EFNA
EUROPEAN FEDERATION OF NEUROLOGICAL ASSOCIATIONS

The Honourable Ursula von der Leyen
President of the European Commission
Berlaymont Building
Rue de la Loi 200
1049 Brussels, Belgium

Date: 30/10/2025

Subject: Urgent Call for a Ringfenced, Standalone Health Budget for Europe

Dear President Von der Leyen,

On behalf of the members of the European Federation of Neurological Associations (EFNA), who represent millions of patients living with neurological disorders across Europe, we write to express our deep concern regarding the current structure of the European Union's health funding mechanisms. Specifically, we urge the European Commission to establish a ringfenced, standalone health budget that reflects the strategic importance of health to Europe's future.

While we acknowledge the value of cross-sectoral collaboration—particularly between health and innovation—we are increasingly alarmed by the dilution of health priorities within broader funding frameworks such as Horizon Europe. When health is subsumed under innovation or other thematic umbrellas, it risks being deprioritised in favour of technological or economic objectives that may not align with the urgent needs of patients, healthcare systems, and public health.

The Risks of Integrating Health into Broader Portfolios

- **Loss of Patient-Centric Focus**: Innovation-driven agendas often prioritise market potential over patient need. This can marginalise chronic and complex conditions—such as neurological disorders—that require sustained investment but may not yield immediate commercial returns.
- **Fragmentation of Funding Streams**: Health-related initiatives must compete with non-health projects for limited resources, leading to fragmented efforts and reduced impact across Member States.
- **Reduced Accountability and Transparency**: When health funding is embedded within other domains, it becomes more difficult to track, evaluate, and ensure equitable distribution of resources across disease areas and populations.
- **Undermining Long-Term Health Strategy**: Europe's ageing population, rising burden of non-communicable diseases, and increasing mental health challenges demand a coherent, long-term health strategy. This cannot be achieved without dedicated, predictable funding.

The Burden of Neurological Disease in Europe

More than half of the European population (approx. 60%) suffers from a neurological disorder and these disorders are among the leading causes of disability and death in Europe[1]. Neurological conditions are responsible for **over 20% of the total disease burden** in Europe, measured in disability-adjusted life years (DALYs)[1].

Conditions such as stroke, dementia, epilepsy, migraine, and Parkinson's disease are **increasing in prevalence**, particularly among ageing populations[1]. The number of known rare neurological conditions is also ever-increasing, and according to the European Reference Network for Rare Neurological Diseases (ERN-RND) **60% of those affected are still undiagnosed**[2].
The economic impact is staggering: neurological diseases cost European economies **hundreds of billions of euros annually**, including direct healthcare costs and lost productivity[1]. Despite this, neurology receives disproportionately low research and policy attention compared to other major disease areas[3].

A Standalone Health Budget: A Strategic Imperative

We believe that a ringfenced health budget would:

- **Ensure that health priorities are defined by public health needs, not market dynamics.**
- **Enable targeted investment in prevention, care, and research for high-burden conditions, including neurological diseases.**
- **Strengthen resilience of healthcare systems across Member States.**
- **Foster trust among citizens that their health is a central concern of the European project.**

Europe's health challenges are not peripheral—they are foundational. The COVID-19 pandemic made this abundantly clear. Now is the time to act decisively and structurally.

The signatories to this letter respectfully urge the European Commission to initiate a dialogue with civil society, patient organisations, and healthcare stakeholders to explore the creation of a standalone health budget in the next Multiannual Financial Framework.

A competitive and resilient Europe cannot be achieved without a healthy Europe.

We remain at your disposal to support this effort and to ensure that the voices of neurological patients are heard in shaping Europe's health future.

Yours sincerely,

Astri Arnesen
President
European Federation of Neurological Associations (EFNA)

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1. *Neurological disorders in Europe: Impact, costs, and the road ahead.* https://www.eanpages.org/2025/06/21/neurological-disorders-in-europe-impact-costs-and-the-road-ahead/
2. *Study conducted by the European Brain Council on the value of early coordinated care for patients affected by rare neurological diseases.* https://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/sante/items/675440/en
3. *The burden of neurological diseases - ean.org*. https://www.ean.org/research/resources/the-burden-of-neurological-diseases

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Signatories: