ERA-NET NEURON

NEWSLETTER 51

Belgium | Canada | Croatia | Estonia | Finland | France | Germany | Greece | Hungary | Israel | Italy | Ireland | Latvia | Norway | Poland | Portugal | Romania | Slovakia | Spain | Switzerland | Taiwan | Türkiye | United Kingdom

Announcements from Neuron

FOLLOW EP BRAINHEALTH ON SOCIAL MEDIA!!

For more updates and Calls for proposals in the NEURON field, please follow EP BrainHealth at:
LinkedIn
YouTube
X
BlueSky

Subscribe to the EP BRAINHEALTH Newsletter!!

To stay updated with the latest in European Brain Health and beyond, please subscribe to the new EP BrainHealth Newsletter!

CHECK OUT OUR LATEST SUCCESS STORIES FROM NEURON FUNDED PROJECT

STAY TUNED FOR OUR VIDEO ON ADHD - COMING SOON!

From the desk of the coordinator | June 2026

Dear NEURON Community,

Welcome to the June 2026 edition of our newsletter. This is a momentous year of transition for all of us. As many of you know, ERA-Net NEURON will be officially phased out at the end of this year, 2026. However, this is not an end, but a major step forward. Our longstanding operations will be smoothly merging into EP BrainHealth, the brand-new European Partnership focusing on various aspects of brain health research.

On this note, in May we marked a major milestone in this transition, celebrating the official EP BrainHealth kick-off week in Paris. This landmark week hosted by the French National Research Agency comprised a series of high-level meetings, including our Joint Transnational Call (JTC2023) Midterm Symposium on "Resilience and Vulnerability in Mental Health" and the ELSA JTC2023 on "Ethical, Legal and Social Aspects of Neuroscience" alongside the JPND

JTC2023 funded projects. The symposium was a resounding success, showcasing excellent scientific progress across fifteen transnational consortia from the biomedical call and five from the ELSA call and fostering deep stakeholder dialogue. You can read a full summary of the event highlights later in this issue (page 3).

We also want to reflect on the success of our "Open Science" workshop held this past February in Berlin in cooperation with the BIH QUEST Centre. The intensive workshop provided crucial training on research robustness, data management plans, and patient and public involvement (PPI) to help our newest consortia establish strong foundations (see page 5).

We are also incredibly proud to highlight the continuous translational achievements of our funded researchers. This month, we feature two fantastic success stories on our website: Project GDNF UpReg: Personalising the Path to Mental Healthcare' and 'Project HYBRIDMINDS: Understanding the Ethical, Legal, and Social Dimensions of Neurotechnology and the "Hybrid Mind"'. Furthermore, our multimedia outreach is growing; stay tuned for three new videos coming soon to our YouTube channel, focusing on ADHD, chronic pain, and the official ERA-Net NEURON Legacy video.

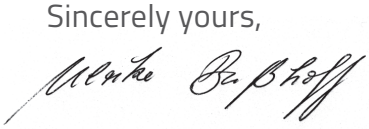
Turning to early career excellence, we are delighted to announce Dr. Christopher Poppe from the University of Basel as the winner of the 2025 Excellent Paper in Neuroscience Award focusing on Ethical, Legal, and Social Aspects (ELSA-EPNA). His profound work on Brain-Computer Interfaces and end-of-life decisions represents the very best of neuroethics, and you can read his full personal interview featured in this issue on page 7.

Looking ahead, next month brings Europe's largest neuroscience event: the FENS Forum 2026 in Barcelona (July 2026). We are thrilled to announce that ERA-Net NEURON will be supporting an exceptional Plenary Lecture by Prof. Elisabeth Binder (Germany) on Tuesday, July 7. Furthermore, the ERA-Net NEURON Excellent Paper in Neuroscience Award (EPNA) 2026 Special Lecture will be delivered by Linbi Cai (Switzerland). In addition, please keep an eye out for two vital EP BrainHealth events taking place at the Forum, organized by EBC and EBRAINS. More details on the FENS conference NEURON and EP BrainHealth-related events are found at the end of this issue on page 11.

To stay informed about the exciting future of EP BrainHealth, we highly encourage everyone to subscribe to the new EP BrainHealth Newsletter and follow the new partnership on LinkedIn, X, YouTube and Bluesky. We also invite you to tune into the latest One Voice for Neurology podcast where they discuss the newly launched EP BrainHealth partnership.

With this, we wish you a wonderful summer, and we thank you for being part of the ERA-Net NEURON community.

