

# Healthcare and Life Sciences 2026 World of Work Outlook



**77%**

OF HEALTHCARE AND LIFE SCIENCE EMPLOYERS ARE  
STRUGGLING TO FIND THE SKILLED TALENT THEY NEED

**\$236 Billion**

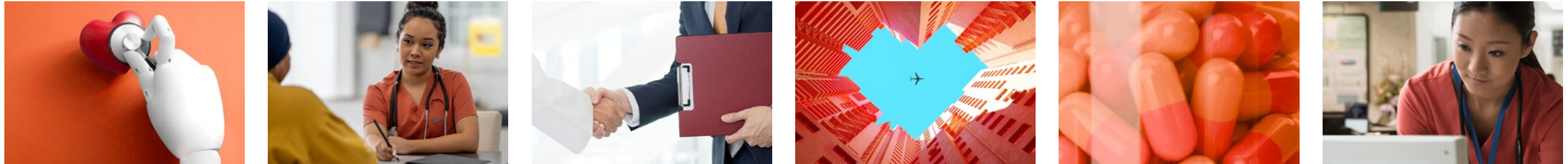
EXPECTED IMPACT ON THE GLOBAL PHARMACEUTICAL  
INDUSTRY AS KEY DRUG PATENTS EXPIRE.

ONLY **19%** OF HEALTHCARE AND

LIFE SCIENCE EMPLOYERS SAY THEY FULLY LEVERAGING  
AI TO IMPROVE THEIR HIRING PROCESSES

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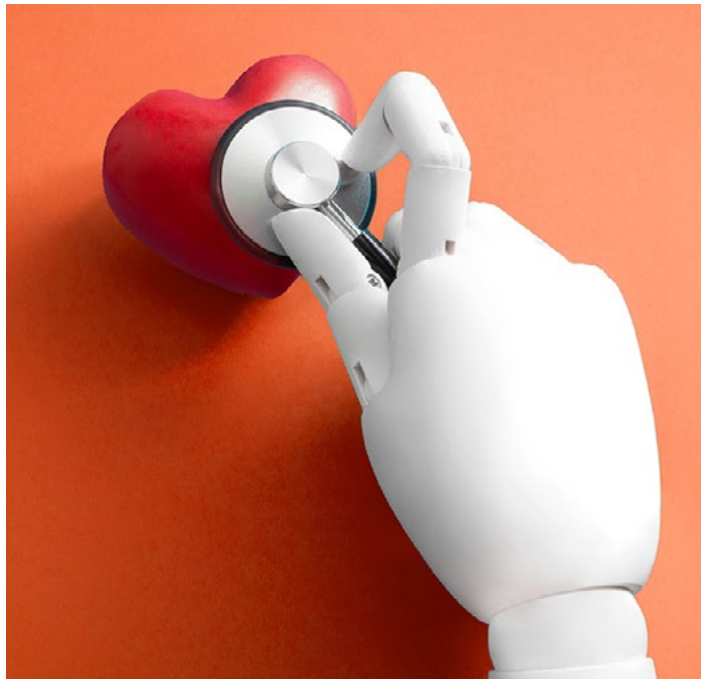
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The global outlook for Healthcare & Life Sciences is cautiously optimistic despite macroeconomic challenges around the world. Key drivers include AI innovation, which is anticipated to reshape operations, enhance productivity, and unlock new opportunities across the value chain. R&D remains a central priority, with companies rethinking strategies to improve productivity and exploring technologies like digital twins and AI to accelerate drug development. This Work Intelligence Lab report is for business leaders seeking to understand the following workforce challenges:

- **What are the key trends that will influence strategic workforce planning in 2026?**
- **How do business leaders overcome talent shortages for in-demand roles such as nurses or data scientists?**
- **What strategies can employers use to recruit and retain the best talent?**





