

Brain Health: Policy Challenges & Opportunities to Manage Neurological Diseases

Embargoed until 24 February 2026 10:00AM.

Brussels, 24 February 2026 – Today, the European Parliament Committee on Public Health (SANT) will hold a Public Hearing on [‘Brain health: Policy challenges and opportunities to manage neurological diseases’](#).

Brain disorders, neurological and mental alike, represent one of the most pressing health challenges facing the European Union. At least one in three Europeans currently lives with a brain conditionⁱ, with such disorders now the leading cause of disability and second leading cause of death worldwide. In Europe alone, they impose an annual economic burden estimated to range between €800 billionⁱⁱ and €1.3 trillionⁱⁱⁱ, a figure set to rise as the population ages^{iv}. While recent strides have been made in improving the understanding of the brain, significant limiting factors remain – prompting the need for increased prioritization and coordination across the EU.

The [European Brain Council \(EBC\)](#), a network of key stakeholders in the brain space, has been invited to provide insight to the committee in a presentation and Q&A session, *“European collaboration on neurological health, in particular in the field of dementia and other neurodegenerative diseases”*, led by President-Elect, Professor Sameer Zuberi, and Board Member and Executive Director of the European Federation of Neurological Associations, Dr. Orla Galvin. Professors Ana Verdelho and Mirosław Zabek will also speak on *Successes and challenges of cutting-edge research on neurology and the potential of neurotechnology*.

Following the Exchange of Views on Neurological Health held by the SANT Committee in October 2024^v, the growing attention from the European Parliament to brain health is welcomed by the community and demonstrates a reassuring and growing recognition of the urgency, timeliness and need to better tackle the staggering burden.

Furthermore, the emphasis placed on the need for increased coordination in the circulated briefing document^{vi} strongly echoes with the calls for an EU Coordination Plan for the Brain, work currently spearheaded by the European Brain Council. Actively involving its [Member Organizations](#) and partners, this Plan is dedicated to providing a cross-sectoral policy framework that aligns existing initiatives, reduces duplication, scales up best practices and maximises impact across the brain health continuum.

Despite the demonstrated burden of brain disorders as well as the central role of brain health in Europe's resilience and competitiveness, policy responses remain fragmented across Member States. While 93% of EU Member States have mental health policies in place^{vii}, only half of the WHO European Region has comprehensive neurological health policies as of 2017^{viii}.

The establishment of a European Coordination Plan for the Brain that aligns national and EU-level action around shared objectives, indicators and timelines is needed. Such a plan would reduce duplication of efforts, break down silos and maximise the impact of existing investments by adopting an integrated brain health approach spanning neurological and psychiatric disorders. The added value of increased EU action far outweighs the costs of inaction, which include escalating healthcare expenditure, lost productivity and avoidable disability.

Today's SANT Committee hearing represents an important milestone in this process and, we hope, the beginning of a sustained and coordinated European approach that recognizes brain health as a strategic priority for the Union's resilience, competitiveness and societal well-being.



Additional Resources

[EBC Joint Statement: Towards an EU Coordination Plan for the Brain](#)

[Strengthening Brain Health: Policy Recommendations to Tackle the Rising Burden of Neurological Diseases](#), Briefing Document Requested by the SANT Committee

[Intersectoral global action plan on epilepsy and other neurological disorders 2022-2031](#), [Global action plan on the public health response to dementia 2017 – 2025](#) and [Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2030](#)

[The economic cost of brain disorders in Europe](#), European Journal of Neurology

[Europe's brain health needs a serious coordination plan](#), Euractiv

[The Hidden Depths of Neurological Disease](#), Politico

Media Contacts:

Hugo Hermantin, Policy Coordinator: hugo@braincouncil.eu

About the European Brain Council:

The European Brain Council (EBC) is a network of key players in the “Brain Area”, with a membership encompassing scientific societies, patient organisations, professional societies and industry partners. A non-profit organisation based in Brussels, its main mission is to promote brain research with the ultimate goal of improving the lives of the millions of Europeans living with brain conditions, neurological and mental alike.

Annex: Expanded Information on the Subject

Brain Health: An Overlooked Driver of Competitiveness and Innovation

Brain health represents both a major societal challenge and a key driver of Europe's competitiveness, leadership in technology and life sciences, and productivity. Beyond tackling the burden of brain disorders, brain health requires broader action across multiple policy domains. Neuroscience is one of the most dynamic and interdisciplinary fields, bringing together life sciences, digital technologies, artificial intelligence and advanced therapeutics. Recent breakthroughs in understanding the human brain, including advances in biomarkers, imaging and digital tools, disease-modifying therapies or neurotechnologies, demonstrate the field's rapid evolution and its potential. Investing in brain research not only advances understanding and treatment of disorders but also fuels economic growth, technological advancement and attracts global talent.

Since 2014, EU-level funding for brain health research has totalled €7.4 billion, narrowly trailing oncology at €8.1 billion. Including overlapping programmes raises total EU investment to €9.2bn, but these figures capture only spending from Brussels, not national budgets^{ix}. However, fully unlocking neuroscience's potential requires



increased long-term funding, stronger public-private collaboration, improved data sharing and better alignment between research, prevention and care pathways. Brain health must therefore be explicitly recognised as a strategic priority in the next EU research and innovation framework programme (FP10) and embedded across key legislative and policy initiatives, e.g. the ERA Act, Biotech Act, AI Omnibus and EU Innovation Act, to ensure that Europe remains at the forefront of scientific discovery, medical innovation and technological sovereignty. This must rely on a clear support to basic and translational research and the generation of an innovation ecosystem, while ensuring that researchers have access to the necessary methods and infrastructures to deliver – including the use of animal methodologies, which remain essential for progress in brain research.

