

Life Sciences Employment and Pay: Regional Trends by Role

IntuitionLabs.ai · Adrien Laurent · 2026-09-05 · life sciences employment · life sciences salary · biotech job market · pharma industry employment statistics · biopharma hiring trends · life sciences salary by region · occupational employment data · life sciences labor market



Executive Summary

The U.S. life sciences workforce entered September 2026 in a mixed but stabilizing position: the bioscience industry employed nearly **2.3 million workers** across almost 150,000 establishments in 2023, up nearly 15 percent since 2019 (www.bio.org), while core life-sciences occupational employment hit a record 2.1 million in March 2025 before pulling back and the unemployment rate for life, physical, and social science occupations nearly doubled to 3.1 percent that April (www.cbre.com). U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) projections remain positive across every major research occupation: **medical scientists** are projected to grow 13 percent and **biochemists and biophysicists** 12 percent from 2025 to 2035, both with median annual pay above \$100,000 (www.bls.gov), while **pharmacists** earn a median \$137,480 across 335,100 national jobs as of 2024 (www.bls.gov).

Layoffs rose sharply through 2025 before easing in 2026. BioSpace's 2026 Employment Outlook Report found biopharma layoffs jumped 47.1 percent year over year in 2025, from 29,017 to 42,701, with 40 percent of surveyed companies cutting staff (www.biospace.com). By the second quarter of 2026, only 26 companies cut or projected cutting jobs, affecting 8,383 employees, a 59 percent drop in the number of companies making or planning layoffs compared with Q2 2025 (www.biospace.com), and job postings on BioSpace.com rose 15 percent year over year, the third consecutive quarterly increase (www.biospace.com). Venture funding recovered in parallel, reaching \$29.9 billion in the first half of 2026, up 30 percent year over year and the highest level in four years (commercialobserver.com).

Compensation kept rising even as headcount contracted. Randstad found average life-sciences salaries jumped 9 percent from 2023 to 2024 despite a 36 percent year-over-year drop in open postings (www.randstadusa.com), and J. Thelander Consulting's private-biotech survey found executive median base pay rising to \$300,000 in 2026 from \$275,000 in 2024 (www.jthelander.com). Geography remains a major determinant of pay: Cushman & Wakefield reports a median R&D salary of \$265,000 in Suburban Maryland, the highest of the markets it tracks (content.cushmanwakefield.com), while Boston-Cambridge and New York-New Jersey carry the largest overall employment bases.

AI's measurable effect on hiring remains limited relative to executive expectations: 78 percent of biopharma and medtech leaders expect AI to drive major change in 2026, but only 14 percent report full workflow implementation (www.deloitte.com), and AI-adjacent roles command a 15-to-25 percent pay premium in venture-backed biotech hiring (recruitslab.com). This report separates employment levels from vacancy and posting counts throughout, states the observation date and sample size behind each figure, and updates prior life-sciences job-market coverage with newer 2026 data and a reproducible method (intuitionlabs.ai).

Introduction and Background

Life sciences employment in the United States sits at an unusual point as of September 2026: near-record aggregate headcount, elevated layoffs, and a resumption of hiring, all at once. The U.S. bioscience industry employed nearly **2.3 million workers** across almost 150,000 business establishments in 2023, the most recent year covered by the biennial BIO and TEconomy Partners state bioscience report (www.bio.org), and industry-tracked core life-sciences occupational employment hit a record **2.1 million** in March 2025 before pulling back (www.cbre.com).

This report combines two data streams that are usually treated separately: official government wage and employment statistics from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), and the higher-frequency, higher-granularity data published by industry trackers such as BioSpace, Cushman & Wakefield, CBRE, JLL, TSP (A Syneos Health Company), and specialty compensation surveyors including J. Thelander Consulting and the Medical Science Liaison Society (MSLS). Bioscience employment grew **nearly 15 percent since 2019**, outpacing overall private-sector growth in nearly every U.S. state (www.bio.org). At the same time, the unemployment rate for life, physical, and social science occupations nearly doubled to **3.1 percent in April 2025**, while the broader U.S. unemployment rate rose only 40 basis points to 3.9 percent over the same period (www.cbre.com).

