



Danish Life Sciences Forum

The Danish Life Sciences Forum (DLSF) was formalized in 2018 as a way for Danish life sciences companies to collaborate around shared opportunities and challenges in the Canadian market, for the benefit of patients everywhere. With the support of the Danish Trade Council acting as the forum secretariat, the group consists of Novo Nordisk Canada Inc., LEO Pharma Canada Inc., and Lundbeck Canada – all foundation-owned companies with a long-term mission to find cures in their therapeutic areas. Our mission is to leverage Danish and Canadian life sciences best practices to advance health, innovation and the Canadian economy.

June 18, 2020

Subject: INDU Committee Study on the Canadian Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

Dear Honourable Members,

The COVID-19 pandemic has raised important questions about the capacity of Canada's health and biosciences ecosystem to address major public health emergencies, including COVID-19. Canada is cooperating with jurisdictions around the world to address the pandemic, and in the context of our collective efforts to address the crisis, a number of challenges have emerged. These include the need for strong and collaborative international trade networks, robust domestic research and manufacturing capacity and world-class digital health infrastructure.

Drawing on our experience in Canada and Denmark, the Danish Life Sciences Forum appreciates this opportunity to demonstrate how the life sciences sector can be a key driver of health system and economic recovery, while reducing greenhouse gas emissions and addressing climate change. Through the collaboration and ingenuity of the public and private sectors, Canada can unlock the sector's potential to drive a successful post-COVID economic recovery, bolster and modernize the health system and build Canada's capacity to respond to future crises. The life sciences sector can help create more knowledge-based jobs for Canada's highly educated workforce, as well as positions in green manufacturing and industry.

In this context, we respectfully provide the following three recommendations for supporting life sciences growth in Canada: (1) create a Life Sciences Growth Team; (2) adopt a national digital health strategy; and (3) address barriers to life sciences growth. Each of these recommendations is discussed in more detail, below.

Recommendation 1: Create a Life Sciences Growth Team

In Denmark, the life sciences sector is viewed as a direct contributor to the wealth of the nation, the health of its citizens, and a source of revenue for government. This "health is wealth" mentality has contributed to Denmark's growth into a global life sciences powerhouse. Denmark is currently number two in the world for developing biotechnology and number one in

Europe in the number of clinical trials per capita. A major driving force behind Denmark's achievements in this area has been a long-standing tradition for public-private partnerships, based in part on the trust of the constituency for such arrangements, as well as a willingness from government to use private sector expertise when developing policies to fuel their long-term strategies.

A recent example is the 2016 creation of an industry-led **Danish Life Sciences Growth Team**, tasked with identifying opportunities and challenges to continued growth in the sector. In 2018, the group released its recommendations for how Denmark can accelerate growth across the sector – from research to commercialization, approval and delivery to international export markets.¹ According to Jakob Kjellberg (JK), an economist and professor at the Danish Center for Social Science Research, “The plan is mainly the government asking the industry, as they’ve done previously, how can we serve you better so you can serve us as a country”²

The DLSF believes that a similar approach and strategy could be applied in Canada with success. Such a growth team could build on the work already accomplished by the federal Health and Biosciences Economic Strategy Table (HBEST).³ The ambitious goals of HBEST, including doubling the size of the sector by 2025, will require a dedicated, focused and coordinated approach.

Recommendation 2: Adopt a national digital health strategy

Emerging technologies and digital solutions are driving advancements within the life sciences sector and have enormous potential to deliver better, faster and more efficient care for patients. These new tools have become increasingly important as we seek to reduce the spread of COVID-19 while ensuring the continuity of care and access for patients.

Recognizing the benefits of these technologies, Denmark has made health system digitization a national priority. The digitization of the Danish healthcare sector began more than 25 years ago, and today digital health solutions are an essential part of the health system in Denmark. Today, Denmark ranks number one in the world for the IT systems in its hospitals and general practice surgeries and for digital communication between healthcare sectors.⁴ To further support these efforts, in 2018, the Danish government launched a new national digital health strategy aimed at further health system integration and improving the use of health data in the context of prevention, care and direct treatment for patients.⁵

Canada has emerged as a world leader in artificial intelligence and other digital tools, and we see a great potential for an increased use of digital health solutions in the health sector. We should continue the momentum of deploying digital health and analytic tools that have been

¹<https://canada.um.dk/~media/canada/factsheet%20for%20the%20danish%20governments%20growth%20plan%20for%20life%20science.pdf?la=en>

² <https://nordiclifescience.org/an-economists-perspective-on-denmarks-plan-for-life-science-growth/>

³ <https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/098.nsf/eng/00016.html>

⁴ <https://investindk.com/set-up-a-business/life-sciences/ehealth>

⁵ <https://www.healthcaredenmark.dk/news/listnews/danish-digital-health-strategy-2018-2022-now-available-in-english/>

created out of necessity and use this as an opportunity to modernize our health system for the benefit of Canadian patients.

Like Denmark, we believe that Canada can take advantage of digitization by adopting a national digital health strategy focused on guiding federal investments in digital health and accelerating the integration of digital tools in the health system. The strategy will require strong leadership and should address privacy and conflict of interest issues, provide a framework for data governance and data sharing, and increase the information available to patients so they can make informed decisions about their own health outcomes. The plan should also seek to implement a fully interoperable digital health platform across provinces and territories.

Recommendation 3: Address barriers to life sciences growth

As noted above, the federal government's Health and Biosciences Economic Strategy Table (HBEST) recognized the potential for the life sciences industry to grow the economy and improve the health of Canadians, and set an ambitious goal of doubling the size of the sector by 2025.⁶ However, achieving this objective will require not only growth initiatives, but also the removal of barriers that hinder innovation and health system adoption of new technologies.

To ensure Canada remains a premier location for R&D and clinical trials investment, the federal government should consider taking steps to improve the ease of doing business by removing unnecessary barriers across the entire value chain of the industry, including research, regulatory approval, pricing, evaluations, and funding decisions. One notable barrier is the federal government's changes to the Patented Medicine Prices Review Board, which have impeded Canada's ability to attract pharmaceutical sector investment in R&D and clinical trials, as well as impacted Canada's attractiveness as a viable location to introduce new therapeutics.⁷

In sum, the federal government can help address COVID-19 by working collaboratively with the private sector and other levels of governments to remove these and other barriers to growing and bolstering the health and biosciences ecosystem.

Final thoughts

The federal government's response to the COVID-19 crisis can contribute to a robust health and biosciences system that delivers long-lasting health and economic benefits for Canadians, now and in the future. We would be pleased to provide further information or testimony if you would like to learn more about these recommendations and how the life sciences sector is contributing to the COVID-19 response in Denmark, in Canada and around the world.

For more information on the DLSF and its work, please visit danishlifesciencesforum.ca, or contact Ms. Robby Spring (robspr@um.dk)

⁶ <https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/098.nsf/eng/00025.html>

⁷ Research Etc. 2020. Impact of PMPRB Pricing Changes Final Research Report: <https://lifesciencesontario.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Research-Etc.-PMPRB-Survey-02-03-20.pdf>