

Olivier Zambelli – President & General Manager, Astellas Pharma France



Acting as One Astellas means ensuring that everything we do, across all functions, ultimately serves one purpose: delivering greater value for patients

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With over two decades of international experience in the pharmaceutical industry, Olivier Zambelli brings both strategic vision and a deeply human approach to his role as President and General Manager of Astellas France. Joining at a time of profound transformation for the organisation, he is leading the affiliate through a new era focused on oncology, precision medicine, and advanced therapies, while strengthening collaboration, clinical research, and patient partnerships.

What have been the defining moments of your career, and what ultimately drew you to Astellas France?

I have spent over two decades in the pharmaceutical industry, most of them with Pfizer, where I held a variety of commercial roles. I began as an affiliate commercial lead before moving into international positions, including European Brand Director for Infectious Diseases, overseeing a diverse team across 16 markets within the EMEA organisation. Those years gave me a deep appreciation for how cultural differences influence leadership and performance in a global environment. In 2018, seeking broader business responsibility, I joined Biogen where I supervised commercial operations for the multiple sclerosis franchise of the French organization, then led the Belgium and Netherlands affiliates at a time of renewed optimism for advancing Alzheimer's disease treatments. It proved to be a challenging but rewarding period that took me and my family to Brussels.

My move to Astellas marked a new chapter and an opportunity to experience a different corporate culture. Having spent much of my career in American organizations, I was intrigued by the distinct perspective of a Japanese company that, while rooted in its heritage, is clearly committed to operating as a global partner. I joined at a pivotal time, as Astellas continues its transformation from historical strengths in transplantation and urology to cutting-edge areas such as oncology, rare diseases, ophthalmology, all with a high unmet medical need. Having worked closely with the oncology community and specialized areas, throughout my career, this focus resonated strongly with me and was a key reason I chose to join Astellas France.

How would you describe Astellas's current global momentum, and how does the French affiliate reflect and contribute to this trajectory?

This is a landmark period in Astellas's 20-year history. The organisation has never achieved such rapid growth in revenues, a clear reflection of the success of the transformation we have been implementing worldwide. That same energy and progress are evident in France, where the affiliate is expanding quickly, particularly in terms of treatment volumes and patient reach.

While our legacy lies in transplantation and urology, we are progressively expanding into oncology, precision medicine, and advanced modalities such as cell and gene therapy. Prostate cancer has become a major area of focus, positioning us as a key contributor to the global standard of care, with more than 1.5 million patients treated worldwide. This ambition is equally evident in France and was one of the main reasons I was drawn to take on this role.

Over the past year, we have launched several therapies and indications across multiple therapeutic areas, including prostate, bladder, and gastric cancers, as well as women's health. Most of these launches were made possible through France's Early Access (Accès Précoce) mechanism, which enables patients to access breakthrough treatments before final pricing and reimbursement approval. These therapies are genuinely reshaping standards of care and reinforcing our role as a trusted partner within the French healthcare ecosystem.

Our affiliate now counts around 200 employees, including several in global functions, with 40 percent of our workforce operating in customer-facing roles, underscoring our commitment to deep and meaningful engagement with healthcare professionals. Approximately 80% of our revenue stems from innovative therapies recognised by the Haute Autorité de Santé (HAS) as ASMR III, meaning they are recognised as innovative compared with existing treatments (moderate improvement as per HAS assessment), a notable achievement given the rigour of the French evaluation system.

How do you view the evolution of France's market access landscape, particularly following the introduction of the Early Access (Accès Précoce) mechanism?

Designed to stimulate innovation and accelerate access to breakthrough therapies, the implementation of the Early Access (Accès Précoce) mechanism since 2021, has been an undeniable success, marking a real turning point in how France approaches access to innovation. In less than three years, more than 100,000 patients have benefited from treatments, many of which had not yet received full regulatory approval, while the average time to patient access has been reduced by around 387 days. This progress stands as clear evidence of France's renewed position as a market that truly champions innovation.

At Astellas, we have been able to make full use of this mechanism, allowing French patients to access three products or indications under Early Access and positively impacting more than 6,000 patients' lives. However, the mechanism's future is now being questioned in the context of the upcoming Social Security Finance Bill. The proposals currently being discussed could undermine what has been one of France's most effective models for ensuring timely access to new therapies. As an industry, we are watching the situation very closely, as any move to weaken or reverse this progress would represent a setback for patients and for the broader goal of sustaining France's position as a leader in healthcare innovation.

France is often cited as one of Europe's strongest research environments. How is Astellas engaging with and contributing to this ecosystem?

France has established itself as one of Europe's leading hubs for clinical research, ranking third overall and second in oncology. The country is home to outstanding Centres of Excellence such as Gustave Roussy, a world-renowned cancer research hospital that plays a central role in attracting cutting-edge innovation. The strength of its early-phase hospital networks and national commitment to precision medicine have created an environment that is exceptionally conducive to scientific advancement, one that aligns closely with our R&D priorities at Astellas.

