

## Event Report: “Brain Health in Europe: Fostering Innovation, Improving Outcome”

A virtual policy roundtable hosted by the European Brain Council, MEP Maria da Graça Carvalho (EPP, Portugal) and MEP Tomislav Sokol (EPP, Croatia) - 20 April 2021, 14:00-15:30 CET

On 20 April 2021, the European Brain Council (EBC) held a virtual Roundtable to formally launch its [Policy Roadmap](#) ‘Brain Health in Europe: Fostering Innovation, Improving Outcomes’.

The roundtable was hosted by the European Brain Council and co-hosted by **MEP Maria da Graça Carvalho** (EPP, Portugal) and **MEP Tomislav Sokol** (EPP, Croatia), both members of the MEP Interest Group on Brain, Mind and Pain. The panel and the audience comprised of an array of key stakeholders, with representatives from the European Parliament, the European Commission, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the scientific and clinical community, patient organisations and industry. **Frédéric Destrebecq**, EBC’s Executive Director, moderated the roundtable.

The roundtable was an opportunity to formally launch the Policy Roadmap to policymakers, bringing together key stakeholders to discuss the Roadmap’s recommendations and next steps for better outcomes for people living with mental and neurological disorders. In this sense, the roundtable was a first step in laying the groundwork for the development of an EU-wide research and public health Brain Plan.

The roundtable was opened by an intervention from **MEP Maria da Graça Carvalho**, one of the two hosts, followed by EBC’s President **Monica Di Luca** who presented the role of EBC in fostering the improvement of brain health in Europe.

The following panel discussion focused on the four key pillars of the Roadmap. Each pillar was introduced through interventions from clinical experts, followed by responses from representatives of the policy environment:

- *Prioritising brain health*: Intervention by **Paul Boon**, President-elect of the European Academy of Neurology (EAN), response by **Elina Suzuki**, the OECD’s Advisor to Director for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs
- *Fostering research and innovation for brain health*: Intervention by **Jean-Antoine Girault**, President of the Federation of European Neuroscience Societies (FENS), response by **MEP Sirpa Pietikäinen** (EPP, Finland)
- *Improving access and outcomes*: Intervention by **Peter Falkai**, President of the European Psychiatric Association (EPA), and saw a response by **MEP Alex Agius Saliba** (S&D, Malta)
- *A call for an integrated approach to brain research and health*: Intervention by **Hilkka Kärkkäinen**, President of the Global Alliance of Mental Illness Advocacy Networks-Europe (GAMIAN-Europe) and commented by **MEP Radka Maxová** (S&D, Czechia)

The roundtable was concluded with a Q&A session, followed by a closing statement by co-host **MEP Tomislav Sokol** (EPP, Croatia).

### Key take-aways

The roundtable's discussion validated the key pillars and recommendations of the Roadmap, emphasising three key recommendations to create an enabling environment which promotes brain health in Europe and to stimulate investment in brain disorders through policy action:

- Develop a European Brain Plan as a matter of priority
- Foster the development of enabling policies and common research platform
- Improve access to treatment and care and focus on better health outcomes

Pillar by pillar, the discussion focused on the following points:

#### **Prioritising brain health**

The discussion focused on the need to raise awareness of mental and neurological disorders and their high global disease burden. Despite the high socio-economic cost of brain illnesses, there are still a lot of unknowns and more research is needed, as well as continuous awareness raising and increased political attention.

*"Everything to bring renewed energy and attention to this area is incredibly important. This is not just an issue of health systems. Mental health and brain disorders affect the entire society and cost the economy billions. We need to raise awareness on the cost of inaction and action."*

**Elina Suzuki, Advisor to Director for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs, OECD**

#### **Fostering research and innovation for brain health**

Participants acknowledged the important advancements in brain research and innovative treatments that have been taking place. The European Union's funding frameworks, in particular, Horizon Europe, the EU's flagship research and innovation programme, has been and will continue to be a game changer in ensuring investments in research and innovation projects. At the same time the digitalisation of healthcare infrastructures and the creation of data sharing platforms will be necessary to promote the interoperability of systems, together with the safe collection and exchange of patients' health data across Europe. It will be important for the regulatory frameworks to foster and not hinder advancements in brain research, as happens due to concerns around data safety and protection, animal research, the appropriate use of gene technology and due to long approval processes.

*"We need to make sure governments, ministers, European and national parliaments understand the importance of innovation in medicine. Precision medicine will play an important role in ensuring we can find innovative, sustainable, personalised therapies to ensure better patients outcomes and improving quality of life for patients with mental health issues or brain disorders."*

**MEP Sirpa Pietikäinen (EPP, Finland)**

## Improving access and outcomes

There was broad agreement that we need to ensure equitable and accessible care, as well as improved patient outcomes and quality of life. To achieve this, a shift from disease-oriented to outcome-oriented care will be fundamental, therefore, patient reported outcome measures (PROMs) and patient reported experience measures (PREMs) are essential tools to evaluate and improve healthcare results by putting patients at the centre. The EU's regulatory framework, especially now, as the European Commission reviews the pharmaceutical legislations and plans to introduce new R&D and incentive rules, will need to play a key role in ensuring the patient can be put at the centre and innovation is fostered. The EU also needs new clinical 'living' guidelines. Finally, the importance of precision medicines, thus the need to raise awareness of targeted therapies was noted as well.

*"We need to improve access to treatment and ensure equal patient access to care across Europe and ensure that new tools, in particular, new digital advancements and innovation, are made available and accessible to everybody. The European Union and its frameworks can play a critical role to ensure research is advanced, but patients' health should be put at the centre."*

**MEP Alex Agius Saliba (S&D, Malta)**

## A call for an integrated approach to brain research and health

The roundtable discussion ended with the call for the development of a comprehensive Brain Plan to bring stakeholders – on both a national and EU level – together to tackle brain health in a collaborative, integrated and forward-looking manner. A European brain health strategy would need adequate funding and would foster the creation and interconnectedness of national brain health plans, as well as platforms to encourage the exchange data; ensure that the Pharmaceutical Strategy strikes the right balance between accelerating research; invest in research and innovative treatments and ensure access to patient-centred care.

*"I fully support the call that was made today and in the Roadmap: we need a holistic approach at EU level for Brain Health. A holistic approach for Brain health will lead to improved provision of health services and care for patients in terms of scaling up prevention and treatment for people with brain disorders, accelerating research on brain health and discovery of innovative treatments, as well as support digital advancements, in order to improve patients' quality of life."*

**MEP Radka Maxová (S&D, Czechia)**

*“Count on my efforts in the ITRE Committee, in the European Parliament and in society at large to give visibility to this question and to the ongoing debate.”*

**MEP Maria da Graça Carvalho**  
(EPP, Portugal)

*“The aim is to develop a common, systematic European strategy, as was done with the EU’s Beating Cancer Plan. Systematic, so it will cover all aspects related to brain health and mental health. With concrete measures, concrete funding and concrete new legislative proposals. This is how we will make brain health a European priority.”*

**MEP Tomislav Sokol (EPP, Croatia)**

**Incisive Health, 7 May 2021**