

Australian science shines for Pfizer

A new collaboration with Australia's Monash University is the latest of many partnerships between global biopharmaceutical company Pfizer and Australian research institutes.

Pfizer Inc. operates in 175 markets and in 2013 had global revenues of US\$51.6 billion. It's a company that is selective in where it chooses to invest its research dollars.

Dr Daniel Grant, Head of External Research and Development (R&D) Innovation for Pfizer in Australia believes the firm can be very thoughtful as to where it collaborates, meaning that it is less about the geographical location and more about the quality of science that can be conducted.

'Pfizer is generally interested in working with the world's best academics and scientists,' said Grant.

'That's one of the reasons why we are actively looking for partnerships in Australia. Australia has some of the world's best academics in areas such as oncology, immunology and neurology.'

Dr Grant said the presence of a strong intellectual property system is essential to ensuring Australia can continue to attract investment in biopharmaceutical research.

'It is a little known fact that the Australian pharmaceutical industry, including Pfizer as the largest player, is one of the biggest investors in R&D, science, innovation, and manufacturing. Indeed pharmaceutical exports are worth more to Australia than the automotive and wine industries combined,' he said.

'Creating and maintaining an operating environment that recognises innovation and in turn can attract the growing investment attached to the discovery and development of, in particular, biologics or large molecules, has the potential to return significant benefits to the Australian economy.'

Pfizer's active research collaborations in Australia span protein therapeutics, brain imaging, diabetes and obesity, immunology, pain, and oncology.



Pfizer is a major investor in Australian R&D. Image courtesy of Pfizer Australia

'Australia has some of the world's best academics in areas such as oncology, immunology and neurology.'

Dr Daniel Grant, Head of External R&D Innovation Pfizer Australia

A wealth of R&D opportunities

Australia's largest university, Monash, recently became the first academic research institution in Australia to be invited by Pfizer to join its collaborative research network known as the Centers for Therapeutic Innovation (CTI).

CTI was founded by Pfizer in 2010 with the goal of translating promising science into clinical candidates.

Dr Tony Coyle, CTI's Chief Scientific Officer, said: 'CTI combines Pfizer's drug discovery expertise with novel science at leading academic medical centres in an effort to decrease the time it takes to bring effective medicines to patients.'

The CTI-Monash partnership is structured under a joint steering committee, supporting science in the area of large molecule therapeutics for a wide range of disease indications.

Dr Coyle said the partnership supports equitable IP and publication rights and will see the collaborative use of Pfizer's proprietary drug discovery tools and technologies.

Pharmacy and Pharmacology at Monash University is ranked number one in the Asia-Pacific region and in the top-10 globally (2014, QS World University rankings). The Monash Institute of Pharmaceutical Science is also Australia's largest pharmaceutical sciences research program in translational drug discovery, drug delivery, and drug development.

'We recognise the quality of the research that comes out of Monash University. Their academic researchers are well connected with clinicians, giving them the ability to translate basic research into discoveries that have the potential to significantly impact patient's lives,' Dr Grant said.

Pfizer is also a core industry participant in Australia's Cooperative Research Centre for Mental Health (CRCMH). Pfizer is helping to fund research aimed at enabling earlier diagnosis for diseases like Alzheimer's disease and Schizophrenia.

Currently, there are no reliable early diagnostic markers available for detecting neuro-degenerative diseases and psychoses meaning these debilitating conditions can't be diagnosed before the onset of mental decline.

'The work of the CRCMH is very exciting and Pfizer has been involved in the CRCMH from its inception. We continue to look for opportunities to grow our interaction with the collaborating partners and in doing so progress the important work of discovering early biomarkers that have the potential to advance the development of new therapies for the treatment of neurodegenerative disease, psychoses, and mood disorders,' Dr Grant said.

Industry collaborations

Australia is home to a globally integrated and sophisticated pharmaceutical industry, and was ranked fourth in the world for biotechnology innovation in the 2014 Scientific American Worldview.

'We have been active participants in many of the Australian government's programs that are designed to support collaborations between companies and academic research groups, such as the Australian Research Council Linkage grants and CRC program,' Dr Grant said.

'It is great to have programs that are relevant to pharmaceutical companies; and that, we hope, will ultimately lead to improved health outcomes for patients both in Australia and around the world.'

Clinical trials

Australia offers an ideal market for conducting clinical research. An efficient regulatory notification scheme for clinical trials and high ethical and medical practices and standards, equivalent to those in the US and European Union, ensure trials are conducted to the utmost quality under the leadership of highly respected local clinicians.

Through external clinical trial organisations, Pfizer is currently running 52 clinical trials in Australia involving over 1,000 patients. The company's Australian trials are in areas including non-small cell lung cancer, rheumatoid arthritis, smoking cessation, advanced breast cancer, hyperlipidaemia and diabetes.

Head of clinical trials for Pfizer Australia, Jane Frost, said Australian investigators are highly respected by our colleagues in the US and many have established long standing relationships.

'Australia's regulatory notification scheme and central ethics review are an efficient way for doing research. What's more, the quality of our research, calibre of our researchers, and predictability in terms of recruitment are all combining to make Australia an attractive option for Pfizer to conduct clinical trials,' Ms Frost said.

'However, in order to remain competitive and viable in this space, it is important that Australia continually refine its research governance framework.'

About Austrade

The Australian Trade Commission – Austrade – is the Australian Government's agency that promotes trade, investment and education, and develops tourism policy and research. For foreign investment, Austrade works in partnership with Australian state and territory governments to provide investors with information and the right industry and government contacts needed to establish or expand a business in Australia.

Disclaimer

Whereas every effort has been made to ensure the information given in this document is accurate, the Australian Trade Commission does not provide warranty or accept liability for any loss arising from reliance on such information.

©Commonwealth of Australia 2015