

Neurodegenerative disease research in Europe gets it together

THE EU JOINT PROGRAMME – NEURODEGENERATIVE DISEASE RESEARCH (JPND) – IS DUE TO LAUNCH A €30 MILLION FUND FOR NEURODEGENERATIVE DISEASE RESEARCH. THIS IS THE FIRST CONCRETE STRATEGY BETWEEN JPND AND HORIZON 2020 DESIGNED TO ADDRESS THE GLOBAL THREAT OF NEURODEGENERATIVE DISEASES.

Professor Philippe Amouyel

Chair of the JPND Management Board writes for EBC News.

As part of the new initiative, JPND will launch a joint transnational call for proposals in early 2015 aimed at supporting high level, multinational and multi-disciplinary neurodegenerative diseases research. The call sees €30 million made available to JPND member countries as well as a top-up of up to 30% by the European Commission.

Neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's are a truly global challenge. Most of these diseases remain incurable and are strongly linked with aging populations. Dementias alone affect more than seven million people in Europe and their care is estimated to cost €130 billion a year. The challenge facing the world of diagnosing, treating and caring for people affected by neurodegenerative diseases is extremely daunting and no single country alone has the expertise or resources necessary to tackle all of the big questions in this area.

The JPND was established in 2009 as the pilot of the Member State-led Joint Programming Initiatives (JPI) to enable participating EU Member States to work together on the challenge of age-related neurodegenerative diseases, in particular Alzheimer's. In the past five years, JPND has become a global initiative with 28 countries now participating. Tremendous progress has been made by JPND in that time in terms of increasing coordination, collaboration and alignment between national research programmes related to neurodegenerative diseases. This has resulted in an unprecedented mobilization of human resources, actions, funding and awareness

to tackle this problem which no country can address alone.

The past 12 months in particular have seen JPND countries work together very effectively in a number of priority areas with activities moving forward in parallel, creating the necessary trust and alignment between the 28 participating countries in order to implement our Strategic Research Agenda (SRA). Guided by our Phase One Implementation Plan, these actions include, but are not limited to:

- Action Groups to promote engagement and partnership, including with the European Commission, patient organisations, industry and other international organisations.
- Alignment Actions to determine research needs and opportunities in areas such as Longitudinal Cohort studies, Animal and Cell Models, Assisted Living Technologies, Palliative and End-of-life Care.
- Annual Calls for Proposals – the results of two JPND calls in the areas of 'Preventive strategies' and 'Cross-disease analysis of pathways', will be announced very soon. These JPND actions are bringing together leading scientific experts, important stakeholders and funding bodies to investigate the key research questions and barriers to progress in these areas. In total, more than €100 million is due to be made available in this phase. Importantly, this funding will be in addition to, not instead of, other neurodegenerative disease funding.

JPND and Horizon 2020

In a significant scale-up of implementation of our Strategic Research Agenda, we recently announced a major new cohesive action with the European Commission, with a call for proposals to be launched in

January 2015 in three JPND priority areas: Longitudinal Cohorts, Animal and Cell Models, Risk and Protective Factors. This 'JPcofuND' action will see more than €30 million coming from the JPND member countries with a significant additional European Commission topping-up fund. This unique co-funded initiative is a major step towards the realisation of a so-called European Research Area dedicated to neurodegenerative disease research – an issue central to the joint programming concept.

It is also important to note that JPND is moving far beyond just calls for research proposals. For example, a 'rapid action' was launched in April 2014 to establish a series of community-led working groups to establish 'best practice' guidelines and methodological frameworks to overcome barriers to research in population studies and neurodegenerative disease-related cohorts. Ten international working groups began their work in August 2014 under this action, through the support of ten JPND member countries.

Global Partnerships and Sustainability

Through its strong global dimension, JPND has quickly become the reference for European and global knowledge and innovation in the area of neurodegenerative disease research and is aligned with the recommendations from the 2013 Global Summit on dementia. As the chair of JPND, together with other JPND members of the G7 countries, I was delighted to have been nominated to the World Dementia Council that has since emerged from this initiative. Moreover, several of our JPND members are working with the OECD on the mapping of e-infrastructures and big data for neurodegenerative disease research, using the JPND mapping exercise as a reference point.

The next most important question for JPND in the coming years is how it is going to sustain the progress already being made. We are now preparing scenarios for a sustainable management structure which will see JPND successes in transnational collaboration in neurodegenerative diseases continue into the long-term in order to tackle these chronic and complex diseases.

For more information on JPND and the call can be found at: www.jpnd.eu or follow us on Twitter @JPNDEurope.