

## Wisconsin poised to invest \$750 million in biomedical research

Nov. 20, 2004 by Terry Devitt

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Wisconsin Gov. Jim Doyle, taking a swing at keeping Wisconsin competitive in the superheated world of biomedical research, announced today (Nov. 17) that over the next several years Wisconsin would invest up to \$750 million, including more than \$500 million in new facilities and direct research support for scientists at UW–Madison.

Speaking to reporters and technology leaders at UW–Madison's [Biotechnology Center](#), Doyle outlined a strategy aimed squarely at bolstering Wisconsin biotechnology, health sciences and [stem cell research](#).

"Wisconsin leads the world in groundbreaking biomedical research, but we need to continue to move forward," Doyle said. "The state, in partnership with the university and our other private partners, has an aggressive and comprehensive strategy to ensure that we remain at the forefront not only of scientific discoveries, but of creating thousands of new high-tech jobs."

Included in Doyle's plan are:

- A new \$375 million public-private research institute, to be known as the Wisconsin Institute for Discovery. The proposed institute would occupy the entire 1200 and 1300 blocks of University Avenue and would become a massive interdisciplinary research center that would combine biology, bioinformatics, computer science, engineering, nanotechnology and other fields in one setting. The first phase of the project would use \$50 million, which already had been earmarked for the fourth phase of the [BioStar initiative](#).
- A new \$134 million interdisciplinary research complex



During a press conference Nov. 17 at the Biotechnology Center, Gov. Jim Doyle announced that over the next several years Wisconsin would invest up to \$750 million, including more than \$500 million in new facilities and direct research support for scientists at UW–Madison. (Photo: [Jeff Miller](#))



[View larger version of this map](#) which shows the location for the proposed Wisconsin Institute for Discovery.

[Statement from Carl Gulbrandsen](#), managing director of the Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation and the WiCel Research Institute

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near University Hospital and Clinics. The new center would be translational in nature, helping bring basic research discoveries to clinical fruition at a more rapid pace.

- \$1.5 million annually to support research on Alzheimer's disease at UW–Madison.
- A new \$132 million research facility at the Medical College of Wisconsin and Children's Hospital that will focus on infectious disease control, cardiovascular illnesses and bioengineering.

In addition, Doyle pledged to smooth the bureaucratic and legal hurdles that impede the ability of faculty to take their innovations to market, and to provide more venture capital for startup research-based businesses through the Wisconsin Department of Commerce.

The new strategy is designed to bolster the university's science research infrastructure at a time when other states, notably California through a recently passed referendum, will begin to invest heavily in such things as stem cell research.

Doyle and UW–Madison Chancellor John D. Wiley noted that over the past decade, Wisconsin has positioned itself to compete through the investment of more than \$1 billion in new research infrastructure on the Madison campus. What's more, they pointed to the university's long-standing strengths in basic biology – biochemistry, genetics and molecular biology, among many others – and a tradition of interdisciplinary research as strengths that will help the university recruit and retain talented faculty.

"Other states are now playing catch-up," Doyle said. "But there are a number of measures we're going to make to advance the work that goes on here."

"We haven't been sitting still," said Wiley. "It is incumbent on us to advance this (stem cell) field."

Stem cell pioneer James Thomson, a UW–Madison professor of anatomy, explained that with access to the human genome, biology has entered a new age. Stem cells, he said, are but one tool that will not only help biomedical science develop new treatments for conditions such as diabetes, Parkinson's disease and heart disease, but will help unravel the causes of those diseases opening a door to their prevention.

Thomson added that Wisconsin is not just a leader in stem cell research, but is a powerhouse in biology in general.

"We are a world leader in embryonic stem cell research at Wisconsin, but I'm actually fairly embarrassed at the amount of press that this one area of research gets, because Wisconsin is a world leader in most areas of biomedical research, and I don't think the average person in Wisconsin appreciates that," Thomson said.

"We are a population of 5 million people and we have a state university, which is in the top 10 universities in the country – private or public – in biomedical research by any measure you

look at, and that's something that people should be proud of. To maintain this leadership position, there has to be a continuing investment. There are states that are competing with us, and private universities that are competing with us, and I think that the initiative that the governor announced today goes a long way in maintaining this leadership position in what is really an age of discovery."

Both Wiley and Doyle placed emphasis on the importance of interdisciplinary research and of building an institute where scientists from many disciplines can work together and exchange ideas.

Biology and biotechnology have always been Wisconsin strengths, Wiley said, but new fields such as bioinformatics and nanotechnology have emerged in recent years. Creating opportunities for cross-fertilization between emerging and established disciplines will only strengthen Wisconsin's hand, he said.

"All of these things are converging. That's the message for technology of the future."

"We need teams of technologists and biologists right next to each other," said Biotechnology Center Director Michael Sussman. "We don't need them in the building down the road. We need them in the office across the hall."

The proposed Wisconsin Institute for Discovery, he said, will accomplish that.

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