Sincerely yours,



ERA-Net NEURON JTC 2023 Midterm Symposium on 'Resilience and Vulnerability in Mental Health'

21st–22nd May 2026 | Paris, France

The EP BrainHealth Midterm Symposium for projects funded under ERA-Net NEURON and JPND took place on 21–22 May 2026 at Espace Cléry in Paris, France. The meeting brought together 91 established and early-career researchers, funding organisations representatives and scientific experts to exchange on the progress of ongoing transnational brain and mental health-related research projects.

This year's symposium was particularly broad in scope, as it included projects funded under three different joint transnational calls 2023 (JTC2023): two ERA-Net NEURON calls, one on 'Resilience and Vulnerability in Mental Health' and the second on 'Ethical, Legal and Social Aspects of Neuroscience', and one JPND call on 'Large Scale Analysis of Omics Data for Drug-Target Finding in Neurodegenerative Diseases'. By bringing these projects together, the meeting provided a valuable opportunity to highlight scientific progress across different areas of brain health research, while also strengthening connections between the NEURON, JPND and the newly forming EP BrainHealth communities.

The programme reflected the diversity of research supported through these initiatives. The fifteen NEURON-funded projects presented work on topics including immune, inflammatory and gut-brain interactions in mental health resilience; stress, development and early-life adversity; metabolic and molecular pathways to resilience; and neural networks and computational perspectives on stress resilience. The eleven JPND-funded projects focused on omics-driven approaches to proteinopathies; novel targets and biomarkers in Alzheimer's disease; and emerging omics-based mechanisms and cross-disease insights. In addition, the symposium included a dedicated session for the five research projects funded in the framework of the ERA-Net NEURON JTC2023 ELSA call addressing ethical, legal and social aspects of neuroscience.

Over the two days, the funded consortia presented their progress, shared emerging results and discussed scientific challenges and future directions. The meeting also created space for exchange across different research fields, from molecular and imaging approaches to microbiome research, computational methods,

neurodegeneration, mental health and societal dimensions of brain research.

Poster sessions formed an important part of the symposium, offering early-career researchers the opportunity to present their work and engage directly with their peers and with established researchers. Overall, 26 posters were presented and the best poster prize was awarded to Daniel Panadero-Soler, a researcher from the group of Dr. Santiago Canals who coordinates the IBRAA consortium, for the poster entitled "Integrative MRI-microbiota analysis reveals protective role of Akkermansia in alcohol-induced white matter alterations." The work highlights how combining brain imaging with microbiota analysis may help uncover mechanisms involved in alcohol-induced changes in the brain, and points to a potential protective role of the gut bacterium Akkermansia.

The symposium also included an interactive networking workshop, providing participants with additional opportunities for discussion, learning and exchange. The workshop aimed to inspire ideas for the constructive involvement of different disciplines and stakeholders in research conducted by researchers funded under the JPND, NEURON and ELSA calls of ERA-Net NEURON. Organised in the format of scientific "speed dating", the workshop enabled researchers to meet and connect with different colleagues across four rounds. Each round focused on one key topic: ethical considerations, interdisciplinarity in research consortia, the involvement and empowerment of early-career researchers, or the inclusion of patient perspectives. During the 15-minute time slots, lively discussions took place around these themes, providing participants with valuable food for thought and new perspectives to take back to their projects and future research.

Overall, the Paris Midterm Symposium showcased the added value of interdisciplinary and transnational collaboration in addressing the complexity of brain health and brain disorders. By bringing together projects from NEURON and JPND within the framework of EP BrainHealth, the meeting highlighted both the achievements of previous European brain research funding initiatives and their important contribution to the development of a more integrated European brain health research community.

‘Open Science’ Workshop

25th-26th of February | Berlin, Germany

On February 25th – 27th, 2026 the ERA-Net NEURON conducted in cooperation with the Berlin Institute of Health (BIH) QUEST Centre and under the umbrella of the European partnership for BrainHealth the Open Science workshop for 23 funded projects ERA Net NEURON, JTC 2025 ‘Interdisciplinary Approaches to the Neuroscience of Pain’ and JPND JTCs 2023, 2024 and 2025 ‘Health and Social Care Research with a Focus on the Moderate and Late Stages of Neurodegenerative Diseases Projects’ projects.
This was a pilot workshop in the combination of NEURON and JPND projects and thus innovative biomedical and public health projects to address real-world challenges. All participants were excited to share ideas that bridge research, practice, and perhaps impact across disciplines. The workshop offered a collaborative space to learn, discuss, and inspire progress in health. In view and under the umbrella of the European Partnership for Brain Health this is important to promote the future joining of the scientific communities.

