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Plans for Oakland County hospital systems could create 45,000 life sciences jobs

By [Chad Halcom](#)

Making a regional attraction out of an Oakland County consortium of hospital systems, medical equipment suppliers, higher education and research firms is the goal of a new medical branding initiative unveiled Wednesday in Pontiac.

If successful, organizers believe they could generate up to 45,000 new jobs in life sciences in Oakland by 2018 and put the county in a league with the **Mayo Clinic**, **Cedars-Sinai**, **Medical City Dallas** and the **Cleveland Clinic**.

"I'm putting Mayo and Cleveland Clinic on notice that they're going to have to look at Oakland County for competition from what we develop here," said Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson, who announced the initiative along with several health care leaders.

"We will be a competitor and a player," Patterson said.

A report completed this month for Oakland County by East Lansing-based **Anderson Economic Group L.L.C.** indicates health care and life science professions account for 93,584 jobs or 12.8 percent of all private sector wage and salary employment in Oakland for 2006. The report also projects that number will grow by 2.2 percent annually through 2018, adding 30,623 new jobs.

But those employees are spread across more than 4,300 locations countywide — about 1,000 more than neighboring Wayne County with 100,012 life-science employees in 2006.

Health system CEOs Nancy Schlichting of **Henry Ford Health System**, and Kenneth Matzick of **William Beaumont Hospitals**, both of whom attended Wednesday's event, agreed the decentralized nature of Oakland's life science employment base adds difficulty in regional attraction.

"That is the challenge," Schlichting said. "But the strength of our region as a whole is that it has all the assets of a national health care destination. None of us individually would be able to do what the region as a whole can in terms of promoting that. That's part of the reason to get behind this plan."

To that end, Matzick and Patterson said an advisory board of local health care providers, equipment makers and education employers will meet four times a year starting in early 2009, to review and discuss promotional efforts and opportunities to build the Oakland brand.

For the next few months, the employers will provide data on their own individual assets for county officials to review in building the regional branding plan.

The county has tentatively titled the initiative "Oakland Medical," but Patterson said the name is still under review.

Patterson said he expects the plan can be incorporated into the county's existing marketing and economic development efforts, but may also approach the county commission for extra funding if that proves necessary.

According to the Anderson report, the regional brand initiative could bump the projection of 30,000-plus new jobs in a decade up to a possible 3.2 percent annual growth, adding 45,000 jobs by 2018.

Matzick said Wednesday the key to a successful brand is expanding on all segments and "finding synergies" between health care providers and other employers such as medical equipment makers and medical education.

A regional attraction plan is also vital as health care providers are growing rapidly in Oakland, even though population

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growth has been below 0.25 percent for several years.

"The growth that all generate collectively, as an industry, is also going to mean new homes built, new demand for schools and educators, and better health care (coverage)," Matzick said.

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