We are deeply engaged in this ecosystem, currently conducting over 30 studies across multiple therapeutic areas, from phase I to phase III. Oncology represents around half of our total R&D investment, particularly in immuno-oncology and innovative modalities such as targeted protein degradation. At the same time, we are expanding into blindness and regeneration and genetic regulation, exploring next-generation modalities like cell and gene therapies to address vision loss and other areas of high unmet medical need. We also maintain a close, constructive dialogue with the Agence de l'Innovation en Santé (AIS), the French Health Innovation Agency, whose work has had a meaningful impact on strengthening France's research landscape. Through collaboration with the agency, we aim to attract further investment to France and reinforce its position as a key European centre for clinical innovation and excellence.

As you lead Astellas France through a period of transformation, what principles guide your approach to leadership and organisational focus?

As a leader, my first responsibility is to ensure that the organisation has the right capabilities in place, that we invest wisely, and that our priorities are clearly defined. When I joined Astellas France, I dedicated significant time to listening and observing, meeting with people across the organisation and externally to gain a full understanding of both our internal dynamics and the broader market environment before making any strategic decisions. This approach allowed me to identify where we stood, what was working well, and where we needed greater focus.

Astellas already holds strong leadership positions in transplantation and prostate cancer, while at the same time advancing treatments in bladder cancer, gastric cancer, and women's health. With such scientific breadth, the challenge is not about opportunity but about maintaining focus and ensuring we invest where it matters most. Together with the leadership team, we have worked to define a clear set of priorities, the areas where we must do more, and those where we should do less, to drive sustainable growth and impact. Ultimately, this transformation is about clarity and alignment: ensuring that our resources, investments, and collective energy are directed toward the areas that will create the greatest value for Astellas, for our teams, and above all, for patients.

The concept of "One Astellas" seems to be an important part of your culture. How are you bringing this philosophy to life in the day-to-day operations of the French affiliate?

One Astellas is deeply embedded in who we are, it means ensuring that everything we do, across all functions, ultimately serves one purpose: delivering greater value for patients. It is not just a corporate message but a mindset that shapes how we collaborate, make decisions, and define success.

From a leadership standpoint, fostering this culture begins with empowerment. Collaboration thrives when people feel trusted, accountable, and inspired to take ownership of their work. My ambition is to nurture a spirit of entrepreneurship within Astellas France, encouraging initiative and individual accountability while maintaining alignment around our shared goals. As leaders, we must focus on the "why" because it creates clarity of purpose and motivation, but we must also stay close enough to guide the "what" and the "how" without slipping into micromanagement. Achieving this balance is something I actively work on with the leadership team. The goal is to build an environment where people are both empowered and supported, where collaboration comes naturally, and where every decision and action reflects our collective purpose as *One Astellas*.

Collaboration clearly extends beyond internal teams at Astellas. How are you engaging with external stakeholders such as research institutions and patient organisations in France?

One of the first things that struck me when I joined Astellas was the remarkably positive reputation we have for building meaningful partnerships. The feedback I received from those connected to us, whether from the scientific community or patient organisations, consistently highlighted our ability to form authentic, value-driven collaborations. A strong example is our partnership with Gustave Roussy, one of the world's leading cancer research centres, where we are jointly exploring novel modalities in pancreatic and lung cancers. This collaboration, which began following a visit by our CEO last year, reflects our shared commitment to advancing oncology research and delivering new therapeutic options for patients.

Beyond the scientific sphere, engagement with patient associations is a cornerstone of how we operate. Shortly after I joined, a large group from our team took part in the Mont Ventoux cycling challenge organised by the Association Française d'Urologie (AFU) to raise awareness about prostate cancer. Soon after, we welcomed over ten patient associations to our office to strengthen dialogue, foster connection, and sign a pledge reaffirming our commitment to long-term collaboration.

Another initiative that is particularly close to my heart is our upcoming women's health awareness campaign, focused on menopause and its vasomotor symptoms (VMS), which can be highly debilitating yet often go unaddressed. This campaign is not only an opportunity to raise awareness around these symptoms but also to encourage broader conversations on diversity and inclusion in the workplace, ensuring that women are supported and not disadvantaged as they navigate this stage of life. These initiatives embody the kind of meaningful, human connections we strive to build as Astellas France.

Looking ahead to 2026 and beyond, what are your main priorities and long-term ambitions for Astellas France?

One of the first things we did with the leadership team was to define a clear vision for what we want Astellas France to look like by 2028. In the midst of daily operational priorities, it is easy to lose sight of the North Star, which for us is ensuring that the medicines we develop ultimately reach patients in France. My foremost priority is therefore to secure the continued success of the early access mechanism, which has played a crucial role in accelerating patient access to innovative therapies. Safeguarding it is vital to preserving France's standing as a country that embraces medical innovation.

A second key priority is visibility and recognition. Astellas has achieved remarkable progress, particularly in prostate cancer, bladder cancer, gastric cancer and transplantation, yet we tend to be modest in communicating our successes. I would like Astellas France to be more vocal about the exceptional work we are doing, both within the global organisation and across the broader healthcare ecosystem. The respect we enjoy among our peers is well earned, and it is important that we share this more openly and confidently.

By 2028, I envision Astellas France continuing to deliver transformative innovation that changes patients' lives, while ensuring that the value of this innovation is fully recognised. When I look at our portfolio, our pipeline, and, most importantly, our people, I am confident that we have all the ingredients necessary to succeed. Together with the leadership team, my commitment is to lead Astellas France toward sustainable growth, greater visibility, and a lasting impact on patients' lives.

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