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MASS. SAW A 14.6 PERCENT INCREASE IN LIFE SCIENCES JOBS DURING PANDEMIC

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A research associate works at Moderna in Cambridge. ADAM GLANZMAN/PHOTOGRAPHER

Employment in the state's life sciences sector climbed 14.6 percent to more than 132,000 jobs from 2019 to 2022, outpacing a 9.4 percent national increase, according to a report being released Wednesday by the Massachusetts Biotechnology Education Foundation.

The report, called "Massachusetts Life Sciences Employment Outlook, 2023," traces a three-year period dominated by the COVID pandemic and its economic fallout, which

reduced the overall number of jobs in the state by 2.6 percent. Massachusetts had just over 3.6 million workers in April, the latest data from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics show.

Employment in the life sciences sector — including biotech and medtech — is projected to grow by another 32 percent by 2032, adding nearly 42,000 jobs despite the challenge of finding enough workers to fill openings, the life sciences outlook report said.

“This industry has just been growing for a long time,” said Sunny Schwartz, chief executive of MassBioEd, a nonprofit foundation created by the Massachusetts Biotechnology Council in 2001 to run educational and apprenticeship programs for adults and students. “That growth didn’t really stop during Covid. It took a small hiccup at the very beginning of COVID, and then it just kept on going.”

Even as the sector’s expansion continued broadly through the early years of the pandemic, many startups and smaller pre-clinical companies have reported a tighter funding environment over the past year. Some larger biotechs, such as Biogen, have laid off workers while others, such as Moderna, have been rapidly boosting their employment rolls.

The pandemic, which wreaked havoc in other corners of the economy, proved to be a boon for companies in life sciences, Schwartz said. “We know there were a lot of workers needed in both discovering and working on vaccines and cures, and manufacturing products for COVID,” she said.

Within the Massachusetts life sciences industry, biopharmaceutical companies and medical labs grew the fastest, with employment increasing 21.6 percent between 2019 and 2022, according to the MassBioEd report. Jobs at makers of medical devices and equipment, by contrast, increased just 3.7 percent, the report said.

The report was prepared for the foundation by TEconomy Partners, an economic development research and strategy firm.

While presenting a bullish employment outlook, the report warns that demand for workers is likely to increasingly outstrip the supply of those available unless the industry, backed by state government, accelerates efforts to recruit, retain, and train life sciences employees. Many biotech and medtech firms already are finding it difficult to hire workers.

MassBioEd’s sister organization, MassBio, last week said a new workforce training center is set to open next January in the Southline Boston development on the site of the former Boston Globe building in Dorchester. Among other things, the 4,000-square-foot center,

called Bioersity, will run short-term certification programs to train high school students for jobs in the burgeoning industry.

“We need to expand the pie of workers,” Schwartz said. “It’s a perennial issue with these companies — they have jobs they can’t fill. It behooves us to think about nontraditional pathways into these jobs.”