Have your say on the future of European research

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To **sign the petition** go to https://www.openpetition.eu/petition/online/call-for-increased-emphasis-on-brain-research-in-the-strategic-plan-for-horizon-europe

For more on **Horizon Europe** see https://ec.europa.eu/info/news/have-your-say-future-objectives-eu-funded-research-and-innovation-2019-jun-28_en

For more on the **European Research and Innovation Days** see https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/events/upcoming-events/european-research-and-innovation-days_en

For **official EU statistics** see https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Population

For more on the **burden of neurological diseases** see **Articles** *Lancet Neurol* 2019; **18:** 459-80

For the **G20 Osaka Leaders' Declaration** see https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2019/06/29/g20-osaka-leaders-declaration/

Neurological researchers are not typically known as ardent activists, and might be viewed to prefer quiet labs or busy clinical centres rather than the spotlight of the press and social media. But the stereotypes are being challenged. The Director of the UK Dementia Research Institute, Bart De Strooper, has chosen to become a campaigner, and he is not alone. Other prominent scientists in Germany, Sweden, and the UK are also lobbying against the underfunding of brain research in Europe. They request your support.

De Strooper and his colleagues want you to start by signing a petition. The petition urges the European Commission to make brain research a top priority for Horizon Europe, which is its new programme for research and innovation, and has a budget of about 100 billion euros to fund projects from 2021 to 2027. On June 28, 2019, the Commission opened up a public consultation to "collect input from across Europe and beyond". Carlos Moedas, the Commissioner for Research, Science and Innovation, declared that the input will guide the calls for proposals from Horizon Europe, and will be debated at the European Research and Innovation Days on September 24–26, 2019.

Policymakers must align public investment and resources with the priority needs of the countries they serve. But the challenges that societies face are not static; they shift with time and are usually not easy to quantify and compare. However, a growing body of evidence, from economics to medical research, unequivocally reveals the salient challenge threatening the future of all relatively wealthy, democratic societies: longevity. Nearly one fifth (19%) of the European Union (EU) population is aged 65 years or older and this proportion will increase over the next two decades. To transform this extended life expectancy into a healthy life expectancy (ie, years lived in good health) must therefore be a core European aspiration. Official European statistics show that life expectancy at birth for women and men are close to 84 years and 78 years, respectively, whereas healthy life years are only 64 years for women and 63 years for men. Even without further gains in life expectancy, advances in healthy ageing could grant millions of people the priceless gift of many more productive and enjoyable years, and national health services the respite that will promote their sustainability. These advances could also tackle health inequalities, which are now wider among older individuals than the young, as the gap between number of years lived in good health keeps widening between wealthy and poor. But can science unravel the key components of healthy ageing? Epidemiological data can point towards the areas for which research advances would have the largest and most rapid impact, and Horizon Europe should therefore use this information to prioritise accordingly.

The best epidemiological evidence to compare the relative harm that diseases cause, and health trends over time, is provided by the Global Burden of Diseases, Injuries, and Risk Factors Study (GBD). The GBD 2016 has shown that neurological disorders are now the leading cause of disability worldwide and that these findings are driven by ageing; hence, the burden of neurological disease will keep growing as populations get older. In Europe, stroke and Alzheimer's disease and other dementias now top the rank for disability burden in the elderly. Funding neurological research, therefore, should be of urgency for Horizon Europe. Furthermore, such strategy would align with that of the 19 countries that, together with the EU, form the G20 forum. "We will promote healthy and active ageing", reads the Declaration that the G20 Leaders have agreed upon after their last Summit in Osaka, Japan, on June 28–29, 2019. Moreover, the Declaration explicitly mentions policies to address dementia as a necessary effort towards "realising an inclusive and sustainable world". The EU has the human power and resources to lead this effort, and Horizon Europe can be the instrument that will catalyse innovation in brain health.

Valentin Fuster, former President of the World Heart Federation, acknowledged that, whereas a healthy heart can lead to a long life, a healthy brain is the guarantor of the quality of that life. Indeed, the complexity and physiological relevance of the nervous system are not comparable to those of any other system in a human being. Consciousness, perception and sensations, movement control, metabolic regulation, sleep, memory and cognition, language, emotions; brain functions are so essential that no wonder their deterioration with age leads to a life that, for some, might unfortunately not be worth living. "We are collectively calling for an urgent deepening and broadening of research efforts towards brain health in the EU", De Strooper states in his plea. Let's sign his petition.

■ *The Lancet Neurology*