

Valney Suzuki - VP & GM, Novo Nordisk Mexico



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Valney Suzuki highlights his focus on expanding access to Novo Nordisk's innovations in Mexico, especially for vulnerable populations; the importance of ethical usage of the company's groundbreaking semaglutide-based treatments for diabetes and obesity; and Mexico's crucial role in Novo Nordisk's global operations, not just as a market but also in terms of clinical trials and research. The company is investing in a new global business center in Mexico, which will support North and Latin American operations, further cementing the country's strategic importance.

How has your career evolved over the years and how have you experienced Novo Nordisk's transformation from a niche player to a global leader?

It has been quite a journey. I joined Novo Nordisk 13 years ago in Brazil, where I started in the rare disease business unit, handling marketing and sales. I then moved into roles focusing on market access and public affairs, eventually overseeing the entire sales organization in Brazil. After six years there, I was appointed as General Manager in Colombia, a position I held for four and a half years. Following that, I was invited to take on the role of leading our operations in Mexico, where I have been for the past two and a half years.

Throughout these years, I have witnessed Novo Nordisk's incredible transformation. When I joined, the company was already a leader in diabetes care but still largely seen as a niche player. Today, we have grown into a global protagonist, with our products recognized and used worldwide. This

growth brings with it a great deal of responsibility, and what I find particularly meaningful is our strong social pillar. Novo Nordisk isn't just about selling products and technology; we have a deep commitment to adding value to society.

Diabetes and obesity have become global health crises, and we are tackling these challenges directly. We are especially proud of our alliance with UNICEF, which has been ongoing for three to four years. This partnership focuses on tackling childhood obesity, a significant issue here. We know that by addressing obesity in childhood, we can likely prevent it in adulthood as well, contributing to long-term health improvements. This social responsibility is deeply embedded in our DNA, and it is something I am proud to be part of.

When you took over the Mexican affiliate in 2021, what was your primary agenda, and what initiatives have you implemented since your arrival?

Mexico is a vast country, and Novo Nordisk has been here for 20 years—this year marks our 20th anniversary, in fact, which we are very proud of. Over the years, we have launched numerous innovative products, but there were challenges in expanding access to a broader segment of the population.

When I arrived in 2021, one of my main focuses was on improving access, particularly for vulnerable populations, and ensuring that our innovations reached those who needed them most. I am pleased to share that in the past two and a half years, we have made significant strides in this area. We have successfully expanded access and integrated our products into the public healthcare setting, reaching around 100,000 patients with our innovations. This has been a mission for me, and while there is still more to do, I am very proud of what the team has achieved so far.

What is the balance between your portfolio that is covered by government programs versus those that are out-of-pocket expenses for patients?

Currently, our portfolio is split about 50-50 between government coverage and out-of-pocket expenses. This is something I am particularly proud of, as it is a significant achievement given the complexities involved.

Many of my colleagues in the industry are hesitant to work with the government due to the challenges it presents. But for us at Novo Nordisk, it is part of our mission to identify and support

the most vulnerable populations. Our goal is to collaborate with various stakeholders in Mexico—government officials, healthcare professionals, payers, and society at large—to provide access to those who need it most.

It is about reaching the people who can't afford medicine and need our help and support. We are committed to leveraging prevention as the best form of medicine and ensuring that access is not just a privilege for the few but a right for all, especially the most vulnerable.

You mentioned earlier that diabetes, much like obesity, has become a pandemic in Mexico. With 50% of your portfolio now tied to government programs, do you feel that the government is truly addressing this issue? Is there a dedicated policy for diabetes, and how has your advocacy influenced this journey?

Unfortunately, diabetes is indeed growing in Mexico, and the situation is alarming. Obesity and overweight, of the adult population is affected. This is a staggering figure when compared globally.

The government is making efforts to address these issues, and that is why we are involved in initiatives like our alliance with UNICEF and the "Cities for Better Health" project, or *Ciudades Más Saludables*. This project, particularly active in Merida since around 2019 or 2020, aims to understand the environmental factors contributing to diabetes and obesity, and collaborates with government officials to focus on prevention.

While it is crucial to innovate in terms of treatments, it is equally important to focus on education, nutrition, diet, and exercise. That is why we also have a patient support program called *Nuevo Yo*, which helps patients learn how to eat well, understand the importance of exercise, and even addresses the psychological and emotional aspects of managing a chronic disease like diabetes.

So, while awareness and education are vital, the innovation we bring to the table is essential for tackling this pandemic. It is about a holistic approach, where prevention and treatment go hand in hand to make a real difference in the lives of those affected in Mexico.

In numerous countries, obesity isn't even recognized as a disease and is instead dismissed as a lifestyle choice. What is your perspective on how obesity is viewed and treated in Mexico?