In brilliant spring weather 41 participants, instructors and organizers discussed in this 2,5 day workshop research robustness and reproducibility, infrastructures, data management plans, neuroethics and AI and – not least – public and patient involvement in research.

The program of the 2,5-day workshop comprised several key elements:

- An introduction to the ESFRI INFRAFRONTIER, the European Mouse Mutant Archive (EMMA), and the German Mouse Clinic by Dr. Sabine Hölter, head of the Behavioural Unit at the German Mouse Clinic at Helmholtz Munich, Germany, because most of the funded projects involve animal as well as human studies.
- A presentation of questions in neuroethics and the challenges arising from Artificial Intelligence (AI)-Ethics, by Dr. Julia Inthorn, Professor for Applied Ethics at the Munich School of Philosophy. Since the European AI act 2024, research projects might be required to assess the risk categories when implementing tools like machine learning on (large) data sets.
- A tutorial session on the creation of the Data Management Plan (DMP) by Dr. Marek Suchanek, Czech Technical University in Prague, Czech Republic for using the Data Stewardship Wizard (DSW), an open-source and collaborative platform for data management planning.

- Important core elements of the workshop were interactive sessions on experimental design with focus on internal, external and translational validity, and reliability provided by Dr. Natascha Drude, head of the Responsible PrecliniX Unit at BIH-QUEST, and Dr. Ulf Tölch, group leader of the Systemic Perspectives in Translational Biomedicine - Training & Quality in Research at BIH-QUEST.

As a new and most exciting element, the interactive session on Patient and Public Involvement (PPI) in research comprised a speed-dating format where participants met patient (reviewer) representatives for rotating short discussions on the active involvement of patients and other relevant stakeholders in the research process.

"Excellent workshop. It was great to meet the people behind the JTC2025 funding proposals. It was a privilege to both watch and participate in the linkages and synergies which emerged in Berlin and which will continue to fructify. "

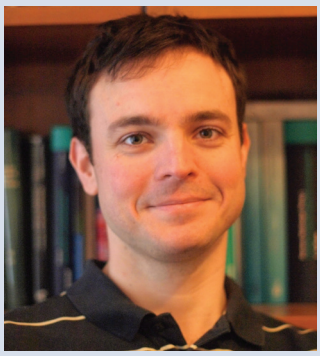
Richard Ballerand, Patient reviewer representative

The workshop for funded projects is intended to help the new consortia in getting started with the brand-new projects. Besides a rich resource hub at the NEURON webpage, the workshop addresses practical issues for the work in an international project. Not least, it provides an opportunity for networking among all funded projects.

The JTCs in 2025 were the last calls in the longstanding funding formats NEURON and JPND. Both initiatives will come to a near end, however not without merging into something new and bigger, the European Partnership for Brain Health. This new partnership will continue to address the topics of the previous initiatives, but will become more inclusive and wider in scope and will pursue a holistic approach to brain health. Having started in 2026, the European Partnership for Brain Health launches joint transnational calls (JTCs) on an annual basis in the field of brain health to invite translational multidisciplinary research consortia. The current calls launched in January address biological, social and environmental factors that impact the trajectory of brain health across the lifespan in both, the field of neurological, mental and sensory disorders and in the field of neurodegeneration. The highly valued QUEST workshops will be continued in the frame of the partnership.

2025 Excellent Paper in Neuroscience Award (ELSA-EPNA)

The ERA-NET NEURON is dedicated to fostering the development of outstanding early-career neuroscientists through various strategic initiatives. One such initiative is the annual Excellent Paper in Neuroscience Award, specifically focusing on the Ethical, Legal, and Social Aspects of Neuroscience (ELSA-EPNA). This prestigious award provides a monetary prize and grants the winner the opportunity to showcase their research findings at the 2026 International Neuromodulation Society (INS) conference. By highlighting exceptional scientific achievements, the ELSA-EPNA aims to increase the appeal of neuroscience research for the next generation of investigators and promote their work to an international audience.



We are pleased to announce that Dr. Christopher Poppe, from the Institute for Biomedical Ethics at the University of Basel, is the winner of the 2025 ELSA-EPNA. His award-winning publication is titled **"Brain-Computer Interfaces, Completely Locked-In State in Neurodegenerative Diseases, and End-of-Life Decisions."** Learn more about Dr. Poppe's significant contributions and research insights in his interview:

Please tell us briefly about your primary research interests.

My PhD research focused on palliative care and informal caregiving, and I retain an interest in relational ethics, for example the impact of end-of-life decision-making and novel interventions and technologies on the relational world of those treated. In recent years my work has expanded into neuroethics, specifically the ethics of psychedelic treatments in psychiatry.

