

SunSentinel

Ensure Florida remains leader in life sciences

By Nancy Bryan | September 8, 2016



Florida has built an impressive and diverse life sciences ecosystem that has considerable potential for continued innovation and growth. With specialties including research, bioagriculture, pharmaceuticals, distribution, medical devices and equipment, the industry is a

major economic driver and has increased the number of high wage jobs in our state.

A recent TEconomy/BIO report examines the significant value that the life sciences bring, and the substantial progress that has been made within Florida.

The industry's strong foundation and sustained growth bodes well for the state's continued success. According to the report, Florida's life sciences industry ranks in the top quintile among all states supporting more than 5,800 establishments and nearly 83,000 direct jobs.

The industry has a robust job growth that continues to outpace the nation at 4.9 percent with double-digit employment gains in both the drugs and pharmaceuticals and medical device subsectors since 2012. To put this in perspective, bioscience employment grew nationally at 2.2 percent during the same period of time.

Across Florida, we are seeing multiple drivers of growth. Companies are choosing Florida to relocate, existing companies are expanding, universities and institutes are laying the framework for spinouts, and new and established incubators and accelerators are creating the right climate for growth.

To drive future growth in the life sciences, research and innovation are key ingredients. Data show the state is strong in both areas with Florida's research universities conducting more than \$1.2 billion in R&D in 2014. With nearly 5,000 patents issued since 2012, Florida ranks in the top quintile for bioscience related patents issued between 2012 and 2015.

However, it is important to remember that Florida is still a young life sciences community, and we must continue to invest in the resources to support this expansion. The

development of this sector – much like the discovery of cures – takes time. While impressive, success cannot be determined in numbers alone.

Take the example of Sharon Mills, whose story demonstrates the impact Florida's life science expertise has on improving patient lives and furthering our understanding of genetic conditions.

Sharon found answers that explained the excruciating stomach pain that she experienced for over 40 years right here in Florida after an exhaustive search involving many leading medical centers and specialists throughout the country. It was at the Mayo Clinic in Jacksonville, a worldwide leader in genomics, where she was properly diagnosed with a rare genetic disorder which caused a problem metabolizing fats and glucokinase regulation. The diagnosis was made using genomic sequencing and metabolomic profiling, a relatively new genomic diagnostic tool and a specialty of the Clinic. Not only did the discovery change Sharon's life and medical treatment, it also made a lasting and meaningful contribution to medical research.

The true significance of Florida's life sciences industry is best reflected in the positive impacts made on human well-being worldwide. The state has recruited acclaimed scientists and established expertise in critical areas of unmet need, such as immuno-oncology, ophthalmology, cell therapy and regenerative medicine, marine biotechnology and neurodegenerative diseases.

Breakthrough research at world-renowned institutions, prominent research universities and leading companies pave the way for tomorrow's discoveries and improving the health and quality of life we enjoy. The potential for advancements like these cannot be quantified, especially to people like Sharon Mills.

Florida is known as the Sunshine State, and the future of the life sciences industry is bright. As we look to support and grow the industry, we must continue an all-hands-on-deck approach to ensure Florida remains at the forefront of this valuable industry – attracting both the talent and resources needed to solve tomorrow's challenges today.

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