

Brain disorders could quickly turn into a ticking time bomb

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Tackling the growing brain disorders health threat is the 21st century's space race, writes Monica Di Luca.



Brain disorders represent a global threat to our individual wellbeing, economic productivity, and intellectual capital. Yet, owing to pervasive social stigma, and thus a lack of awareness and data demonstrating their full burden, the real adverse impact of brain disorders is, in most cases, hidden.

Some combined estimates indicate that the true global impact of brain diseases amounts to a staggering 31 per cent of all deaths. That's an estimated 17 million people every year.

While brain disorders are currently affect one in three Europeans, other estimates suggest that this figure will increase to one in two by 2030. Health economists also estimate that brain disorders account for around 45 per cent of the annual health budget of Europe.

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Despite their significant contribution to the burden of disease and disability, brain disorders have largely been absent from the global health research agenda; the reversal of this trend has only just begun. We are now at a crucial juncture in advancing this agenda.

European Union countries must face up to the question of whether they want to commit the adequate attention and resources into preventing, curbing and healing brain disorders in the future. The existing political commitments need to be implemented on a dramatically larger scale.

This is why, as President of the European Brain Council, I am calling for the brain to be included as one of the research missions in the upcoming Horizon Europe programme. In April, we released our proposal for a “Brain Mission: Understand - Fix - Enhance. The space race of the 21st century”.

The target of our proposed brain mission is to decrease the burden of brain ill-health, neurological and mental alike through better understanding of the physiology of the healthy and diseased brain, relevant prevention strategies and, more generally, an increased awareness of the healthy brain and its diseases among EU citizens.

Awareness among the general public is of particular importance. We want everyone to know how wonderful the human brain is, how to preserve, protect, develop and nurture it, and what the EU achievements and future plans are in this field. Last but not least, we would like Europe to take a global leadership in brain science.

Without significantly expanding existing efforts, brain disorders will quickly turn into a ticking time bomb. We hope that our mission proposal will alert everyone to this threat and help galvanise actions to confront the rising tide of brain disorders.

About the author

Monica Di Luca is President of the European Brain Council (EBC)

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