VC investments of top 10 pharma companies

Linda Pullan in Pullan's Pieces #219 October 2025

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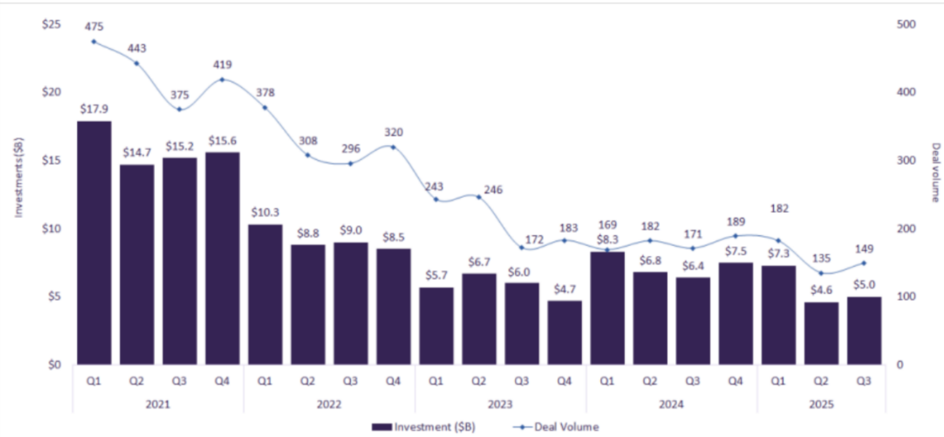
linda@pullanconsulting.com

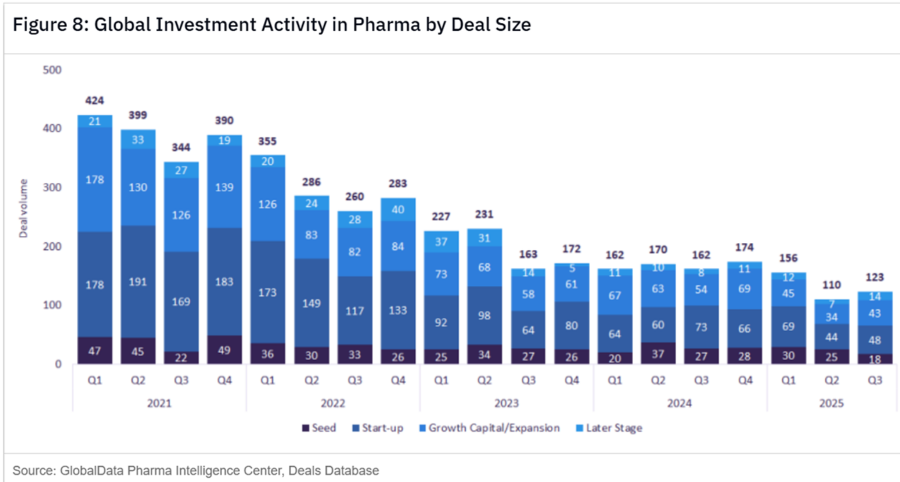
GlobalData just issued a report on investments in pharmaceuticals as down in volume and dollars in 2025, consistent with other reports.

Figure 2: Global Investment Trends in Pharma

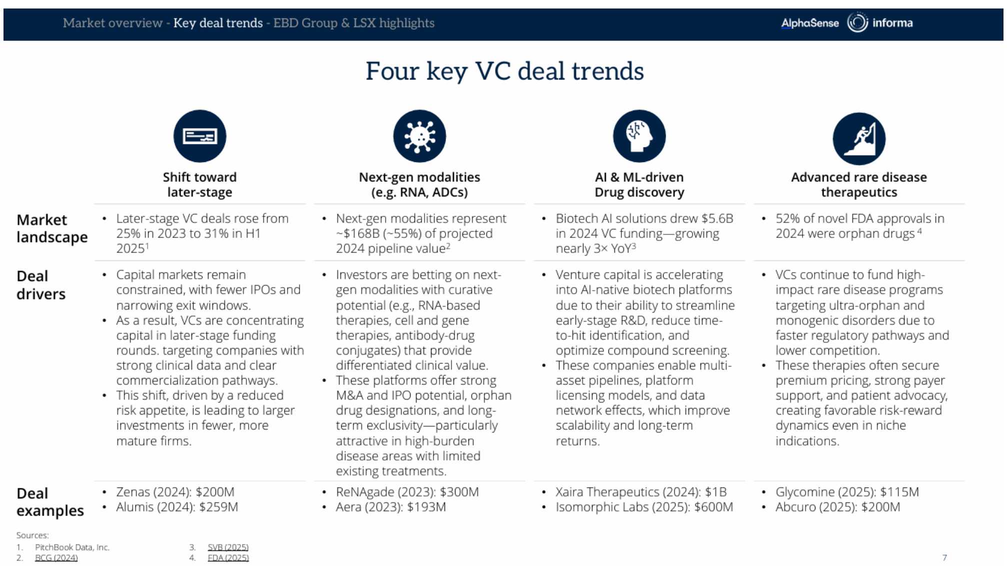


Source: GlobalData Pharma Intelligence Center, Deals Database

Global Investment Activity in Pharma by Deal Stages



And the EBD Group and AlphaSense identified 4 big VC trends.



