

EU Health Policy Platform

European Brain Council Consultation Response to the European Commission call for proposals for a new cycle of Thematic Networks

Proposal for a BRAIN HEALTH Thematic Network

The European Brain Council (EBC) and its members, as part of the EU Health Policy Platform, would like to respond to the European Commission's call for a new cycle of Thematic Networks, organised under the framework of the EU Health Policy Platform.

EBC is most interested by the proposed 'Mental Health' topic; however, would like to urge for the expansion of the proposed topic to **'Brain Health', covering both mental and neurological disorders.**

Some 179 million Europeans live with brain disorders, mental and neurological alike. Brain disorders result in lost quality of life, costs on the individual and society (healthcare costs, lost productivity) and lost opportunities. Currently, major attention is being paid to neurological disorders like Alzheimer's, Parkinson's and epilepsy. While it is positive that these brain disorders are receiving the attention they require, this regrettably leaves many others, including burdensome disorders like stroke, multiple sclerosis, headache, sleep disorders... still in the shadows and in need of increased attention. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) and recent studies, at least 1 in 3 people of all ages will suffer from a neurological disorder in their lifetime, making this the highest figure of all non-communicable diseases¹. In Europe, the costs of neurological disorders amount to more than 800 billion euro with dementia, stroke, headache and sleep disorders as main drivers of cost.² With over 600 neurological diseases and over 450 psychiatric disorders known, many continue to be endured without proper preventative measures, interventions/treatment and hardly any with cures. Numerous neurological diseases present with psychiatric symptoms and vice versa, as both mental and neurological diseases are due to the malfunctioning of the same organ, the brain.

This creates a still overlooked massive burden on society. In fact, this acts as a pandemic of its own on our populations that certainly deserve much greater awareness and concern than currently given. For a more encompassing approach, addressing "brain health" as a whole also draws in the need for recognition of the need to take care of our brains, whether this means through lifestyle or at a more complex level, such as neural development, plasticity, functioning, and recovery across the life course (as defined by the WHO).

¹ Feigin VL, Vos T, Nichols E, et al. The global burden of neurological disorders: translating evidence into policy. *Lancet Neurol.* 2020;19(3):255-265. doi:10.1016/S1474-4422(19)30411-9

² Gustavsson A, Svensson M, Jacobi F, et al. Cost of disorders of the brain in Europe 2010 [published correction appears in *Eur Neuropsychopharmacol.* 2012 Mar;22(3):237-8. Van den Bergh, Peter Van. *Eur Neuropsychopharmacol.* 2011;21(10):718-779. doi:10.1016/j.euroneuro.2011.08.008

Scope of the future Joint Statement

The Joint Statement will position all aspects of brain health as a major health area to include in all EU discussions and policy orientations, global health discussions and research topics. Only a healthy brain guarantees a healthy citizen in Europe, as the brain is the master organ of our body.

The Joint Statement will be overarching to encompass all brain disorders and, as such, ensure no-one living with a neurological disease nor mental disorder is left behind.

The Joint Statement will look at brain health through the life course.

Proposal relevance and synergies with EU actions

EBC's proposal is most relevant to the EU vision to include Health in all Policies (social, digital, education and entertainment, economy, environment).

The European Commission's NCDs initiative - Healthier Together - is a most welcome springboard to improve brain health at European level. Making sure all neurological diseases and all mental disorders can benefit from the initiative is paramount. The synergies that can be made with other areas in the field of prevention also bring opportunities to maximise our joint efforts to improve EU citizens' health and inclusion in society.

'Brain Capital', encompassing brain health and brain skills, is a major asset for the economy. Investing in the brain is investing in the economy and the community. NextGenerationEU does need a healthy population!

Furthermore, at global level, pinning brain health as a European agenda priority would support the implementation of the WHO's Intersectoral Global Action Plan on epilepsy and other neurological disorders 2022 – 2031.

Objectives of the Brain Health Thematic Network and how to reach them

Brain Health is currently gaining traction in Europe as the desired solution or path forward in improving health systems. However, no agreed definition of Brain Health has been proposed yet. The first objective of the Thematic Network would be to present an agreed definition of Brain Health that would facilitate dialogue and advocacy work.

The second objective will be the production of an agreed position on the scope of neurological and mental 'disorders' in the EU (variety of disorders, their impact on individuals and society, what are the loopholes in tackling these disorders, how to move forward). This second objective will give all advocates in the brain area (patients with manifest neurological and mental disorders, subjects at risk for a brain disorder, clinicians, researchers, industry, health insurance, etc.) a tool to make more impact and a difference in the EU health agenda.