This is a companion piece to, not a replacement for, IntuitionLabs' [earlier life sciences job-market reference](http://intuitionlabs.ai) (intuitionlabs.ai) and its [regional biotech-salary companion](http://intuitionlabs.ai) (intuitionlabs.ai). Where those pieces summarized 2025 conditions, this report emphasizes the reproducible method behind the numbers, separates employment levels from

vacancy and job-posting counts, and updates the picture with Q1 and Q2 2026 hiring and layoff data, 2025-2035 BLS occupational projections, and newly published regional and role-level compensation benchmarks. Every figure below states its source, its observation date, and, where applicable, the sample size behind it, so a reader can judge how much weight to place on it.

The remainder of the report proceeds in five parts: the data sources and method used to compile it; national occupational employment and wage levels by role; regional employment concentration and pay premiums; salary benchmarks broken out by seniority; and an analysis of hiring, layoff, and venture-funding dynamics through mid-2026.

Methodology and Data Sources

Three categories of source feed this report, and they are not interchangeable.

- **Official government statistics:** BLS Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS), the Occupational Outlook Handbook (OOH), Employment Projections, and Current Employment Statistics (CES) for the chemical manufacturing supersector (NAICS 325, which contains pharmaceutical and medicine manufacturing, NAICS 3254). These are census-scale, methodologically documented, and revised on a fixed schedule; they are the only sources in this report suitable for precise national wage medians and legally defensible workforce counts.
- **Industry and real-estate trackers:** BioSpace's quarterly job-market reports and its 2026 Employment Outlook survey, TSP's H1 2026 Labor Market Report, and life-sciences lab-market research from CBRE, JLL, and Cushman & Wakefield. These firms track job postings, announced layoffs, lab vacancy, and venture funding at a monthly or quarterly cadence that BLS cannot match, but their figures are proprietary tallies, not censuses, and their methods vary by publisher.
- **Compensation-specific surveys:** J. Thelander Consulting's private biotech compensation survey, the MSLS global Medical Science Liaison salary survey, and staffing-firm salary guides from Randstad, gForce Life Sciences, and Recruits Lab. These rely on self-reported or placement-derived samples of varying size; where a survey discloses its sample, this report states it.

A recurring distinction matters throughout: **employment levels** (how many people currently hold a job in an occupation or industry) are not the same as **job postings or vacancies** (how many open requisitions exist at a point in time). A market can show record employment and falling job postings simultaneously, which is close to the actual 2024-2025 pattern in several life-sciences occupations, as later sections document. This report labels each statistic accordingly and never substitutes one for the other.

The MSLS's 2025 global compensation survey, cited in the seniority section below, drew on **1,100 MSL professionals from 44 countries** (themsls.org), while BioSpace's 2026 Employment Outlook Report was built from two web surveys: one drawing **1,499 biopharma-professional responses** and a second from 136 talent-acquisition and workforce-planning respondents, both fielded November 3 to December 15, 2025 (www.biospace.com). Readers reproducing this analysis should pull the same primary reports rather than secondary citations of them, since several intermediate blogs restate these figures with rounding or attribution errors.

National Occupational Employment and Wages

BLS's Occupational Outlook Handbook, updated for the 2025-2035 projection window, and its OEWS wage survey remain the only Tier-1, nationally representative source for life-sciences occupational pay and headcount. *Table 1* below summarizes the core research and clinical occupations most relevant to life sciences employment.

Occupation	Median Annual Wage	National Employment	Projected Growth
Biochemists and Biophysicists	\$127,410 (2025) (www.bls.gov)	35,200 jobs (2025)	+12%, much faster than average, 2025-2035 (www.bls.gov)
Medical Scientists (except epidemiologists)	\$103,410 (2025) (www.bls.gov)	181,000 jobs (2025)	+13%, much faster than average, 2025-2035 (www.bls.gov)
Microbiologists	\$87,990 (2025) (www.bls.gov)	20,100 jobs (2025)	+6%, faster than average, 2025-2035
Pharmacists	\$137,480 (2024) (www.bls.gov)	335,100 jobs (2024)	+5%, faster than average, 2024-2034
Bioinformatics Scientists (SOC 19-1029.01, biological scientists, all other)	\$98,920 (www.onetonline.org)	Not separately broken out by BLS; grouped under "biological scientists, all other"	Not separately projected

