

IN CONVERSATION WITH JOHN STEWART

FROM MOLECULE TO MARKET

OCTOBER 26-28, 2026 | BOSTON

FROM MOLECULE TO MARKET

In Conversation with John Stewart, Senior Director, One Health Innovation District and Economic Development, Elanco

Ahead of AHNTI Boston, we sat down with John Stewart, Senior Director for the One Health Innovation District and Economic Development at Elanco, to talk about his move from government affairs into ecosystem building, and the district Elanco is developing with Purdue University around its Indianapolis headquarters.

We covered what it takes to get human, animal and plant health working as one ecosystem, how the district aims to move companies faster through the inflection points between molecule and market, and why he believes Indianapolis has undersold itself as a home for the life sciences.



John Stewart, Senior Director, One Health Innovation District and Economic Development, Elanco



NIAMH GALLAGHER

LEAD PRODUCER, AHNTI
KISACO RESEARCH

ON THE PATH INTO THE ROLE

Niamh: To begin, can you describe your current role and your journey to how you got here today?

John: Currently, I'm the Senior Director for the One Health Innovation District and Economic Development for Elanco. My primary responsibility is the development, building and securing of the One Health Innovation District around our corporate headquarters in Indianapolis, Indiana. Prior to that role, most of my career has been in government affairs. I spent six years at Elanco advocating to policymakers in the US, as well as in Canada, federally and provincially, on a variety of issues that are important to our customers and to Elanco's portfolio. I started my career in Washington, DC. I worked on Capitol Hill for a congressman, and then joined a trade association, lobbying on behalf of animal food and ingredient companies, including Elanco. I still do part of that work today, but I spend a lot more time in business development, real estate and some other things too.

ON BUILDING AN ECOSYSTEM

Niamh: What drew you to this kind of ecosystem-building work, rather than a more traditional role in animal health or government?

John: I think it's a couple of things. One is that our industry is such a unique opportunity and intersection. It sits alongside traditional pharmaceuticals, but has a very different marketplace: it's mostly a cash business as compared to a payer market. And we get access to innovation across pharmaceuticals and the broader life sciences, crop and agricultural health. That's a pretty unique position for an industry to be in, where we can work across all those innovation platforms, and the opportunity that creates for us to deliver solutions for animals.

I also think that even though we're in the animal business, it's really a people business.

There's the chance to work with some of the

best minds, solving real, complex challenges from different perspectives. In the One Health Innovation District we're not only working with university partners, we're working with industry partners, nonprofit think tanks and government, and asking how we help align and articulate the vision, and then provide solutions. Our whole perspective is: in what ways, across human, animal and plant health, can we bring innovation to market faster? And really the genesis of that is whether we're able to create outcomes and solve problems.

ON THE DISTRICT, DAY TO DAY

Niamh: What does your role at the One Health Innovation District look like day to day?

John: I lead that effort on behalf of Elanco, and I'd break it into a few categories. The first, and maybe the most important, is our work with Purdue University: the partnership we have with Purdue here in Indianapolis as they think about their campus expansion, and how we bring a world-class institution like Purdue to bear to help companies and ideas go from what we call molecule to market. How do we help grow an incubated idea into a real-world, practical solution?

The second part is thinking about what other ecosystem players we want in that space. In fact, I just left a meeting with two startups. One has technology currently available in human health, but sees an animal health application. The other is already an animal health company, and wants to be part of this ecosystem. What I find most interesting is that it's not an incentives question. They're not looking for a handout. Obviously, all those startups are looking for capital as they progress their business, but it's much more about what kind of partnership they can create with Elanco as a commercial leader, to help bring a product to market, and with Purdue as a research institution, to find the right talent.

The third part, and I think a lot of times in innovation districts we think about this backwards, is the real estate function. I'm not a real estate agent; it's not my background, but I've got a good team around me on how we make decisions for facilities that support the businesses, rather than the other way around. If real estate isn't serving the purpose of the business, and it's not intentional about creating collaboration, networking and the right programming around these small, mid and large companies and their university integration, then we're not doing our job.

ON THE HARDEST PART

Niamh: What's the hardest part of getting institutions like Purdue, Elanco and future partners to function as one ecosystem?

John: I don't know that there's any one singular problem, because we all look at every piece of that business model differently. Questions come up about how we protect our IP, whether that's us at Elanco or a small startup, and we solve for those challenges. Building buildings is hard. It's not easy and it's certainly not free, so the business model for some of this is a big piece. Elanco and Purdue are massive institutions, so how we continue to stay agile, nimble and responsive, and solve the problems of the partners who want to be part of this district, is a focus area for us. There are certainly challenges, and I think we rise to meet those.

ON ONE HEALTH IN PRACTICE

Niamh: How would a startup benefit from being close, physically and intellectually, to human medical and plant science research, as opposed to just working with animal health peers?

John: For decades, and maybe longer, all three of those industries have borrowed from or spun out of one another. If we think about the three largest players here in Indianapolis, Elanco spun out of Eli Lilly, and it's still in our name today. That happened in 2018, so for almost a decade we've been independent, but it's no secret that a lot of technology comes out of human pharmaceuticals

and vice versa. Corteva, and its leadership in this space, was at one time DowElanco. A classic example is probably spinosad. We saw it first used in crop protection, then in animal health, and now it's being used in human health to treat eye mites. But the timeline to get across all those verticals was long. Our value proposition is that by bringing human, animal and plant health together in a connected way, we can speed innovation across multiple verticals simultaneously.