The end goal is to improve the quality of life of all individuals affected by a brain disorder, and inter alia the quality of life of their families. It is also to address the increasing burden of brain disorders on our society, economies and healthcare systems and strive towards a population with better brain health and a thriving brain capital. As such, public and patient consultation will be paramount in the development and implementation of Brain Health across Policies: 'No decisions about us without us'.



This Thematic Network will build on existing Brain Health strategies of its members³ and create further synergies in efforts to define brain health while bringing stakeholders together for harmonised and holistic approach.

Leading organisation



The [European Brain Council](#) proposes to lead the **Brain Health Thematic Network** in collaboration with its Member Organisations, a network of key players in the ‘brain area’, encompassing scientific societies, patient organisations, professional societies and industry partners.

EBC is a recognised organisation within the EU institutions, as leader in research projects and promoter of strong European health policies, raising awareness and encouraging education on the brain.

EBC’s main strength is the organisation’s ability to foster dialogue and interaction between different parties to reach consensus. The [Value of Treatment](#) or ‘[Rethinking the Management of Brain Disorders](#)’ papers, various [calls for action and awareness campaigns](#) largely supported by the neurological and psychiatric community epitomise the organisation’s collective and consensual work. EBC is also involved in a number of EU-funded research projects, mainly the European Brain Research Area (EBRA), which it coordinates in partnership with the ERA-NET Neuron, JPND and the Human Brain Project. EBRA, in its final months, is working towards the establishment of a Shared European Brain Research Agenda. Additionally, EBC carries out many communication and awareness-raising campaigns through online platforms, reports and events, particularly through its major in-person event, the Brain Innovation Days, showcasing the important work going on in the brain space to understand the brain.

This letter is supported and co-signed by the following organisations:

Patient Organisations



The European Federation of Neurological Associations (EFNA) brings together European umbrella organisations of neurological patient advocacy groups, to work with other associations in the field of neurology.

Clinical and Scientific Societies



The European Academy of Neurology (EAN) unites neurologists across the whole of Europe, aiming to promote neurological excellence and help neurologists provide better patient care and outcomes.

³ Bassetti, CLA, Endres, M, Sander, A, et al. The European Academy of Neurology Brain Health Strategy: One brain, one life, one approach. Eur J Neurol. 2022; 29: 2559- 2566. doi: 10.1111/ene.15391





The European Association of Neurosurgical Societies is the continental, non-governmental, learned society representing the neurosurgeons of European region.



The European Psychiatric Association is the main association representing psychiatry in Europe, with more than 78,000 European psychiatrists.



The European Paediatric Neurology Society is a society for physicians with a research or clinical interest in Paediatric Neurology.



The Federation of European Neuroscience Societies is the voice of European neuroscience, representing 21,000 neuroscientists, 44 member societies and 33 European countries.



The International Brain Research Organisation is the global federation of neuroscience organizations that aims to promote and support neuroscience around the world through training, teaching, collaborative research, advocacy and outreach.



The European Stroke Organisation aims to improve stroke care by providing medical education to healthcare professionals and the lay public.

National Brain Councils

National Brain Councils (NBCs) are independent and multidisciplinary councils that unite scientific organisations of neuroscientists, psychiatrists, neurologists, neurosurgeons, patients' associations, as well as the pharmaceutical and medical device industry, in order to speak with one strong voice — at the national level — on behalf of the “brain space”.





Belgian Brain Council



Consejo
Español
del Cerebro

Spanish Brain Council



Hellenic Brain Council



SRPSKI SAVET ZA MOZAK
SERBIAN BRAIN COUNCIL

Serbian Brain Council



French Brain Council



Portuguese Brain Council



Hjernerådet

Norwegian Brain Council

Other Organisations



Servier Laboratories is an international pharmaceutical company governed by a non-profit foundation, with its headquarters in France.



Brain
Capital
Alliance

The Brain Capital Alliance is an expanded, multi-national and multi-organisational programme stemming from the OECD Neuroscience-inspired Policy Initiative, focused on neuroscience-inspired investment and public policy innovation.



The Cajal Advanced Neuroscience Training Programme is an international organisation that aims to accelerate progress in neuroscience by providing high-quality and advanced training to all neuroscientists.