

October 7, 2024

Hon. Victor Fedeli
Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade
Chair of Cabinet
18th Floor - 777 Bay St.
Toronto, ON M7A 1S5

Hon. Sylvia Jones
Deputy Premier and Minister of Health
5th Floor - 777 Bay St.
Toronto, ON M7A 2J3

Re: Building the Bioeconomy: Priorities for Catalyzing Ontario's Life Sciences Sector

Dear Minister Fedeli and Minister Jones,

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce (OCC) is the indispensable partner of business and Canada's largest, most influential provincial chamber representing a diverse network of more than 60,000 businesses. The OCC's mission is to convene, align and advance the interests of its members through policy work, value-added business services and broad engagement to drive competitiveness and inclusive, sustainable economic growth.

We commend the government on recognizing the significance of the life sciences industry with its strategy: [*Taking Life Sciences to the Next Level*](#), and working to attract investments, including the announcement of an \$800 million vaccine manufacturing facility earlier this year. We write today to recommend accelerating the implementation and broadening the scope of the strategy, seizing the tremendous opportunities this sector presents for Ontario.

Ontario's Life Sciences Advantage

A strong, globally competitive life sciences sector is critical to Ontario's economic growth and competitiveness. Ontario is home to world-leading universities, public hospitals, research centres, and a diverse population. It has long been a leading destination for clinical research trials and innovation – from the discovery of insulin and stem cells to the development of new breakthrough gene therapies.

The province produces more than half of the world's supply of life-saving medical isotopes and is pioneering new innovations in surgery, medicine and robotics. Moreover, Ontario's highly diverse population makes it an optimal place for clinical trials with gender, racial and ethnic diversity. Ontario's is also home to more than 1,900 life sciences companies contributing \$65.2 billion every year in GDP and including more than 72,000 high-paying jobs.

With the right support, Ontario can capitalize on its world-class talent, research and discoveries and take its place as a global leader in life sciences – creating economic growth while providing patients around the world with life-saving innovations. As you know, this year, from October 15-17, Ontario will host the world’s largest conference on medical technology, taking place for the first time outside the United States. This conference is a testament to the value of our vibrant ecosystem and our growth opportunity.

To realize this opportunity, the Ontario Chamber recommends that the government pursue the following priorities:

1. Introduce Phase 2 of the Strategy and Establish a Permanent Life Sciences Council

The Life Sciences Council provides an invaluable forum to convene researchers, biotech innovators and industry to support policymakers and ensure government actions are based on the latest research, data collection and real-world evidence efforts. The importance of this group was made clear with consultations in 2023, leading the government to extend the Council’s mandate for another year. We recommend that the Province take the following actions:

- Create a permanent mandate for the Life Sciences Council to oversee and provide advice over the implementation of the Life Sciences Strategy. This should include an annual brief from the secretariat summarizing the Council’s work and recommendations, as well as regular consultations or touch points with relevant stakeholders in the life sciences ecosystem as necessary, to inform progress towards Ontario’s goals.
- Implement phase 2 of the strategy before the end of the year, as advised by the Life Sciences Council in its report. This will create predictability and enable researchers, industries and clinicians to work with government and collaborate on the implementation of evidence-based solutions.

2. Ensure Timely Access to Life-Saving Care

Ontarians wait almost two years – a year longer than residents of peer OECD countries – to access the latest innovative medicines, therapies, devices and technologies, which can significantly improve their quality of care. Often discoveries made in Ontario get to patients around the world before being used to treat those here at home. We commend Premier Ford’s calls to get medicines into patients’ hands faster, and the \$12 million Health Technology Accelerator Fund announced in Budget 2024. The province should explore more timely innovation pathways while continuing to work with the federal government to speed up patients’ access to life-saving medications. We recommend that the Province take the following actions:

- Increase funding for the Health Technology Accelerator Fund so that proven piloted technologies can be adopted throughout the health system.
- Make greater use of the Innovation Pathway developed by Supply Ontario to speed up the adoption of new technologies including in clinical diagnoses, treatment and cancer care. This can reduce surgical backlogs, improve outcomes and lower costs for taxpayers.
- Support clinical trials by ensuring they are run efficiently, streamlining and harmonizing regulatory processes.

