Agenda for West Swedish Life Science

By 2035, West Sweden shall be a leading life science cluster in Europe where we together create excellence, competitiveness and patient benefit

Foreword

Life science is one of West Sweden's most dynamic and strategically important sectors. It uniquely connects industry, academia, and healthcare, contributing to improved health and quality of life while strengthening both West Sweden's and Sweden's international competitiveness.

The life science sector in Sweden operates in a global context shaped by climate change, geopolitical uncertainty, and intense competition for investments and talents. International decisions can have significant consequences for industry development. At the same time, healthcare faces challenges such as an ageing population, health inequalities, and emerging health threats including pandemics and antibiotic resistance. Rapid medical and technological advancements create new opportunities but also introduce new complexities.

To address these challenges and harness the opportunities, Sweden has set a clear ambition to be a leading life science nation. The National Life Science Strategy calls for coordinated efforts toward excellence, long-term competitiveness, and strengthened patient benefit within key priority areas. The strategy also clarifies the role of the Swedish regional authorities in its implementation and encourages collaboration at local, regional, and national levels.

The Agenda for West Swedish Life Science aims to align the West Swedish life science ecosystem around a shared vision based on identified challenges, and to articulate West Sweden's contribution to the national strategy. The Agenda focuses on areas where joint efforts across the ecosystem can make particularly significant differences and help reach the goal of positioning West Sweden as a leading life science cluster in Europe. The next steps of joint initiatives and action plans will be crucial for translating the Agenda into concrete progress.

As the authority responsible for public healthcare and regional development in Västra Götaland, Region Västra Götaland (VGR) holds a particular responsibility for driving life science development. The Agenda will serve as a guiding framework for us, although its effective implementation will require active engagement from the entire West Swedish life science ecosystem. We will prioritize the execution of the Agenda by mobilizing efforts, expertise, and financial resources. By strengthening the innovation system and coordinating our internal capabilities, we aim to create the conditions for West Sweden to become a leading life science cluster, characterized by sustainability, innovation, and collaboration that drive excellence, competitiveness, and patient benefit.

Region Västra Götaland

Helen Eliasson
Chair of the Regional Executive Board

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A successful West Swedish Life Science Ecosystem

Life science is one of West Sweden's most fast-growing sectors with a long tradition of collaboration and innovation. This has enabled the development of new pharmaceuticals, medical devices, and healthcare innovations that create value for both patients and society. The region is home to a strong, well-developed, and geographically concentrated ecosystem of actors from industry, academia, and the public sector, which over many years has built solid structures for collaboration.

Industry plays a crucial role in commercializing and realizing the value of research and innovation in life science. West Sweden is home to approximately 600 life science companies employing over 10,000 people. Growth is significant, both in headcount and turnover, and around 20 new companies are founded each year. West Sweden is home to internationally leading companies, with AstraZeneca, Mölnlycke Health Care, and Getinge as the largest in terms of turnover. West Sweden is a strong industrial region with close links between life science and adjacent sectors such as chemical, textile, and automotive industries and with substantial private investments in research and development.

Together with academic and public partners, VGR has built a well-developed support system comprising research and innovation offices, science parks, incubators, and venture companies that promote innovation and business development. Alongside the county's business promotion agencies, including Business Region Gothenburg (BRG), and innovation-enabling infrastructures such as RISE Research Institutes of Sweden, CCRM Nordic, and AstraZeneca BioVentureHub, strong conditions are created for both new and established companies to grow. Initiatives such as GoCo Health Innovation City and Sahlgrenska Life are, and will be, central drivers of future growth and international visibility.

Research and education are the foundation of life science, and West Sweden is home to several internationally recognized universities and research institutes in the field. The University of Gothenburg and Chalmers University of Technology play particularly important roles, hosting world-leading research groups, well-established research centers, and close collaboration with healthcare as well as regional, national, and international industry. Together with the University of Borås, the University of Skövde, and University West, they educate the next generation of researchers and experts in life science, providing knowledge and expertise in medicine, natural science, engineering, health economics, and nursing science.

Healthcare plays a central role in life science, not only in identifying the need for new technologies and treatments, but also in proposing and co-creating solutions and in introducing innovations that generate patient benefits. Healthcare is likewise a key actor when conducting clinical trials and studies, which are essential for the development of new pharmaceuticals, medical devices, and treatment methods. VGR offers a coherent care system that connects university hospitals, county healthcare, primary care, and dental care, complemented by infrastructures supporting clinical research and care-adjacent innovation.