Tell us about your scientific journey to date. Are there any key moments or milestones that have defined your path so far?

After graduating in clinical psychology, I studied philosophy and subsequently completed a doctorate in biomedical ethics at the University of Basel, where the awarded paper originated. The intellectual environment there, and the collaboration with colleagues, was quite formative. It remains a defining period in my academic development. After my PhD, I began postgraduate psychotherapy training, which has helped to anchor my research in clinical realities.

What motivated you to choose a career in the field of bioethics and neuroscience?

In my opinion, bioethics is best off if it addresses normative questions with societal consequences. These are quite often dilemmatic and there is no right or wrong. Also, bioethics is something of a futurist enterprise sometimes, envisioning possibilities and technologies which might or might take place in the social reality of most people. For me it is a clear motivation to not lose track of this. My interest in neuroscience developed through my background in clinical psychology and my engagement with neurodegenerative disorders, where ethical questions around autonomy and decision-making and dignity are particularly acute.

Where do you see your field of research in a few years, and what do you anticipate will be the major breakthroughs?

Returning to the awarded paper, I expect significant advances in the scalability of brain-computer interfaces, which will raise new ethical questions alongside new clinical possibilities. Furthermore, not least in Germany, policies of assisted dying continue to evolve across different legal contexts. The growing role of AI, e.g. in the prediction of mental states, adds further complexity. Across all of these areas, questions of human dignity and autonomy remain central.

What were the main challenges you had to overcome in your career path, and how did you navigate them?

Besides the ordinary difficulties of any academic career, holding multiple professional roles simultaneously is genuinely demanding. I value my clinical work immensely, but it limits

the time available for scholarship and the mobility typically expected at this career stage. I navigate it as best I can and would not want it otherwise. The EPNA-ELSA award has been a clear motivation to maintain a presence in academic research.

What are your goals for the future, and where would you like to see yourself five years from now?

I want to shape a research agenda surrounding novel interventions in neuroscience and psychiatry while maintaining an active clinical role, working on questions with direct relevance to clinical and societal challenges in mental illness and neurodegenerative diseases. I have a particular interest in the preconditions for psychiatric assisted dying. Beyond novel interventions, I am also interested in lower-technology approaches, including psychotherapy and nature-based interventions, which I think is also of importance in the current research climate.

How did it feel to present your research at the INS 2026 conference as part of the EPNA Award, and what was the experience like speaking at such an event?

It was an exciting and overall very positive experience. Lucca was a beautiful setting. Having almost a full hour to present allowed me to address the topic more thoroughly than a standard conference slot permits. The audience engagement and the subsequent discussion were gratifying and confirmed that these questions resonate well in the bioethics community.

In your paper, you discuss how BCIs (Brain-Computer Interfaces) rely on probabilistic processes, which introduces an "intrinsic uncertainty". Beyond simple technical malfunctions, in what ways could highly advanced BCI systems actually become a barrier to a patient's sense of agency or lead to their true intentions being misinterpreted?

The most immediate barrier is availability. The kind of highly advanced BCI this question imagines remains inaccessible to most patients, and the ethical questions it raises are therefore partly prospective. That said, they are worth taking seriously now. One important dimension of this was raised in the discussion following my EPNA-ELSA lecture in Lucca.

In ordinary communication, we typically have a two-stage process: we form a thought, then we decide to express it. This gap provides a natural check on intention. In certain BCI configurations, this two-factor structure could collapse, with the system acting on neural signals before any deliberate communicative act has occurred. Whether and how patients in these situations retain a meaningful sense of agency is a genuinely open empirical question. Colleagues in the ERA-Net Neuron project HYBRIDMIND have done important work here. My own view is that we currently know too little about how patients subjectively experience BCI-mediated communication to draw firm conclusions, and that epistemic humility on this point should inform both research design and clinical implementation.

In your publication, you argue that enabling patients in a completely locked-in state (CLIS) to make end-of-life decisions via BCI might "paradoxically" uphold their quality of life. Could you elaborate on why having this option is so critical for these patients?

The paradox rests on a feature of the current situation that is often overlooked. ALS patients who wish to preserve the option of assisted dying must typically act before they lose the motor capacity required to fulfil legal self-administration criteria. This forces a premature decision: patients who might otherwise continue living must choose death earlier than they would wish, precisely because they fear being trapped in CLIS with no exit. If a reliable BCI pathway to end-of-life decision-making were available in CLIS, this forced choice would be removed. Patients could enter CLIS knowing that their autonomy remains intact. The option itself, even if never exercised, provides a form of control that research suggests meaningfully improves quality of life. Generally, a significant proportion of patients who obtain legal assisted dying authorisation never use it, but report reduced anxiety and greater sense of agency. The paradox, then, is that enabling access to death may allow more patients to continue living. More broadly, I argued in the lecture that enabling communication and autonomous action in CLIS should be understood as a form of care in its own right, independent of the end-of-life decision.

