

Meet Juniper, the new way to offer your whole team reproductive health cover

On the back of their recent £1.5M pre-seed investment, we spoke to Ambra Zhang, Co-Founder and CEO of Juniper about healthcare insurance, taking care of our reproductive organs and the importance of finding your real "why".

Temps de lecture : minute

20 March 2024

You know how they say necessity is the mother of invention? That's exactly what happened with Juniper. Eight years ago, I was diagnosed with polycystic ovaries syndrome, and I encountered firsthand the struggles of navigating the healthcare system, particularly regarding reproductive health issues. It was frustrating and disheartening to see how traditional health insurance plans often fell short of providing adequate coverage for conditions like mine because they are chronic conditions and/or fertility matters. Every year, for my routine gyno checkups, I paid £1,000 for my consultations, blood tests, ultrasound, and prescriptions. I asked myself how others afforded it. I then turned to the NHS, and had a chaotic experience for three months trying to get my prescription. This frustration ignited a fire within me to create something better - something that would bridge the coverage gap and provide comprehensive support for individuals facing similar challenges. I realised there had to be a better way to ensure people receive the support they need without breaking the bank. Why is it that we can have dental insurance and go for a dentist checkup but not the same for visits to our gynaecologist or urologist?

Tell me about the business - what it is, what it aims to achieve, who you work with, how you reach customers and so on?

Juniper is my passion project turned into a reality. It's more than just a business; it's a mission to revolutionise healthcare insurance, starting with reproductive health. We're dedicated to providing inclusive coverage for all genders and stages of life, from endometriosis to menopause, but also from low testosterone to prostate screenings. We all have reproductive organs, and we help you take care of them, whether you want a family or not. We believe we should all be covered for discovery and routine consultations, treatment, and family planning. We want to provide a platform for you to have care navigation and support, and we help you find the specialist that you need, when you need it, without too much fuss. We focus on working closely with medium to large enterprises, offering tailored insurance packages to their employees, and we sell through insurance benefits brokers. We see companies having reproductive health at the top of their priorities to address, with 51% of companies offering benefits in the space, and some offering £15-45K of family planning allowances.

How has the business evolved since its launch?

I met Sam, my co-founder, in June 2023 and we founded the company in July 2023. Since its inception, Juniper has undergone significant growth and evolution, but the mission is always the same and we pride ourselves on being focused. We've continuously refined our offerings, expanded our reach, and grown the team. From fine-tuning our insurance packages to enhancing our technological capabilities, every step of our journey has been guided by a commitment and focus on innovation and excellence.

We have also just gone through the regulatory approvals by the FCA! Massive milestone. We have so much more to do and to learn, but we're eager and excited to bring Juniper to reality and really make a difference.

Tell us about the working culture at Juniper

Culture is at the core of building a successful startup. Sam's experience has been mainly in startups, while I come from the finance corporate world. We pieced together the pros of various cultures we have seen in the past to create an environment defined by collaboration and a shared sense of purpose. We operate like a tight-knit family, supporting and uplifting each other every step of the way. We foster an environment where creativity thrives, ideas are valued, and every voice is heard. It's not just about what we do; it's about how we do it – with integrity, compassion, and a genuine desire to make a difference.

How are you funded?

Securing funding for Juniper has been a crucial aspect of our journey. We've been fortunate to receive support from a diverse range of investors who share our vision and believe in our mission. We raised £1.5M in pre-seed, with Insurtech Gateway as our lead investor, followed by 2100 Ventures, Exceptional Ventures, HEARTFELT, and Angel investors, including Vera Elizabeth Baker (Atomico angel), Charles Delingpole (founder of ComplyAdvantage), Matt Cooper (fintech and healthtech angel), Tara Reeves (co-founder of Turo and managing director at Eurazeo), Guillaume d'Audiffret (co-founder of Seyna) and others.

What has been your biggest challenge so far and how have you overcome this?

One of the biggest challenges we've faced at Juniper is navigating the

complex landscape of insurance regulations and insurance industry practices. It does not come as a surprise, and we love the challenge. Someone needed to break through this barrier to entry and we think we are the ones.

From regulatory hurdles to established legacy players' practices, the road has been anything but easy. However, through perseverance and creativity, we've overcome each obstacle that's come our way so far. We have been fortunate to have an amazing network of advisors who have helped us in this journey. We realised that network is everything in this industry, and we're making the most out of it as we've found people who truly believe in us.

How does Juniper answer an unmet need?

One in three women suffer from reproductive or gynaecological issues, while one in four men experience low testosterone by age 30. It takes on average 16 weeks to get a gynaecologist appointment through the NHS and health insurance doesn't cover routine checkups, chronic conditions, and fertility matters. It's a massive gap. We recognised this gap and we made it our mission to fill it with specialised insurance packages tailored specifically to reproductive health needs.

Unlike traditional plans that may offer limited coverage or exclude certain reproductive health services altogether, our packages are designed to provide comprehensive support across the entire spectrum of reproductive health.

From routine screenings and preventive care to diagnostic tests, treatments, and fertility services, Juniper covers it all. We understand that reproductive health is not a one-size-fits-all issue - it's deeply personal and unique to each individual. That's why our coverage is inclusive of all genders and stages of life, ensuring that everyone has access to the care

they need when they need it.

What's in store for the future?

We want to launch a pilot this year, and as such we're engaging with employers that are interested in the coverage, as well as insurance capacity providers that would want to insure the risk with us. This will give us the proof of concept to do a full launch in the market next year. In the meantime, we're focused on building and refining our product and growing the team. It definitely will not be a boring year!

What one piece of advice would you give other founders or future founders?

There are two rules for me. First, find your real "why". The founding journey is an exciting roller coaster filled with ups, but also many downs, twists, and turns. Make sure you find your "why" to be focused and keep overcoming each obstacle on the way. Second, ask questions and build your support network. There are so many little things about founding that you just cannot ask Google and it will take you hours if not days to figure it out by yourself, but maybe someone knows the answer already, so ask your questions. But I always remember to pay it forward. That's how we create a sustainable entrepreneurial ecosystem!

And finally, a more personal question! What's your daily routine and the rules you're living by at the moment?

I wake up at 7AM and I walk my dog Yuki with my partner for one hour. This is our family time to speak and catch up before the day starts. I start work at 9AM with focus time in the morning and meetings in the afternoon. I take time to do a workout before dinner and I always come

home for dinner no matter how much work there is (unless there is a dinner scheduled). And then, my favourite part of the day: I read in the evenings. I have a newly found passion for my Kindle and I cannot wait every day to be in bed and read. Sleep, sports, family, and friends are extremely important to me and I schedule time to keep a balance, as Juniper is a real passion!

Ambra Zhang is the Co-Founder and CEO of *Juniper*.

Article by Ambra Zhang