

# University of Miami steps up innovation strategy and renames life science park



< 1 of 7 >

Healthsnap Solutions, a Miami health-tech startup that spawned from University of Miami research technology, is based at the Cambridge Innovation Center inside Converge Miami, formerly the UM Life Science & Technology Park. Back Row (left to right): Samson Magid (co-founder), Kelly Thornton, Misha Kerr (co-founder), Dr. Wesley Smith (co-founder); Front Row (left to right): Graham Salmun, Yenvy Truong (Co-founder and CEO), Celie Weaver, Chase Preston (co-founder). Healthsnap has created an assessment tool for healthcare providers. After filling out a 10-minute online questionnaire, a patient can leave the doctor's office with a report full of personalized dietetic and exercise information and advice. **CIC Miami**

BY NANCY DAHLBERG  
[ndahlberg@miamiherald.com](mailto:ndahlberg@miamiherald.com)

The University of Miami Life Science & Technology Park will be renamed Converge Miami to more inclusively brand the building for what the University of Miami hopes it will become: a hub of entrepreneurship and technology reaching across industries as well as geographies.

Inside Converge Miami is the Cambridge Innovation Center, or CIC Miami, which is running a 70,000-square-foot co-working center with open work areas, offices and labs for entrepreneurs and scientists. Converge Miami also houses Venture Cafe, a nonprofit that puts on programming and events for the

community, including its signature #ThursdayGathering, with talks, pitch nights, mentor and investor office hours, exhibitions and networking.

When the Converge Miami sign goes up on the six-story UMLSTP building facing Interstate 95, it might be one of the most visual symbols yet that University of Miami leadership is serious about innovation.

“CIC has one of the most impressive records of attracting the startup community, so they are a great tenant to have there,” UM President Dr. Julio Frenk said. “The idea is to signal that we are striving to have a space where innovators and entrepreneurs, healthcare experts, investors and established companies can all come together.”

[**Read more:** Cambridge Innovation Center makes big bet on Miami tech]



University of Miami President Julio Frenk

ADVERTISING

[Learn more](#)



To be sure, the rebranding is just one piece of Frenk’s larger innovation mission for the University of Miami .

“

**MY ASPIRATION FOR THE UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI IS THAT IT IS THE COMPREHENSIVE RESEARCH UNIVERSITY AT THE CENTER OF THE MIAMI INNOVATION HUB ... THAT WILL TRULY HAVE HEMISPHERIC REACH.**

Dr. Julio Frenk, University of Miami president

“For Miami, being the hemispheric innovation hub is a natural for economic development — Miami is the crossroads of the Americas and I do think it has huge potential,” Frenk said in an interview last week. “But if you look at any successful innovation ecosystem, there is always a comprehensive research university at its core. My aspiration for the University of Miami is that it is the comprehensive research university at the center of the Miami innovation hub ... that will truly have hemispheric reach.”

He said the major Latin American cities already have critical masses of engineers and scientists but they don’t have the other elements of a successful innovation ecosystem, such as suitable regulations and access to capital: “I think Miami can play the role of housing innovators from the hemisphere. I see UM as a magnet for some of that talent. ... We are partnering with the business community, government, the county and cities and other academic institutions.”

To be sure, UM has been a pioneer in innovation programs. Its Launch Pad, founded in 2008, was very innovative in its time, bringing in teams of mentors to help UM students and alumni develop concepts and connect with potential customers and funders. And The Launch Pad’s metrics are impressive.

According to William Silverman, director of The Launch Pad, since inception, The Launch Pad ([thelaunchpad.org](http://thelaunchpad.org)) has met with entrepreneurs with ideas for nearly 2,600 incipient companies. From those meetings, 385 startup companies emerged and have been assisted by The Launch Pad. At peak employment levels, those companies created nearly 1,200 jobs. In the past five years, companies started by clients of The Launch Pad have raised more than \$25 million in investment, Silverman said.

Milain David, a recent UM alumnus in economics and finance and founder of skin-care startup Eben Naturals, received strategic advice about business planning and researching the market from The Launch Pad for his. “It was like getting a very good business consulting firm, but for free.”

**[Read more:** How a trip to the Congo kickstarted a skincare startup.]

“The Launch Pad has become so successful that it is being replicated in other universities. It contributes to our educational mission with our students but it is also contributing to the economic development of the city and the county,” Frenk said.

The Launch Pad has been building bridges between departments and colleges to widen access to its services, and it is also starting a partnership with an incubator in Peru. “We will have opportunities to use their experts in Peru, and we’ll provide expertise to their entrepreneurs that want to break into the U.S.

market,” Silverman said. “We’re going to bring people to our summer programs on campus and we will be able to send people there as well.”

Over at Converge Miami and the nearby UM Miller School of Medicine, tech transfer has ramped up under the direction of Norma Kenyon, UM’s vice provost of innovation. Kenyon leads Frenk’s HIT (Hemispheric Innovation and Technology) Initiative to identify opportunities to translate discoveries into solutions, lending help with incubation, intellectual property development and capital raising.