	Shift toward later-stage	Next-gen modalities (e.g. RNA, ADCs)	AI & ML-driven Drug discovery	Advanced rare disease therapeutics
Market landscape	• Later-stage VC deals rose from 25% in 2023 to 31% in H1 2025[1]	• Next-gen modalities represent ~$168B (~55%) of projected 2024 pipeline value[2]	• Biotech AI solutions drew $5.6B in 2024 VC funding—growing nearly 3× YoY[3]	• 52% of novel FDA approvals in 2024 were orphan drugs[4]
Deal drivers	• Capital markets remain constrained, with fewer IPOs and narrowing exit windows. • As a result, VCs are concentrating capital in later-stage funding rounds. targeting companies with strong clinical data and clear commercialization pathways. • This shift, driven by a reduced risk appetite, is leading to larger investments in fewer, more mature firms.	• Investors are betting on next-gen modalities with curative potential (e.g., RNA-based therapies, cell and gene therapies, antibody-drug conjugates) that provide differentiated clinical value. • These platforms offer strong M&A and IPO potential, orphan drug designations, and long-term exclusivity—particularly attractive in high-burden disease areas with limited existing treatments.	• Venture capital is accelerating into AI-native biotech platforms due to their ability to streamline early-stage R&D, reduce time-to-hit identification, and optimize compound screening. • These companies enable multi-asset pipelines, platform licensing models, and data network effects, which improve scalability and long-term returns.	• VCs continue to fund high-impact rare disease programs targeting ultra-orphan and monogenic disorders due to faster regulatory pathways and lower competition. • These therapies often secure premium pricing, strong payer support, and patient advocacy, creating favorable risk-reward dynamics even in niche indications.
Deal examples	• Zenas (2024): $200M • Alumis (2024): $259M	• ReNAgade (2023): $300M • Aera (2023): $193M	• Xaira Therapeutics (2024): $1B • Isomorphic Labs (2025): $600M	• Glycomine (2025): $115M • Abcuro (2025): $200M

Sources:
1. PitchBook Data, Inc.
2. BCG (2024)
3. SVB (2025)
4. FDA (2025)

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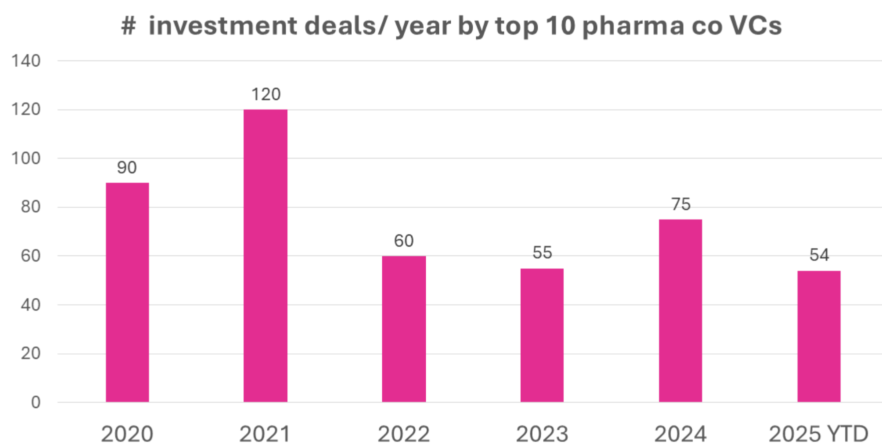
I thought I would take a deeper dive on what the top 10 pharma corporate VC arms are investing in.

Generally, the pharmaceutical company corporate VCs are driven, at least in part, by the strategies of the parent companies, often using the internal R&D folks to vet the science. But presumably, they are more open to "bleeding edge" investments which fit within the broad corporate thinking.

So first, **the Corporate VC arms of the top 10 pharma (by 2024 revenues) have a drop in number of deals since 2021**.



The most investment deals by top 10 pharma company corporate VCs (listed in order of 2024 revenue) are at preclinical. And Lilly has done the most deals in 2024-2025 to date.