Sahlgrenska University Hospital is a cornerstone in the West Swedish life science ecosystem and plays a unique role in advancing the field. The hospital delivers care and conducts research of the highest quality, with a long-standing tradition of

developing healthcare with the patient at the center. With leading researchers and strong national and international collaborations, the hospital drives innovation and medical progress with the ambition of becoming one of Europe's leading university hospitals.

With a mandate for healthcare and regional development, VGR carries a particularly significant responsibility for life science development in West Sweden and for translating research into concrete applications that create value for patients and society. VGR is one of Sweden's largest employers and pursues an ambitious sustainability agenda that includes far-reaching goals for social sustainability, health and wellbeing, and environment and climate. Together with the University of Gothenburg, VGR has been ranked as Sweden's leading region in terms of clinical research quality in the two most recent national evaluations by the Swedish Research Council. VGR's Life Science Office coordinates the region's life science efforts and ensures strong links between healthcare and regional development.

Challenges as a driving force

Sweden’s life science sector operates in a complex and rapidly evolving global environment shaped by climate change, geopolitical uncertainty, and intense competition for investments and talents. Industry development is in many cases influenced by international decisions, while the healthcare system faces challenges related to an ageing population, health inequality, and emerging health threats such as pandemics and antibiotic resistance. Advances in precision medicine, advanced therapies, artificial intelligence (AI), and other breakthrough technologies create new opportunities but also pose challenges in terms of prioritization, implementation, and regulation, as well as increased demands for access to health data, digital infrastructure, and expertise.

West Sweden has strong foundations and significant potential to meet current and future needs in life science. Maintaining and strengthening this position require coordinated efforts that address challenges across several areas:

- Opportunities to develop and test new solutions, particularly in clinical settings
- Efficient and predictable conduct of clinical trials
- Equitable implementation and dissemination of innovations
- Access to investments and capital, both public and private
- Attracting and retaining the right skills and expertise
- Long-term sustainability and resilience
- National and international visibility

To address these challenges and elevate West Sweden´s life science sector, a shared vision, collaboration within priority action areas, and coordinated leadership are essential — which is the purpose of the Agenda for West Swedish Life Science.

Goals for West Swedish life science

By 2035, West Sweden shall be a leading life science cluster in Europe where we together create excellence, competitiveness and patient benefit.

The Agenda for West Swedish Life Science sets out the goals and direction for West Swedish life science sector through 2035. West Sweden shall be a place where it is attractive to study, work, conduct research, and develop the life science solutions of the future. Ideas from healthcare, universities, research institutes, and industry shall be rapidly and effectively translated into concrete patient benefit and/or be commercialized. The West Swedish life science industry shall be strong, innovative, and growing, creating new jobs. Patient needs and perspectives shall be central in the development of new medical innovations, and through rapid access to new medical and technological solutions, healthcare will be equipped to meet future needs.

The West Swedish life science cluster shall have strong international collaborations and strong ability to attract investments and capital. West Sweden shall be a natural place for leading researchers, entrepreneurs, talents, and students from around the world to operate and thrive. The cluster shall be characterized by a collaborative culture and generate international visibility and recognition. It shall contribute to sustainable and resilient economic and societal development and to the implementation of national and European life science strategies.

Priority Action Areas

Seven action areas have been identified as prioritized for jointly advancing West Swedish life science and reaching the stated goal. Each area includes a target scenario as well as the underlying needs.

1. Collaboration in research, development, verification, and validation

Target Scenario

The West Swedish life science cluster is distinguished by its ability coordinate efforts and rapidly mobilize in areas where collaboration is critical for research and development, as well as for securing national and international funding. The focus is on how new knowledge can drive discoveries and innovations within strategic technology areas, such as precision medicine, advanced therapy medicinal products (ATMPs) including cell and gene therapies, molecular mechanisms, AI, quantum technologies, and medical technology, as well as within public health, prevention, sustainability, and resilience.

Research infrastructures and environments for development, testing, verification, and validation are accessible and fit for purpose, supported by clear innovation processes and shared structures and routines for utilization. Infrastructures and practices that promote access to health data for secondary use are in place. Patient participation in research and innovation is an established principle.

