

# From a Few Clues to an Amazing Research Memo

**USER PROMPT**

- SAGA Diagnostics
- founders?
- funding history?
- acquisition context?
- coverage?
- competitive moat?

**AI RESEARCH MEMO**

## SAGA Diagnostics: Acquisition Context, Founders, Funding History, Coverage, and Competitive Moat

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**  
High-level overview of SAGA Diagnostics, including origins, funding trajectory, market coverage, and potential competitive advantages.

**AT A GLANCE**

Milestone	Year	Status
Series A	2018	✓
Series B	2019	✓
Series C	2020	✓
Series D	2021	✓

**COMPANY ORIGINS**  
Background on the founders, mission, and early inspiration.

**FUNDING HISTORY**

Year	Series A	Series B	Series C	Series D
2018	1	2	3	4

**KEY MILESTONES**

Year	Product Launch	Series A	Key Partnership	Series B	Series C	Series D
2018	✓	2018	2019	2019	2020	2021

**COVERAGE & VALIDATION**

- ✓ Analyst & media coverage (articles)
- ✓ Notable publications & reports
- ✓ Regulatory or clinical validation (if any)
- ✓ Key partnerships & collaborations

**COMPETITIVE MOAT**

- Proprietary technology or IP
- Data advantages & scale
- Regulatory expertise
- Partnership network
- Other defensible strengths

**SOURCES & NOTES**

Primary sources, reports, articles, and public filings reviewed.

**Change Summary**

Category	Count
Analysis	32
Media	0
Notes	0
Other	0

Understand > Research Deeply > Synthesize > Deliver Insight

AI that thinks. Research that impresses.

## SAGA Diagnostics

As of April 21, 2026, SAGA Diagnostics has **agreed to be acquired**, but the transaction has **not yet closed**.

Roche[1] said on April 16, 2026 that it had entered a definitive merger agreement to acquire SAGA through Foundation Medicine[2] for **up to \$595 million**, inclusive of regulatory and commercial milestones, with closing expected in **the third quarter of 2026** subject to customary approvals. [3]

<https://www.fiercebiotech.com/medtech/roche-boosts-diagnostics-offering-595m-saga-buyout>

*Prompt: Chat GPT 5, 4-21-2026, Method: "Deep Research" Mode*

*What is known about SAGA Diagnostics, a molecular company newly acquired by Roche. What are SAGA's founders, spinout status if any, funding history, and main themes in prior press, publications or news articles? What's their "moat" or where/why do they excel? Does Roche have a longer history with them? Where is saga based?*

SAGA “Pathlight” got MoIDx coverage for MRD in 8/2025.

<https://www.discoveriesinhealthpolicy.com/2025/08/moldx-greenlights-pathlight-new-mrd.html>

## Executive summary

SAGA Diagnostics is best understood as a **structural-variant-first MRD company**. Its core bet was that tumor-specific **structural variants** are more stable, more tumor-defining, and often more plentiful in cell-free DNA than the single-nucleotide-variant markers used by many first-generation MRD assays; SAGA then built a stack around that bet using tumor whole-genome sequencing, proprietary SV selection, selective pre-amplification, and multiplex digital PCR. That differentiation is the heart of the company’s moat and is also the primary reason Roche wanted it. [4]

The company was launched in **2016** as a spinout from Lund University[5] research led by founders Lao Saal[6] and Anthony George[7]. Public sources clearly document university-originated research, university commercialization support, and university holding-company backing. What they **do not** publicly disclose is the exact IP transfer structure: I did **not** find public license terms, royalty rates, or a clear statement that Lund licensed a patent family to SAGA. Key patent families instead list **SAGA Diagnostics AB** as original assignee, so the most careful conclusion is that SAGA is a genuine university spinout, but the public licensing details are **unspecified**. [8]

