

Juan Ignacio Diddi - General Manager, BMS Puerto Rico & Caribbean



By joining forces—across sectors, across regions—we can make a real difference in improving access to life-saving treatments for people around the world

11.12.2024

Tags: [Puerto Rico](#), [BMS](#), [Strategy](#), [Access](#), [Talent](#), [Innovation](#)

Juan Ignacio Diddi, GM of BMS Puerto Rico & Caribbean, has over 20 years of experience in the pharmaceutical industry, having held various roles across Latin America before taking on the role leading BMS Puerto Rico and the Caribbean in 2022. He focuses on ensuring early access to therapies, fostering talent development and innovation, and strengthening the company's position in oncology, haematology, cardiovascular, neuroscience and immunology. Under his leadership, BMS Puerto Rico has advanced in improving patient outcomes, and expanding clinical trials diversity while promoting diversity and inclusivity, with the company being recognised as one of the best workplaces for women.

HORSE Influence has recognized him among the Top 100 Change Maker CEOs in Latin America and the Top 100 Most Influential CEOs in Argentina. His leadership is marked by a commitment to diversity, inclusion, and building a more equitable society, which he sees as key to creating long-lasting, meaningful change.

To start, could you give our readers, particularly those with a global perspective, an overview of your career journey and your current role at BMS Puerto Rico?

With over 20 years in the pharmaceutical industry, I have held various roles across diverse markets. My decision to join this field was deeply influenced by my parents: my father, a cancer

survivor whose resilience inspired my focus on oncology, and my mother, a pioneering leader in Argentina who faced challenges in promoting diversity and inclusion.

I began my career at Roche, then moved to AstraZeneca, where I took my first leadership role in market access. Thirteen years ago, I joined BMS, driven by the opportunity to launch transformative immunotherapies like Yervoy and Opdivo in Argentina. Over time, I transitioned from market access to commercial roles, managing portfolios in HIV, immunology, and transplantation. In 2019, I became General Manager for Argentina, Chile, and Peru, which broadened my understanding of regional markets.

In 2022, I was honoured to be appointed General Manager for BMS Puerto Rico, a market filled with exciting opportunities for product launches, talent development, and innovation. My focus is to ensure early access to groundbreaking therapies, foster a high-performing team, and strengthen collaborations with stakeholders to drive impactful results for patients and our health care ecosystem

Externally, I have been highly involved in shaping a more equitable and sustainable healthcare system, with roles in various pharmaceutical chambers across Latin America.

Recently, I was elected President of the Board of Directors of the Pharmaceutical Industry Association in Puerto Rico. I am honored to represent this sector, which makes substantial and far-reaching contributions to Puerto Rico. The pharmaceutical industry drives economic growth, enhances healthcare quality, and actively supports community development, making it a cornerstone of the island's prosperity and well-being.

This sector generates around \$32 billion in economic activity and pays \$3.1 billion in payroll. PIA members create 18,000 direct jobs with an average salary of \$80,000, which is four times the average salary in Puerto Rico. These highly specialized and well-paid jobs contribute an estimated \$150 million in taxes paid by our employees. Indirect employment rises to 69,000.

The industry is also a large contributor to philanthropic initiatives in the island such as the United Way PR (where individual donations are matched by the companies) and relief funds for natural disasters such as Hurricane Maria in the past.

There is no question that our sector has been, and continues to be, Puerto Rico's economic engine and the most critical economic development sector for its long-term financial stability.

I am committed to driving innovation, fostering talent, and ensuring that our contributions continue to make a significant impact on both the healthcare system and the broader community.

BMS CEO Chris Boerner recently highlighted significant advancements in oncology, cardiovascular, and neurology portfolios. How does this transformation manifest in Puerto Rico?

Puerto Rico plays a unique role as an associated state of the US. We adhere to FDA guidelines, which allow us to launch therapies at the same time as the US market.

While Puerto Rico is part of the Latin American region at BMS, we maintain close collaboration with our US organisation. This dual affiliation enables us to leverage insights and best practices from both regions, strengthening our ability to deliver high-impact therapies to patients here.

Our operations are organised into two business units: one focusing on oncology, haematology, and cell therapy, and the other on cardiovascular, immunology, and neuroscience. This structure enables us to manage a diverse and robust portfolio, bringing the same innovative treatments available globally to patients in Puerto Rico.

Additionally, as part of the broader Latin America team, we contribute to and benefit from shared learnings and strategies. This dual role strengthens our capacity to adapt global insights to local needs, ensuring that innovations reach patients as quickly as possible.

