

European Brain Council Response
to the European Commission call for proposals for a new cycle of Thematic Networks under the EU Health Policy Platform – April 2024

Leading organisation – Contact person

In response to the European Commission's invitation to stakeholders to make a proposal under its next cycle of Thematic Networks under the EU Health Policy Platform (EU HPP), the [European Brain Council](#) (EBC), its members and allies are proposing a '**Brain Health and Brain Research Innovation**' Thematic Network under the '*Life-time approach to prevention with stakeholders contributing to a comprehensive and multi-sectorial approach on healthy longevity*' topic.

EBC's main strength is the organisation's ability to foster dialogue and interaction between different parties to reach consensus¹.

The leading contact will be Frédéric Destrebecq, EBC Executive Director (frde@braincouncil.eu).

Scope of the future Joint Statement

Building on the emergence of 'Brain Health', 'Brain Capital', 'Brain Wealth' and 'Brain Economy' as overarching topics to address current societal, economic and research challenges in a context weakened by the COVID-19 pandemic², the Joint Statement will position brain health as a pivotal and much needed EU health, social and research policy orientation to answer these challenges and improve citizens' quality of life.

Looking at brain health as an overarching and inclusive theme encompassing all brain disorders (neurological and mental health alike), the Statement will support the EU and WHO drive to address the NCDs challenges, including those posed by neurological and mental health conditions. Under this Thematic Network and its ensuing Joint Statement, we want to make sure the EU aligns with other advocacy and policy priorities and ensure no-one living with a neurological disease nor mental disorder is left behind. A life-course and gender approach will also reflect the breadth of these challenges.

Prevention of brain disorders will be a primary goal, notwithstanding equitable access to diagnosis, treatment, and care of such disorders. In this respect, early detection and early intervention strategies have demonstrated tangible benefits in improving patient outcomes and, to this end, increased research is necessary.

Relevance of our proposal

The brain is an incredibly complex organ. Understanding how the brain works, how brain diseases progress and finding treatments and cures for these diseases is a long-term endeavour and investment and support is crucial.

¹ The [Value of Treatment](#) or [Rethinking the management of brain disorders](#) projects, participations in [EU-funded projects and initiatives](#), various calls for action and awareness campaigns largely supported by the neurological and psychiatric community epitomise the organisation's collective and consensual work.

² Smith E. et al., A Brain Capital Grand Strategy: toward economic reimagination, *Mol Psychiatry*. 2021 January ; 26(1): 3–22. doi:10.1038/s41380-020-00918-w.

Approximately one in three Europeans lives with a neurological condition and one in four with a severe mental disorder. The latest figures show 3.4 billion people worldwide experienced neurological conditions, making it the leading cause of ill health and disability globally, and depression on its own is identified to become the leading source of disability by 2030. ³Clearly, these conditions represent a high individual, social and economic burden and contribute to the global disease burden and disability.

Brain disorders result in lost quality of life, costs on the individual and society (healthcare costs, lost productivity) and lost opportunities. In Europe, the cost of managing brain disorders was estimated to amount to more than € 800 billion every year.⁴

While attention is paid to a select group of brain conditions – namely mental health-focused or neurodegenerative such as Alzheimer’s— many unfortunately are underrecognized and receive much less attention than required. As such, the EU risks missing its NCDs targets and misaligning itself from global action on addressing brain conditions and overall brain health.

In 2023, EBC collaborated with its member and like-minded organisations to launch a [Pledge for Science](#)⁵ calling for the prioritisation of brain research & innovation in the EU. EBC’s [2024 European Elections Manifesto](#) particularly calls on the European Parliament and European Commission 2024-2029 to support policy making towards equitable and quality brain health to combat brain challenges, promote societal cohesion, boost economic productivity and guide the EU to the role of global leader in brain research.

Synergies with on-going and planned EU activities

- Healthier Together, the European Commission’s NCDs initiative promoting a holistic and coordinated approach to prevention and care, supporting better knowledge and data, screening and early detection, diagnosis and treatment management, and the improvement of quality of life for patients, notwithstanding a health equity dimension and reduction of health inequalities;
- The EU4Health programme that inter alia seeks to foster health and disease prevention, strengthen health systems and enhance access to healthcare;
- CSA BrainHealth, the EU-funded Coordination & Support Action (CSA) was launched in November 2023. This two-year CSA is preparing the future European Partnership on Brain Health, which the European Commission plans on launching in 2025/2026 in its 2nd Strategic Programme of Horizon Europe, with the aim to further coordinate and structure the area of brain health research in Europe. EBC is a partner in this CSA and will build on the work already undertaken with the EBC-coordinated [European Brain Research Area \(EBRA\)](#);
- NextGenerationEU and its priorities to reinforce social infrastructure and services, support inclusive growth, research and development, and innovation for all, and ensure modern, efficient and accessible healthcare services;
- 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

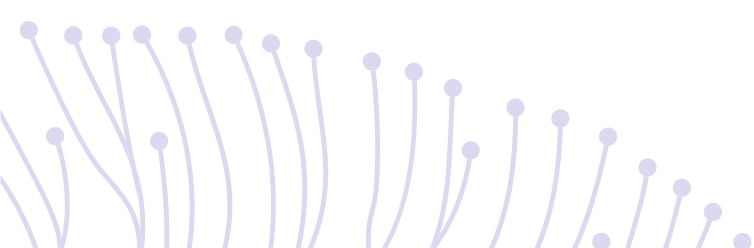
Brain health has been gaining traction in Europe as the desired path forward in improving health systems. Thriving democracies and economies can make a difference through supporting environments that enable each citizen to achieve their full brain health potential conducive to both personal and societal well-being.

On this basis, the **Brain Health and Brain Research Innovation Thematic Network** will have 3 objectives:

³ Global, regional, and national burden of disorders affecting the nervous system, 1990–2021: a systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2021, Steinmetz et al., The Lancet Neurology, Vol. 23, No. 4, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1474-4422\(24\)00038-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1474-4422(24)00038-3)

⁴ 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

⁵ To-date, the pledge has been supported by 3692 individuals (including policy makers, Nobel Prize winners) and 61 organisations.



- 1) **Reach a consensus** on what defining Brain Health and Brain Capital and how pivotal they are in addressing the current social, economic, demographic challenges and improving EU citizen's health with a focus on prevention of NCDs.
- 2) **Make policy recommendations supporting the development of a European Brain Health and Brain Research and Innovation Plan**, combining research and public health initiatives to address brain function and disorders in a comprehensive, collaborative and innovative way (looking at the social and commercial determinants of brain health, a life-course approach (from pre-conception to old-age); developing a systemic, cross-disorder understanding that allows for effective prioritisation of limited resources; developing policy recommendations for a concerted action to improve access to prevention, effective and timely diagnosis, treatment, and rehabilitative and supportive care is sorely needed to achieve potential savings and improve EU citizens' quality of life.
- 3) **Forge long-lasting cooperation** between the Thematic Network partners to continue collaboration beyond the Network.

Thematic Network format and dissemination

The Joint Statement will be a joint paper drafted by the Thematic Network members and proposed for public consultation before it is formally endorsed by the Network members.

It will be officially presented to the EU HPP community and serve as a compass for future action.

It will be posted on the EU HPP website. It will also be largely disseminated by the Network members and like-minded stakeholders on their social media streams (websites, LinkedIn, X, etc.).