The strongest public clinical evidence is in **early-stage breast cancer**, where the TRACER study published in *Clinical Cancer Research* reported very strong sensitivity, specificity, and lead-time performance, later supporting **Medicare coverage** and a **U.S. commercial launch** of Pathlight in 2025. SAGA had begun expansion into colorectal cancer and continued conference-stage work in ovarian and metastatic breast cancer by early 2026, but the evidence base outside breast cancer was still earlier-stage than the company’s marketing narrative. That mix — **clear technical differentiation, real reimbursement progress, but uneven depth of prospective validation by indication** — is the fairest rigorous summary of the business on the eve of the Roche deal. [9]

## Origins and founders

SAGA Diagnostics was formally launched on **April 4, 2016** as a new spinout company from Lund University research. The original launch announcement described the company as “the new spin-out company from Lund University,” stated that it had been formed with a significant investment from LU Innovation System AB[10], and named Lao Saal as founder/CEO and Anthony George as co-founder/CTO. Later university summaries continued to describe SAGA as a Lund University spinout and a portfolio company backed by LU Ventures[11] and university commercialization resources. [12]

Lao Saal's public biography is comparatively rich. Lund University lists him as associate professor and head of Translational Oncogenomics, with research focused on cancer genomics, liquid biopsy, ctDNA, and biomarker translation. A 2019 SmiLe program biography adds that he earned MD/PhD degrees from Columbia University[13], completed a clinical postdoc at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center[14], established an independent research group at Lund in 2009, and founded SAGA in 2016. The 2016 launch release also described him as an assistant professor in the Department of Clinical Sciences with more than 15 years of international experience in advanced molecular genetics for cancer. [15]

Anthony George's public biography is thinner, but the available record is still clear on the essentials. Lund University lists him as a doctoral student, project assistant, and research participant in Translational Oncogenomics and the Lund University Cancer Centre environment. University commercialization materials identify him as co-founder, and public executive-profile pages say he worked at Lund University from 2011 to 2016 as a research engineer and PhD student before becoming SAGA's co-founder/CTO. Because those fuller career details are not laid out on an official SAGA biography page I reviewed, the safest formulation is that George was the lab-to-company technical co-founder emerging directly from the Lund translational-oncogenomics group. [16]

On spinout mechanics, the public evidence supports four points. First, SAGA came out of Lund academic research in the Department of Clinical Sciences / Translational Oncogenomics. Second, Lund's innovation system funded and incubated launch. Third, university-affiliated holding entities kept equity stakes for years. Fourth, the public material I reviewed does **not** disclose explicit IP license terms. Because SAGA's core later patent families name SAGA Diagnostics AB as original assignee, the most likely explanation is that commercialization involved company-owned filing and/or assignment/option structures rather than a publicly described university outbound patent license — but that is an inference, not a disclosed fact. [17]

## Capital formation and corporate structure

Historically, SAGA was a Swedish company rooted in Lund; currently, its operating face is U.S.-based. The current website lists the company address as **860 Aviation Parkway, Suite 300, Morrisville[18], North Carolina[19] 27560, USA**, while the site footer says "SAGA Diagnostics is a registered trademark and PATHLIGHT is a trademark of SAGA Diagnostics AB." Lund's 2023 holding-company report adds that **SAGA Diagnostics AB** expanded to the U.S. during 2023 and became a wholly owned subsidiary of U.S. parent **Saga Dx Inc**, which opened operations in **Boston[20]** and North Carolina. The public sources I reviewed do **not** specify the U.S. parent's state of incorporation, so the exact present legal domicile of Saga Dx Inc is **unspecified**. [21]

The legal entity most consistently named in official and semi-official materials remains **SAGA Diagnostics AB**, including the 2021 financing press release, the 2026 acquisition announcement, the website trademark notice, and Lund portfolio materials. That strongly suggests a Swedish original legal domicile even as the operating/commercial

center shifted to the U.S. In practical terms, the cleanest description is: **historical legal root in Sweden; current commercial headquarters in Morrisville, North Carolina; U.S. parent structure in place by 2023; exact current parent jurisdiction unspecified in reviewed public materials.** [22]

## Funding history

The table below compiles the **publicly documented** financings I could verify from official or near-primary sources. Where the amount, lead, or structure was not disclosed precisely, I label it **unspecified** rather than interpolate.

