

EP BrainHealth: Building a holistic European Partnership for Brain Health

Leveraging decades of substantial investment across Europe's diverse brain research landscape, the **European Partnership for Brain Health** marks a transformative shift towards coordinated, long-term alignment and systemic impact. Emerging from the **CSA BrainHealth**, this 10-year initiative seeks to unite scientific, clinical, societal and policy communities under a single, holistic framework.

With 60+ participating institutions from 36 countries across Europe and beyond, the initiative is one of the largest collaborative efforts in brain research worldwide. **Dr. Friederike Bathe**, head of the partnership's coordination office at the German Aerospace Center (DLR Projektträger) in Bonn, explains how this approach will redefine how research and innovation translate into meaningful solutions to prevent and treat neurological and mental disorders, improving people's lives.

For more than two decades, Europe has invested heavily in brain-related research, funding major initiatives that have advanced understanding of neurological, neurodegenerative and mental disorders. Yet despite this sustained effort, the European brain health landscape has largely remained fragmented, shaped by parallel programmes with distinct objectives and their own funding motivations.

The creation of the European Partnership for Brain Health (EP BrainHealth) represents a deliberate attempt to move beyond that fragmentation – not by replacing what came before, but by bringing it together and widening the scope under one long-term, collaborative framework.

Formally launched in January 2026 for a planned 10-year

duration, EP BrainHealth has emerged from an extensive preparatory process conducted under the EU-funded CSA BrainHealth project (CSA stands for Coordination and Support Action). That process did more than design a new network structure. It redefined how research priorities in brain health should be set and how scientific and societal impact can realistically be achieved systemically over the long term.

A major driving force and contributor of the initiative has been the German Federal Ministry of Research, Technology and Space. It has appointed the DLR's project management agency to coordinate the huge project. Dr. Ulrike Bußhoff is the official coordinator, and Friederike Bathe heads the coordination office for both the CSA and the new partnership in Bonn. "The purpose of the CSA was to prepare and pave

the way for the new European Partnership for Brain Health," Bathe explains. "With great ambition and bringing together 21 partners from 11 countries, we wanted to design the new partnership to grow beyond the sum of its predecessors."

The CSA ran from November 2023 to October 2025, bringing together EU Member States, Associated Countries and third countries and involving a broad range of stakeholders, including policymakers, national funders, scientific communities, health professionals, patients and industry across the brain health ecosystem.

Four objectives defined the CSA's work. The first, and arguably the most impactful, was the development of a Joint Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda (SRIA). Led by the French national research agency ANR and the health research agency INSERM, the SRIA was produced through an iterative process which, as well as involving funders and the European Commission, also involved researchers, patient organisations, health professionals, social sciences experts and industry representatives. The SRIA also received the input and support of the broader brain health ecosystem through an open consultation.

Published in October 2024, it set out four overarching research priorities for the partnership as well as a portfolio of transversal topics that now guide the partnership's activities.

"The SRIA is the basis document for everything we are doing now in the partnership," Bathe underlines. The process of developing it was a very important step towards alignment, enabling discussion of common definitions, joint priorities and key brain health challenges to tackle," she adds.

Another CSA objective focused on the structural design of the new partnership. Rather than starting from scratch, the CSA deliberately looked to capitalise on the work done by existing European initiatives, including the Network of European Funding for Neuroscience Research (ERA-Net NEURON), the JPND Neurodegenerative Disease Network, the former CSA EBRA, and the Human Brain Project, which led to today's EBRAINS RI, a research infrastructure focused on brain research. Many of the actors behind these initiatives were involved in CSA BrainHealth, enabling the partnership design to build on proven governance models and processes while addressing some of their limitations.

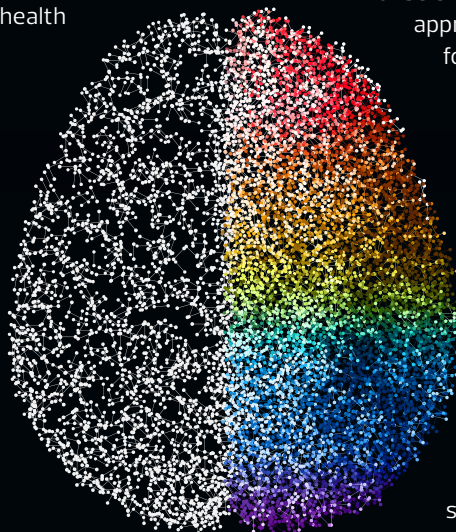
The third CSA objective was to gather partners and secure national commitments. Ministries, national funding agencies and foundations from across Europe and Associated Countries were brought into a single proposal for the co-funded European Partnership that was submitted in June

2025, leading to the formal start of the partnership on the 1st January 2026. The EP BrainHealth network brings together more than 60 participants from 36 countries across Europe and worldwide. The total planned budget sums up of approximately €500 million, making it one of the largest collaborative efforts in brain research worldwide.

