

# Novel Drug Discovery Startup VastBiome Raises \$4.5 Million in Seed Funding

*Persuaded by the Opportunity to Improve Patient Lives, Lead Investor Viking Global Joins Timewise Investment and Merck Global Health Innovation Fund*

MILLBRAE, CA, UNITED STATES, December 15, 2020 /EINPresswire.com/ -- VastBiome, a novel drug discovery company that mines microorganisms in the human body for molecular products with therapeutic potential, has secured \$4.5 million in seed funding to expand its efforts in search of disease biomarkers and therapies to treat cancer and autoimmune diseases.

Viking Global Investors led the round, which also included Timewise Investment, Merck Global Health Innovation Fund, and nine other funds.

VastBiome is working to disrupt the business of drug discovery, making it more efficient by sourcing drug leads directly from patients. Specifically, it mines the gut microbiome, a collection of microbes that live in the human gut and work hand-in-hand to keep humans healthy.

VastBiome has developed a machine learning platform – “VBx1” – that analyzes the gut microbiome for drug discovery. It does so by scrutinizing the bacteria in the human gut to better understand the specific roles they play in controlling health. The end goal is to learn which bacteria and the substances they create result in a chemical alteration that influences a patient’s response to therapeutic treatment. This, in turn, can be used to create novel therapies.

“We are building a pipeline that will enable us to characterize the gut microbiome in a high throughput manner and provide clinical relevance into how these microbes function,” said Kareem Barghouti, the CEO and co-founder of VastBiome. “These mechanistic insights will unlock the power of the microbiome and what these amazing bugs are capable of doing.”

“We are excited to support VastBiome in its quest to better understand the human microbiome and advanced innovations to make a positive difference in patients’ lives,” said Prem Tumkosit, managing director at Merck Global Health Innovation Fund.

The seed investment will be used to increase the company’s technical team and refine the computational platform to increase the quality of predictions. The funds will also be used to initiate clinical studies to expand access to patient data and bio specimen samples.

These steps will supplement an additional effort to further collaborate with industry partners and clinical researchers.

VastBiome is targeting what Visiongain, a London-based diversified market intelligence firm, says is a \$20 billion market in which pharma is outsourcing the drug discovery process and acquiring drug leads from R&D organizations in both academic and industry. The market is expected to double in the next 10 years.

#### About VastBiome

VastBiome, a drug discovery company, mines microorganisms in the human body for potential molecular drug candidates in the fields of cancer and autoimmune disease. Using proprietary methods in genomic sequencing, artificial intelligence and synthetic biology, VastBiome aims to discover biomarkers and novel therapeutic molecules. The company relies on “VBx1,” a customized machine learning platform, to analyze the bacteria in the human gut microbiome to better understand the specific roles they play in controlling health. This leads to the creation of select chemical alterations that trigger a patient’s response to therapeutic treatment, the seed corn of novel therapies. VastBiome is targeting a rapidly growing, \$20 billion market for outsourced drug discovery. The company, based in Millbrae, Calif., was founded in Houston in 2018 as a participant in the Texas Medical Center Biodesign fellowship. The company subsequently benefitted from involvement in the Illumina Accelerator, a business accelerator focused solely on creating an innovation ecosystem for the genomics industry. For more information, visit <http://www.vastbiome.com>.

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