



CITY OF CHICAGO • OFFICE OF THE MAYOR



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

October 11, 2024

**CONTACT**

Mayor's Press Office

312.744.3334

[press@cityofchicago.org](mailto:press@cityofchicago.org)

Andrew Hayes

World Business Chicago

312.823.4333

[ahayes@worldbusinesschicago.com](mailto:ahayes@worldbusinesschicago.com)

**MAYOR BRANDON JOHNSON & LONDON TECH STARTUP ANNOUNCE CHICAGO AS U.S. HEADQUARTERS, BRINGING WELL-BEING BENEFITS TO BUSINESSES NATIONWIDE**

*Pirkx, a leading London-based scale-up tech company focused on providing affordable and accessible well-being benefits, has selected Chicago as its U.S. headquarters.*

**CHICAGO** — In a virtual event connecting London and Chicago, Mayor Brandon Johnson and World Business Chicago announced that Pirkx, a leading London-based insurtech company focused on providing affordable and accessible well-being benefits, has selected Chicago as its U.S. headquarters.

The event featured Mayor Johnson, Pirkx founder and CEO Stella Smith, and other officials at Pirkx's London office in Covent Garden. Meanwhile, a group of World Business Chicago representatives and 10 local small business owners gathered at the Quad Cities Development Corporation in Chicago's Bronzeville neighborhood. In a move showcasing Pirkx's dedication to empowering small businesses, each of the 10 businesses received a complimentary membership to the Pirkx platform.

Globally, 90% of the 3.2 billion workers lack access to workplace well-being benefits, leaving billions without crucial support – especially workers that are part of small businesses and minority communities. Pirkx's platform bridges this gap by offering more

than 40 benefits that span health, wealth, and education, including on-demand GP services, mental health support, financial tools, and skills training, all via a flexible, self-service technology platform.

"Chicago is a destination of choice for forward-thinking companies like Pirkx," said **Mayor Brandon Johnson**. "The company's decision to establish its U.S. headquarters here speaks volumes about Chicago's role as a global business hub. Pirkx will also be well-positioned to address one of the city's growing challenges – mental health – which affects many sectors, including our business community."

Pirkx's journey to selecting Chicago as its U.S. headquarters was driven by the collaboration and strategic outreach of World Business Chicago's Chief Growth Officer, Kyle Schulz, and Director of Foreign Direct Investment, Karla Orozco, whose work was recently reported in a recent [Chicago Council on Global Affairs blog](#). This win underscores the City's dynamic approach to international business development, prioritizing partnerships with businesses that make impactful contributions to the community and position the city as a global leader with a strong local impact.

In January 2019, Stella Smith founded Pirkx with a mission to provide freelancers, contractors, and small business employees access to a comprehensive range of wellness benefits, including a dedicated telephone counseling service, an interactive app for mental health resilience, and discounts on gym memberships, prescriptions, and food shopping. Supported by the Department for International Trade's UK-Australia Fintech Bridge and Deloitte's Think Forward Initiative, Pirkx has secured funding from prominent investors and its Board includes Dan Cobley, former MD of Google UK & Ireland and Todd Ruppert, former CEO and President of T. Rowe Price Global. The platform has already expanded into Australia, and Smith has set an ambitious goal of providing multiple workplace well-being services to the millions of people across the globe that do not have access to them.

"The opportunity is enormous. Millions of people in the contingent worker space – self-employed, contractors, and gig economy workers – and workers in smaller or micro businesses are left without access to important and meaningful well-being benefits," said **Pirkx founder and CEO Stella Smith**. "So many do not have the support that they need. We can utilise technology to replicate the Pirkx model globally, and our aim is to revolutionize well-being access for the global workforce. Chicago is the perfect city to start this next phase of our growth."

As Pirkx establishes its U.S. headquarters in Chicago, the company is expected to expand to 50 employees in the next few years. With its innovative well-being platform, Pirkx is poised to scale rapidly across the U.S., bringing much-needed support to millions of American workers.

"We are in the business of promoting Chicago to the world, and this announcement is a prime example of that work," said **Kyle Schulz, Chief Growth Officer of World Business Chicago**. "Having grown up in a small, family-owned, retail store I know deeply the struggles of providing key benefits to your employees and Pirkx brings a solution that will

directly benefit our small businesses and gig workers, providing crucial well-being support. This decision strengthens Chicago's position as a global city where businesses thrive, and innovation grows."

"I want to thank Mayor Johnson and World Business Chicago for bringing this wonderful opportunity to small businesses on the south and west sides," said **Rhonda McFarland, Executive Director, Quad Cities Development Corp.** "We're looking forward to utilizing the Pirkx platform, having been gifted a one-year membership for our agency. This is exactly the type of innovative business we need to continue pitching to relocate or expand into Chicago—one that directly supports the well-being and productivity of our local businesses and workforce."

The announcement was part of a strategic business development trip led by Mayor Johnson and World Business Chicago, aimed at strengthening global ties, fostering international partnerships, and generating new economic growth opportunities for the city.

###