The final, and possibly most crucial objective that runs through everything the partnership has now set out to achieve is meaningful stakeholder dialogue. "Patients, industry, global partners and society at large were engaged throughout the CSA, ensuring that the partnership was shaped not only by scientific priorities but by societal needs and expectations as well," says Bathe. It was this work that laid the foundation for what EP BrainHealth now refers to as its BrainHealth ecosystem.

Why a partnership?

Addressing one of the most pressing global challenges, brain health research is a complex and highly diverse field of science and translation. The European Partnership approach has emerged as the appropriate format for bringing together relevant stakeholders, bridging gaps and maximising synergies.



Bathe explains: "Europe has always supported a wide range of brain-related research, but funding has often been siloed by disease category or methodological approach. At the same time, scientific understanding of brain health has shifted, and biological, social and environmental factors have all now been recognised as influencing factors in health outcomes. That has led the research focus to move towards a more holistic view on brain health," she continues. The field is now overcoming traditional indication-related boundaries and beginning to understand the role of a broad range of influencing factors on the health of our brains.

The end, or impending end, of several major initiatives further reinforced the need for a more long-term, coordinating framework. EP BrainHealth is explicitly designed to provide continuity with these programmes, while also creating space for evolution. By acting as an umbrella over previous initiatives, and by actively building interfaces with other European Partnerships, research infrastructures and global programmes, it aims to strengthen Europe's global position in brain health research.

Improved brain health for all

At its core, EP BrainHealth is guided by a simple and well-articulated vision: improved brain health for all. This aligns closely with the World Health Organisation's definition of brain health as 'a lifelong, functional state encompassing cognitive,

sensory, emotional, behavioural and motor domains, irrespective of the presence or absence of disorder'.

The partnership's mission is explicitly research-driven. It will support brain health research and innovation by strengthening transnational collaboration and alignment. At its core, it also promotes the translation of results into tailored solutions for prevention, diagnosis, treatment and care that are accessible to all.

This dual focus of collaboration and translation is what differentiates EP BrainHealth from many previous efforts to coordinate brain health research. Rather than treating research, innovation and implementation as sequential or separate, the partnership is structured to support progress along the entire translational value chain. The work goes from fundamental research through clinical research and proof of concept to implementation science.

Crucially, the partnership recognises its limits in terms of the implementation of its outcomes. Implementing solutions within healthcare systems always depends on political decisions at national and regional levels. "But the partnership is designed to ensure that research outputs are relevant, accessible and visible to those who can take them forward – and that largely comes down to developing a community and to effective communication," Bathe points out.

Strategic priorities

The SRIA defines four research priority areas, which together reflect Europe's most pressing brain health challenges.

The first focuses on promoting brain health and preventing disease, grounded in a deeper understanding of brain development and functioning across life stages. The second addresses early detection, diagnosis, monitoring and treatment, recognising the need for improved insight into disease mechanisms and pathophysiology. The third priority shifts attention to care, support and quality of life – emphasising translation into clinical practice, patient involvement and equitable access to care. The fourth priority integrates social, ethical and legal dimensions, explicitly embedding social sciences and humanities into neuroscience research. "These aspects are critical to the success of the partnership in the long term," Bathe stresses. "They are essential if results are to be accepted by society and translated into real impact."

Across all four priorities, a set of cross-cutting themes, including data standardisation, access to high-quality data, participation, targeted treatment approaches and training the next generation of researchers, ensures coherence and continuity in all activities. Digital technologies and data-driven approaches play a central role in this strategy and interdisciplinary research teams working on EP BrainHealth projects will be encouraged to leverage AI-powered tools,

advanced computational protocols and multilevel datasets to improve disease stratification and prediction, paving the way for tailored healthcare.