Date	Round / event	Amount	Lead / participating investors	Valuation	Notes
2016-04-04	Formation / launch financing	<b>Unspecified</b>	Significant investment from LU Holding AB[23] via LU Innovation System AB	Unspecified	Launch announcement says the new spinout company was formed with “a significant investment” from the university holding company, but gives no number. [24]
2018-03-15	Seed financing	<b>SEK 10.5M</b>	Participation disclosed from Christer Fåhraeus[25], Simon Fredriksson[26], Torna Kapital[27], LU Holding, and Gunnar Nilsson Cancer Foundation[28]; lead unspecified	Unspecified	University announcement calls this “seed financing from international investors.” [29]
2018-11-16	Non-dilutive grant	<b>SEK 4.7M</b>	Swelife / Vinnova	n/a	Awarded for “Commercialisation of ultrasensitive methods for analysis of circulating tumor DNA in cancer

Date	Round / event	Amount	Lead / participating investors	Valuation	Notes
2019-06-12	Venture financing / growth round	<b>SEK 40M</b>	Led by Hadean Ventures[31], with existing shareholders including Fårö Capital[32] and the Gunnar Nilsson Cancer Foundation	Unspecified	patients.” Grant, not equity. [30] Proceeds earmarked for commercialization, ISO and CE-IVD certification, and clinical studies. [33]
2021-06-29	Series A2	<b>SEK 106M</b>	Official company release says led by Segulah Medical Acceleration[34] and a syndicate from Society[35], with support from Hadean and other new/existing investors	Unspecified	Funds targeted SAGAsafe expansion, SAGAsign commercialization, SAGAseq launch, CLIA capability, and clinical studies. [36]
2023 fiscal year	Aggregated financing activity reported by Lund holding company	<b>SEK 143.3M</b>	Counterparties unspecified in the public source	Unspecified	Lund’s 2023 annual report says SAGA Diagnostics raised 143.3 MSEK via new issues and/or convertible structures during 2023; it does <b>not</b> provide a clean named-round press release, so I treat it as a documented financing event rather than a clearly labeled round. [37]

One ambiguous item deserves mention. Lund’s 2020 holding-company annual report says SAGA Diagnostics raised **SEK 12M** in 2020, but I was not able to verify from a

dedicated company press release whether that reflected a discrete external round, an internal bridge, or part of a broader financing sequence. I therefore regard it as **possible additional financing activity**, but not clean enough to place in the main table without qualification. [38]

## Technology, products, papers, and patents

SAGA's current flagship is **Pathlight**, which the company describes as a blood-based, multi-cancer MRD platform. The workflow is straightforward in concept and nontrivial in execution: sequence the patient's tumor by whole-genome sequencing, identify candidate **structural variants** unique to that patient/tumor, use a proprietary algorithm to choose variants that are less exposed to therapy selection and clonal evolution, then build a personalized multiplex digital-PCR "fingerprint" to test blood for recurring ctDNA. The company says this design enables **sub-1 ppm detection** and **100% analytical specificity** in its analytical setting, and it explicitly positions the platform against SNV-based first-generation MRD approaches. [39]

Public materials also show that SAGA's product architecture evolved over time. In 2020-2021, the company's portfolio language centered on **SAGAsafe** dPCR assays, **SAGAsign** for MRD monitoring (described as formerly **KROMA**), and the planned **SAGAsseq** platform. By 2025-2026, the commercial message had converged on **Pathlight** as the flagship branded product. The best reading is that these earlier assay families were platform components or portfolio lines that were eventually consolidated into a clearer MRD product narrative. [40]

The strongest peer-reviewed clinical paper is the **TRACER** study in *Clinical Cancer Research* in 2025. In that study, SAGA/Pathlight's structural-variant approach in early-stage breast cancer showed very strong performance and offered a median **13.7-month lead time** over standard clinical detection of recurrence; SAGA's later Medicare-coverage announcement cites that paper as the evidence base underlying coverage. This is the company's most important public clinical-validation asset because it bridges technical differentiation, peer-reviewed evidence, and reimbursement traction. [41]

