

**DIVE BRIEF**

A brain-focused biotech raises \$225M to develop drugs for schizophrenia, Parkinson's

MapLight Therapeutics' Series C round saw participation from new investors Novo Holdings, 5AM Ventures and Cowen Healthcare Investments.

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Magnetic resonance images of the brain are seen in this stock image. sudokl via Getty Images

Dive Brief:

- MapLight Therapeutics, a San Francisco-based biotechnology company, has raised another \$225 million in its pursuit to develop new drugs for brain disorders.
- The Series C fundraising saw participation from MapLight's existing backers as well as new ones like 5AM Ventures, Cowen Healthcare Investments and Novo Holdings, the parent group of Novo Nordisk, which led the round.
- MapLight said the fresh funds will help push the company's most advanced program into mid-stage clinical trials next year, where it'll be tested as a potential treatment for schizophrenia and Alzheimer's disease psychosis.

Dive Insight:

For years, many of the world's largest, most deep-pocketed pharmaceutical firms had cast brain drugs aside, opting instead to devote resources to less risky, often more lucrative areas of research like oncology and immunology. But recent scientific and technological breakthroughs, along with the approvals of new medicines for Alzheimer's and ALS, have helped renew investor interest in neuroscience.

In 2021, for example, GSK mounted somewhat of a return to the field through a deal with Alector, a California-based company attempting to use the immune system to fight neurodegeneration. GSK agreed to pay at least \$700 million for rights to two of Alector's experimental drugs, both of which target a protein that normally helps control immune system activity in the brain.

Bristol Myers Squibb has also upped its neuroscience dealmaking. It licensed experimental medicines from Prothena and Evotec. And, last month, the company said it will be "re-establishing" neuroscience as a therapeutic area of focus.

"We can all agree that disorders of the central nervous system are increasing in prevalence," Ken Rhodes, Bristol Myers' vice president of neuroscience research, said during an event hosted by BioPharma Dive last week.

"They're very serious diseases," Rhodes added. "There's clear medical need. And they represent some of the greatest challenges of our time, both in terms of their impact on patients, on caregivers, on families and on the healthcare system."

At MapLight, the company believes its three-pronged technology platform will allow it to develop treatments for some of these diseases.

The company's most advanced program is designed to stimulate two members of a protein family that control whether

acetylcholine — a neurotransmitter involved in a variety of important neurological processes — gets released in the brain. It's an approach shared by Karuna Therapeutics, which is developing a similar, closely watched drug called KarXT.

MapLight says it has two more medicines in human testing. One is being evaluated as a potential treatment for dyskinesia, or involuntary body movements. The other has progressed into Phase 2 trials of patients with autism spectrum disorder.

The money will also “enable continued progress on the company's other pipeline programs,” which include preclinical drugs targeting depression, Parkinson's disease, hyperactivity and impulsivity.

MapLight had previously raised around \$80 million, according to Chief Commercial Officer Charmaine Lykins. The company notified the Securities and Exchange Commission earlier this year of plans to raise \$175 million in equity financing. The Series C round announced Monday was oversubscribed, MapLight said.

“The enthusiasm and continued support of our existing investors, combined with the significant commitment from this new slate of top tier funds, provides validation for our circuit-based discovery platform approach, the quality of our clinical assets, and the strong capabilities of our team,” said Christopher Kroeger, the company's founder and CEO, in a statement.

MapLight announced that Jim Trenkle, a partner in the Venture Investments group at Novo Holdings, will join the company's board of directors in connection to the new financing.