Clinical trials are a specifically highlighted area. They shall be straightforward to conduct, for both pharmaceuticals and medical devices, with reliable recruitment and strong execution capacity. Clinical trials shall be a prioritized and natural part of everyday care.

Needs

The full potential for collaboration in research, development, verification, and validation of new innovations is not being fully utilized, which affects both national and international visibility as well as access to funding. Access to test and development environments, particularly within healthcare, to support the development of products, methods, and services in life science, is perceived as limited. Restricted access to health data is slowing the development of new medicine and improved care. Time, resources, expertise, and incentives for clinical trials within healthcare are limited, and the execution capacity does not meet expectations.

2. Implementation of sustainable innovations

Target Scenario

West Sweden´s healthcare and social care system is characterized by its ability to demand and effectively introduce and evaluate innovative solutions in terms of pharmaceuticals and medical devices in clinical practice. Focus is on creating patient benefit and contributing to resource-efficient, sustainable, and equitable care. Structures and tools are in place to ensure effective compliance with applicable regulations. Knowledge of innovation management and its importance is strong at all levels of the healthcare system. New insights from Health Technology Assessment (HTA) including health economics, as well as care governance, implementation research, and innovation ecosystems, are actively applied and provide guidance on how culture, incentives, processes, and resources can be aligned to support the uptake and implementation of innovations.

Needs

New innovative methods, technologies, and advanced therapies, with focus on both precision and prevention, are placing increasing demands on healthcare and social care. The ongoing transformation of care including new care models and the shift from hospital-based to home-based care, adds further pressure. Healthcare's limited capacity to work systematically with innovation alongside care delivery, combined with time-consuming implementation processes, results in restricted and uneven access to innovative solutions. Consequently, research findings do not reach patients and care providers quickly enough. This also affects the region´s attractiveness for clinical trials, posing a potential risk of reducing industry investments in research and development in West Sweden.

3. An attractive environment for establishment, investment, and funding

Target Scenario

It is attractive and straightforward for life science companies of all sizes and stages to grow and operate in West Sweden, and more ideas can be developed into new companies. The West Swedish life science cluster fosters exchange across sectors and companies and provides appealing support to businesses and individuals seeking to establish themselves in the region. Clear processes and entry points to competitive innovation and test environments are in place, together with a collaborative culture that spans across industry boundaries. West Swedish life science actors are distinguished through strong international engagement and high success rates in EU funding applications.

Needs

West Swedish life science sector is not attracting capital to the extent required, neither private investment nor public funding. The lack of a visible and coherent cluster that promotes establishment and enables rapid mobilization of strong consortia for joint and successful applications, limits access to external financing, particularly EU funding. Too few ideas reach commercialization and grow into larger companies, and too many businesses and entrepreneurs choose to establish themselves elsewhere rather than in West Sweden.

4. Skills supply, education, and lifelong learning

Target Scenario

Efforts to supply the right skills are coordinated and adapted to meet the emerging competence needs driven by the transformation and rapid technological and medical advances in the life science sector. Attractive education and career pathways are available, offering opportunities such as dual employment, trainee programs, and mobility within and across sectors. The cluster's culture, opportunities for lifelong learning, excellent research environments, and strong innovation systems attract and retain talents, experts, and specialists.

Needs

Industry, academia, and healthcare all compete for, and struggle to retain talent, while rapid developments in areas such as AI and precision medicine are creating a growing demand for new competencies. Today, there is no clear coordination or strategy within the cluster to build strength and flexibility in skills supply, which limits mobility and knowledge exchange. The cluster's national and international visibility is limited, reducing its attractiveness to current and potential talents.

5. Sustainability and resilience

Target Scenario

West Sweden is a leader in sustainable and climate-neutral life science, strengthening the region´s international competitiveness. The integration of sustainability principles across research, production, and care, with prevention and early disease detection as core elements, creates a resource-efficient sector with low environmental and climate impact. A strong focus on resilience throughout the value chain contributes to a robust system prepared for rapid and effective responses to future pandemics and capability of withstanding other crises related to climate, health, and geopolitics. Industry, academia, and healthcare collaborate to develop working methods and business models that leverage new knowledge and innovation while balancing growth with climate responsibility, circular economy principles, and social sustainability.