Puerto Rico also plays a significant role in BMS's global manufacturing footprint. How does the production of some of your best-selling drugs align with the activities of your affiliate?

Our manufacturing presence is integral to our success. BMS Puerto Rico operates a facility in Manatí, which produces some of our most critical therapies, including Opdivo, Yervoy, and Orencina, for over 100 countries. This makes us a vital player in BMS's global supply chain.

However, our operations go beyond production. We work seamlessly across manufacturing and commercial teams, ensuring that we deliver high-quality medicines efficiently and that these reach patients without unnecessary delays. For instance, our commercial teams collaborate closely with stakeholders to facilitate early access to innovations while supporting community initiatives.

Our commitment to Puerto Rico also extends to societal contributions. We partner with NGOs, government agencies, and other organisations to raise awareness about diseases and provide support to underserved populations. Recently, BMS Puerto Rico was recognised as one of the top

employers for women by Women Who Lead. This reflects our inclusive and empowering workplace culture.

What makes the BMS affiliate in Puerto Rico so significant within the company's global business model, particularly in comparison to other centres of excellence or affiliates?

Puerto Rico is a very important market for BMS and its importance stems from several key factors. The first is the speed of launches. Because we follow FDA regulations, we can launch therapies in Puerto Rico at the same time as in the US. This ability to bring medicines to patients quickly is crucial and sets us apart from other markets in the region.

The second factor is our collaboration with local stakeholders, which allows us to navigate the unique dynamics of Puerto Rico's healthcare ecosystem. While the system shares similarities with that of the US, it also has distinct local regulations and decision-making processes. Working closely with the medical community and health plans, we ensure that patients have access to innovations without unnecessary delays.

Lastly, and most importantly, our teams here are exceptional. They are the driving force behind everything we achieve, making it possible for us to deliver life-changing therapies to patients and support the broader community. Their dedication and expertise are what truly make the Puerto Rico affiliate a standout within BMS.

Puerto Rico benefits from FDA alignment, enabling faster access to innovations. How does this advantage translate into improved access to therapies, and what role does pricing play in the equation?

Puerto Rico's FDA alignment provides a significant advantage, enabling us to launch therapies simultaneously with the US and bypass the long wait times often seen in other markets. However, market access involves more than just regulatory approval—it requires a multi-faceted approach.

First, clinical trials play a crucial role. We are committed to fostering diversity in clinical research, and over the past year, we have increased clinical trials by 20%. This growth not only gives patients early access to groundbreaking therapies but also facilitates knowledge transfer within the local medical community, strengthening infrastructure essential for ongoing success.

The second priority is addressing access challenges in underserved communities. With a poverty rate of 40%, Puerto Rico faces significant socioeconomic barriers. Our patient support programmes tackle every aspect of the patient journey, including financial assistance, ensuring therapies reach those in need.

Lastly, pricing and sustainability are universal challenges. We work closely with governments and healthcare systems to balance innovation with affordability, developing sustainable access models that meet local needs while ensuring the viability of healthcare systems. As Puerto Rico navigates a period of political transition, we continue collaborating with policymakers to ensure patient-centric healthcare. Ultimately, our mission remains clear: to ensure that the right patients receive the right treatments at the right time, in a way that is both equitable and sustainable.

BMS has two CAR T cell therapies approved in Puerto Rico. How is the company addressing the complexity and cost of bringing these therapies to patients?

CAR T cell therapy, such as Breyanzi and Abecma, is an advanced and complex treatment that has been available in Puerto Rico since 2019. However, until recently, patients had to travel to the US to receive these therapies, creating significant barriers for many. Recognising the urgent need for local access, BMS began collaborating with Auxilio Mutuo, Puerto Rico's leading oncology centre, to establish the island's first CAR T treatment facility. After two years of intensive collaboration, Auxilio Mutuo became the first institution in Puerto Rico to be certified to administer these therapies, enabling patients to receive life-saving treatments without leaving the island. This milestone not only alleviates financial and logistical challenges for patients but also strengthens the local healthcare system by eliminating the need for costly patient transfers to the US. This achievement underscores BMS's commitment to enhancing access to innovative therapies through both internal and external collaboration, benefiting the entire Puerto Rican healthcare community.

In a challenging global financial environment, with many products losing exclusivity, how empowered are country managers like yourself to innovate and maintain growth while ensuring patient access to new therapies?