We are making progress in raising awareness about obesity, but there is still a long way to go. As you have pointed out, this is a global issue—just 10 years ago, the situation was even worse. Nowadays, there is a bit more consciousness about obesity as a serious health issue, and media coverage, have certainly helped. However, we are still not where we need to be.

It is not just about the physicians or medical associations, nor solely the responsibility of pharmaceutical companies or governments. Every stakeholder in the healthcare system—across all countries—needs to take on a more proactive role. Without collective effort and increased awareness, we will not be able to change the dramatic situation we are facing with obesity.

Both of Novo Nordisk's semaglutide-based diabetes/obesity treatments are approved in Mexico. How have they been performing thus far?

Semaglutide, which is the active ingredient in these medications, represents a significant innovation in the industry worldwide. From what I have observed, healthcare professionals are very enthusiastic about it. While saying they are “in love” with the medication might be too strong, they certainly regard semaglutide as an excellent tool for providing the best care to their patients, backed by solid scientific evidence. It is truly helping healthcare professionals deliver more value to their patients.

How does Novo Nordisk address this issue ethically? How do you work with both patients and doctors to ensure the product is used correctly?

We take this very seriously and advocate for the proper use of our medications. Our approach is rooted in science, and we strictly adhere to what has been approved by our regulatory body, COFEPRIS, here in Mexico. This scientific guidance is what we share with doctors, and we fully expect that they follow this science in their practice. It is crucial for us to maintain this approach, as it not only ensures the correct use of the medication but also upholds our reputation as a responsible pharmaceutical company.

Another crucial topic for the industry is clinical trials. Where does Novo Nordisk stand in Mexico in this regard? Is the country considered a significant player in global trials for the company, or how do you see Mexico's role?

Mexico is indeed a key player in our global clinical trials. As an innovative company, our lifeblood is innovation, and we invest heavily in the development of new drugs and technologies. Mexico plays an important role in this process. Over the last three to four years, we have invested around 600 million Mexican pesos in clinical trials here.

We have also partnered with approximately 30 scientific centers across the country to conduct these trials. This level of involvement requires significant investment in our local teams as well, ensuring they are well-equipped to carry out these trials effectively and contribute meaningfully to Novo Nordisk's global research efforts.

In the competitive landscape of diabetes and obesity treatments, how does Novo Nordisk differentiate itself from other companies in Mexico?

Our differentiation primarily stems from two key aspects: science and reputation. Firstly, our commitment to scientific excellence is evident in our innovative developments and the results of our clinical trials. Both physicians and patients appreciate the added value our medications bring, which sets us apart in terms of product efficacy and satisfaction.

Secondly, our company's reputation plays a crucial role. Novo Nordisk is known for its dedication to societal contributions and joint efforts with communities, which fosters trust and reliability. People generally prefer products from companies they perceive as reliable and trustworthy.

Novo Nordisk CEO Lars Fruergaard Jørgensen has stressed the importance of maintaining the company's key values as it expands. How do you ensure that these values and the company culture are effectively transmitted within your Mexican operation?

Our culture is at the heart of everything we do. We pride ourselves on creating a great workplace environment, which has been recognized as one of the top places to work among mid-sized companies in Mexico. This recognition, achieved in 2021, 2022 and 2023, reflects our commitment to not only developing effective drugs but also fostering a supportive and respectful work environment.

We strive to instill our values throughout the organization, treating every individual with respect and emphasizing that each person is more than just a number. This approach helps our team feel

integral to our mission and purpose. By maintaining open communication and embodying these values, we ensure that our Mexican operation reflects the strong, values-driven culture that Novo Nordisk is known for globally.

As Novo Nordisk celebrates its 20 years in Mexico, what are your future plans for the country, and how does Novo Nordisk see Mexico contributing to its global objectives?

For Novo Nordisk, our goal is not just to maintain our presence but to expand it further. In addition to our ongoing pharmaceutical operations, we are excited to announce the opening of a global business center in Mexico. This new hub will contribute significantly by adding around 300 new roles, which will support both North and Latin American operations.

Mexico was chosen from several countries in Latin America due to its advantageous geography and the high quality of its labor. The project is already underway, and we expect to have all 300 positions filled by the first half of next year. This expansion also includes relocating to a new office, which will be part of our 20-year celebration in Mexico.

You have had extensive experience in Latin America, having worked in Brazil, Colombia, and now Mexico. What are your expectations for Novo Nordisk's operations in these regions over the next three years?

I am very optimistic about the future. Mexico has become a key contributor to our LATAM growth, and I expect this trend to continue. Over the past two years, we have seen significant progress and growth in Mexico, which has been a major asset to our operations. I believe Mexico will remain one of the most important players in the LATAM region, second only to Brazil, as we move forward.

As we conclude, what message would you like to leave for our global readers?

My message is to be mindful of your personal health and that of your loved ones. Prioritize healthy eating, regular exercise, and mental well-being. The pandemic has underscored the importance of these aspects of health.

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