Table 1 shows a consistent pattern: every life-sciences research occupation BLS tracks is projected to grow faster than the 2025-2035 all-occupation average, led by medical scientists at +13 percent and biochemists and biophysicists at +12 percent. Two caveats apply. First, BLS also publishes an earlier 2024-2034 projection vintage in its Monthly Labor Review, which shows **medical scientists growing 8.7 percent** and **biochemists and biophysicists growing 5.8 percent** over that decade (www.bls.gov). The discrepancy with the 2025-2035 OOH figures reflects a newer projection cycle, not a data error, and readers should cite the vintage they use. Second, at the industry level rather than the occupation level, BLS projects the **Scientific Research and Development Services** industry (which includes pharmaceutical and biotech R&D) to grow 8.7 percent from 2024 to 2034, versus 3.1 percent for the economy overall (www.bls.gov), while the broader Healthcare and Social Assistance sector is projected to grow 8.4 percent, almost three times the all-sector average, adding the largest absolute job gains of any sector (www.bls.gov).

At the manufacturing level, BLS Current Employment Statistics put **chemical manufacturing employment** (NAICS 325, encompassing pharmaceutical and medicine manufacturing) at 898.7 thousand workers as of May 2026 (www.bls.gov). BLS's May 2025 state OEWS release provides occupational employment and wage estimates for each state, district, territory, and commonwealth (www.bls.gov).

Regional Employment Concentration and Salary Premiums

Geography is the single largest driver of life-sciences pay dispersion, and the newest cross-market data comes not from BLS but from commercial real estate researchers who track lab-occupying employers directly. CBRE's June 2026 life-sciences report names **Boston, San Francisco, Washington, D.C., and New York-New Jersey** as the

top overall U.S. life-sciences R&D markets (www.cbre.com), while noting that **Chicago, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, and New York City** all reached record life-sciences employment levels and kept adding jobs into 2026. CBRE also reports the sector's highest year-over-year job growth rate in nearly three years as of April 2026 (www.cbre.com), and rising secondary markets: **Raleigh-Durham (now fifth nationally), Denver-Boulder (10th), and Madison, Wisconsin (13th)** each climbed one spot in the 2026 rankings (www.cbre.com).

Table 2 compares headline employment and pay figures across the markets these trackers name most consistently.

Market	R&D / Pharma-Manufacturing Employment	Notable Salary Data	Source and Date
Boston-Cambridge, MA	Over 125,000 employed in R&D and pharma manufacturing (content.cushmanwakefield.com)	Median pharma-manufacturing salary \$138,242/year	Cushman & Wakefield, 2026
Suburban Maryland	R&D represents 82% of area life-sciences jobs (per publisher analysis)	Highest median R&D wage of any market analyzed, at \$265,000/year ; page states median R&D wages are the highest nationally in this market (content.cushmanwakefield.com)	Cushman & Wakefield, 2026
New York / New Jersey	Over 143,000 combined R&D and manufacturing workers in 2024; manufacturing alone exceeds 93,000 (content.cushmanwakefield.com)	New Jersey pays medical scientists a mean \$129,410/year, the highest of any state on this occupation (www.bls.gov)	Cushman & Wakefield 2026; BLS OEWS, May 2023
Massachusetts (statewide)	Highest U.S. concentration of biochemist/biophysicist jobs, location quotient 14.07, 11,200 workers (www.bls.gov)	Mean biochemist/biophysicist wage below California's; ranks among top states for medical-scientist employment (17,570 workers)	BLS OEWS, May 2023
California (statewide)	Most medical scientists of any state, 22,520 workers (www.bls.gov)	Highest mean biochemist/biophysicist wage nationally, \$137,360/year (www.bls.gov)	BLS OEWS, May 2023

The pattern in Table 2 is that employment scale and pay level do not always move together: Suburban Maryland, dominated by federal-adjacent and early-stage R&D employers, posts the highest reported median R&D wage of any tracked market despite a smaller overall employment base than Boston-Cambridge or New York-New Jersey. This is consistent with TSP's finding, citing CBRE data, that **medtech salaries run 49 percent above the U.S. average** in markets where medtech employment concentrates (tsptalent.com).

