The Swiss Integrative Center for Human Health aims for recognition as a national technology competence centre

The Swiss Integrative Center for Human Health SA (SICHH) is aspiring to the status of national technology competence centre for the period 2021–2024. A facility of this magnitude at the blueFACTORY site would not only enable significant advances in the field of human health, but would also be a boost for the Canton of Fribourg business and innovation hub.

Technology competence centre – five centres in Switzerland

Completing a process begun in 2016, SICHH recently submitted its application to obtain the title of “technology competence centre” for the period 2021–2024 to continue to catalyse innovation and incubate technologies in the field of health at the national level. Switzerland currently has only five technology competence centres recognised by the Confederation. Since 2017, SICHH has developed cutting-edge expertise in the health sector, especially in the field of personalised diagnosis.

Federal grants are granted through a competitive application process to research institutions working with universities and businesses on a not-for-profit basis. Only centres regarded as having national importance receive grants. Funding applications are for four-year periods and are assessed by the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI). The decision will be made known at the end of 2020.

Swiss Smart Diagnostics – the key component in SICHH’s application

“The application submitted to the Confederation on 30 June last is centred on precision medicine”, says SICHH director Dr Jean-Marc Brunner. “It meets a growing need to improve the effectiveness of treatments for cancer, diabetes and cardiovascular and neurodegenerative disease by means of diagnostic tests.”

Thanks to its competence in the field of diagnostics, SICHH occupies a strategic position in the ecosystem of technology competence centres. As things currently stand, SICHH would be the only technology competence centre working in this domain.

It is in this context that SICHH is currently setting up a programme devoted to intelligent diagnostic tests – Swiss Smart Diagnostics – as part of long-term collaborations with the pharmaceutical and biotechnology industries. SICHH has been working with academic institutions on a programme to develop diagnostic tests since 2017.

“It is essential that public and private institutions join the personalised medicine race to prevent disease and to treat patients on an individualised basis. Thanks to its avant-garde approach, SICHH has a strong hand to play in this field and is a means by which the Canton
of Fribourg is able to demonstrate its commitment to innovation”, says René Jenny, president of the pharmaceuticals industry association of French-speaking Switzerland and president of the European healthcare distribution association from 2005 to May 2019.

Support from the Fribourg Council of State and the business community

The Fribourg Council of State supports SICHH’s objective of obtaining the status of technology competence centre and is prepared to allocate financial resources to consolidate the centre’s development. The decision will be submitted to the Grand Conseil of Fribourg in autumn 2019.

Fifteen national and international companies working in diagnostics have formally stated their interest in participating in the centre’s future activities. The research and development projects undertaken in the context of the Swiss Smart Diagnostics programme will include biomolecular diagnostics, medical imaging, point-of-care diagnostics and in vitro diagnostics.

“The application for recognition as a technology competence centre marks a huge step for SICHH and its industrial division”, says Dr Vincent Dessenne, president of the SICHH Board of Directors. “Four major companies have expressed their wish to be a part of Swiss Smart Diagnostics and develop new technologies. We are pleased to observe that they include Medion Grifols Diagnostics AG, a company based in Guin and operating internationally as part of the Grifols Group”, he says.

A technology competence centre represents a competitive advantage that is likely to attract national and international businesses to the Fribourg region and create highly qualified jobs.

About the Swiss Integrative Center for Human Health SA

SICHH is a unique technology competence centre in the field of human health. Headquartered in the blueFACTORY innovation park, its objective is to strengthen Swiss businesses’ capacity to innovate by carrying out research projects and offering integrative research and development (R&D) solutions. SICHH’s innovation methodology is based on integrating skills to carry out projects in its high-tech platforms. As a gateway for academic research to the private sector, SICHH supports innovation actors in the fields of medical technology, biotechnology, food technology and other fields related to human health.

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