Needs

Climate change, environmental health risks, pandemics, and other health threats pose growing societal challenges that affect both population health and the capacity of healthcare. At the same time, the life science sector, including healthcare, accounts for a substantial share of the global emissions and resource consumption. Addressing these challenges requires cross-organizational collaboration, shared sustainability and climate ambitions, and a stronger focus on resilience and preparedness across the entire value chain, from research through industrial production to care delivery and patient flows.

6. A coordinated cluster with a world-class support system

Target Scenario

West Sweden's life science cluster is characterized by a collaborative culture that builds trust, attracts partnerships, and drives development, innovation, and sustainability. Strength is generated through coordination, networks, platforms for strategic dialogue, and partnerships, both within the cluster and with other clusters, sectors, and technology areas at regional, national, and international levels. Across the entire value chain, from research and development to innovation, implementation, and commercialization, there is a strong and effective support system meeting the needs of both public, academic, and private actors. This support helps create optimal conditions for ideas to be transformed into solutions that deliver clinical or societal value.

Needs

To address shared challenges and drive development, a systems perspective and stronger coordination are needed. The West Swedish life science ecosystem has a well-established support system for research and innovation, with incubators, science parks, venture companies, investors, advisory organisations, and healthcare infrastructures playing key roles. However, the system is perceived as difficult to navigate, with both overlaps and gaps. It needs to be further developed and adapted to emerging needs and rapidly evolving technologies and research and development areas. West Sweden needs to strengthen collaboration with, and draw inspiration from, leading international clusters.

7. Visibility, participation, and influence

Target Scenario

The strengths, offerings, and achievements of the West Swedish life science cluster are recognised both nationally and internationally. West Swedish actors are present on national and international arenas, engage in advocacy, and participate in strategic dialogues within the life science field. There is a clear and compelling offering, supported by a shared message that positions West Sweden as an attractive location for research, innovation, and life science.

Needs

Today, West Sweden´s life science sector has limited national and international presence, visibility, and reach. Despite several initiatives and collaborative arenas for communication and networking, West Swedish priorities are not well coordinated, and the offering for investments and talents within life science is not sufficiently clear. The absence of a forum for strategic dialogue limits West Sweden´s ability to influence national and international developments in life science.

Implementation and shared leadership

Implementation of the Agenda is built on shared responsibility and active participation from the entire ecosystem. The challenges addressed by the Agenda cannot be solved by any single actor, but require collaboration. To successfully achieve the goal of becoming a leading life science cluster, shared leadership is therefore essential. A council shall be established with high-level representatives from industry, academia, and the public sector to ensure commitment and engagement, and to enable a unified West Swedish voice. The council will stimulate, guide, and accelerate the work by requesting analyses, agreements, activities, and targeted action plans and sub-strategies including assigned responsibility and indicators aligned with the Agenda's action areas.

A coordination function that links the council to operational implementation and facilitates activities within the Agenda's action areas will be appointed. The execution will build on existing initiatives, structures, collaborations, and strategies, not least the business strategy for which BRG is responsible. Emphasis is placed on coordination and clearly addressing the diverse perspectives and needs of the ecosystem, as well as the Agenda's objectives.

Monitoring of the Agenda creates transparency and accountability while providing learning enabling and continuous development and allowing progress to be tracked. Progress in the Agenda's implementation will be measured against indicators that reflect the sectors development. These indicators will be defined jointly and may include the number of employees, industry investment in research and development, the volume of EU funding received, and the number of clinical trials.

The agenda will be followed up annually and activities and results will be communicated.

Process for the formulation of the Agenda

The work with the Agenda for West Swedish Life Science was initiated at a roundtable discussion in spring 2025. West Swedish life science and West Sweden's contribution to the national life science strategy was discussed and the participants highlighted the need to jointly strengthen and further develop the regional life science ecosystem, as well as to establish a shared vision for this work.

In addition to Region Västra Götaland (VGR) and Sahlgrenska University Hospital, the discussion involved the University of Gothenburg with the Sahlgrenska Academy, Chalmers University of Technology, AstraZeneca, Getinge, Mölnlycke Health Care, and Business Region Göteborg (BRG). During the meeting, VGR's Life Science Office was entrusted with coordinating the process of developing an agenda for West Swedish life science.

The agenda has been prepared through broad dialogue with actors across the ecosystem, including meetings, mailings, and joint workshops. The needs assessment produced by BRG in 2025 has also contributed to shaping the agenda's priority areas. Finally, the agenda has been politically anchored within VGR and adopted by the Regional Executive Board.