



European Brain Council  
CALL TO ACTION

2015

## The brain is a true wonder that needs to be nurtured, protected and cared for.

The human brain is the most complex living structure known in the universe. This single organ controls every aspect of our bodies, ranging from heart rate to emotion, learning and memory. The brain has enabled humans to achieve breathtaking milestones: walking on the moon, mapping the human genome, or composing masterpieces of literature, art and music. It is the home of our personalities, thoughts, feelings and other human characteristics. It is the ability of the brain to perform all of these functions that makes us human. The brain is a true wonder that needs to be nurtured, protected and cared for.

At the same time, the human brain is also the origin of many chronic and disabling diseases that have a huge impact on the lives of people affected by them, as well as the healthcare systems that support them, and European societies as a whole. Brain disorders – including developmental, psychiatric, neurodegenerative and pain-related diseases – represent an enormous disease burden in terms of both human suffering and economic cost.

Brain disorders pose one of the greatest societal challenges for Europe:

- **Brain disorders affect at least one in three people during their lifetimes – currently 165 million people in Europe<sup>1</sup>**
- **Brain disorders cost Europe around € 800 billion every year<sup>2</sup>. This cost far exceeds that of cardiovascular diseases, cancer and diabetes combined<sup>3</sup>. As the population in European countries ages, these numbers are increasing.**
- **WHO concluded that brain disorders account for 35% of the burden of all diseases in Europe and are predicted to become the major medical need of the 21st century<sup>4</sup>.**

Tackling the most pressing societal challenges is the key objective of the Europe 2020 Strategy, designed to turn Europe into “a smart, sustainable and socially inclusive market economy”. While economic priorities come first in the current environment, healthy brains actually need to be put right at the heart of Europe 2020 Strategy: it is only with healthy brains that we will solve many of the challenges that face modern societies. Advancing understanding and improving the health of the brain has a positive ripple effect – improved health of the brain leads to better overall health, which leads to better productivity among the working population, which thus contributes to increasing Europe’s economic competitiveness.

It is crucial that the huge challenges posed by brain disorders are addressed through integrated, coordinated and co-operative efforts, both at the European and national level. These efforts should focus on implementing evidence-based strategies for prevention, early detection and diagnosis, and adequate treatment and research, in order to meet the needs of patients, carers, doctors, researchers and industry. Above all, patients should be put at the centre of the entire process, in order to provide the right treatment to the right patient at the right time.

To this end, the closing conference of the European Month of the Brain in May 2013, organized by the European Commission together with the Irish EU Presidency delivered a call for EU Member States and associated countries to “develop, or refine, national strategies on brain research and healthcare within an overarching European context”, noting that «successful examples of national strategies in other research areas, such as cancer, already exist in Europe.”

## While great progress has been made thus far, advancing our understanding of the brain is more essential now than ever before.

This will be achieved through the involvement of, and collaboration among, all stakeholders and the Member States in translating research findings into benefits for people’s health, patient care and for society as a whole.

The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union stipulates that a high level of human health protection shall be ensured in the definition and implementation of all European Union policies and activities (Art. 168)

In recognition of this principle and in light of the above, we call on the European Institutions to put support for healthy brains at the top of the European and national agendas:

- We call upon the European Commission to come forward with a European strategy to tackle brain disorders in a collaborative, integrated and comprehensive manner, as well as to further support European Union Member States and associated countries in their efforts to combat the impact of brain disorders.
- We call upon European Union member states and associated countries to implement public health programmes addressing brain health in a systematic way, making the best possible use of available resources in order to stimulate more and better co-ordinated brain research, and to foster strategies for prevention, early detection, diagnosis and adequate treatment.

<sup>1</sup> Cost of Disorders of the Brain in Europe, European Journal of Neuroscience, Vol. 33, pp. 768–818, 2011

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> For costs associated with other disease areas see :*Economic burden of cancer across the European Union: a population-based cost analysis (2009)*; *European Cardiovascular Disease Statistics (2012)*; *Economic Impact of Diabetes (2010)*

<sup>4</sup> Eur J Neurol. 2003 Sep;10(5):471-7

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