# The Rx is AI Acceleration

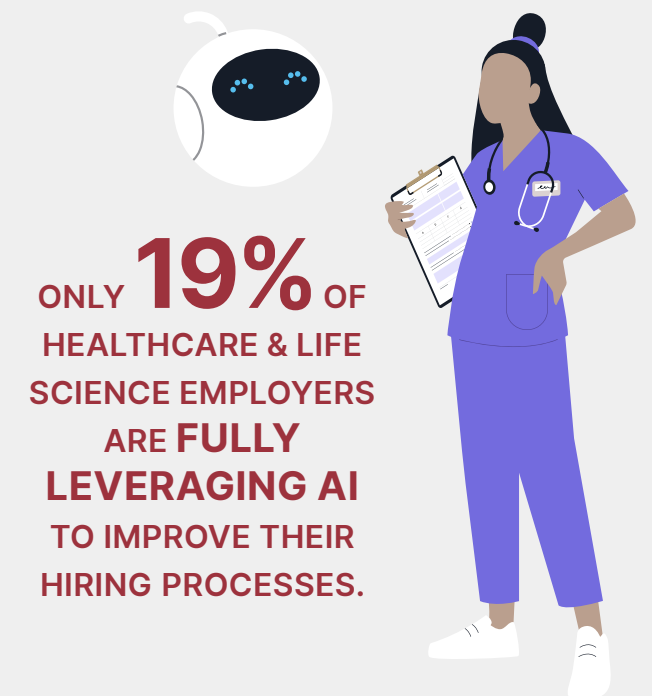
AI adoption in the global healthcare and life sciences sector is accelerating rapidly, transforming everything from diagnostics to drug discovery. Hospitals are increasingly integrating AI for early diagnosis, remote monitoring, and surgical assistance. This surge reflects a broader shift toward data-driven, personalized, and efficient care models, positioning AI as a cornerstone of future health systems.

- **Increasing adoption:** More than half of executives in the life science sector (60%) say they plan to increase their generative AI investments across their value chains.<sup>1</sup>
- **Growing talent acquisition use:** Healthcare and life science adoption of AI for talent acquisition is still scaling. While 32% of employers in this sector are currently using these tools, only 19% say they are fully leveraging the technology for their hiring processes.<sup>2</sup>
- **Difficult to Automate Skills:** However, there are limits to automation. Healthcare and life science employers say ethical judgement (33%), patient service (33%) and communications skills (29%) are the most difficult to replace or augment with AI.<sup>2</sup>

1. [Deloitte](#) 2. [ManpowerGroup Employment Outlook Survey, Q2 2025](#)

## Workforce Implications:

- There is still a significant opportunity to scale AI to improve talent acquisition in this sector around the world.
- Continuous workforce education will be key as this technology continues to rapidly evolve.
- AI upskilling is important but improving difficult to automate soft skills are also a differentiation opportunity for both healthcare employers and workers.



# Cost Cutting

Amidst ongoing economic pressures and the ever-increasing cost of research, development, and regulatory compliance, the healthcare and life science industry must cut costs without compromising quality, safety, or innovation. Managing workforce costs is particularly important as employers balance the needs of workers with increasing business costs.

- **Rising supply chain costs:** More than 80% of pharma R&D leaders anticipate supplier spending to rise by 10-30% over the next two to five years.<sup>1</sup>
- **Geopolitical uncertainty:** Most (65%) employers in the healthcare and life science sector say global trade uncertainty is having a moderate or significant impact on their hiring decisions.<sup>2</sup>
- **Hiring Caution:** In Q4 2025, hiring managers in this sector were still cautious. Many (35%) still planned to increase hiring but most anticipated keeping headcount flat (46%) or decreasing staff (16%).<sup>3</sup>



**MOST HEALTHCARE & LIFE SCIENCE EMPLOYERS (46%) PLAN TO KEEP HEADCOUNT FLAT TO MITIGATE GROWING COST PRESSURES.**

## Workforce Implications:

- Hiring is more selective and focused on either high skill or frontline roles.
- Global talent sourcing enables organizations to access a broader pool of skilled professionals, streamline workforce expenses, and maintain competitiveness while effectively managing operational costs.
- Optimizing your contingent workforce strategy also offers opportunities to mitigate risks and reduce costs.

