



OPINION

Canada has a national asset in life sciences. Now what?

The question is whether our policy environment is doing enough to turn that strength into something patients, their doctors, and their families can actually feel.

BY WENDY ZATYLNÝ

Canada has a long and proud history of delivering innovations that help heal the world. That history has provided tangible benefits to patients and their loved ones, and—more recently—to the Canadian economy.

The more than \$30-billion in investment secured in recent years points to real momentum, and growing recognition of the sector as a strategic economic driver. The question is whether our policy environment is doing enough to turn that strength into something patients, their doctors, and their families can actually feel.

For Canadians, the value of this sector lies both in the therapies and treatments it can help



Industry Minister Mélanie Joly. Canada doesn't need to prove that it can generate innovation. The task now is to make sure patients feel more of the benefit, writes Wendy Zatylný. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

deliver, and in the jobs, growth, and resilience it can create here at home. Realizing that value depends on supporting the full life sciences continuum, from discovery through development to patient access. That means creating the conditions for innovation to move from the lab to the people who need it most: enabling promising therapies to be developed and tested here, sustaining Canada's strength in clinical trials, and building a system that can respond more effectively to disruption, whether from supply pressures or a more unstable global environment.

Companies are more likely to invest where the path from research to launch is clearer, more predictable, and better aligned with patient access. Closing that gap will require more than scientific strength.

It will require the conditions that help innovation move from research to launch and, ultimately, to patients.

What it will take

The first is access to investment. Therapies don't move from discovery to patients on good science alone. They need companies that can raise capital, build partnerships, move therapies through development, grow, and remain in Canada. Recent federal initiatives have started to reflect that reality more clearly. Measures such as the life sciences stream within the new Venture Capital Catalyst Initiative, the expansion of Scientific Research and Experimental Development tax incentive eligibility, the launch of the Business Development Bank of Canada's Life Sciences Venture

Fund, and new dual-use technology commitments all point to growing recognition that the sector needs targeted tools to support innovation across the life sciences continuum. That's meaningful progress.

But it also reinforces an important reality: access to capital is only one part of what it takes to build globally competitive biotech companies in Canada. For patients, what matters is whether promising therapies can keep moving forward, and that requires the broader conditions that help companies grow, scale, and commercialize in Canada.

The second priority is a modern regulatory system. If Canada wants patients to benefit from homegrown innovation, then a modern, efficient, and predictable regulatory environment has to be part of the answer. It



Wendy Zatylný is president and CEO of BIOTECanada. *Handout photograph*

shapes whether innovation can move efficiently through the system, whether companies choose to develop and launch here, whether they then stay here, and whether Canadian patients see timely access to the products their own country is helping to create. Canada has the science and the expertise. The challenge is building a regulatory environment that recognizes the value of innovation, and helps turn that into real patient benefit.

Why this matters now

This conversation is also happening in a far less predictable global trade environment. For life sciences, that sharpens the case for action. The more uncertain the external environment becomes, the more important it is to build the conditions that allow Canadian innovation to stay here, scale here, and serve Canadians here.

Canada doesn't need to prove that it can generate

innovation. It already does. The task now is to make sure patients feel more of the benefit. That will take better investment conditions and a regulatory environment built to move innovation forward. In a more uncertain world, that's not optional. Biotechnology isn't just an industry of the future. It's part of the health security Canadians need now, and part of protecting patients and strengthening Canada's long-term resilience.

Wendy Zatylny is the president and CEO of BIOTECanada. As the head of the organization, she serves as the lead voice for Canada's biotechnology sector, advancing its interests with government, regulators, international stakeholders, media, and the public.

The Hill Times