- Leverage Ontario's leadership of the Council of the Federation to ensure patients can access the latest treatments by speeding up Canada's Drug Agency (CDA) recommendations, pricing agreements from the pan-Canadian Pharmaceutical Alliance (pCPA), provincial listing processes, and exploring accelerated pathways.

3. **Enabling World-Class Research**

Ontario is home to leading universities, hospitals and research institutions including SickKids Hospital (#1 in pediatric care), the University of Toronto (#2 in global health sciences research), Toronto General Hospital (#3 globally ranked hospital), and Princess Margaret Cancer Centre (#10 global ranking in oncology). These institutions have produced incredible breakthroughs including the discovery of insulin (1921), the world's first open heart surgery (1950s), stem cells (1961) and T-cell receptors for cancer research (1984). To continue to lead the world in breakthrough discoveries, Ontario's research institutions need sustainable funding sources. We recommend that the Province take the following actions:

- Leverage the provinces' diverse population, experience, and global networks to support a made-in-Ontario clinical trials network.
- Ensure sustainable funding for post-secondary institutions, in line with the [recommendations](#) of the Blue Ribbon Panel to ensure higher education can continue to invest in innovative life sciences research and discoveries.
- Expand scholarships, fellowships, and research programs to allow Ontario to continue to attract and retain globally leading researchers.
- Invest in Big Genomics Data by sequencing large patient cohorts to support pharma industry innovation (disease diagnosis, clinical trials).
- Support data sharing mechanisms across siloed institutions to enable academic hospitals, research institutes and clinicians to leverage real-world data to drive better patient care.

4. **Commercialization of Made-in-Ontario Discoveries**

While Ontario has been a global leader in medical and life sciences breakthroughs, too often our best companies struggle to secure the necessary funding and end up being pushed south of the border or abroad. To ensure that made-in-Ontario discoveries can be commercialized, and accessible here at home and exported to serve patients around the world, the life sciences strategy must include new measures to attract funding and help companies commercialize in the province.

Ontario must support commercialization throughout the life sciences sector, including in agriculture, which contributes to innovation and human health. We recommend that the Province take the following actions:

- Provide dedicated funding streams for life sciences within the Ontario Research Fund and the Life Sciences Innovation Fund to enable the next generation of world-class discoveries, saving patient lives and providing tremendous economic opportunities for Ontarians. The government should also expand funding, including through new government sources and by incentivizing the private sector to meet the urgent seed funding gap for companies requiring \$2M-10M in capital.

- Expand access to biomanufacturing, building upon the successes of the McMaster Innovation Park and the Centre for Commercialization of Regenerative Medicine to support all made-in-Ontario innovations with accessible wet labs, test centres and production facilities.
- Provide funding for researchers through Intellectual Property Ontario to increase patents and help them protect their innovations so Ontarians benefit from discoveries resulting from research funded in the province.
- Consider new tax credits to help attract and retain leading global life sciences companies in Ontario.
- Continue efforts to reduce red tape and make private sector investment more competitive.

5. **Value Based Procurement for Long-Term Health Outcomes**

Procurement for medicines, medical technology and devices needs to employ different approaches to acknowledge the unique impact of these innovations on the overall health system. By investing in new medicines and vaccines, medical devices and technologies, the government can create long-term savings for taxpayers by alleviating future health care costs for care.

The OCC's [Power of the Purchase Order Report](#), in collaboration with MedTech Canada, makes eight recommendations including developing a regulatory sandbox for healthcare innovation, and designing an Innovation Pathway that ensures the most successful technologies are adopted across the healthcare system.

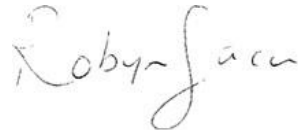
We know that Ontario has the research expertise, track record of innovation and world class systems to become a global leader in life sciences. With the right steps, beginning with the recommendations outlined above, the province can catalyze the industry and build a world-class bioeconomy – creating tens of thousands of jobs and generating billions of dollars in new economic growth to combat our productivity crisis.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to your feedback.

Sincerely,



Daniel Tisch, APR, FCPRS, ICD.D
President and CEO
Ontario Chamber of Commerce



Robyn Saccon
Co-Chair, Health Policy Council
Ontario Chamber of Commerce

CC:

Hon. Nolan Quinn, Minister of Colleges and Universities
JP Cadeau, Deputy Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade
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