The Brain as a Strategic Priority for Europe's Resilience

Beyond the economic cost lies a strategic reality: healthy brains underpin Europe's productivity, innovation capacity, social cohesion and democratic resilience. Brain disorders are not inevitable. The EU urgently needs to step up its action on preventing brain disorders, tackling the identified risk factors – from lifestyle determinants to environmental factors. Scaling up coordinated brain health interventions can add up to 1.8 healthy life-years per EU citizen by 2050 and contribute an estimated €559 billion to EU GDP by 2050^x.

Brain health is also increasingly shaped by external pressures beyond the health sector – geopolitical instability, climate-related stressors, pandemics and digital environments all have measurable effects on mental health, cognition and decision-making. Strengthening brain health is therefore a matter of resilience against hybrid threats, disinformation and democratic erosion^{xi}. Acting on brain health is not only about curbing a growing burden: it enables citizens to thrive, helps the EU face digital and environmental transitions, and provides better protection against geopolitical threats.

A Life Course Approach with Patients and Carers at the Centre

Crucially, an EU strategy on brain health must adopt a life course approach – addressing brain development, function and wellbeing from early childhood through to older age, rather than focusing solely on late-stage life. It must ensure meaningful patient involvement and lived experience in policy design, implementation, evaluation and monitoring, alongside improved health literacy and shared decision-making.

The strategy must cover crucial needs for prevention, research support and innovation-enabling reforms, whilst providing commensurate, long-term predictable funding mechanisms that recognise the importance of basic, curiosity-driven research. EU Member States committed to tackling the burden of brain disorders by establishing national strategies by 2030-2031, but the EU needs to support and coordinate them to ensure maximum impact during the current European Parliament mandate. EU action on brain health is urgent, timely, doable and yields very tangible benefits. A coordinated approach to brain health is not only a health imperative; it is a strategic necessity for Europe's future.



The Urgent Need for EU Coordinated Action

Despite the central role of brain health in Europe's resilience and competitiveness, policy responses remain fragmented across Member States. While 93% of EU Member States have mental health policies in place^{xi}, only half of the WHO European Region has comprehensive neurological health policies as of 2017^{xiii}. Several Member States have already established National Brain Strategies^{xiv}, aligned with commitments made in the framework of World Health Organization Action Plans^{xv}, to tackle the burden of brain disorders in an overarching, streamlined and efficient way.

Therefore, the establishment of a European Coordination Plan for the Brain that aligns national and EU-level action around shared objectives, indicators and timelines is needed. Such a plan would reduce duplication of efforts, break down silos and maximise the impact of existing investments by adopting an integrated brain health approach spanning neurological and psychiatric disorders. The added value of increased EU action far outweighs the costs of inaction, which include escalating healthcare expenditure, lost productivity and avoidable disability.

However, coordination alone will not be sufficient without a commensurate and sustained increase in EU research and innovation investment. Brain health must be firmly embedded as a strategic priority within Horizon Europe and, critically, in the next Framework Programme (FP10), with dedicated funding, clear strategic orientation and integration across relevant clusters and missions. Failure to prioritise brain health within FP10 would not only slow scientific progress but would undermine Europe's ability to remain competitive in one of the most strategically important and fast-moving global research fields.

In this context, the members of the European Brain Council - bringing together researchers, clinicians, patients, carers and industry partners - are actively working toward the development of such a Coordination Plan to support more coherent, efficient and strategic action across Europe.

ⁱ [Economic Burden of Neurological diseases in Europe](#), European Academy of Neurology.

ⁱⁱ J. Olesen et al., The economic cost of brain disorders in Europe, *European Journal of Neurology* 2012, 19: 155–162.

ⁱⁱⁱ [Economic Burden of Neurological diseases in Europe](#), European Academy of Neurology.

^{iv} [The Hidden Depths of Neurological Disease](#), Politico.

^v [EBC Invited to Address the European Parliament Public Health Committee](#), European Brain Council.

^{vi} Strengthening Brain Health: Policy Recommendations to Tackle the Rising Burden of Neurological Diseases, Briefing Document Requested by the SANT Committee, PE 780.418 - February 2026.

^{vii} Mental health systems capacity in European Union Member States, Iceland and Norway. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe; 2024, p.3.



-
- viii Atlas: country resources for neurological disorders – 2nd ed. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2017. p.19.
- ix [EU rewires its brain health investment model, but scaling challenge remains](#), Euractiv.
- x McKinsey Health Institute Analysis of the Global Burden of Disease, [Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation](#), 2021.
- xi [NATO Chief Scientist Research Report on Cognitive Warfare](#), 2025.
- xii Mental health systems capacity in European Union Member States, Iceland and Norway. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe; 2024, p.3.
- xiii Atlas: country resources for neurological disorders – 2nd ed. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2017. p.19.
- xiv Spain, Portugal, Finland, or Italy are examples in the European Union. Norway or Switzerland are examples in the WHO European Region. [List of initiatives accessible here](#).
- xv [Intersectoral global action plan on epilepsy and other neurological disorders 2022-2031](#), [Global action plan on the public health response to dementia 2017 – 2025](#) and [Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2030](#).