Beyond the largest hubs, gForce Life Sciences' 2026 U.S. salary guide finds that major coastal hubs pay the highest, with Boston-Cambridge, the San Francisco Bay Area, and San Diego routinely adding **15 to 30 percent premiums over national averages** (www.gforcelifesciences.com). A first-party regional analysis on IntuitionLabs' site, drawing on BioSpace's 2025 salary survey, found the highest reported regional pay premium in the "BioForest" cluster spanning Oregon and Washington, at \$184,526 (intuitionlabs.ai), ahead of the Boston-Cambridge "Genetown" cluster at \$156,700, and separately noted that, on a cost-of-living-adjusted basis, a worker in Virginia would need roughly \$60,000 more in nominal pay than a Massachusetts-based counterpart to maintain an

equivalent standard of living (intuitionlabs.ai). Outside the United States, the same analysis identifies **Switzerland** as the highest-paying country for biotechnology professionals globally, averaging \$139,030 per year (intuitionlabs.ai).

Regional employment growth correlates closely with capital flows. San Francisco, Miami-Fort Lauderdale, Austin, Pittsburgh, Houston, and Chicago posted the **largest gains in venture-capital funding** for life-sciences companies from 2024 to 2025, as overall U.S. life-sciences VC investment rose 33 percent in the first half of 2026 versus the first half of 2025 (www.cbre.com). Real estate, however, remains a lagging indicator of hiring recovery: lab vacancy across the top 13 U.S. life-sciences markets stood at **23.2 percent** as of the first quarter of 2026 (www.cbre.com), and JLL separately reported national lab vacancy spiking to 27 percent, up 20.4 percentage points in three years (www.jll.com), a gap that reflects real estate's multi-year construction lead time relative to hiring decisions, not a contradiction between sources.

Salary Benchmarks by Role and Seniority

Compensation varies as much by seniority and role as by geography. *Table 3* summarizes published pay bands for roles commonly cited in life-sciences hiring, drawn from named staffing-firm and association surveys.

Role	Entry / Mid-Level Pay	Senior / Director-Level Pay	Source
Clinical Trial Manager / Clinical Operations	\$115,000 to \$155,000 (www.gforcelifesciences.com)	\$180,000 to \$240,000 for directors/heads of clinical operations	gForce Life Sciences, 2026
Regulatory Affairs	\$85,000 to \$125,000 at mid-level (www.gforcelifesciences.com)	\$150,000 to \$210,000 for senior managers/directors	gForce Life Sciences, 2026
Clinical Research Associate (CRA)	\$102,563 average, national (www.indeed.com)	Not separately broken out in this source	Indeed aggregated postings, accessed August 2026
Medical Science Liaison (MSL)	\$165,000 to \$220,000 base at MSL I-II (recruitslab.com)	\$250,000 to \$400,000 base at Director/Senior Director level, per the same guide	Recruits Lab, 2026
Private Biotech Executive vs. Staff	Staff median base rose from \$125,000 to \$132,000 (www.jthelander.com)	Executive median base rose to \$300,000, up from \$275,000 (www.jthelander.com)	J. Thelander Consulting, May 2026

Table 3 illustrates that seniority premiums compound with specialization: MSL pay alone spans a roughly 2.4-times range from entry to director level, while regulatory affairs and clinical operations show similar 1.5-to-1.75-times spreads between mid-level and senior bands. J. Thelander Consulting's private-biotech dataset adds a compensation-mix dimension beyond base pay: **median executive bonuses grew from \$67,500 in 2024 to \$75,000 in 2026** (www.jthelander.com), and the share of both executives and staff reporting equity compensation has grown significantly year over year (www.jthelander.com). BioSpace's regional analysis, however, found the opposite trend in aggregate bonus and equity **participation**: bonus participation dropped from 71 percent to 69

percent of employees, and average equity value fell sharply (intuitionlabs.ai), a discrepancy plausibly explained by the two surveys covering different populations (privately held biotechs surveyed by J. Thelander versus the broader BioSpace respondent base spanning public and private employers of many sizes).

At the high end of specialization, the MSLS's 2025 global survey drew participation from **1,100 MSL professionals across 44 countries** (themsls.org), giving it one of the larger disclosed sample sizes among role-specific life-sciences compensation surveys cited here. National averages compiled by gForce Life Sciences place overall U.S. life-sciences base salaries in the **mid-\$140,000s to low-\$160,000s** (www.gforcelifesciences.com), a figure that sits well above BLS's economy-wide occupational medians in Table 1 because it aggregates a narrower, more senior life-sciences-specific respondent pool rather than BLS's full national workforce in each occupation code.

