



Medtech CEO Armen Bakirtzian paying it forward by creating incubator to keep IP in Canada & foster Canadian talent

KITCHENER, ON, Jan. 10, 2020 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE) -- Medical Innovation Xchange (MIX), Canada's first industry-led hub for medtech startups, celebrated its official launch and ribbon-cutting ceremony on Friday, January 10, 2020 at its Kitchener headquarters. Mr. Simon Kennedy, Deputy Minister, Innovation, Science & Economic Development provided the keynote address on what infrastructure is required to help retain and successfully scale Canadian medtech startups. Honoured guests included Kitchener Mayor Berry Vrbanovic, Member of Parliament Raj Saini, Member of Parliament Tim Louis, and industry leaders including prominent medtech CEOs, investors, hospital administrators, and government officials.

MIX, spearheaded in June 2019 by Intellijoint Surgical CEO Armen Bakirtzian, joins the powerful community within the Toronto-Waterloo Innovation Corridor to offer Canadian medtech companies an environment to grow locally and go to market globally. MIX Residents have a unique opportunity to retain ownership in early stages and succeed by leveraging MIX resources to avoid early stage pitfalls and post-prototype growing pains. The successes of Intellijoint Surgical, which celebrated its landmark 10,000th surgery in April of last year, and other successful Canadian medtech strategic advisors, help illuminate the path to bootstrapping as an alternative to acquisition by, for example, global medical device and pharmaceutical companies or packing up and moving operations to the United States.

"Despite Canada's well-deserved reputation for nurturing startups, challenges remain -- especially for our peers in medtech. Not only do medtech startups have similar needs as any venture, such as recruiting top talent and managing a business without a lot of capital, we must also conquer hurdles facing both high-tech manufacturing and pharmaceutical companies, too," explains Bakirtzian. "For example, we need to build physical prototypes, secure IP, and ensure early compliance by the FDA. All of this is surmountable with guidance."

MIX is a non-profit incubator-hub with transparent terms, of which Bakirtzian emphasizes, "we never take equity in participating companies. Our mission is simple: to pay it forward." MIX offers Residents a place to engage in impactful dialogues with peers and strategic advisors. It also provides assistance navigating costs associated with legal / IP

requirements, manufacturing prototypes and products eventually used to diagnose and treat humans, and testing for compliance and medical trials. Too often, these costs overwhelm Canadian medtech startups and limit their ability to benefit from Canada's startup-friendly ecosystem and economy, where high-tech manufacturing and SMEs typically thrive. **Michael Phillips, CEO of Vena Medical, joined MIX as part of the inaugural Resident cohort, after returning home to Canada from the U.S. in 2018.**

“Vena felt compelled to travel to the United States in order to conduct our first preclinical studies and access very early funding from Y Combinator,” recounts Phillips. “While we went through some great programs in the U.S., we happily seized the opportunity to come back to Canada to access the awesome talent in the Kitchener-Waterloo area and the burgeoning medtech ecosystem we saw developing here.”

Being a MIX Resident company has already paid off for Phillips' company. “After moving into MIX we had the first external audit of our quality management system. When the auditor asked us a question we didn't have a great answer to, we were able to walk across the hallway to Intellijoint's Quality team to ask for advice. We walked back into the room with a great strategy that we're implementing now. This access and proximity to experienced leadership and mentorship can't be found anywhere else for medtech companies like us.”

MIX Resident companies benefit from industry-specific advice critical to success but difficult to obtain from the more general startup incubators. At MIX, Residents navigate such milestones as “de-risking” device prototypes and product development; U.S. Federal Drug Administration (FDA) compliance and ISO 13485 Quality Management Planning; audit readiness; go-to-market strategy planning -- how to take advantage of Canada's proximity to the largest healthcare market in the world and access to global markets; and handling Canadian healthcare market-specific hurdles. To that end, Bakirtzian has already assembled a roster of some of the most prominent Canadian medtech CEOs and clinicians to mentor MIX companies.

“As medtech companies mature and phase out of early stage incubators, they are left without the resources they need to continue product development and enter the most critical stage of their business: commercialization,” said Alexa Roeper, CEO and founder of **Penta Medical** and MIX Resident. “MIX's hub fills this gap. By taking advantage of a collaborative space designed to help overcome research and regulatory hurdles, Penta successfully identified clinical study opportunities essential to learning novel applications for our product and shaping our distribution strategy into new markets.”

Bakirtzian and MIX's inaugural Residents want to galvanize these realities for the medtech space and their many peers in the Kitchener-Waterloo area. Their vision also includes addressing tough questions about healthcare procurement policies, which impact the domestic healthcare market, and channels to access more mature sources of funding. They are keenly aware of the immediate and broader impact of their work.

“Canada is a place where innovation thrives – especially here in the Kitchener-Waterloo region.” says Raj Saini, MP for Kitchener Centre. “We offer one of the best economies in the world for new business ventures as well as small and medium enterprises. And medtech is an area rich in intellectual property -- something Canadians lead at developing. But we need to improve at commercialization. Of patents filed in the past two years, 60% ended up with global companies within a year.”

“We are experiencing a tech boom right across our region,” adds Tim Louis, MP for Kitchener Conestoga. “We excel at IP development, and have a global reputation in high-tech manufacturing – from automotive to aerospace. But we understand that more must be done to cultivate local successes. When IP leaves the country, we miss out on future opportunities, as well as the potential spillover effect from high-tech research. MIX will certainly help to address some of those gaps.”

Since the June 2019 **announcement** of its founding, MIX has already received dozens of inquiries from interested companies seeking to become part of the community. This will ensure Bakirtzian meets his commitment to fill the incubator’s office space with mature startups that would most benefit from peer-to-peer information exchanges over the course of their minimum 18-24 month occupancy. “We are committed to helping ‘grow our own’” says Bakirtzian, “and it starts with ensuring the most promising medtech startups have a home here at 809 Wellington Street where they can thrive and scale.”

MIX is now formally **accepting applications** for the Spring 2020 Residency.

ABOUT MEDICAL INNOVATION XCHANGE

MIX is Canada’s first industry-led hub dedicated to helping medical technology startups scale and succeed in Canada. Spearheaded by anchor tenant Intellijoint Surgical, MIX was created to reduce the barriers and bridge the resource gap facing medtech startups by fostering a collaborative community that helps develop, sustain, and retain these companies to establish the Waterloo region as a leader in medtech innovation. Our mission is to provide a collaborative environment for Canadian medical technology companies that supports their individual growth and contributes to the overall success of the Canadian medtech ecosystem.

Attachments

- **[Simon Kennedy MIX Grand Opening Jan. 10 2020 \(1\)](#)**
- **[MIX Ribbon Cutting](#)**

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