A second important publication is the 2025 ovarian-cancer paper on postoperative residual disease, which used a tumor-informed ctDNA protocol from SAGA and showed that ctDNA levels shortly after surgery correlated strongly with residual disease burden. That paper matters less as pure commercial proof than as evidence that the SAGA workflow travels beyond breast cancer into another solid-tumor setting where disease monitoring is clinically meaningful. A third important publication is the 2018 *Methods in Molecular Biology* chapter by Chen, George, Olsson, and Saal on identifying and using personalized genomic markers for ctDNA monitoring; it is not a commercial validation paper, but it documents the conceptual and workflow roots of the company's biomarker strategy. [42]

The publications page also shows how SAGA was broadening indication coverage by late 2025 and early 2026: colorectal cancer MRD, triple-negative breast cancer, ovarian cancer, sarcoma, and updated breast-cancer relapse analyses all appear in conference output. That is encouraging from a platform-expansion perspective, but it also means the evidence base was still partly **conference-led** outside early breast cancer. In other words, SAGA had a growing clinical story, but not yet a uniformly mature one across all indications. [43]

On patents, SAGA appears to have built a **stack** rather than a single blocking patent. The 2016 family on **detection of target nucleic acids and variants** covers highly sensitive PCR/dPCR detection logic for low-frequency variants. The more recent **detection of target nucleic acids with preamplification** family covers selective pre-amplification of low-abundance variants before PCR/dPCR to reduce false negatives and improve rare-target detection. The **multi-vector detection of variant sequences** family covers multiplexed variant detection using identifiable dPCR signal “fingerprints” to detect multiple rare variants with fewer fluorescent channels than variants tested. And the two 2022-priority families on **structural variant identification** and **library preparation from fixed samples** move the moat upstream into tumor-sample processing, matched-normal-free somatic/germline discrimination, primer/probe design, and FFPE library preparation that is good enough to call tumor-defining SVs from real archived tissue. [44]

## Moat assessment

SAGA’s moat has four layers.

The first layer is **marker choice**. SAGA built around structural variants rather than the short variants that dominate many MRD products. The company’s argument — and its published positioning — is that SVs are often **founding or truncal events**, more resistant to therapy-driven clonal selection, and often represented by more ctDNA fragments, which raises both specificity and sensitivity. That idea is not just branding; it is the biological thesis that underwrites the whole company. [45]

The second layer is **workflow integration**. A weaker company might have had one good assay chemistry or one good biomarker hypothesis. SAGA instead appears to control a chain: FFPE sample prep, SV identification, artifact/germline filtering without guaranteed matched-normal data, primer/probe design, selective pre-amplification, and multiplex dPCR interpretation. That matters because copying one step does not recreate the product; a competitor would need to reproduce the entire linked workflow with comparable failure rates on real archived tissue and real low-input plasma. The patent families strongly reinforce that “full-stack MRD workflow” interpretation. [46]

The third layer is **clinical and reimbursement validation**. Many diagnostics startups can show attractive analytical claims. Far fewer can point to a peer-reviewed paper in a major oncology journal, a clinical use case with clear lead time, a U.S. commercial launch, and Medicare coverage within the same asset story. Pathlight could do all four

by mid-2025. That does not guarantee durable leadership, but it dramatically narrows the gap between technical promise and commercial credibility. [47]

The fourth layer is **strategic fit with Roche/Foundation Medicine**. Roche's stated rationale was not merely to buy revenue; it was to strengthen the monitoring portfolio and combine SAGA's MRD capabilities with Roche/Foundation platforms such as AXELIOS sequencing and Digital LightCycler PCR to build a more decentralized MRD solution. That is a strong signal that SAGA's moat was viewed as both **technically differentiated** and **integrable** into a larger diagnostics architecture. In M&A terms, that is often a stronger sign of moat than standalone marketing language. [3]

