

Report: State needs to transform itself into "new medicine" hub

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BOSTON — Massachusetts, a leader in the field of life sciences research, must next transform itself into a "new medicine" hub or watch its front-runner status slip away to California, Singapore and others.

That's the conclusion of a new report on the state of the cutting edge research in Massachusetts.

The report by Mass Insight Corp. comes as House lawmakers prepare to debate their version of Gov. Deval Patrick's 10-year, \$1 billion life sciences bill this week.

The report says lawmakers should focus on strengthening links between researchers, major teaching hospitals in Boston and the University of Massachusetts Medical School in Worcester in the development of individualized, gene-based medicine, dubbed "new medicine."

One way to guarantee that flow of ideas and enhance what the report called the "bench to bed" delivery of new medicines, is to create a new "Translational Medicine Center," the study said.

"Instead of spending years developing a drug and hoping that it does what you want it to do you're going to be able to target drugs on a much more personalized basis," Mass Insight president William Guenther said.

"The drugs will be much more customized to people's individual needs."

The report estimates creating a new center would cost about \$200 million, with about \$50 million coming from the state and the rest from federal grants and private industry contributions.

The National Institutes of Health has made "translational medicine" a priority through a new science awards program designed to support about 60 large-scale research project through 2012.

Researchers and industry representatives say the new center could help the state hold onto key researchers and encourage companies specializing in "new medicine" to sprout up here.

"It is central to a global talent strategy that can recruit and retain the top researchers from Massachusetts and the world," said Dana Farber CEO Ed Benz, co-chair of a panel of Massachusetts life science academic and industry leaders.

The report also recommended the state:

- Build stronger connections with existing life science clusters in New Jersey, the European Union, India and China;
- Boost investments into state and community colleges and the University of Massachusetts for help produce more mid-level researchers;
- Reform its process for conducting clinical trials by streamlining the hospital review and approval process.

The key is to make sure Massachusetts doesn't lose its edge in the shifting global drug and treatment landscape, Guenther said.

"The dynamics of drug development are changing," he added. "We need to forge closer ties between teaching hospitals and the industry players."

On Wednesday, the House is set to debate its version of Patrick's life sciences bill, including \$500 million in bonding to build and upgrade labs, \$250 million in research grants and \$250 million in tax credits for life science companies.

Nearly \$200 million would be spent on the University of Massachusetts campuses, for the construction of a life science center in Amherst and construction of a stem cell center in Worcester.

House Speaker Salvatore DiMasi has said the House bill builds upon Gov. Deval Patrick's similar proposal last year.

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