Hiring Trends, Layoffs, and Labor Market Dynamics (2024-2026)

Aggregate headcount and hiring sentiment diverged sharply across 2024 and 2025 before both stabilized into 2026. BioSpace's 2026 Employment Outlook Report, fielded November to December 2025, found that made or projected biopharma layoffs jumped **47.1 percent year over year in 2025**, from 29,017 in 2024 to 42,701, with 40 percent of surveyed companies reporting layoffs during the year (www.biospace.com). Fierce Biotech's independent layoff tracker recorded a smaller but directionally consistent increase, describing 2025 layoff **activity** (rounds of workforce reductions, a different metric than total headcount affected) as rising 16 percent year over year (www.fiercebiotech.com), and identified **May 2025** as the point when 29 different companies reported workforce reductions in a single month (www.fiercebiotech.com), an all-time monthly high for that tracker. Readers should treat the 47.1 percent (headcount) and 16 percent (rounds) figures as measuring different things from different trackers rather than as conflicting statistics about the same quantity.

Layoffs were also concentrated in size. Fierce Biotech's first-quarter 2025 analysis found that among companies disclosing a percentage of staff cut, the average reduction size was **43 percent** of the affected workforce (www.fiercebiotech.com), with at least 1,965 people losing jobs from the 20 companies that disclosed headcount numbers that quarter (www.fiercebiotech.com).

By 2026, both hiring and layoff trends improved. BioSpace's Q1 2026 job-market report found 35 biopharma companies cut or projected cutting their workforces, affecting 6,593 employees, versus 74 companies affecting 5,926 employees in Q1 2025 (www.biospace.com); fewer companies cut deeper. The Q2 2026 report showed the trend continuing, with 26 companies cutting or projecting cuts of 8,383 jobs, down from 64 companies affecting 8,789 jobs in Q2 2025, a **59 percent drop** in the number of companies making or planning layoffs (www.biospace.com). Job postings on BioSpace.com rose 15 percent year over year and 12 percent quarter over quarter in Q2 2026, the third consecutive quarterly increase (www.biospace.com).

Deal activity moved in the same direction. BioSpace recorded 52 mergers and acquisitions in the first half of 2026, compared with around 30 in the first half of 2025 (www.biospace.com), along with 18 initial public offerings in H1 2026, more than double the 2025 full-year total, including seven in Q2 alone. Q1 2026 M&A spending alone reached roughly \$46.8 billion across 19 acquisitions (www.biospace.com). Venture funding data corroborates the recovery: PitchBook's year-end 2025 report found biopharma VC funding reaching \$33.8 billion across 1,171 deals, up from 1,091 in 2024 (www.biospace.com), describing 2026 as a period of "continued, albeit disciplined" recovery (www.fiercebiotech.com). By mid-2026, Cushman & Wakefield reported **life-sciences venture capital** had reached \$29.9 billion in the first half of the year, up 30 percent from a year earlier and its highest level in four years

(commercialobserver.com), though asking rents at U.S. life-sciences lab facilities still averaged \$64.17 per square foot in Q2 2026, down 5.3 percent (commercialobserver.com), and the construction pipeline had shrunk to just 2 percent of existing inventory, down from a 17 percent peak in mid-2023 (commercialobserver.com), evidence that developers, unlike hiring managers, remain cautious.

Data Analysis and Evidence

Three cross-cutting patterns emerge when the sources above are read together rather than individually.

First, **compensation kept rising through the hiring slowdown**, which is a distinct claim from employment growth. Randstad's life-sciences salary guide found average salaries jumped 9 percent from 2023 to 2024 even as open job postings fell 36 percent year over year in late 2024, a period colloquially termed a "biotech winter" (www.randstadusa.com). TSP's H1 2026 report similarly found base salary, bonus, and total compensation all increased in 2025 despite layoffs and lower job postings (tsptalent.com), attributing the rise to seniority and role complexity effects rather than broad market expansion; put differently, the average employee in the sample got more experienced and more specialized even as headcount contracted, which mechanically raises the average wage without implying wage inflation for a fixed role. Recruits Lab's 2026 hiring report adds a demand-side data point consistent with this: hiring intent at venture-backed biotech rose 26 percent year over year in its 2025 dataset, with AI-adjacent roles commanding a 15-to-25 percent pricing premium over comparable non-AI roles (recruitslab.com).

