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OPINION
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Guest opinion: Jennifer Jones Paton: Colorado's life sciences community is taking on COVID-19

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By Jennifer Jones Paton

Beating COVID-19 requires an unprecedented, multi-front global health care response. Colorado BioScience Association salutes the tens of thousands of health care workers and first responders on the front lines of this crisis. We also must shine a spotlight on health researchers and innovators — hidden heroes working to save lives with new tests, treatments and eventually, a COVID-19 vaccine.

The COVID-19 crisis offers a crash course on the challenges of creating new, reliable and effective treatments for a devastating disease. Biomedical research and development programs offer hope for significant, lasting medical and economic recovery. It's no surprise that Colorado's vibrant and growing life sciences ecosystem has such a large footprint in this critical work.

Life sciences companies and organizations around the world are leading work to detect, prevent and treat COVID-19. Close to 40 Colorado companies and organizations, many of them Boulder based, are part of the global effort. Researchers at the University of Colorado Boulder and our state's other nationally ranked academic and research institutions are running dozens of projects to better understand how to identify and treat the disease.



Boulder County companies in the fight include:

[Biodesix](#), a leading diagnostic company in lung disease, recently launched the Biodesix WorkSafe™ program. The customized return-to-work service for employers across the U.S. incorporates two highly accurate diagnostic tests for COVID-19 with an end-to-end solution to assist companies in their goals of preventing and slowing the spread of COVID-19 while resuming business operations. Results for both tests are provided in 24 hours after samples are received at the Biodesix Laboratory.

[Brava Diagnostics](#) and [MBio Diagnostics](#) are developing point-of-care, multiplex tests for host-response biomarkers in blood and an antibody panel for COVID-19. Host-response biomarkers can be measured early in acute infection. The tests provide rapid results that give insights about immune response and help direct treatment decisions. The 5-minute COVID-19 Antibody Panel is funded by the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority and will be ready for sale in August.

[Medtronic](#), a global leader in medical technology that employs 2,500 people in Colorado, ramped up ventilator production worldwide to meet the urgent needs of patients and health care systems across the globe. The company open sourced the design specifications for the Puritan Bennett™ 560 ventilator and is providing COVID-19 Virtual Care Evaluation and Monitoring to evaluate, remotely monitor, and provide recommendations based on Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines for people with COVID-19 symptoms.

[SomaLogic](#) measures proteins in the human body and derives actionable health insights from that information for each individual. The company is making its proteomic technology, the SomaScan Assay, broadly available to researchers and drug developers. The goal is to assay every eligible clinical sample and share the resulting data as broadly as possible to accelerate effective drug and vaccine development globally.

[VitriVax](#), a company with a platform technology for thermostable, single-dose vaccine regimens and the academic lab of its co-founder Ted Randolph at CU Boulder received a COVID-19 innovation grant from Boettcher Foundation. The funds will support work on the next generation of a system to be ready to manufacture thermally stable, single-dose formulations of novel COVID-19 vaccines at the scale required for large human clinical trials.

Colorado's life sciences community directly employs more than 32,000 skilled workers and supports indirect jobs for 85,000 more. Roughly 850 clinical trials are underway in Colorado for a wide range of medicines. We are all learning how difficult and exacting clinical trials really are as we follow the path to the development of a COVID-19 vaccine.

To successfully develop lifesaving treatments, tests, and technologies, these companies and organizations rely on a pro-innovation business environment and critical, early-stage funding from the Advanced Industries Accelerator Grant Program and other state funding sources. Our ecosystem appreciates the General Assembly's partnership in sustaining a supportive tax environment for emerging companies and preserving critical funding that supports growth and commercialization.

Colorado's life sciences innovators work closely with health care providers throughout the country. They have seen firsthand the tireless work in hospitals and clinics, and the need for additional support that the health care community desperately needs. Life sciences companies are providing in-kind and financial support to a wide range of health care and community relief funds.

The challenge has never been greater and the need for research, innovation, and development never deeper. Yet through a spirit of determination, collaboration and old-fashioned hard work, Colorado's life sciences community is playing a vital role in the war to defeat this disease.

Jennifer Jones Paton is the president and chief executive officer of the [Colorado BioScience Association](#).