

“We plan to invest in 100 startups, with ticket sizes ranging from Rs 25 L to Rs 10 Cr”

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Incorporated this year, New Delhi-based BioAngels, an angel investor group, plans to invest Rs 350 crore over the next three years. Padmaja Ruparel, Founder, BioAngels in interaction with BioSpectrum India reveals more about the investment and the way forward for startups. Edited excerpts;

How will your investments help startups in the long run?

As the first sector-focussed angel investor group focusing on biotech, healthtech, medtech, pharma, cleantech, agritech, BioAngels has been set up as a unique partnership between BIRAC (an enterprise of the Department of Biotechnology) and the Indian Angel Network (IAN). BioAngels is focussed on furthering BIRAC's efforts – by plugging the gap of early-stage funding in startups from these sectors. It aims to fuel the ecosystem through interactions with high-quality investors and industry leaders, whilst emphasising on a strong operational focus, framework, processes and governance drawing from IAN. It brings an amalgamation of private investor groups driving the investment process along with access to domain and technology experts embedded in the government ecosystem.

Some reports say that startups are on the verge of shutting shop. Will these forms of investments help the cash-strapped startups?

There may be several reasons why a startup is not able to scale, ranging from being in the wrong market, money running out, increased competition and more. Biotech and health tech are promising and have moved rapidly in the last two to three years. India's BioEconomy in 2021 registered 14.1 per cent growth over 2020 and was valued at \$80.1 billion. The role that the government has been playing, to facilitate these sectors is phenomenal and is bound to flourish further.

As an enabler of angel investment in the sunrise sectors: bio/health/medtech, pharma, agritech, cleantech, BioAngels is addressing a void in this space which has high potential. We have access to domain experts to help investors understand the science behind a startup and fuel the ecosystem with money, mentoring and market access – echoing IAN's genetics.

We will fulfil the cash crunch in a startup once both the science and the commercial aspects, legal (IP) are vetted, and investors find trust in the entrepreneurs to lead the journey.

What are your plans for investing in startups for the next five years?

BioAngels will continue to focus on seed to early-stage investments in healthcare, biotech, pharma, medtech, cleantech and agritech sectors. We plan to invest in 100 startups over the next few years, with ticket sizes ranging from Rs 25 lakh to Rs 10 crore and follow-on rounds for future growth, providing good returns to investors.

Moreover, domain expertise in these sectors is extremely crucial. Hence, BioAngels aims to create a pool of domain experts who will provide their technical expertise to entrepreneurs and investors.

What are the major challenges being faced by biotech startups? Are there any specific areas that you would be focusing on, while working with startups?

Biotech startups need money from domain experts who can understand their science/solution. Moreover, they need scale-up and growth money which is not easily available in India.

We would be looking at all preventive and curative health issues that can be solved innovatively.

How do you foresee the growth of biotech startups by 2030?

The biotech/healthcare sector will grow exponentially (13.25 per cent) and will see a lot of innovation. With the pandemic, Outpatient Department (OPD) has moved to Do It Yourself (DIY) so there is already a behavioural change happening. In addition, tech innovation in healthcare is increasing with precision medicine etc.

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