

Meet Elena Rodriguez, Global Head of Diversity & Inclusion at Novartis ^[1]

People and Culture ^[2]

Elena Rodriguez leads Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) at Novartis, with a focus on increasing diversity of talent, strengthening inclusive behaviors and influencing positive change in society. A bioorganic chemist by training, she spent most of her career in drug research and development, and was instrumental in growing a small US technology institute into a drug discovery engine for Novartis. She talks more about her career path and current role below.

You spent most of your career in Research & Development, what made you decide to lead Diversity & Inclusion at Novartis?

D&I has been a constant theme in my life. Growing up, people would often make incorrect assumptions about who I was as a person based on my last name, where I lived, the education I pursued. It was frustrating to be judged without being truly understood. Starting out in my career, I was often the only woman in the room, often the youngest person, often the only single person, and I tried hard to fit in. Eventually, I got tired of trying to be someone else, and I started to be more open about who I was and what interested me. I saw the positive effect this had on myself and on those around me: People appreciated my differences. During my time at the Genomics Institute of the Novartis Research Foundation, I pushed for more inclusive leadership behaviors to help increase innovation and motivate our employees. Again, I saw positive impact. Several years later, when a casual conversation led to the opportunity to pursue D&I as a full-time career, something clicked for me. It was my chance to make a positive impact at a very large scale, using all of my skills and being 100% myself while doing so. It is the job I've always wanted.

What is your vision for D&I at Novartis?

My vision is that we live D&I at Novartis. I want everyone to feel heard, respected and valued. Our culture aspiration as a company is to become more self-aware, more curious about each other, with more inspiring and empowering leaders. I see D&I at the heart of this aspiration, and it starts with listening. Taking time to listen to someone is a powerful act of inclusion; it shows that you are curious about them, it creates an opportunity to learn something new, it says: "I hear you. I value you. You matter." When leaders take time to do this, it can have a particularly strong impact, even if it is only a brief hallway conversation. This small act of caring may inspire a person to find a new solution to bring medicine to patients faster, or simply make them feel recognized for who they are. From a strategic perspective, D&I is a key enabler. Our business needs diverse people working in an inclusive environment in order to spark more innovation, improve our productivity and be sustainable. Our employees expect the same to enable their personal and professional growth, and increase their impact in the world. I want D&I to be a fundamental part of how we serve our people, patients, and

customers.

What keeps me going is our clarity of purpose as a company, the amazing people I get to work with from all over the world, and the opportunity to help everyone feel heard, respected and valued.

What will it take to fulfill this vision?



With our global D&I strategy [3] as a foundation, fulfilling our vision will require both individual and organizational change. At an individual level, we must continue to develop as leaders who are self-aware and curious, who can inspire and empower their people. We need role models at all levels in the organization who will share their stories of compassion and courage, and invite others to do the same. Our Pride 2019 [4] employee story series was a great example of this, and it had significant impact on our LGBTI community and its allies. At an organizational level, we must continue to integrate D&I principles into our business practices, especially in hiring and promotion decisions, to ensure equal access and opportunities. We are already equipping our recruiters and line managers to better address unconscious biases [5], and we are fostering inclusive leadership through modules that help teams collaborate more effectively. I am deeply committed to listening to our people to ensure we continue to make demonstrable progress, and I recognize we have more work ahead. What keeps me going is our clarity of purpose as a company, the amazing people I get to work with from all over the world, and the opportunity to help everyone feel heard, respected and valued.



[People and Culture](#) [2]

[Nudging bias out of the organization](#) [5]

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[Careers](#) [8]

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Links

[1] <https://www.novartis.com/stories/people-and-culture/meet-elena-rodriguez-global-head-diversity-inclusion-novartis>

[2] <https://www.novartis.com/stories/people-and-culture>

[3] <https://www.novartis.com/our-company/diversity-inclusion/diversity-inclusion-our-strategic-priorities-novartis>

[4] <https://www.novartis.com/news/pride-novartis-2019>

[5] <https://www.novartis.com/stories/people-and-culture/nudging-bias-out-organization>

[6] <https://www.novartis.com/tags/social-commitment>

[7] <https://www.novartis.com/tags/working-novartis>

[8] <https://www.novartis.com/tags/careers>