

Montreal must be able to meet the challenges of international competition **The life sciences and health technology sector remains a powerful growth driver in Quebec**

Paul Lévesque
President, Pfizer Canada Inc.
Chairman of the Board of Montréal InVivo

At the *Focus Stratégique Québec* meeting, held on April 22 in Montreal, Quebec's business community reiterated that innovation and entrepreneurship are instrumental to the province's prosperity. The life sciences and health technology (LSHT) sector is perfectly aligned with this vision. However, it is important to clearly identify the many challenges and opportunities that lie before this sector.

Quebec and Montreal are losing ground to international competition. All major industrialized countries and some emerging markets are using effective strategies to develop their LSHT sector. More than 80% of the U.S. states have ranked the life sciences as one of their top two priority sectors.

Quebec must therefore continue to develop this sector, which contributes significantly to the creation of the province's economic wealth. The Quebec government should bolster its support, specifically with Quebec's public research investment strategy, which is aimed at maintaining expertise and knowledge. It should be noted that Quebec is performing better than all the other Canadian provinces in this regard. Therefore, it is essential that the announced merger of the three main research funds (FRSQ, FQRNT and FQRCS) not weaken Quebec's uniqueness and expertise in terms of public research in life sciences.

The upcoming creation of two university hospitals and their world class research centres in the heart of Montreal will provide incredible levers for economic development and huge business opportunities for Montreal. We should above all seize the opportunity before us to create centres of excellence that will help Montreal and Quebec distinguish themselves on the world stage.

Montreal has positioned itself as a major player in aligning public and private resources for conducting R&D activities, with the creation of biotechnology firms, contract research centres, research chairs, centres of excellence, private research centres, as well as large clinical research teams in the large pharmaceutical companies. These organizations have contributed to the marketing of major innovations, enabling Quebec to play a leading role in the field, all in the best interest of patients.

In addition to being the main contributor to the province's socioeconomic health, the LSHT sector constitutes a powerful driver of economic development. It contributes significantly to improving the quality of life of Quebecers by giving access to new options for the prevention, screening, treatment and curing of diseases, as well as alleviating suffering in the population. From a societal perspective, this sector is also contributing to the province's increased productivity by reducing periods of inactivity and extending people's working lives, but also by

reducing health costs, in particular, medical costs and the costs of institutionalization and hospitalization.

This said, our universities and research centres continue to experience difficulty retaining and attracting the most brilliant minds. They need to be able to better transform their discoveries into innovative products that are accessible to the population. Biotechnology and health technology firms continue to have problems obtaining funding for developing and marketing their products. Pharmaceutical companies with a local presence continually have to battle to justify maintaining large research centres or operations in Montreal. Contract research companies still face overly long delays for the approval of clinical studies, which is eroding their competitiveness.

The model now needs to be reinvented. Certain adjustments are required to stimulate and develop this sector. Quebec must speed up and strengthen the creation of initiatives to bring the sectors together and invest in targeted areas of academic research, while maintaining the mandates of the FRSQ and Génome Québec. We must acquire the means to develop integrated strategies for the key areas that are going to revolutionize medicine and our health care system, such as personalized medicine.

We must also be able to take advantage of the concentration of companies and well-integrated groups located in the greater Montreal area and the rest of Quebec. In partnership with the government, we can optimize the use of all the financial and human drivers available to better support skill development, coach and financially support the companies that contribute to this sector's growth.

The LSHT sector is one of innovation and therefore one of the future. This is why the members of the life sciences and health technology cluster of the Montreal metropolitan area, Montréal InVivo, are joining forces to create and develop new projects so that Montreal becomes one of the hubs in this sector in North America.

Only with the support of the scientific and business communities, politicians and the Quebec population will this be possible.