



WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP



Why did you decide to join Astellas Canada as general manager?

The smaller biotech company where I served as general manager was acquired and I found myself looking at other opportunities. My previous company had a partnership with Astellas outside of Canada, so I knew of the company and was intrigued by their pipeline of products — in particular, those focused on women's health, ophthalmology and cancer. I wanted to help bring those innovations to Canadian patients.

What are your top priorities for the organization?

I'm a people-focused leader, so my top priority is the employees. When I joined in September 2024, I was immediately taken by the culture within the affiliate and I wanted to preserve that. At the same time, as we prepare to launch new products, we've been bringing in new talent. Nine months ago, Astellas Canada had about 80 employees. Now we're upwards of 130. In the context of that tremendous growth, it was very important to me that new employees felt and understood the culture.

Beyond that, my priorities are to make sure our innovations are accessible to patients. That means ensuring there's funding to support these products and we make their value clear to our payers.

We also have a long legacy in transplantation, with one of our immunosuppressants helping patients for more than 30 years. We continue to focus on areas where we've already established a strong presence as well.

What is the impact of menopause on the workplace?

Women's health is so important to me, in part because I'm the mother of three daughters. I want to make

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Sandra Heller
General Manager
Astellas Canada

sure that they, and all women in Canada, live in a world where the stigma associated with menopause is eliminated. The fastest-growing segment of workers in Canada comprises women aged 45 to 55, with more than two million women in the perimenopausal, menopausal or post-menopausal stage of life. While every woman's journey with menopause is unique, one in four will experience severe, debilitating symptoms.

At Astellas Canada, most of our staff are women (64 per cent) and, among those over age 45, 61 per cent are women. Yet, looking beyond our own firm, the Astellas Menopause Experience and Attitude Survey found that more than half (57 per cent) of global respondents believe women aren't supported at work. The Menopause Foundation of Canada puts the cost to the Canadian economy of unmanaged menopause symptoms at \$3.5 billion per year.

We need more education, resources and support for women in the workplace and greater awareness that every individual has a partner, mother, grandmother, aunt or other family member who is going through these stages. If not addressed, menopause

can have a significant impact in terms of loss of income for employees and reduced revenues for employers.

We have launched the Pledge to Champion a Menopause-Inclusive Workplace, which is an initiative that reinforces our commitment to creating an environment where everyone navigating menopause feels supported and empowered. And we are proud members of the Menopause Foundation of Canada's Menopause Works Here campaign.

How can benefits programs better support women at all life stages?

Benefits programs need to address the needs of women at all life stages — from contraceptives and fertility through to menopause and beyond. It's also critical to consider the needs of employees' children and parents. We must ensure we're not creating barriers for women to excel in their careers and enable them to participate fully in the workforce.