The limitations are equally important. Public evidence for SAGA is **deepest in breast cancer**, especially early-stage disease. Expansion into colorectal, ovarian, metastatic breast cancer, and other niches was real, but as of April 2026 much of it remained at the conference or early-publication stage. Also, I found no public disclosure of private-company valuation marks, customer concentration, unit economics, assay gross margins, or renewal behavior among biopharma clients — all of which would matter in a fully investor-grade moat model. So the best conclusion is that SAGA had a **strong science-and-workflow moat**, a **credible early clinical moat**, and a **promising but not fully mature cross-indication commercial moat**. [48]

## Market position, Roche fit, and milestone tables

In the public materials I reviewed, SAGA was consistently framed as a **high-sensitivity liquid-biopsy/MRD challenger** with unusual technical depth and strong academic roots. Coverage centered on financing, assay validation, partnerships, reimbursement, and finally the Roche exit. I did **not** find any major public scandal or governance controversy tied to SAGA itself. The more interesting reputational theme was that independent-style evidence and external validation were growing, but the company's narrative was still driven heavily by company, university, and investor announcements — which is common for a private diagnostics company, but worth noting. [49]

The clearest named external partners I found were WntResearch[50], which contracted SAGA in 2018 to measure ctDNA in a Phase II colon-cancer study; Servier[51], whose collaboration on SAGAsafe was reported in 2020; and AstraZeneca[52], which signed a 2021 assay-development agreement for custom dPCR assays toward methylated targets. SAGA also states that Pathlight is being used by leading clinical institutions, national cancer centers, and major pharmaceutical companies, but most customer names are **not** publicly disclosed. [53]

On prior Roche ties, the public record I reviewed shows **no clearly disclosed earlier collaboration, licensing deal, or investment** between SAGA and Roche before the April 2026 transaction announcement. The first plainly documented relationship is the definitive merger agreement itself. That absence does not prove there were no private commercial contacts, but publicly the Roche relationship appears to have started with the acquisition announcement. [54]

## Timeline of key milestones

Date	Milestone	Why it matters
2016-04-04	SAGA launched as a Lund University spinout with university holding-company backing. [24]	Establishes true academic-origin spinout status.
2018-03-15	Seed financing of SEK 10.5M announced. [29]	First clearly disclosed external financing round.
2018-08-31	WntResearch partnership for ctDNA measurement in Foxy-5 Phase II study. [55]	Early clinical-pharma validation of SAGA as a partnership lab/assay provider.
2018-11-16	Swelife/Vinnova grant of SEK 4.7M awarded. [30]	Non-dilutive support for commercialization of ultrasensitive ctDNA methods.
2019-06-12	SEK 40M growth financing led by Hadean Ventures. [33]	Funded commercialization, certification, and clinical studies.
2020-01-30	Collaboration with Servier on SAGAsafe reported as extended. [56]	Shows continued biopharma utility of the assay stack.
2021-06-29	SEK 106M Series A2 announced. [57]	Major scale-up round for commercialization, CLIA capability, and platform expansion.
2021-01-07	CEO transition to Peter Collins announced. [58]	Marks move from founder-led early phase toward commercial scaling.
2021-01-02	AstraZeneca assay-development agreement announced. [59]	Reinforces relevance to large-pharma translational-development workflows.
2023	U.S. expansion; Swedish AB became wholly owned by U.S. parent Saga Dx Inc. [60]	Important corporate re-architecture before U.S. launch and exit.
2025-05-27	U.S. commercial launch of Pathlight at ASCO 2025. [61]	Transition from platform story to market-available product.
2025-07-30	Medicare coverage announced for breast-cancer use. [62]	Strongest public sign of payer/market validation.
2026-01-12	Pathlight launch expanded into colorectal cancer. [63]	First clear post-breast indication expansion in product form.
2026-04-16	Roche/Foundation Medicine definitive merger agreement announced. [3]	Confirms strategic value of SAGA's MRD platform to a major global diagnostics player.