Second, **worker-side sentiment lagged the recovery employers reported**. In BioSpace's late-2025 survey, 64 percent of employed respondents said they would actively look for a new job in 2026, up from 59 percent the prior year, and both employed and unemployed respondents reported lowering compensation expectations at a higher rate than the year before, 43 percent versus 36 percent for the employed, 77 percent versus 68 percent for the unemployed. At the same time, 64 percent of employer respondents reported actively recruiting, an increase from 59 percent the year before and 63 percent two years before, and 39 percent expected fundraising to get harder in 2026, up from 29 percent the year before (www.biospace.com). Employer optimism about hiring and worker anxiety about job security therefore coexisted in the same survey wave, a pattern consistent with a market recovering from a trough rather than one still deteriorating.

Third, **remote-work openness among life-sciences employers has been retreating since 2022, not expanding**, contrary to a common assumption carried over from pandemic-era hiring. BioSpace reporting found that nearly half of surveyed companies said they would recruit and hire remote employees regardless of location in 2022, a share that had dropped to just 20 percent two years later (www.biospace.com), before ticking back up to 28 percent in the 2026 outlook survey (www.biospace.com). Flex Index data cited by BioSpace put the share of healthcare and biotechnology companies offering any work-location flexibility at 69 percent, ranking these sectors in the middle of all industries tracked (www.biospace.com), while 17 percent of employed and 13 percent of unemployed survey respondents said they had turned down a job because it didn't offer remote work options (www.biospace.com), a tension that remains unresolved heading into 2026.

Case Studies: Regional Cluster Snapshots

Suburban Maryland's federal-adjacent R&D concentration

Cushman & Wakefield's 2026 labor-dynamics analysis found Suburban Maryland carries the highest R&D employment share of any tracked market, with R&D positions estimated at 82 percent of area life-sciences jobs, alongside the highest reported median R&D salary nationally at \$265,000 per year. The market's proximity to the National Institutes of Health and the Food and Drug Administration's Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research campuses concentrates federally adjacent research roles that pay above the broader industry median documented in Table 1, illustrating how a single institutional anchor can shift a regional pay distribution well above national occupational medians.

Boston-Cambridge's scale advantage

With more than 125,000 workers employed in R&D and pharma manufacturing combined (content.cushmanwakefield.com) and a median pharma-manufacturing salary of \$138,242, Boston-Cambridge remains the largest single life-sciences labor pool CBRE and Cushman & Wakefield both track, consistent with BLS's own state-level finding that Massachusetts carries the nation's highest location quotient for biochemist and biophysicist employment.

AI-native biotech leasing behavior

JLL's September 2025 real-estate outlook found that AI-native biotechs, companies built around [computational drug discovery](#) rather than traditional wet-lab-first R&D, now account for **one-sixth of all biotech venture-capital deals** (www.jll.com), a segment JLL links to changing lab-space demand patterns even as overall lab leasing has declined by an average of 8 percent per year alongside a 12 percent annual drop in venture funding across the broader sector (www.jll.com). This bifurcation, compute-first biotechs gaining deal share while aggregate lab demand contracts, is one of the more concrete, quantified signals available on how AI is reshaping the sector's employment and real-estate footprint simultaneously.

Implications and Future Directions

AI's effect on life-sciences hiring is more anticipated than realized as of 2026. Deloitte's 2026 executive outlook survey found 78 percent of biopharma and medtech leaders expecting AI to play a central role in driving major organizational change in 2026 (www.deloitte.com), yet only 29 percent of biopharma leaders and 31 percent of medtech leaders said they specifically planned to use [AI tools to improve workforce productivity](#) (www.deloitte.com), and just 14 percent reported full implementation into daily workflows (www.deloitte.com). One supply-chain executive interviewed for the report framed automation as a response to staffing gaps rather than a displacement strategy, noting simply, "there aren't enough phlebotomists or lab managers" (www.deloitte.com) in some patient-facing and lab roles, framing AI and automation as a complement to a tight specialist labor market rather than a threat to it.