So far, reviving tech transfer activities is working: In the past few years, there has been a dramatic spike in the number of companies started as well as patents and licenses issued. Some of these startups are working on treatments for cancer, spinal cord injuries, kidney disease and asthma as well as early detection of head and neck cancer and heart disease.

.....

**STARTUPS SPAWNED FROM UM RESEARCH AND TECHNOLOGY ARE WORKING ON TREATMENTS FOR CANCER, SPINAL CORD INJURIES, KIDNEY DISEASE AND ASTHMA AS WELL AS EARLY DETECTION OF HEAD AND NECK CANCER AND HEART DISEASE.**

---

The number of licensing agreements has increased, from 19 in 2013 to 32 this year. Kenyon’s team is currently working with 35 UM startups, up from 20 just two years ago, and they range from very early stage to one that is publicly traded.

Six UM startups have received funding from the Florida Institute for Commercialization of Public Research, including Vigilant Biosciences, which has developed a test for assessing a person’s risk of oral cancer. Vigilant recently received approval in Europe to market its product, and commercialization efforts are underway.

UM’s Wallace H. Coulter Center for Translational Research funds and supports promising biomedical research toward commercialization. These UM startups have received \$2.66 million in Coulter Center funding and more than \$96 million in follow-on funding, mostly from venture capitalists and angel investors, Kenyon said.

**[Read more: Q&A with Norma Kenyon, powering UM innovation]**

A recent \$100 million gift from Phillip and Patricia Frost is earmarked for basic science and engineering research that can translate into innovation, said Frenk, who led Harvard’s school of public health before coming to Miami.

Although 88 percent of the startups Kenyon's team currently works with are biomedical, innovation can come from anywhere. One of them stems from the College of Education.

Healthsnap Solutions has created a powerful assessment tool for healthcare providers. After filling out a 10-minute online questionnaire, a patient can leave her doctor's office with a report full of personalized dietetic and exercise information and advice, pulled by an algorithm from more than 500 research sources, said Yenvy Truong, CEO of the health-tech company and a UM biomedical alumna.

---

**HEALTHSNAP SOLUTIONS HAS  
CREATED A POWERFUL ASSESSMENT  
TOOL FOR HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS.**

---

The inventor of the technology, Dr. Wesley Smith, is chair of the exercise physiology program at the School of Education, and two of Healthsnap's other cofounders, Samson

Magid and Chase Preston, were his students. "It started as a service-based research project at UM. We assessed almost 2,000 University of Miami employees, professional athletes and UM athletes. We collected all this data and we still have ongoing studies now," Magid said.

Healthsnap co-founders came together with the help of Kenyon's team, and exclusively licensed the technology at the end of last year. Since then Kenyon's team has advised them and made introductions for the company as needed.

The initial assessment product launched in April to a group of doctors in South Florida, as the team continues to gather feedback. Now the company is working on the next version of Healthsnap's assessment, which will likely include a shorter questionnaire and more optional categories for targeted advice in particular areas, said Truong, who has worked in the anti-aging industry and has started other diagnostic companies. When Healthsnap rolls out the software product nationally, it will sign up doctors who will pay a subscription fee to use the tool.

Healthsnap, now with 10 employees, was one of the first companies to move into CIC's 6th floor in Converge Miami. Truong said the team likes being in the healthcare district and in a vibrant space with entrepreneurs from many industries. She also likes that UM is a strong partner in the team's success. "We want to be an example university company."

With Converge Miami's Building 1 now fully leased with CIC Miami ([miami.cic.us](http://miami.cic.us)) at 1951 NW 7th Ave., Building 2 is in the planning stages.

"Innovation and entrepreneurship need to be part of the education of every student," Frenk said. "We owe it to our community for the economic development of Miami to play a

major role in innovation.”

*Nancy Dahlberg: 305-376-3595, @ndahlberg*

### Read more:

**Florida International University:** Blastoff for StartUP FIU, with food, art and tech incubators on way

**Miami Dade College:** At the Idea Center, innovation is everywhere, even on skateboards

## MORE EDUCATION

---

### YOU MAY LIKE

Sponsored Links by Taboola

#### Veterans Day Sale Prices on Dining Rooms

Rooms to Go

#### Remember Barbi Benton? What She Looks Like Today Is Unbelievable

Viralbasset

#### 17 Final Photos Taken Before Tragedy Struck

Trend Chaser

#### Man afraid of flying dies on first flight

OddChatter

## COMMENTS

0 Comments

Sort by



Add a comment...


 Facebook Comments Plugin

### Chicago Cubs Victory Celebration

CHICAGO, IL - NOVEMBER 04: Ben Zobrist #18 of the Chicago Cubs waves to...





Powered By 

---