VC deals by highest deal stage, 2024-2025YTD

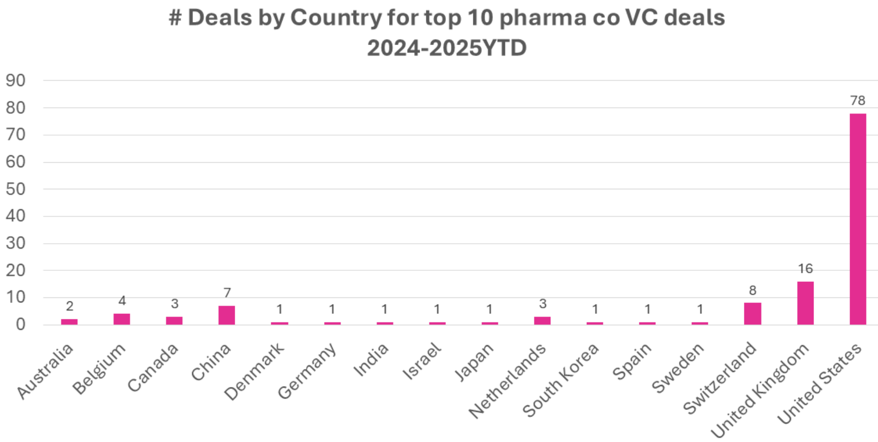
	discov	preclinical	Ph I	Ph 2	Ph 3	Marketed
J&J (JJDC and J&J Innovation)	1	6	4	1		1
Roche Ventures		2		2		
Merck Global Health Innovation Fund	AI & clinical trial process					
Pfizer Ventures	1	3	3	2		
Abbvie (Abbvie, Abbvie Ventures)	1	3				
AstraZeneca	1 in radio supply chain		1			
Novartis Ventures Fund	4	4	4	5		
BMS	1	10	5	4		
Lilly (NOT Lilly Asia Ventures)	5	17	3	4		
Sanofi Ventures		3	8	11	4	

Often more than 1 molecule per deal

The number of investments made by each of the top 10 pharma companies VC arms varies a lot, with Merck and AstraZeneca doing 2 and 1 deals. Lilly did the most. Sanofi did the most late-stage investments. It should be noted that on some of these investment rounds, multiple big pharma joined other traditional VCs.

Please note: Lilly Asia Ventures is not part of Lilly and is not counted in this analysis of the top 10 pharma company VC arms.

Most investments are in the US, but the number of investments in the UK and Switzerland are higher than the number in China.



Most of the drugs in the invested companies are in oncology, followed by CNS and immunology. But it does vary by company corporate VC arm! Abbvie showed no CNS investment, while Roche and Sanofi had more CNS than oncology.

drugs by TA and company investor, 2024-2025YTD

	J&J (JJDC, J&J Innovation)	Roche Ventures	Merck Global Health Innovation Fund	Pfizer Ventures	Abbvie (Abbvie, Abbvie Ventures)	AstraZeneca	Novartis Ventures Fund	BMS	Lilly	Sanofi Ventures
oncol.	12	4		15	6	1	11	44	53	13
CNS	8	2		2			4	5	18	18
immunol	8	5		10	1		5	8	20	18
metabolic		1		2	2			2	9	4
CV	2			1			2	1	4	
ophthal	2	1					3			5
infect	1								2	1
derm	2	1		2			1	2	2	9
respir	1						5			6
heme	1	1		1			1	3	1	3
GI	2	3		2			1	3	7	7
GU					1		1	1	1	
muscl/skel				1					2	3
genetic							3	1	3	
hormonal									3	

Often more than 1 drug per deal

The molecule types in the investments in 2024-2025 to date are not uniform across the top 10 pharma company VC arms. Small molecules dominate and Abs are 2nd, but Roche did no small

molecule deals. Only BMS did cell therapy deals, while gene therapy was an active pace for most of the top 10.

molecules by type and company, 2024-2025YTD

	J&J (JJDC and J&J Innovation)	Roche Ventures	Merck Global Health Innovation Fund	Pfizer Ventures	Abbvie (Abbvie, Abbvie Ventures)	AstraZeneca	Novartis Ventures Fund	BMS	Lilly (NOT Lilly Asia Ventures)	Sanofi Ventures
small mol	20		none	8	4		7	10	40	20
Ab	1	6			2		12	8	20	
ADC				1				4	9	1
peptide	1	1					1		1	2
protein	1	3		4	1	1		12	6	11
gene tx	3	3		3	3		4	3	15	1
cell tx				1				17		
oligos								1	2	2
biologic		8						8	3	
polymer									4	
vaccine										1
allergen							1			

Often more than 1 drug per deal

The VC arms of the top 10 pharma companies are NOT ALL in 1 big HERD!