Globally, the World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report 2025 found 86 percent of employers across all industries expect AI and information-processing technologies to transform their business by 2030 (reports.weforum.org), against just 11 percent citing biotechnology and gene technologies specifically as similarly transformative (reports.weforum.org), with biotechnology and gene technologies expected to contribute a net 0.2 million new jobs globally between 2025 and 2030, well behind the 0.3 million the same report attributes to quantum and encryption technologies (reports.weforum.org), a modest figure relative to AI-driven job creation projected across other categories in the same report. McKinsey's life-sciences research and development talent analysis, built on an analysis of nearly one million LinkedIn job listings for R&D roles posted between 2020 and 2024 (www.mckinsey.com), similarly frames AI as increasingly enabling data-driven decision-making across the drug-development life cycle (www.mckinsey.com), while a separate McKinsey report on agentic AI adoption observes that life-sciences companies are broadly struggling to attract and retain talent amid margin pressure and rising technological complexity (www.mckinsey.com).

Taken together, the near-term skills implication is additive rather than substitutive: demand is rising for roles that sit at the intersection of biology and computation (bioinformatics, data-enabled R&D, and AI-adjacent specialties commanding the 15-to-25 percent premium Recruits Lab documented above), while core wet-lab and clinical-operations occupations continue to show the positive multi-year growth projections BLS publishes in Table 1. Employers appear to be adding a **data-science layer** on top of existing scientific staffing needs rather than replacing bench scientists or clinical operations staff outright, at least based on the evidence available as of September 2026. Organizations evaluating where to invest in AI-enabled workflows are advised to weigh specialized-headcount needs against productivity gains that AI tools are expected, but not yet proven, to deliver at scale.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

What is the best data source for life sciences workforce statistics?

For legally defensible national wage medians and occupation-level employment counts, the BLS Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics survey and Occupational Outlook Handbook are the only Tier-1, government-audited sources; for monthly and quarterly hiring or layoff trend data, which BLS does not publish at that frequency, industry trackers such as BioSpace and Fierce Biotech provide the fastest available signal, with the caveat that their tallies are proprietary and not censuses.

How is pharma industry employment measured differently from job postings?

Employment counts, whether from BLS Current Employment Statistics or a real-estate tracker's occupancy-based estimate, measure people currently on payroll. Job postings measure open requisitions at a point in time and can rise or fall independently of headcount; BioSpace's own Q1 2026 report shows both metrics moving in the same direction, but earlier periods in this report show them diverging.

Why do different sources report different biopharma layoff totals for the same year?

Trackers count different things: total headcount affected (BioSpace's 47.1 percent year-over-year increase in 2025) versus number of distinct layoff rounds or announcing companies (Fierce Biotech's 16 percent year-over-year increase). Neither figure is wrong; they answer different questions.

Are life sciences salaries actually rising despite the layoffs reported in 2024 and 2025?

Yes, according to every compensation-specific source in this report, including Randstad (9 percent salary growth in 2023-2024), TSP (compensation up across nearly all categories in 2025), and J. Thelander Consulting (biotech executive and staff base pay both up from 2024 to 2026), though the increases are attributed by TSP to a more senior, more specialized surviving workforce rather than broad-based wage inflation.

Which U.S. regions pay the most for life sciences roles?

Suburban Maryland reports the highest median R&D salary of the specific markets Cushman & Wakefield tracks (\$265,000), while Boston-Cambridge and New York-New Jersey have the largest overall employment bases; a separate first-party analysis found Oregon and Washington's "BioForest" cluster leading on average biotech pay nationally.

Conclusion

The data assembled here points to a life-sciences labor market that spent 2024 and most of 2025 contracting in headcount terms while continuing to raise pay for the workers who remained, then began a measured hiring and dealmaking recovery through the first half of 2026. National occupational projections from BLS remain positive across every major life-sciences research occupation tracked, with medical scientists and biochemists and biophysicists each projected to grow faster than 12 percent through 2035. Regional data confirms that where a life-sciences job is based, not just what it is, remains one of the largest determinants of pay, with reported premiums ranging from roughly 15 to 30 percent in established coastal hubs to a reported \$265,000 median R&D salary in Suburban Maryland. AI's measurable effect on life-sciences hiring so far shows up mainly in a targeted, AI-adjacent skills premium and shifting venture and real-estate patterns around AI-native biotechs, rather than in broad workforce displacement, a distinction organizations should track carefully as they plan headcount, compensation, and technology investment for the remainder of 2026 and beyond.

For informational purposes. Verify critical medical, legal, financial, regulatory, and technical information with qualified professionals and primary sources.