ON MOLECULE TO MARKET

Niamh: How does working with the innovation district look different from working with another hub or commercialisation group?

John: I think it depends on the company and on their objectives. That's a very government affairs answer, but I think it does. If you're an incubated company with an idea for a molecule, we can lend expertise on what the marketplace might accept in that space, or what demand looks like from a forecasting perspective. Companies get to inflection points with whatever their technology is, and for us it's about helping them move faster through those inflection points. Can we get to proof of concept faster? What technology and what assets can we bring to bear to do that? Once past that point, it's about what has to exist for this product to be successful in the market. It's not as simple as how we get to a regulatory approval faster. That's part of the equation, but so is the outcome we're looking for, and whether the marketplace is ready for it.

Ultimately, we want everybody to have what I'll call an exit strategy. That term gets used to mean selling or licensing an asset, closing a business down or getting acquired. It can be that, but I think the exit strategy is what it looks like when this product finally makes it into the marketplace. Is that through a partnership, an acquisition, or staying independent and building your own capacity?

One of the most interesting things we're building now is a turnkey solution. Our HQ building is the first building in the district and we're breaking ground on the second this month: a shared-use office and lab space. A company shows up and we can provide whatever lab and office space they might need. But the most important part is the programming: how we help that company access other expertise inside the district. We're also partnering with Purdue's College of Veterinary Medicine on how we perform research trials, and on continuing education for veterinarians and current veterinary students. The last piece is what we call the pilot scale-up studio: a space where we can grow and batch product, demonstrate efficacy in a manufacturing setting, and batch enough product to put into clinical trials. We see that as a major gap, particularly in animal health. Providing those solutions doesn't necessarily mean Elanco has an equity stake in that company at all. We want to help the industry grow, and providing the right facilities and expertise is part of how we do that.

ON WHY INDIANAPOLIS

Niamh: There are a number of innovation hubs across the country. Why Indianapolis in particular, when you're converging these three industries?

John: There are several reasons. Some have to do with the legacy of the companies already here: Lilly, Elanco, Corteva, and Roche, which has its US headquarters operation here. Indianapolis is a powerhouse when it comes to life sciences. There's an expertise here that doesn't exist anywhere else in

the world in such a concentrated way. We're not only good at ideation, we're also really good at manufacturing and distribution. Our ability to invent, make and move product is unlike anywhere else. Indiana is the number one state for pharmaceutical exports, and we're about a day's drive from 70 percent of the US population.

"Our ability to invent, make and move product is unlike anywhere else."

I'd be remiss if I didn't mention our universities. Purdue is probably one of the most globally recognised public university brands, with well over a billion dollars annually in research expenditure, and IU has the largest medical school in the country. Any one of those as a snapshot probably doesn't sell you on Indianapolis, but when you bring all those pieces together, you start to see the opportunity. Frankly, Indianapolis has probably undersold itself.

We're on about 70 acres right in the middle of downtown. I'm literally a ten-minute walk from major sports franchises, restaurants and hospitality. The build-out of the district will be mixed-use retail and residential. We want people to be here 24 hours a day, not just as an obligation to come to work.

"Frankly, Indianapolis has probably undersold itself."

ON FIVE YEARS FROM NOW

Niamh: Thinking big picture, what would have to be true in five years' time for this to be a success?

John: We're on target to have the first research building open by 2030, so that's going to be a big milestone. What we want to see is companies fully taking advantage of the opportunity here, with Elanco as a commercial partner and Purdue and others as a networked partner opportunity. By that five-year timeline, we would love to see innovation in the marketplace. Over the last few weeks I've talked to I don't know how many startups with really neat and novel technologies. Some are very early ideas; some are almost through a regulatory submission.

The discipline across those three verticals is where the real magic happens. How might we pursue multiple regulatory approvals for a product? How can we distinguish the microbiome in the rumen of a cow from the microbiome of soil, and make incremental improvements to the integrity of both, producing a better output for that cow and for the crops that may end up feeding it? You'll see technology borrowed, acquired or licensed, but we want to get ahead of that and ask how we can improve the R&D pipeline for innovation across multiple verticals, and accelerate the pace at which it gets to market.

In five years we also want places for people to live, work and play. We want people to be excited not only about the work they're doing, but the place they get to do it.

"The discipline across those three verticals is where the real magic happens."



JOIN US AT AHNTI 2026

AHNTI US returns to Boston, October 26-28 2026.

Now spanning the full animal health value chain: from discovery and development through to the delivery of care, AHNTI US brings together the founders, investors, scientists, veterinary leaders, and strategists shaping the future of animal health. From biopharma and diagnostics to nutrition, technology, and the business of veterinary care, this is where the ecosystem connects.

Whether you are bringing a product to market, looking to fuel your pipeline, investing in the next wave of innovation, or navigating how care is delivered on-farm and in clinic, AHNTI 2026 is where the conversations that matter happen.

FIND OUT MORE AND REGISTER YOUR INTEREST AT [AHNTI-US.COM](https://ahnti-us.com)