



Clinical Research Industry in Southeastern North Carolina

30+ CROs – with several headquarters represented in region
3200+ Clinical Research Employees, with high average salaries
60+ CR Support Companies, employing almost 400 local professionals
100+ Clinical Trials ongoing in region
22 Medical Practices and 45+ Physicians conducting clinical trials locally

Significant Opportunities for Clinical Research Industry Growth and Clinical Trial Expansions

Quick Facts – A Report on the Clinical Research Industry Cluster in Southeastern North Carolina

The Clinical Research industry cluster is vital to Southeastern North Carolina, supporting knowledge-sector jobs to strengthen the region's diverse economy. The region is home to an impressive range of clinical research companies, from large companies, such as PPD, headquartered in downtown Wilmington and the world's third largest CRO in terms of sales, to entrepreneurial startups and companies of all sizes. Additionally, many support companies provide services to the CROs located in the area, and UNC Wilmington's educational programs support the industry's workforce development needs.

Local Economic Impact

More than 100 companies are a part of the clinical research and biotechnology industry cluster in Southeastern North Carolina, employing over 3,200 people locally. The focus areas of the companies in the cluster vary widely. Of the 30+ CROs operating and/or represented locally, 4 are headquartered in Wilmington. Many mid-size and smaller, entrepreneurial organizations here provide a range of services in very specific areas, such as biostatistics or medical writing.

Local Clinical Trials

Local healthcare providers already conduct many clinical trials, often managed by CROs, but ample opportunity exists to increase the number of clinical trials conducted locally. A range of issues contributes to the number of clinical trials offered in a community; population size and the number of physicians in the area are 2 important considerations. Currently, more than 22 medical practices and over 45 physicians conduct clinical trials locally. Additionally, several local firms actively recruit patients to participate in clinical trials in a variety of therapeutic areas, including heart disease, COPD, arthritis, and diabetes.

Local Talent

The southeastern region is rich with talented professionals in the clinical research industry. In addition to the existing clinical research employee base, educational programs at UNC Wilmington, including the undergraduate and graduate degree programs, enhance the local workforce with highly skilled graduates. Recently, Duke Energy awarded \$390,000, with a significant funding match from UNC Wilmington, for the creation of a clinical research workforce development program to bolster the industry in the region. UNC Wilmington, the North Carolina Biotechnology Center Southeastern Office, and local industry leaders are partnering to design and implement this program, which will include *Continuing Education* offerings, *Curriculum Enhancements*, a *Fellowship Program*, and an *industry/academia Collaborative Workspace*.



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Regional Health Statistics

Several medical conditions have a higher prevalence in the southeastern region than in the rest of North Carolina. In the region, for instance, there are higher rates of diabetes, obesity, cardiovascular diseases, treatment at drug and alcohol centers, and septicemia. Health data can be useful when evaluating where to place investigational sites. Areas with a higher prevalence of certain types of medical conditions are ideal for clinical trials aimed at treating those conditions. The higher rate can help to ensure that a larger number of potential participants for a study that meet the inclusion criteria are available.

A broad, regional approach to collecting this health data was taken for several reasons. One consideration is that patients may already travel to Wilmington to receive treatment for certain healthcare issues and could easily participate in clinical trials offered in the focus area. Additionally, doctors with offices in both Wilmington and the rural counties could identify clinical trial candidates from those rural areas. Another key reason to explore regional health statistics includes the fact that New Hanover County Regional Medical Center hosts locations throughout the area.

Recommendations

The North Carolina Coast Clinical Research Initiative (NCCCRI) should continue working with local healthcare providers, clinical trial patient recruitment companies, educators, economic developers, and CROs to strengthen and grow the local clinical research industry cluster. One recommended action is to attract additional clinical trials to the region. Additional clinical trials should be targeted to match the specific medical conditions, of which there is higher prevalence in the region, to increase the likelihood of accessing the optimal number of patients for clinical trials.

The NCCCRI will also continue to work with partners to increase the clinical research focus of regional healthcare providers, to build a cohesive clinical research community locally with networking opportunities and educational programs, to strengthen the existing workforce, and to communicate and promote the assets of the local clinical research industry to the region, the state, and beyond.

*The southeastern region's **North Carolina Coast Clinical Research Initiative** is a collaborative, cluster development effort between clinical research companies, healthcare providers, economic developers, University of North Carolina Wilmington, and the North Carolina Biotechnology Center Southeastern Office, who work together to strengthen and grow the clinical research industry cluster in our area. The goals of the **NC Coast Clinical Research Initiative**, an economic development initiative, are to help existing companies grow and to attract additional talent and companies to the region by creating greater cohesiveness between members of the clinical research community, by enhancing the local clinical research workforce, by increasing physician-led clinical research trials in the region, and by promoting the local clinical research cluster in the region and beyond, all for the economic, societal, and health benefit to the southeastern region of North Carolina.*

*The **North Carolina Biotechnology Center** provides long-term economic and societal benefits to North Carolina through support of biotechnology research, business, education, and strategic policy statewide. Headquartered in Research Triangle Park, the Center has five regional offices, including the **Southeastern Office** in Wilmington, focused on regional biotechnology economic development.*

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Updated December 2016

**North Carolina
Biotechnology Center**