# M&A Prognosis

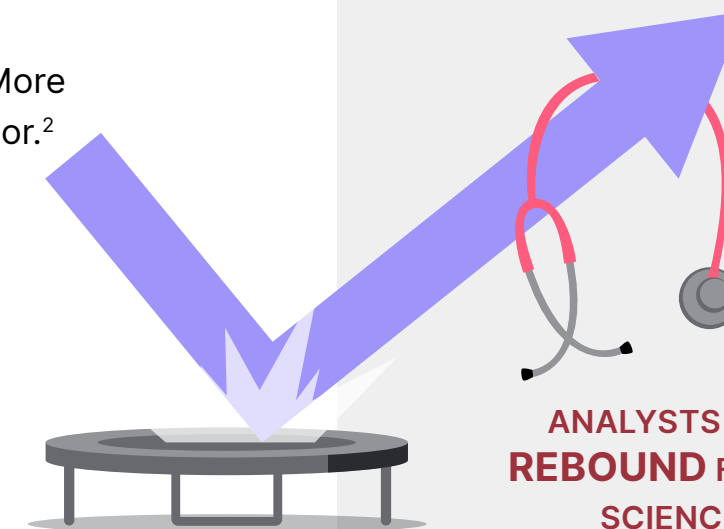
Global life sciences M&A (merger and acquisition) activity is driven by the need to offset patent losses and strengthen pipelines, focusing on smaller deals in high-growth areas like oncology, immunology, and AI therapeutics. Although deal values have decreased, steady deal volume and available capital suggest larger deals are possible. This trend requires proactive workforce planning to integrate specialized R&D talent and address skill gaps after mergers.



- **Caution in 2025:** The first half of 2025 saw a continued slowdown in global M&A activity across the life sciences sector, with deal value dropping sharply to just under \$48 billion across 44 deals — down from the strong figures seen in early 2024. This marks the lowest deal volume and value since Q1 2023, highlighting ongoing caution among investors and acquirers.<sup>1</sup>
- **Rebound in 2026:** Goldman Sachs expects 15% growth in M&A across industries in 2026. More than 80% of the top acquisition targets their analysts identified were in the biopharma sector.<sup>2</sup>
- **Interim Belt Tightening:** Within healthcare and life sciences, biotech employers worldwide were the most likely (19%) to say they planned staffing decreases in Q4 2025.<sup>3</sup>

## Workforce Implications:

- One-third (33%) of M&A failures are due to cultural clashes, key talent loss and a lack of engagement, so HR has an important role to play.<sup>4</sup>
- Effective strategic workforce planning is critical to avoid workforce disruptions during the transition.
- Contingent workforce optimization and outplacement services for impacted roles are some examples of important considerations for HR leaders navigating M&A.



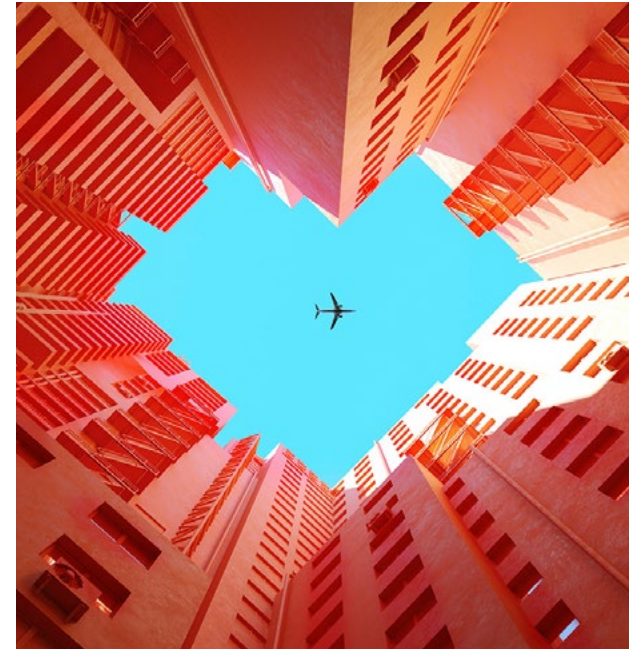
ANALYSTS EXPECT A **STRONG REBOUND** FOR HEALTHCARE & LIFE SCIENCE M&A IN 2026.

1. [Biotechgate](#) 2. [Business Insider](#) 3. [ManpowerGroup Employment Outlook Survey, Q4 2025](#) 4. [Deloitte](#)



# Healing at Home

The healthcare and life sciences sector is actively reshaping supply chains to enhance resilience, with a particular emphasis on localizing the production of key materials and adopting advanced digital tools for real-time inventory monitoring and predictive analytics to anticipate shortages. Organizations are also diversifying their supplier networks and closely evaluating geopolitical risks, all with the goal of constructing agile supply systems that can reliably deliver essential treatments and support uninterrupted patient care, even in the face of unexpected disruptions.



