The European Commission welcomes the first EU 'Joint Programming Initiative' to boost research on Alzheimer's and other neurodegenerative diseases

Leading researchers from across Europe will gather today in Stockholm to develop a European-wide research strategy to tackle neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's Disease. This is the first of the new European Union (EU) Joint Programming Initiatives which are designed to address 'grand challenges' which cannot be tackled effectively and efficiently by any one Member State acting alone. Joint Programming Initiatives aim to confront these common challenges through publicly funded research, by bringing together researchers, existing research evidence and national funding bodies and by sharing tools, techniques and other resources more efficiently among Member States. Such efforts can make a substantial contribution to achieving the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy, which focuses on research and innovation as the key means of delivering both improved quality of life and new sources of growth.

European Commissioner for Research, Innovation and Science, Máire Geoghegan-Quinn says: "This is the first example of the new Joint Programming approach by the EU to tackling the health-related, social, technological, and environmental "grand challenges" which face all of our citizens. Thanks to this Joint Programme, the best European medical researchers will be working together and pooling resources to help the millions of people who suffer from Alzheimer's and other neurodegenerative diseases. By making research more efficient and avoiding duplication of work, the Joint Programme will increase the prospects of real progress in preventing and treating these diseases. The lessons learned will then be used to inform research efforts in other areas."

Neurodegenerative diseases are strongly linked with age and Europe has a rapidly ageing population. Currently, 16% of the European population is over 65, and this figure is expected to reach 25% by 2030. In 2006, it was estimated that neurodegenerative diseases cost European health services approximately €72 billion to treat. Existing treatments for neurodegenerative diseases are limited, and mainly treat the symptoms, rather than addressing the cause. Alzheimer's disease is particularly expensive to manage due to its insidious onset, its ever-increasing levels of disability and the length of time over which the condition extends itself. The average duration of this disease is between 2 and 10 years, during which patients will require special care that is a significant burden for both caregivers and for society as a whole.

The ultimate goal of the Joint Programming Initiative on combating Neurodegenerative Diseases, in particular Alzheimer's Disease (JPND) is to accelerate progress in understanding the causes of these debilitating conditions, leading to early diagnosis, the development of new treatments and prevention and the provision of more effective medical and social care to improve the quality of life for patients and care givers.

To achieve this goal, 24 European countries, sharing a common vision, have decided to work together in an unprecedented collaborative initiative in research which is seeking to align their scientific competencies, medical strengths and social approaches to tackle the challenge.

The European Commission will be supporting the work of the JPND through a coordinating action with an EU contribution of close to €2 million.

The JPND will build on existing collaboration in Europe. The European Commission has contributed to fostering such collaboration. For example, during Research Framework Programme 6 (FP6), 28 projects on neurodegenerative diseases were funded with an EU contribution of € 136 million. So far in FP7, 34 projects have been funded with an EU contribution of € 159 million. The Commission will continue launching activities that are complementary to the work of the JPND.

The JPND will start by:

- Developing a strategic research agenda for neurodegenerative diseases encompassing basic, clinical and social research, with the latter also including models of healthcare delivery.
- Implementing that agenda by proposing innovative ways of pooling expertise and resources to address the fragmentation and duplication of current research efforts.

A Scientific Advisory Board comprising 15 of the top neurodegenerative disease scientists from Europe and elsewhere in the world has been formed to advise on the development of the strategic research agenda and its implementation. This group begins its work today. Professor Philippe Amouyel will be the Chair of the JPND Management Board.

More details at:

http://www.neurodegenerationresearch.eu/news/

http://ec.europa.eu/health/major_chronic_diseases/diseases/alzheimer/index_en.htm MEMO/09/346