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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Esteemed organisers and participants of the Brainstorming the Future of Brain Health conference, thank you for the invitation.

179 million Europeans are estimated to live with brain conditions, either mental or neurological. This accounts for an economic cost of over €800 billion per year¹.

Neurological conditions are now the leading cause of ill health and disability worldwide. The overall amount of disability, illness and premature death caused by neurological conditions has increased by 18% since 1990².

The Parliament recognises the urgent need to address this crisis, although recently approached the brain health less from a strictly neurological perspective and more from the mental health perspective. But in my opinion today we have gone beyond historic Descartes' psychophysical dualism, the division between *res cogitans*, the mind, and *res extensa*, material bodies. As Professor Claudio Bassetti of the European Brain Council rightly emphasised during our last exchange of views on neurological health in the SANT, the Subcommittee on Public Health of the European Parliament, mind and body are two sides of the same coin, seen from different scientific paradigms.

Therefore, just to mention few most important and recent examples:

¹ [The economic cost of brain disorders in Europe. Eur J Neurol. 2012; 19\(1\):155-62 \(ISSN: 1468-1331\). DOI: 10.1111/j.1468-1331.2011.03590.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-1331.2011.03590.x)

² [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/laneur/article/PIIS1474-4422\(24\)00038-3/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/laneur/article/PIIS1474-4422(24)00038-3/fulltext)



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- On 5 July 2022, Parliament adopted a [resolution](#) on Mental Health in the Digital World of Work. Parliament recognises the benefits of working from home, like increased flexibility and autonomy, but warns of the significant health risks stemming from over-connection, a blurring of the lines between work and private life, and higher work intensity or “technostress” – the stress linked to work-related technology use. Parliament calls for preventive measures and a directive to ensure the right to disconnect, and urge the EU and member states to tackle the issue utilising the EU Mental Health Strategy, the European Care Strategy and national action plans.
- In December 2023, Parliament adopted its [report on mental health](#), calling on the Commission to draw up a long-term, comprehensive and integrated EU [Mental Health Strategy](#), building on its [recent communication](#). The Parliament also called on member states to develop corresponding national strategies with clear timelines, adequate budgets, concrete targets and indicators to monitor progress.
- Parallely to mental health report also during December 2023 plenary the Parliament has adopted the report on [Non-Communicable Diseases](#) where it referred to neurological conditions including neurodegenerative diseases.
- On 10 October 2024, World Mental Health day, Parliament held a [debate](#) on Mental Health during the plenary session in Strasbourg, where the Members discussed the need for not only a comprehensive EU strategy but its implementation in an action plan.
- More recently, on 17 October 2024, the SANT subcommittee that I have the honour to continue to chair also this term, held an exchange



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of views on neurological health, with the European Brain Council, where Members discussed strategies and actions to address the subject.

- On 20 November 2024 the SANT Committee will hold a hearing on *Public health challenges in view of children and young people's wellbeing*, debating solutions and good practices to tackle the impact of the excessive exposure to screens and the interaction between social networks and mental health in children.

The Commission [listens](#), at least partially to our calls:

- On 20 March 2024, in its action plan on labour and skills shortages in the EU the Commission announced that it would 'launch the first-step social partners' consultation in view of proposing an initiative on telework and the right to disconnect to ensure workers' work-life balance in the context of increased digitalisation of the world of work, as well as their physical and mental health, and, in turn, their overall job quality.'
- The Commission recognised young people's safety online as a key priority. The recently updated [Digital Competences for Citizens Framework](#) includes a dedicated competence on protecting oneself and others from possible dangers in digital environments, including cyber bullying. The European network of [Safer Internet Centres](#) helplines provide information, advice and assistance to children, young people and parents on how to deal with issues associated with mental health and well-being, including addressing harmful online content, harmful contact and harmful conduct.



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- In its [Healthier together – EU non-communicable diseases initiative](#), launched in December 2021, and covering the period from 2022 to 2027, the Commission allocates €8 million for projects on mental health.
- The Commission has already funded and will continue to fund studies looking into the relationship between mental health and associated chronic conditions. For example, the ongoing EU-funded [HAPPY project](#) is studying one of the most common and debilitating comorbidities, namely the association between chronic pain and mood disorders, with the aim to translate research results into clinical practice.

While brainstorming about brain health in the European context we cannot ignore the achievements of the The [Human Brain Project](#), which has been a European Future and Emerging Technologies Flagship project 2013 to 2023. It pioneered a new paradigm in brain research, at the interface of computing and technology. In 2016, the Human Brain Project developed six research platforms that were opened to the community. Research and technology development paved the way for the establishment of [E-BRAINS](#) in 2018, a digital research infrastructure that gathers an extensive range of data and tools for brain-related research. E-BRAINS builds upon the work performed by the Human Brain Project teams in digital neuroscience, brain medicine and brain-inspired technology, and its infrastructure represents a significant milestone towards advancing the understanding of the human brain.



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My political family, the European Peoples Party, in the campaign for the European Parliament 2024, in [the Bucharest Manifesto](#), among other priority health tasks for this term, called for a strategy in the area of neurodegenerative diseases and an action plan in the area of mental health. We want the EU to build upon the achievements of the comprehensive holistic strategy [Beating Cancer Plan](#), which we called for in 2019 and which has been implemented since 2021. The Beating Cancer Plan has shown that it is possible and even necessary to include the EU more broadly in health. There is grassroots social support for this from citizens in the Member States, which has grown out of the experience of the COVID19 pandemic crisis. This is the EU Monnet Moment in health, the EU advancing not despite, but through crises, with the citizens, in accordance with subsidiarity, ready to transfer national competences to the EU in the expectation of a more effective response to challenges that know no national borders. It is therefore commendable that Ursula von der Leyen also raised those challenges in the area of mental and neurodegenerative health in her July opening plenary speech in the Parliament. These aspects also appear in the mission letter of the Commissioner for Health, although we would probably expect something more. However, the hearing of Olivér Várhelyi in the Parliament last week showed that the European Commission has concrete plans for this term in the area as well.

On the other hand, as indicated in the beginning of my intervention we would perhaps prefer a more holistic approach, not fragmentation in an approach focusing only on degenerative or neural issues and mental health separately. **We need a holistic Brain Health approach.**



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And in this approach, the EU must use the achievements of the aforementioned decade long Human Brain Project. In this respect, I assure you of our readiness to cooperate, among others, within the framework of the Parliament's health subcommittee, and soon probably the first full independent legislative Health Committee in the history of the EU and the European Parliament, SANT.

I hope that today's discussions will help to develop good conclusions that can be used in our joint actions for brain health in a healthier Europe.

Adam Jarubas, MEP, Chair of SANT