PHARMACEUTICAL COOPERATION BETWEEN SEATTLE AND TASHKENT: BUILDING ON A HALF-CENTURY SISTER-CITY PARTNERSHIP

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Abstract: This article examines the prospects for pharmaceutical and life-sciences cooperation between Seattle, United States, and Tashkent, Uzbekistan, viewed against the background of the two cities' longstanding sister-city relationship established in 1973. The study reviews the history of the Seattle-Tashkent Sister City Association, including past exchanges between physicians and health professionals and the University of Washington-Tashkent State University partnership, and analyzes Seattle's standing as one of the leading biotechnology and life-sciences clusters in the United States, anchored by the University of Washington School of Pharmacy, the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Center and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's global health programs. It further examines the development of Tashkent's own pharmaceutical infrastructure, including the Tashkent Pharmaceutical Institute and the Tashkent Pharma Park cluster. The findings suggest that the existing citizen-diplomacy framework between the two cities, combined with Seattle's global-health orientation and Tashkent's expanding pharmaceutical production base, provides an unusually strong and underused foundation for translating a decades-old civic friendship into concrete pharmaceutical, academic and public-health cooperation.
Keywords: Uzbekistan, United States, Seattle, Tashkent, sister city, pharmaceutical industry, global health, biotechnology, Tashkent Pharma Park, University of Washington.

INTRODUCTION

Relations between Uzbekistan and the United States have traditionally been analyzed at the level of national governments and federal agencies. Yet one of the oldest and most continuous threads connecting the two countries operates at the municipal level: the sister-city partnership between Seattle, Washington, and Tashkent, Uzbekistan, established in January 1973 as the first city-to-city affiliation between the United States and the Soviet Union. This relationship has persisted for more than five decades, surviving the Cold War, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and the dissolution of the USSR, and it continues today under the auspices of the Seattle-Tashkent Sister City Association.

What makes this partnership particularly relevant to the pharmaceutical field is the character of the two cities involved. Seattle has developed into one of the leading biotechnology and life-sciences hubs in the United States, while Tashkent has, in the past decade, become the largest pharmaceutical manufacturing center in Central Asia. The purpose of this article is to examine the history of the Seattle-Tashkent civic relationship, assess Seattle's pharmaceutical and life-sciences potential, and identify concrete directions in which this longstanding sister-city framework could be used to deepen pharmaceutical cooperation between Uzbekistan and the United States.

The object of the study is the institutional and civic ties between Seattle and Tashkent; its subject is the potential for channeling these ties into pharmaceutical research, education and industrial cooperation.

MAIN PART

A half-century of citizen diplomacy between Seattle and Tashkent

The Seattle-Tashkent Sister City Association traces its origins to a 1971 visit by the mayor of Tashkent to Seattle, which led the Seattle City Council to formally adopt Tashkent as a sister city in January 1973, making it the first Soviet-American sister-city affiliation in history. Over the following decades, the association organized exchanges involving schoolchildren, teachers, physicians, chefs, lawyers, broadcasters and mountain climbers, and in 1988 it worked with Seattle volunteers to help design the Seattle Peace Park in Tashkent, while a Tashkent Park was established in Seattle's Capitol Hill neighborhood.

Notably for the pharmaceutical and medical field, the association's activities have historically included exchanges in health care and medical relief, as well as an academic partnership between the University of Washington and Tashkent State University. Following Uzbekistan's independence in 1991, the relationship continued without interruption, and in 2023 the two cities marked fifty years of continuous civic partnership. This sustained institutional memory, built through decades of physician and academic exchange, represents a distinctive asset that few other American-Uzbek city pairings possess.

Seattle as a center of pharmaceutical and life-sciences research

Greater Seattle ranks among the top ten biotechnology and life-sciences clusters in the United States, with more than 42,000 jobs and nearly 9.3 million square feet of research and laboratory space as of 2024. The region's strength rests on a close relationship between academia and industry, anchored by the University of Washington School of Pharmacy, one of the top-ranked pharmacy schools in the country, and by the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Center, a National Cancer Institute-designated center whose campus anchors what is often described as Seattle's biotech corridor.

Seattle is also a global center for public-health-oriented pharmaceutical research, hosting the global health programs of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation alongside the University of Washington's Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation. Washington State's research institutions collectively receive close to 1.4 billion US dollars in annual federal life-sciences funding, and in 2025 alone the state's life-sciences sector attracted approximately 1.46 billion US dollars in venture investment across thirty-five deals. This concentration of pharmaceutical research capacity, global health expertise and investment capital positions Seattle as a natural potential partner for countries seeking to strengthen their own pharmaceutical research and regulatory systems.

Tashkent's growing pharmaceutical industry

Tashkent has emerged as the center of Uzbekistan's rapidly expanding pharmaceutical sector. The Tashkent Pharmaceutical Institute, founded in 1937, remains the only specialized pharmaceutical higher education institution in Central Asia, while the Tashkent Pharma Park, an innovative scientific and industrial cluster supported by approximately 1.2 billion euros in state investment, is intended to bring local manufacturing into alignment with internationally recognized quality standards through its planned Pharmacopoeia Center.

With more than 220 private pharmaceutical manufacturers now operating in Uzbekistan, the country has become the largest pharmaceutical producer in Central Asia. This growth creates a natural counterpart to Seattle's research and innovation base: while Seattle institutions bring strength in drug discovery, health economics and global health research, Tashkent brings expanding manufacturing capacity and a strategic position serving Central Asian and neighboring markets.

From civic friendship to pharmaceutical partnership: concrete directions

Several directions appear promising for translating the Seattle-Tashkent sister-city relationship into substantive pharmaceutical cooperation. First, the existing academic channel between the University of Washington and Tashkent State University could be extended to include the University of Washington School of Pharmacy and the Tashkent Pharmaceutical Institute, building on the historical precedent of physician exchanges organized by the Seattle-Tashkent Sister City Association.

Second, Seattle's global health institutions, including the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, have a long track record of engagement with health systems in developing and middle-income countries; similar engagement focused on pharmaceutical access, quality assurance and health economics could be explored for Uzbekistan. Third, given Fred Hutch's expertise in specialty pharmacy and clinical trial management under Good Clinical Practice standards, targeted training exchanges could support the development of clinical research capacity at Tashkent Pharma Park's planned research facilities.

Finally, the Seattle-Tashkent Sister City Association itself, as an established and government-recognized citizen-diplomacy organization, could serve as a convening platform for structured business and academic delegations focused specifically on pharmaceuticals and life sciences, building on more than fifty years of accumulated trust between the two cities.

CONCLUSION

The relationship between Seattle and Tashkent is unusual among Uzbek-American city ties in both its length and its institutional depth, having endured for more than fifty years since becoming the first Soviet-American sister-city partnership in 1973. This civic foundation, combined with Seattle's position as one of the leading pharmaceutical and life-sciences hubs in the United States and Tashkent's rapidly developing pharmaceutical manufacturing base, creates conditions for a partnership that goes well beyond cultural exchange.

Realizing this potential will require deliberate effort to connect the two cities' pharmaceutical institutions directly, extending a fifty-year civic friendship into the domains of pharmaceutical education, clinical research and global health cooperation. Given the existing trust and institutional memory built by the Seattle-Tashkent Sister City Association, the pharmaceutical dimension of this relationship represents a significant and currently underutilized opportunity for both cities.

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