The healthcare landscape is undergoing rapid transformation, and within this dynamic environment, loss of exclusivity (LOE) is a natural part of a product's lifecycle. We view these changes not as setbacks, but as opportunities for innovation. Our diversified portfolio, which is

focused on addressing real medical needs, allows us to pivot and continue driving progress. For example, our recent expansion into psychiatry opens new avenues to address global mental health challenges, while in oncology and haematology, we are strengthening our leadership with CAR T therapies. Additionally, our cardiovascular portfolio remains a key pillar of success, and we continue to make significant progress in immunology and neuroscience. As we navigate the evolving product lifecycle, we remain committed to innovation, ensuring access through collaboration with stakeholders and ongoing clinical trials, and ultimately providing patients with the latest therapies. This approach will allow us to continue making a lasting impact both now and in the future.

You have mentioned that BMS conducts clinical trials in Puerto Rico. Coming from Argentina, a country known for its robust clinical trial infrastructure, do you see Puerto Rico following a similar path? What does Puerto Rico have to offer in this regard?

Puerto Rico offers a tremendous opportunity as an innovation hub, with a growing focus on both manufacturing and clinical trials. While we may not yet compare to Argentina in scale, the potential is enormous. We are strengthening our clinical trial footprint, which not only benefits patients by providing early access to research therapies but also enhances the local healthcare community. Our commitment to Puerto Rico includes increased investments in both manufacturing and clinical trials, ensuring we have the infrastructure and processes in place to support this growth. A key challenge is talent retention, particularly among newly graduated physicians, but by expanding clinical trial opportunities, we are creating pathways for young professionals to grow, contribute to the community, and build rewarding careers in the healthcare sector.

You were recently recognised as one of the Change Makers in Latin America for 2024. What do you think led to this recognition, and how would you describe your leadership style?

I'm grateful for this recognition that reflects the passion and commitment of an entire team. I firmly believe that innovation thrives when we bring together people with diverse backgrounds and perspectives. By embracing this, we create an environment where everyone is empowered to contribute and share ideas. Through diversity and inclusion, we unlock the full potential of our teams.

Urgency and a patient-centric approach are central to my leadership. I ensure that every team member, no matter their role, understands their contribution to bringing life-saving medicines to patients more quickly. Everyone in the organisation plays a vital role—whether you are in IT, finance, or medical, each function is integral to our mission. This sense of shared accountability is key to driving our success.

BMS Puerto Rico was recently named one of the best companies to work for women. What initiatives have contributed to this recognition, and how do you plan to continue building on this success?

I am incredibly proud of the diverse and talented women leaders at BMS Puerto Rico, where women make up approximately 70% of our workforce, with similar representation in the leadership team. This achievement is the result of intentional efforts to empower and support women at every stage of their careers. We have built a strong community of women leaders, including our Business Resource Group, BNOW (Business Network of Women), which fosters collaboration across commercial and manufacturing teams in Puerto Rico and globally. This initiative ensures we learn from one another, driving continuous change and strengthening our commitment to diversity and inclusion.

A key part of our success is understanding the unique needs of each individual and providing tailored support for their career journeys. We don't take a one-size-fits-all approach; we recognise that each woman has different aspirations, needs, and challenges. By supporting women's development, we ensure that we are cultivating the leaders of tomorrow, preparing them to take on even greater roles within the organisation.

We are committed to continuing this work, and we are proud of the progress we have made, but we know that there is always more to do. Building on this success is a key priority for us, and we are focused on ensuring that BMS Puerto Rico remains a place where women can thrive, lead, and make a lasting impact.

What has kept you at the company and motivated to continue driving change?

The dynamics of the pharmaceutical industry are constantly changing, and this ever-evolving environment is something that inspires me. Change is a challenge, but it is also what drives innovation. The opportunity to lead in a time of transformation is incredibly motivating. What has

kept me at BMS is the company's commitment to driving innovation that transform patient's lives.

The pipeline we have here is incredibly exciting. Since I joined BMS Puerto Rico, we have launched more than 10 new brand indications, and in the next 5-10 years, we expect another 10-20 more.

The prospect of being part of that journey—of making a real difference in patients' lives—is what fuels my passion for the work we do.

Additionally, the culture at BMS is fantastic. The collaborative spirit, the commitment to diversity, and the patient-first mentality make this a place where I am proud to contribute. The work we are doing here has a direct impact on patients, and that's what continues to inspire me to drive change and innovate.

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

My message is simple: global health is a priority for all of us. Whether you are a leader in an organisation or in government, we need to work together to ensure that we make a meaningful impact on our communities and on the patients we serve. No single entity can do it alone. By joining forces—across sectors, across regions—we can make a real difference in improving access to life-saving treatments for people around the world.

The work we do at BMS is driven by this mission, and we will continue to innovate, collaborate, and lead with urgency to ensure that patients get the treatments they need, when they need them.

[See more interviews](#)