europe's digital future—one that includes Croatia, its neighbors, and beyond.

New European Digital Innovation Hubs set up across the Western Balkans, Ukraine and Türkiye!

AI in Practice: Croatian Hospitals Show How Technology Reduces Burden and Boosts Accuracy

AI in healthcare is no longer theoretical. From administrative streamlining to diagnostic support, Croatian hospitals are already embracing AI-based solutions that change the way clinicians work—and patients receive care.

At KBC Rijeka, for example, the hospital is actively implementing AI in multiple aspects of its operations. Notably, they have acquired two state-of-the-art ultrasound devices for the Clinical Institute of Radiology, which allow for the application of computer-assisted diagnosis. This advancement contributes to faster and more accurate diagnostics, especially in detecting early signs of illness and supporting decision-making in imaging interpretation.

Digital assistants are also entering the picture. The Newton Dictate system, a Croatian voice-to-text software tailored for medical use, is already being used by **over 500 doctors nationwide**. It enables physicians to dictate findings, discharge notes, and medical records up to **eight times faster** than manual entry.

But perhaps the most human-centered example comes from Megi, a digital assistant developed in Croatia to support patients with cardiovascular conditions.



Delivered via chatbot, Megi reminds users to take their medication, measure their blood pressure, and follow up with health checks. By supporting patient adherence and easing routine tasks, it lightens the load on overburdened physicians and helps patients become more engaged in managing their own health.

"AI doesn't replace the doctor, it enhances the system's ability to function under pressure," explains Dr. Anja Barešić, project coordinator of AI4Health.Cro. *"We must demystify AI and show that it can be a responsible, ethical, and supportive tool in healthcare."*

Despite the promise, Dr. Barešić notes challenges remain: especially access to high-quality data for AI training, ethical concerns, and varying attitudes among professionals and patients. However, through initiatives like AI4Health.Cro, Croatia is closing the gap between innovation and implementation.



What's Ahead: Key Events for Innovation, Regulation & Growth – Spring 2025

This spring, the European Digital Innovation Hubs (EDIH) ecosystem will offer a series of high-value online events designed to help innovation hubs, healthtech developers, and public institutions prepare for the next steps in their digital journey. Below are three essential events that AI4Health.Cro and its community will closely follow or participate in.

4 MARCH 2025

Unlocking Opportunities in the European Health Sector

TIME: 10:00–11:45 EET | Online only

Hosted by HealthHub Finland EDIH and FAIR EDIH

This insightful webinar will bring together experts from healthcare, regulation, and technology to discuss how organizations can innovate responsibly with health data while staying compliant with EU regulations. Attendees can expect presentations on the European Health Data Space (EHDS), the AI Act, Data Act, and compliance frameworks like MDR and IVDR. Additionally, there will be a focus on synthetic data and privacy-enhancing technologies that open new possibilities for innovation. This session will be especially valuable for healthtech SMEs, developers, and digital service providers seeking to enter regulated European health markets with cutting-edge, compliant solutions.

21 MARCH 2025

Sustaining Digital Innovations: Getting Ready for EDIH 2.0

TIME: 10:30–12:30 CET | Online only

Organised by the European Commission

The European Commission will host its second interactive webinar to support current and future EDIH participants as they prepare for the 2025 Call for Proposals. This session will provide answers to previously submitted questions and offer clear guidance on how hubs can position themselves for success in the next phase of the programme—EDIH 2.0.

Topics will include changes in co-funding rules, continuity planning, services expected by the new Digital Transformation Accelerator (DTA), and how to integrate advanced AI testing infrastructures. Attendees will also gain practical insight into how to submit strong applications and strengthen strategic partnerships for the upcoming call. Supporting documents and slides will be made available on the EU's EDIH event page after the session.

3 APRIL 2025

EDIH Network Information Day – 2025 Call for Proposals (EU/EEA)

**Organised by the European
Commission**

This event will officially mark the launch of the 2025 Call for Proposals for the European Digital Innovation Hubs (EDIH) network in the EU/EEA. Participants will receive a comprehensive overview of the call, including timelines, eligibility, evaluation criteria, and the application process through the EU Funding and Tenders Portal.

The event will also introduce the Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP) and explain how this initiative links with the goals of the EDIH programme to build stronger digital capabilities across Europe—especially in AI.

An interactive Q&A session will follow, giving participants the opportunity to clarify any final details before the application deadline in May.