



## PRESS RELEASE

European College of Neuropsychopharmacology (ECNP)  
14 June 2011

### **Funding crisis threatens development of new treatments for mental illness – urgent action needed**

**A new report published today by the European College of Neuropsychopharmacology (ECNP) raises serious concerns about the abrupt withdrawal by major pharmaceutical companies from research into mental disorders and diseases of the brain in Europe. Coupled with low levels of EU research funding, the report states “the withdrawal of research resources is a withdrawal of hope for patients and their families.”**

**The report asks that urgent action is taken to tackle Europe’s foremost health care challenge of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.**

The report is the output of an ECNP Summit held in March 2011 attended by 60 key representatives from academia, government, the pharmaceutical industry, the biotechnology sector, regulatory agencies and patients’ organisations.

The current problem is that identification of reliable targets for improved pharmacological treatment in psychiatry and neurology is particularly complex and challenging. This means that the costs of drug discovery and development no longer easily translate into returns from the market for prescription medicines.

The report identified the major challenges facing the field:

- Longer development times than other treatments – 13 years on average for neuropsychiatric medicines
- Higher failure rates, often late in the development cycle, incurring (even) greater financial loss
- Higher licensing barriers, with only one new antidepressant – agomelatine – licensed in Europe in the last ten years, as against 10 new anti-epileptics
- Increasing litigation hazards, as adverse treatment effects are more and more pursued through the courts
- Pressure from the capital markets for shorter investment cycles
- Continuing deficits in the science underpinning neuropsychiatric drug discovery, with secure biomarkers still lacking for most neuropsychiatric disorders
- Residual prejudice against mental illness and suspicion of neuropsychiatric treatments, leading to a greater unwillingness by health care systems to pay for them.

The report recommends that urgent action needs to be taken including:

- Working on ways to increase investment, especially to redress Europe’s historically low levels of public investment in brain science
- Enhancing research, in particular by working with industry to make no-longer-needed industrial data and compounds available to the academic research community
- Reviewing the regulatory process, to encourage more and better trials in psychiatry

- Working with patient organisations to address stigma, trial outcome measures and alternative funding sources.

Summit co-organiser David Nutt said, “Despite the public health imperative, not only has EU research funding remained very low, but – even worse – big pharma is increasingly coming to see research into better neuropsychiatric drug targets as economically non-viable. With Europe’s extraordinary tradition in neuroscience innovation relying so heavily on private-sector investment, the consequences for the region’s research base and public health agenda are of major concern.”

Co-organiser Guy Goodwin said, “The issue here is not just that a very key part of Europe’s knowledge economy is under serious threat, it’s that the withdrawal of research resources means the slow down – and even outright cessation in some areas – of new treatments being developed, and this will inevitably affect patient well-being.”

Every year around one third of the EU’s population suffers from one or more mental or neurological disorder. The currently imperfect treatment options have resulted in highly prevalent disorders such as depression, dementia and addiction now accounting for some 35% of Europe’s total disease burden – higher than cancer or heart disease.

The economic cost to the EU region, driven especially by disease-specific impairments and premature disability, is conservatively estimated at €386 billion a year (in 2005), far exceeding that of any other disease area. The human cost – in terms of illness-related work disability, social role failure and premature death – is similarly immense. As Europe’s population continues to age, moreover, it is due to escalate even further. Addressing these issues, through improved prevention, intervention and rehabilitation, is Europe’s health care challenge of 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Executive Director of the European Brain Council, Alastair Benbow, said, “The report highlights the urgency of the Europe’s funding crisis in neuropsychiatric drug discovery. If steps aren’t taken now, as the report advises – to stimulate research and investment in both the public and private sector – the field could really suffer lasting damage. The consequences of this for the region’s long-term mental health will necessarily be negative.”

The report is available at: [www.ecnp.eu/publications/reports/report-summit2011.aspx](http://www.ecnp.eu/publications/reports/report-summit2011.aspx).

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### **About ECNP**

ECNP is an independent scientific association whose mission is to advance the science of the brain, promote better treatment and enhance brain health. The annual ECNP Congress attracts scientists and clinicians from across the world to discuss the latest advances in brain research in Europe’s largest meeting on brain science. More information about ECNP, its aims and activities, can be found at [www.ecnp.eu](http://www.ecnp.eu).

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## Funding crisis threatens development of new treatments for mental illness

### – Fact File –

Mental disorders and neurological diseases are disorders of the brain and the central nervous system. These encompass a wide range of mental disorders and conditions, such as depression, schizophrenia, anxiety, sleep disorders and addiction, as well as neurological disorders, such as Parkinson's disease and Alzheimer's. Neuroscience, the scientific study of the nervous system, is the underlying research discipline.

- In any given year, by a conservative estimate, almost 80 million Europeans (27% of the EU population) are affected by disorders of the brain.

