

“Headway – A new roadmap in Brain Health: Focus Epilepsy”, realized by the Think Tank **The European House – Ambrosetti** in collaboration with **Angelini Pharma**, was conceived and launched in 2022 with the aim of creating a **multidisciplinary platform for strategic reflection, analysis, dialogue, and comparison** between various European experiences in the management of individuals with Epilepsy.

The initiative **keeps the trajectory and works in continuity and coherence** with programs, activities, and strategies of Governments and International Organizations (such as the WHO) and scientific societies/patient associations/advocacy groups (among others, ILAE, IBE, and Epilepsy Alliance Europe), as well as of European Institutions, to contribute to **reducing the burden of Epilepsy** in Europe. The specific goals include to:

- Increase **knowledge and awareness** of the critical issues/specificities related to Epilepsy, outlining the current scenario in Europe and **elaborate reflections** on the impacts of Epilepsy with a particular focus on the quality of life of individuals;
- Create **benchmarks to compare policies and action plans** developed and implemented across Europe;
- **Stimulate debate among relevant stakeholders** (including policymakers, institutions, patient and caregiver associations, clinicians, etc.);
- **Communicate and disseminate** the results of the initiative and its priorities areas of intervention.

Among neurological disorders, Epilepsy is the **4th most common** in Europe, causing **1.3 million DALYs** and **941,000 YLDs**. The incidence of the disease is often underestimated given the complexity of symptom manifestation and underlying causes. Nonetheless, estimates report nearly **400,000 new cases in Europe each year**, for a total of **6 million individuals** living with Epilepsy (**6-8%** of the population).

Epilepsy and its seizures can develop in **any person at any age**, even though the latter are more common in children and the elderly. The **risk of premature death** in people with Epilepsy is up to **3 times higher than for the general population**, while **life expectancy** is reduced by **2-10 years**.

It is important to tackle Epilepsy and support individuals with Epilepsy due to its important **economic burden** equal to **~20 billion euro annually**. Social exclusion and stigma **largely contribute to the global burden of Epilepsy**. Despite this, very few European countries have national plans for managing the disorder.

The **COVID-19 pandemic has exasperated** some of these issues: disruption of services, difficult access to medicines, interrupted immunization programs and increased mental health issues have added to the **burden of individuals with Epilepsy**.

In the past decade, global health policy has recognized Epilepsy as a **leading cause of disability**. In 2009, the WHO defined **Epilepsy as a social disease**, while in 2020 the 73rd World Health Assembly identified Epilepsy as one of the

most common neurological disorders, adopting a resolution aimed at developing the **Intersectoral Global Action Plan on Epilepsy and other Neurological Disorders (IGAP) 2022-2031**. First discussed as a draft at the 150th session of the WHO Executive Board in January 2022, in May 2022 the document has been **unanimously approved**.

In the European context, the burden of Epilepsy is significant, yet access to quality care is often lacking, especially in some countries: even though approximately **70% of people with Epilepsy are likely to respond to treatment**, around **40% across Europe** - and **up to 90%** in some areas - are missing out (**treatment gap**), emphasizing the need for **harmonization programs and European guidelines outlining minimum standards of care**. Differences in access to treatment between European countries are not surprising, also given the **great variability** in terms of **national income, life expectancy, and healthcare systems organization**.

This preoccupying situation **highlights a serious underlying issue**, impacting also on the experience of people with Epilepsy and their families across all sectors:

- Within **school settings**, there is a complex interaction between **learning ability and Epilepsy**, which can result in a greater risk of children with Epilepsy being misunderstood and excluded: it has been estimated that between **25-50% of children with Epilepsy** have some **degree of educational difficulty**.
- In workplaces, both **under- and unemployment are more common in people with Epilepsy**: studies have shown that people with Epilepsy have significant difficulties in obtaining jobs (in Europe, unemployment is **2-3 times higher among people with Epilepsy vs. general population**). Nevertheless, when Epilepsy is well controlled, it has been proven that it has much less impact on employment rates and history.
- In general, people with Epilepsy often **experience social withdrawal and isolation**, which is frequently the result of anxiety about possible adverse reactions of others in case a seizure should occur in a public area.

SAVE THE DATE

We will talk about this and more at the **Digital Event “HEADWAY – A NEW ROADMAP IN BRAIN HEALTH: FOCUS EPILEPSY”**, which will be held on **July 21st, from 16.00 – 18.00 (CEST)** to present the **main findings of the report** realized with the **contribution of European Epilepsy experts**.

For information and registration, please [click here](#).



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