- **A Significant Shift:** In Europe, 80% of active pharmaceutical ingredients used for drug production are sourced from China and India.<sup>1</sup>
- **Critical Mass:** The European Commission proposed the Critical Medicines Act (CMA) seeks to address medicine shortages and secure supply chains by establishing a list of critical medicines, creating pathways for public procurement, and encouraging EU-based “strategic projects” for manufacturing capacity. Comparable efforts are underway in similar markets.<sup>2</sup>
- **Breaking Ground:** The recently announced \$6.5 Eli Lilly active pharmaceutical ingredient manufacturing facility in Texas is a good example of the size and scale of these investments.<sup>3</sup>

1. [European Union](#) 2. [European Commission](#) 3. [Eli Lilly](#)



**EUROPE CURRENTLY IMPORTS  
MORE THAN 80% OF ACTIVE  
DRUG INGREDIENTS.**

## Workforce Implications:

- As drug production shifts to regions where it has not existed at scale in decades, adequate recruitment marketing, upskilling and reskilling will be critical.
- These facilities will have a larger impact on the surrounding labor market demand as related supply chain and logistics roles are created.
- Programs such as Manpower MyPath™ can help close skills gaps and boost retention for related contingent workforce roles.

# Accelerating Drug R&D



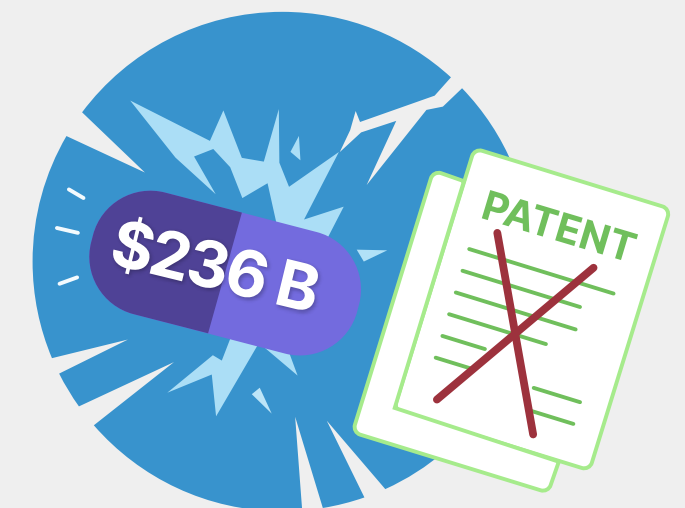
The life sciences industry faces mounting pressure to improve R&D productivity amid rising development costs, longer timelines, and increasing complexity in drug discovery. Despite technological advances in AI, genomics, and data analytics, the rate of successful new drug approvals remains relatively stagnant. As a result, research teams around the world are under pressure to accelerate innovative solutions to overcome healthcare challenges.

- **The Patent Cliff:** The global pharmaceutical industry faces a \$236 billion patent cliff between 2025-2030, with nearly 70 lucrative drugs losing exclusivity and exposing major companies to significant revenue losses.<sup>1</sup>
- **Rethinking R&D:** More than half of biopharma executives (56%) say they need to rethink their R&D and product development strategies over the next 12 months.<sup>2</sup>
- **Talent Challenges:** At the same time, many industry talent acquisition leaders (25%) say they are struggling to fill complex technical roles.<sup>3</sup>

1. [MedPath](#) 2. [Deloitte](#) 3. [ManpowerGroup Employment Outlook Survey, Q4 2025](#)

## Workforce Implications:

- Thoughtful strategic workforce planning is key to doing more with less.
- Contingent workforce spending optimization for related laboratory talent offers an opportunity to reduce costs.
- Robust outplacement programs can help impacted workers and protect your employer brand.



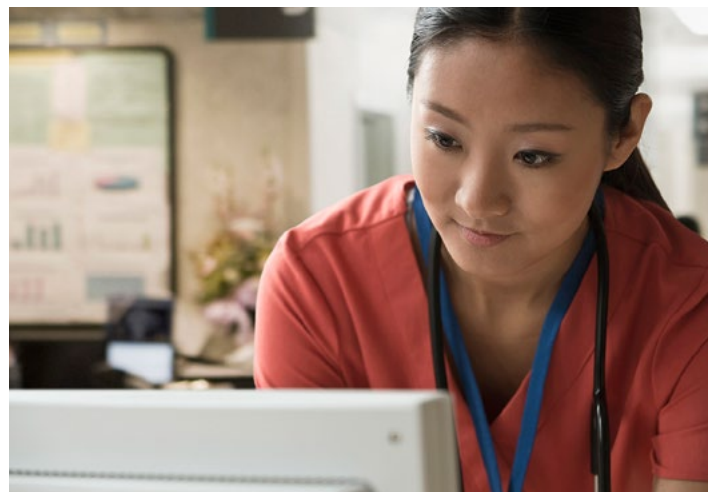
ESTIMATED IMPACT OF  
**EXPIRING PATENTS** ON THE  
PHARMACEUTICAL INDUSTRY.



