

Health innovations for Maryland's future

BY BRIAN FELDMAN

To build on our existing economic strengths and usher in a new era of prosperity, Maryland must strengthen our already impressive roster of enterprises devoted to medical innovation. Medical research drives much of Maryland's economy, and the state can produce new jobs through efforts to upgrade its education system, seek federal help in focusing more state resources on innovation, and head to Washington to make the case for medical innovation.

A new report from research firm Battelle and the Council for American Medical Innovation (CAMI) illustrates how much the state stands to gain.

Maryland's strong medical innovation base has already helped buoy the state through a severe recession. The state's largest employer, the Johns Hopkins University, is one of the world's leading research institutions. Maryland is also home to the nation's preeminent research institution, the National Institutes of Health, as well as the Food and Drug Administration. A cluster of 370 private bioscience companies employ about 30,000 workers.

Overall, these critical economic drivers employ more than 100,000 workers and have actually added more than 20,000 employees during the recession, keeping the state's unemployment rate well below the national average. In Baltimore County, health has replaced manufacturing as the leading economic activity. The largest medically oriented employers — including Hopkins, two other major hospital systems, and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services

— provide more than twice the number of jobs as the area's largest manufacturing companies.

But if Maryland hopes to return to solid growth and bring down the state's still-worrisome 7.5 percent unemployment rate, it cannot simply rely on past successes.

As the Battelle/CAMI report strongly implies, the state needs to improve its education system. While Maryland provides world-class higher education through Johns Hopkins and

in university-affiliated research parks, and improved federal-state programs aimed at training workers for biomedical careers.

Many of the Battelle/CAMI report's national policy agenda recommendations have a significant impact on Maryland. For example, a series of continuous increases in funding for the NIH — a major recommendation of the report — could help Maryland replicate the significant growth seen in the 1990s and early 2000s while producing thousands of jobs. A larger FDA, with a streamlined approval process and increased attention to international standards, could create thousands more jobs and have significant benefits for medical innovation across the country.

The Battelle/CAMI report provides compelling analysis into where we are and where we can go in medical innovation as a state and nation. We know that medical innovation can save lives and generate new, high-paying jobs. We know that Maryland has the infrastructure for bioscience success. However, we need a strong partnership among the federal government and our state and local businesses to take advantage of our state's unique strengths.

Great opportunities exist under the umbrella of medical innovation — and we should continue to vigorously pursue each one.

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the University of Maryland, primary and secondary schools could use improvement. Students from poorer families and members of minority groups need better, more rigorous schools to help them become the scientists and engineers of the future. The state should be doing more to train tomorrow's workers.

The state and federal governments also need to enhance efforts to promote medical innovation. Gov. Martin O'Malley has promoted medical innovation and supported progressive programs intended to build small, medically innovative companies, promote stem cell research, and encourage new venture capital investment. Efforts like this could be enhanced by federal programs that would guarantee capital pools, as well as expanded federal funding for medical research