The main primary-source pathway for this timeline runs through the 2016 Lund University spinout announcement, LU Innovation portfolio/news pages, SAGA's own press releases, PubMed/PMC records for the core clinical papers, and Roche/Foundation Medicine's 2026 investor update. [64]

## Suggested mermaid timeline chart

timeline

```
title Suggested SAGA Diagnostics timeline
2016-04-04 : Lund University spinout launched
2018-03-15 : SEK 10.5M seed financing
2018-08-31 : WntResearch ctDNA partnership
2018-11-16 : SEK 4.7M Swelife/Vinnova grant
2019-06-12 : SEK 40M round led by Hadean Ventures
2021-06-29 : SEK 106M Series A2
2021-11-02 : AstraZeneca assay-development deal
2023 : U.S. expansion and parent-company restructuring
2025-05-27 : Pathlight U.S. commercial launch
2025-07-30 : Medicare coverage in breast cancer
2026-01-12 : Colorectal-cancer Pathlight launch
2026-04-16 : Roche / Foundation Medicine merger agreement
```

The milestones encoded above are drawn directly from the publicly documented launch, funding, partnership, commercialization, reimbursement, and M&A events summarized in the tables and sections above. [65]

## Suggested mermaid entity-relationship diagram

graph TD

```
LS[Lao Saal] -->|co-founded| SAGA[SAGA Diagnostics]
AG[Anthony George] -->|co-founded| SAGA
LU[Lund University] -->|research origin / spinout source| SAGA
LUI[LU Innovation System / LU Holding / LU Ventures] -->|formation support / early capital| SAGA
HV[Hadean Ventures] -->|2019 financing lead| SAGA
CF[Christer Fahraeus] -->|2018 seed investor| SAGA
SF[Simon Fredriksson] -->|2018 seed investor| SAGA
TK[Torna Kapital] -->|2018 seed investor| SAGA
GN[Gunnar Nilsson Cancer Foundation] -->|seed and follow-on participation| SAGA
SMA[Segulah Medical Acceleration] -->|2021 Series A2 co-lead / largest investor disclosed by Sciety| SAGA
SCI[Sciety] -->|2021 Series A2 syndicate / investor| SAGA
AZ[AstraZeneca] -->|assay-development partner| SAGA
SV[Servier] -->|SAGAsafe collaboration| SAGA
WR[WntResearch] -->|ctDNA clinical-study partner| SAGA
FMI[Foundation Medicine] -->|acquisition vehicle| SAGA
RO[Roche] -->|parent of Foundation Medicine / merger agreement| FMI
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The relationships shown above reflect only **publicly disclosed** founder, investor, partner, and acquisition links; they intentionally exclude any private or inferred commercial relationships that were not documented in the sources reviewed. [66]

Taken together, the evidence supports a clear investment-style conclusion: SAGA Diagnostics did **not** win because it was merely “another liquid biopsy startup.” It won because it assembled a biologically thoughtful, technically integrated, and increasingly

validated **SV-based MRD platform** at exactly the point where a scaled diagnostics acquirer could turn that platform into a broader monitoring business. That is the company's moat in one sentence. [67]

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[1] [11] [19] [59]

<https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/saga-diagnostics-enters-into-an-assay-development-agreement-with-astrazeneca-301413814.html>

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[2] [9] [41] [47] Ultrasensitive Detection and Monitoring of Circulating ...

[https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/39785866/?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/39785866/?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

[3] [54] <https://www.roche.com/investors/updates/inv-update-2026-04-16b>

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[4] [6] [39] [45] [67] <https://sagadiagnostics.com/>

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[5] [25] [56]

<https://www.biospace.com/saga-diagnostics-extends-its-collaboration-with-servier-to-use-ultrasensitive-sagasafe-technology-in-cancer-clinical-trials>

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[7] [15] <https://portal.research.lu.se/en/persons/lao-saal/>

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[8] [12] [17] [24] [31] [35] [52] [64] [65] [66]

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[18] [44] WO2016184902A1 - Detection of target nucleic acid and ...

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[20] [30]

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[22] [36] [57] SAGA Diagnostics raises SEK 106 million (€10.5 ...

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[27] [46] <https://patents.google.com/patent/WO2024047179A1/en>

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