

WHO launches its Global Action Plan for brain health

On May 27, the 75th World Health Assembly adopted the *Intersectoral Global Action Plan on Epilepsy and Other Neurological Disorders 2022–2031* (IGAP). By launching the IGAP, WHO is now committed to prioritise brain health over the next decade. This action is overdue and crucial, because neurological disorders are the leading cause of disability and second leading cause of death worldwide. More than one in three people will have a brain disorder in their lifetime, many of which are preventable and treatable. The IGAP must finally place brain disorders as a top priority in the agenda of policy makers.

The IGAP outlines five strategic objectives, each comprising two targets, which countries should reach by 2031. The first objective aims to make neurological disorders a priority and strengthen governance. The aspiration is for 75% of countries to have a national strategy for reducing the burden of neurological disorders by 2031, and for all countries to implement an awareness campaign to increase understanding of brain disorders, highlight issues such as prevention, and reduce stigma and discrimination. The second objective is to provide effective, timely, and responsive diagnosis, treatment, and care. To achieve this objective, 75% of countries should include brain disorders in a universal health care benefits package, and 80% of countries should provide essential medicines and basic technologies for management of brain disorders in primary care. The third objective is for 80% of countries to have an intersectoral programme for brain health promotion and prevention of brain disorders by 2031. The fourth objective relates to research and information: the goals are for 80% of countries to collect data on a core set of indicators for brain disorders, and for global research output to double by 2031 from levels in 2022. The final strategic objective focuses on a public health approach to epilepsy, as a model brain disorder. Countries should aim to increase service coverage (eg, access to inpatient or outpatient facilities) for epilepsy by 50% from levels in 2021, and 80% of countries should enact legislation to protect people living with epilepsy against discrimination (eg, in the workplace) by 2031.

The International Bureau for Epilepsy (IBE) and the International League Against Epilepsy (ILAE) are notable contributors to the success of the IGAP. Since 1997, IBE and ILAE have been working with WHO on a Global Campaign Against Epilepsy, with the aim to recognise

epilepsy as a public health imperative. Focusing initially on epilepsy awareness, acceptance, and education, the campaign subsequently looked at the burden of epilepsy and ways to decrease the treatment gap. Epilepsy is one of the most common brain disorders worldwide, and it is highly treatable; nevertheless a treatment gap still exists, not only in low-income and middle-income countries (LMICs) but also in high-income countries. The launch of the IGAP is an achievement that now provides opportunities to ensure that epilepsy and other brain disorders are placed high on government agendas.

The European Academy of Neurology (EAN), which represents 47 countries in Europe and elsewhere, must become a key partner for WHO in implementing the goals of the IGAP in Europe. On May 10, EAN released its Brain Health Strategy, which outlines a programme to reduce the burden of neurological disorders and promote brain health in Europe over the coming years, complementing the timeframe of the IGAP. The EAN Brain Health Strategy could also be viewed as a model for other regions. In Europe, brain disorders are the second leading cause of death (after cardiovascular diseases) and the third most common cause of disability and death (after cardiovascular diseases and cancer). EAN anticipates that, with an ageing population, this burden of brain disease will inevitably increase, and that the COVID-19 pandemic might have added to the burden, regarding long-term neurological effects of SARS-CoV-2 infection.

The objectives of the IGAP are ambitious and require a strong commitment from WHO Member States and global organisations if they are to be achieved over the next decade. With 70% of the burden of brain disorders falling on LMICs, global collaboration is essential. The World Federation of Neurology, IBE, ILAE, and the International Child Neurology Association have already committed to work together to achieve the targets set out in the IGAP.

Triggered by the launch of the IGAP, the next decade could see a revolution in neurology, not only by increasing public awareness of brain disorders but also by boosting numbers of neurologists in training, raising research funding, and making neurology a priority for policy makers. The chance to act is here, and hopefully the opportunity for a truly global collaboration is realised.

■ *The Lancet Neurology*



For more on the IGAP and prioritising brain health see [Editorial Lancet Neurol 2022; 21: 103](#)

For more on the global burden of neurological disorders see [Articles Lancet Neurol 2019; 18: 459–80](#)

For more on the IGAP and its strategic objectives see https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/brain-health/global-targets-and-indicators_summary_04_2022.pdf

For more on the Global Campaign Against Epilepsy see [Epilepsia 2021; 62: 1057–63](#)

For the EAN Brain Health Strategy see [Eur J Neurol 2022; published online May 10. https://doi.org/10.1111/ene.15391](#)

For the burden of neurological disorders in Europe see [Articles Lancet Public Health 2020; 5: e551–67](#)