TECH & INNOVATION

ISRAEL-AUSTRALIA TECH/BUSINESS UPDATE

When a hospital's best invention is how to innovate



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AFTER October 7, a 34-year-old woman in Sderot found it difficult to leave her home. A rocket had hit her house. When she fled outside, gunmen opened fire.

She later joined a therapy group from her living room, wearing a virtual reality headset. Represented by an avatar, she could speak with others while keeping her identity private from the group. A professional guided the sessions.

Her experience, reported by Israeli news outlet Ynet, shows how when reaching a clinic feels impossible, another route to human support can make a difference.

The platform is developed by NEAO, one of the companies involved in Sderot's growing innovation community. Behind that community is an unexpected partner, Sheba Medical Centre and its ARC Centre for Innovation.

ARC stands for Accelerate, Redesign, Collaborate. Established in 2019, it brings doctors and nurses together with researchers, engineers, entrepreneurs and investors to turn problems encountered in care into technologies, businesses and better ways of treating patients.

By April this year, Sheba reported more than 130 startups in ARC's global platform, with a portfolio valued at over $US6.7 billion. It shows how ideas emerging from a hospital can grow into an industry. Now Sheba is exploring whether the method behind that growth could help people working in other industries.

After decades of rocket attacks and the devastation of October 7, 2023, recovery in Sderot involves rebuilding livelihoods as well as caring for people. Residents need opportunities to learn, work and build businesses in the city they call home.

RiSE.Hub brings these ambitions together. Supported by ARC, Sderot Municipality and Israel's National Insurance Institute, alongside other partners, it connects technology developers with professionals and communities who understand trauma and recovery firsthand.

Another company, Bpreven, is developing artificial intelligence tools to help clinicians identify signs of psychological distress. Both address practical questions about reaching people and recognising when they need help.



The RiSE.Hub ribbon-cutting in Sderot. Photo: Supplied

The hub also aims to grow expertise, entrepreneurship and employment in Sderot itself. Residents' experiences can help shape technologies with uses far beyond Israel, while the city builds an economic future around that knowledge.

Now the same thinking is entering social welfare.

ARC Welfare, a separate NIS 25 million partnership with Israel's Ministry of Welfare and Social Affairs, aims to give more than 120,000 welfare professionals access to the support needed to develop innovations from their everyday work.

Consider a social worker helping a family escape domestic violence. They may know exactly where referrals break down or why someone has to repeat their story to several services. A housing worker may see how administrative delays leave a person facing homelessness without timely help.

What could those professionals build alongside software developers and researchers?

ARC Welfare plans to introduce suitable startup technologies, improve working processes and help promising ideas become practical solutions. The test will be whether families receive better support and professionals gain more time to provide it.

Sheba already has partnerships with Australian hospitals and universities, and aims to establish an ARC centre here. That would help Australian clinicians turn their own ideas into solutions, drawing on the expertise and connections developed at Sheba.

As ARC expands beyond hospitals, a further opportunity comes into view. Could that same approach help Australian social workers, housing services and communities develop answers to the problems they face every day?

For our community, there is something compelling about this next chapter of Israeli innovation. It offers a way to support Israel's recovery while developing ideas that could improve lives here.

A hospital may not have the answer to homelessness. It might, however, know how to help the people closest to the problem develop new answers.

Idan Goldberger is the CEO of Australian Friends of Sheba Medical Centre.