# Growing Medical Needs, Limited Talent

Across the globe, the need for healthcare services is expanding rapidly, fueled by an aging population, increased prevalence of chronic diseases, and advances in medical technology. As medical needs continue to grow, healthcare systems are challenged to meet the rising demand while managing limited talent and resources. This trend not only places pressure on existing healthcare infrastructure but also highlights the importance of strategic workforce planning, investment in specialized training, and innovative approaches to care delivery to ensure that quality healthcare is accessible to all.

- **A Global Healthcare Talent Shortage:** There is an urgent need for medical talent today, and by 2030 the world will face a global shortage of 11 million healthcare workers.<sup>1</sup>



- **Current State:** Healthcare and life science employers around the world are most likely to say they are struggling with skilled talent scarcity. Most (77%) worldwide say they are struggling to find the skilled talent they need.<sup>2</sup>
- **High Stakes:** Solving the global healthcare crisis could avert 189 million years of life lost to early death and disability and boost the global economy by \$1.1 trillion.<sup>3</sup>

## Workforce Implications:

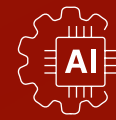
- Employers and policymakers around the world must innovate to educate, train, hire, and deploy more healthcare workers to meet the needs of aging populations.
- Expanding talent pools also offers an opportunity. For example, 67% of the healthcare workforce is female, so attracting more men into frontline roles could help.<sup>4</sup>
- As the workforce ages in developed countries, efforts to retain more experienced talent.



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# Top Workforce Opportunities in Healthcare & Life Sciences



**AI Change Management:** New AI tools have the potential to dramatically improve operational efficiency, patient outcomes and medical innovation. However, getting your workforce more comfortable using them will be the key to success.



**More HEAL Men and STEM Women:** Fewer men work in Healthcare Education Administration Literacy (HEAL) professions such as nursing. At the same time, women are underrepresented in Science Technology Education Mathematics (STEM) roles. Promoting greater gender equity in both would significantly increase the size of available talent pools.



**Retention Attention:** With the overall workforce aging, retaining your most experienced talent not only mitigates current talent scarcity, but also provides invaluable coaching expertise to your next generation of talent.



**Global Talent Sourcing:** As the size of the workforce in many developed markets contracts, sourcing in developing countries offers an opportunity to expand potential talent pools and control costs.



**Total Talent Health:** Total talent management (TTM) is the practice of managing permanent employees and external workers under the same umbrella – from full- and part-time employees to service providers and contingent staff. With so much in flux, it is a great time for employers to get second opinions on their TTM strategy.

# Global Workforce Solutions for Healthcare and Life Sciences



Workforce Consulting  
& Analytics



Workforce  
Management



Talent  
Resourcing



Career  
Management



Career  
Transition



Top Talent  
Attraction



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Our expert family of brands – Manpower, Experis, and Talent Solutions – creates substantially more value for candidates and clients across more than 70 countries and territories and has done so for more than 75 years. We are recognized consistently for our diversity – as a best place to work for Women, Inclusion, Equality, and Disability, and in 2025 ManpowerGroup was named one of the World’s Most Ethical Companies for the 16th time – all confirming our position as the brand of choice for in-demand talent. To learn more, visit [manpowergroup.com](https://manpowergroup.com).

**Forward Looking Statements** — This report includes statements including statements regarding the impact of workforce trends that are forward-looking in nature and, accordingly, are subject to known and unknown risks and uncertainties. Actual results might differ materially from those projected in the forward-looking statements due to numerous factors.

These factors include those found in the Company’s reports filed with the SEC, including the information under the heading “Risk Factors” in its Annual Report on Form 10-K for the year ended December 31, 2024, which information is incorporated herein by reference. Forward-looking statements can be identified by forward-looking words such as “expect,” “anticipate,” “intend,” “plan,” “may,” “will,” “believe,” “seek,” “estimate,” and similar expressions.