At the same time, the partnership places strong emphasis on responsible research and innovation. Ethical, legal and societal implications, particularly around data sharing, privacy and neurotechnologies, are embedded throughout the work programme. The participation of the relevant research infrastructures, such as EBRAINS AISBL, plays a key role in supporting data harmonisation, standards and access.

The first two calls

The partnership's ambitions are translated into practice through joint transnational funding calls under the leadership of the French National Research Agency (ANR). The calls use a variable geometry model that allows funders to participate according to national priorities. The first two calls, launched in January 2026, are deliberately designed as a bridge between past and future priorities.

Both calls share a single overarching topic focused on factors influencing brain health trajectories across the lifespan, including biological, social and environmental determinants. Call One addresses neurological, mental and sensory disorders, while Call Two focuses on neurodegenerative diseases. (<https://www.brainhealth-partnership.eu/calls/>)

This approach allows continuity with NEURON and JPNP funding streams in the partnership's first year, while already bringing communities closer together. In future years, this separation will be further reduced as the partnership moves towards fully integrated brain health calls.

The expected outcomes from these first calls are multi-dimensional and transnational collaboration is one of them: "We have more than 40 funders from over 30 countries committing more than €50 million to the first calls," explains Dr. Christina Müller, scientific officer in the coordination office. "This is a significant achievement in the current political climate in which funding for international cooperation is often constrained."

Equally important is translation, with EP BrainHealth fostering interdisciplinary and innovative approaches in fundamental and clinical research. By funding research projects along the entire translational pathway up to proof-of-concept studies and implementation-oriented research, the EP BrainHealth is laying the groundwork for later-stage developments, for example in collaboration with industry.

With these core expectations in place, the partnership has been explicitly designed to attract multidisciplinary actors with these first two calls from the outset. Beyond neuroscientists and clinicians, they actively encourage

participation from social scientists, digital health experts, patient organisations and other adjacent sectors.

One notable innovation to this participatory approach has been the possibility to include patient organisations as independent consortium partners in the new research projects, who can be supported by a dedicated EU budget where national eligibility rules would otherwise exclude them. This is intended to enable meaningful patient involvement from the earliest stages of research.

But engagement is not limited to funding calls. The partnership's work plan also includes platforms for capacity building, training, global outreach, private sector engagement and citizen involvement, with dedicated boards being established to support this ecosystem approach.

The message to potential stakeholders is clear: The EP BrainHealth is not a closed partnership. New partners, new funders and new collaborations will be integrated throughout its entire lifetime.

Looking ahead

This is a long-term vision designed to shape brain health research and deliver meaningful improvements to brain health over the next ten years. The ambition is healthier populations, improved wellbeing, better prevention, diagnosis, treatment and care, and scientific breakthroughs that are not only published, but also implemented and applied.

Within the BrainHealth ecosystem, success will mean EP BrainHealth becoming established as a trusted, collaboration framework, recognised internationally and capable of sustaining momentum beyond individual projects or political cycles. Achieving that needs scientific breakthroughs, societal relevance and engagement, and a structure that allows all of this to come together.

"For Europe's brain health community, and for disciplines that have not traditionally seen themselves as part of it, we face a big challenge: we need stakeholders to engage early and to work across traditional boundaries. With EP BrainHealth, we now have a partnership structure in place to enable collaboration to deliver lasting impact over the next ten years."

PROJECT INFORMATION

Project Title

EP BrainHealth – European Partnership for Brain Health

Project Objective

EP BrainHealth aims to deepen understanding of the brain in all its dimensions and to foster translation of research results into tailored, accessible solutions for prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and care. The partnership involves relevant stakeholders and strengthens transnational collaboration to increase and align investment in brain health research and innovation.

Project Duration and Timing

10 years: 1 January 2026 – 31 December 2035

Project Funding

Overall amount: ~ €500 million
Source: ~€345 million national contributions from partner organisations, ~€146 million co-funding from the EU

Project Partners

54 partners and 10 additional participants from 36 countries; primarily funding organisations and ministries

MAIN CONTACT

Name

Friederike Bathe

Email

Brain-health@dlr.de

Web address

<https://www.brainhealth-partnership.eu/>



BrainHealth
PARTNERSHIP



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation program under the grant agreement No 101259512.