Source: H.-U. Wittchen and F. Jacobi, 'Size and Burden of Mental Disorders in Europe,' *European Neuropsychopharmacology* 15 (2005), pp. 357-76.  
[http://www.europeanbraincouncil.org/pdfs/Publications\\_/Size\\_Burden%20of%20Mental%20Disorders%20-%20ecnp.pdf](http://www.europeanbraincouncil.org/pdfs/Publications_/Size_Burden%20of%20Mental%20Disorders%20-%20ecnp.pdf)

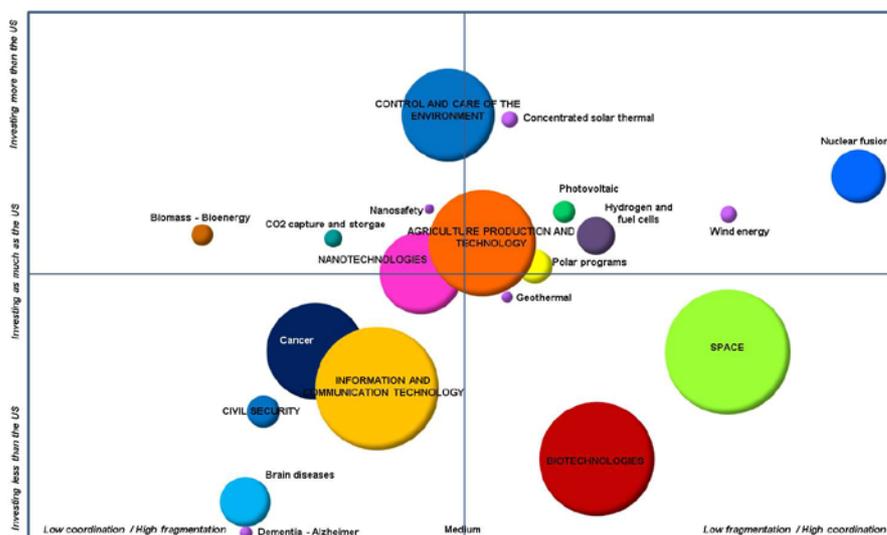
- Diseases of the brain and central nervous system constitute 35% of Europe's total disease burden. Throughout Europe, 23% of the years of healthy life are lost due to brain diseases and 50% of the years of life lived with disability (YLD) – at a total cost to the region of €386 billion per annum.

Source: J. Olesen and M. Leonardi, 'The burden of brain diseases in Europe,' *European Journal of Neuroscience* 10 (2003), pp. 471-77.  
[http://www.europeanbraincouncil.org/pdfs/Publications\\_/EBC%20Burden%20of%20Brain%20Diseases%20-%20EJN%20-%20August%202003.pdf](http://www.europeanbraincouncil.org/pdfs/Publications_/EBC%20Burden%20of%20Brain%20Diseases%20-%20EJN%20-%20August%202003.pdf)

- And yet only 8% (€465 million) of the total EU's Seventh Framework Programme (FP7) health research budget (€6,050 million) has so far been invested in research on the causes and treatment of disorders of the brain.

Source: [http://ec.europa.eu/research/health/index\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/research/health/index_en.html)

- Public funding for research into disorders of the brain in Europe significantly lags comparable investment in the United States.



X-axis: The degree of coordination (estimated) among EU member state research programmes and funding and institutional fragmentation.

Y-axis: The logarithmic ratio of public R&D investment in Europe (member states + European Commission) compared to the US.

Size of bubbles: Directly proportional to the amount of European public funding (member states + European Commission).

Source: COM (2008) 468, *Towards Joint Programming in Research*, Box 1, p. 5.  
[http://ec.europa.eu/research/press/2008/pdf/com\\_2008\\_468\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/research/press/2008/pdf/com_2008_468_en.pdf)

- Brain research suffers disproportionately – not just relative to other regions but also to other disease areas. For example, although cancer incurs only 50% of the cost of brain diseases, public grants for cancer research have been almost twice as high as the public financial support of brain research.

Source: P. Sobocki, I. Lekander, S. Berwick, J. Olesen and B. Jönsson, 'Resource allocation to brain research in Europe (RABRE),' *European Journal of Neuroscience* 24 (2006) pp. 2691-93.  
<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1460-9568.2006.05116.x/pdf>

- The neurosciences are one of Europe's scientific success stories and have made many transformational contributions to human knowledge of the brain and the treatment of its disorders:

- Seventeen Nobel prizes: Camillo Golgi, Santiago Ramón y Cajal (1906); Charles Scott Sherrington, Edgar Douglas Adrian (1932); Henry Hallett Dale, Otto Loewi (1936); Walter Rudolf Hess, António Caetano Egas Moniz (1949); Alan Lloyd Hodgkin, Andrew Fielding Huxley (1963); Ulf von Euler, Bernard Katz (1970); Torsten N. Wiesel (1981); Rita Levi-Montalcini (1986); Erwin Neher, Bert Sakmann (1991); Arvid Carlsson (2000)

Source: [http://nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/medicine/nerve\\_signaling.html](http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/medicine/nerve_signaling.html)

- The first antidepressant (imipramine), anxiolytic (diazepam) and antipsychotic (chlorpromazine), as well as most of the later refinements such as the SSRIs.
  - The first proof that a neurotransmitter was responsible for a brain disease (dopamine in Parkinson's disease), leading to the first pathology-targeted treatment (L-DOPA).
  - Groundbreaking discoveries in nerve transmission, leading to pioneering inventions in brain imaging such as MRI and PET.
  - A history of breakthrough innovations in the chemistry and pharmacology of brain science.
- The vast majority (79%) of funding for brain research in Europe has historically come from industry.

Source: P. Sobocki, I. Lekander, S. Berwick, J. Olesen and B. Jönsson, 'Resource allocation to brain research in Europe (RABRE),' *European Journal of Neuroscience* 24 (2006) pp. 2691-93.  
<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1460-9568.2006.05116.x/pdf>

*The pull-out of many pharmaceutical firms from psychiatry and or neurology research and development in Europe will inevitably slow the development of new and better treatments.*