Upcoming ERA-Net NEURON & EP BrainHealth Events at FENS Forum 2026

25–29 June 2026 | Barcelona, Spain

Date	Title / Organizer
4–5 July 2026	ENCODS 2026 Conference: "Brain in Context", *European Neuroscience Conference by Doctoral Students*
5 July 2026	EBRAINS Symposium Satellite Event: Accelerating Your Neuroscience Research through European Research Infrastructures, *Co-organized by EBC, EBRAINS, EP BrainHealth*
7 July 2026	ERA-NET NEURON Plenary Lecture: "Understanding the Molecular Impact of Stress: from functional mapping of Gene–Environment Interactions to clinical implication", *Prof. Elisabeth Binder, Max Planck Institute of Psychiatry, Munich, Germany*
9 July 2026	Special Interest Event: Opportunities for Neuroscientists in the European Partnership for Brain Health-Advancing European Brain Health Research, *EP BrainHealth*
10 July 2026	Award Ceremony & Special Lecture: Excellent Paper in Neuroscience Award (EPNA) 2026 **- "A nasal chemosensation–dependent critical window for somatosensory development"**, *Linbi Cai*

Key Event Highlights

1. ENCODS 2026 Conference: "Brain in Context" (Organised by European Neuroscience Conference by Doctoral Students)

- **Date & Time:** 4–5 July 2026
- **Topic:** Satellite conference on the "Brain in Context"
- **Overview:** A premier satellite event of the FENS Forum 2026, the European Neuroscience Conference by Doctoral Students (ENCODS) brings together roughly 100 early-

career researchers to present their work, network, and engage with leading keynote speakers. This year's core theme, "Brain in Context," investigates how intricate genetic, environmental, and internal biological dynamics collectively dictate brain function. Beyond high-level scientific sessions, the conference features tailored career and technical workshops designed to equip doctoral students with the communication confidence and modern research tools required to thrive in academia and industry.

2. EP BrainHealth Satellite Event (Organised by EBRAINS)

- **Date:** Sunday, 5 July 2026
- **Topic:** Accelerating Your Neuroscience Research through the European Research Infrastructures
- **Overview:** Serving as a bridge event right at the launch of the FENS Forum, this session showcases how integrating European Research Infrastructures (RIs) can drive efficiency and innovation in multinational brain health projects. Attendees will gain direct strategies on utilizing regional tools to enhance cross-border scientific work.

3. ERA-Net NEURON Plenary Lecture: Prof. Elisabeth Binder, Germany

- **Date:** Tuesday, July 7
- **Topic:** Understanding the Molecular Impact of Stress: from functional mapping of Gene–Environment Interactions to clinical implication
- **Overview:** The ERA-Net NEURON plenary lecture is designed to promote cutting-edge neuroscientific research while elevating the network's global profile. This year, Prof. Binder will address how adverse and early life stress experiences interact with genetic predispositions and epigenetic mechanisms to impact mental health vulnerability or resilience. Using complex human cohorts, deep phenotyping, and advanced experimental systems like human neural organoids, this session will dive into cell-type and context-dependent gene interactions, paving the path toward precision psychiatry.

4. Special Interest Event (SiE14): Opportunities for Neuroscientists in the European Partnership for Brain Health, Organized by EP BrainHealth

- **Date:** Thursday, July 9
- **Topic:** A panel discussion chaired by Frédéric Destrebecq (Belgium), with speakers Catherine Marquer (France), Ulrike Busshoff (Germany), Kathleen D'Hondt (Belgium), exploring the long-term plans of incoming partnership EP BrainHealth
- **Overview:** Organized by EP BrainHealth, this session explores the partnership's long-

term roadmap over the next 7–10 years to foster an inclusive, holistically aligned brain health community. The event highlights strategic activities focused on funding avenues, matchmaking, networking, and training across all career stages. A dedicated panel discussion will cover explicit professional opportunities designed to empower early, mid, and senior-career researchers alike to scale their research and showcase their work internationally.

5. Excellent Paper in Neuroscience Award (EPNA) 2026: Linbi Cai, Switzerland

- **Date:** Friday, 10 July 2026
- **Topic:** Recognition of early career scientists through the EPNA award and lecture
- **Overview:** Dedicated to supporting and empowering the next generation of neuroscience leaders, our annual EPNA initiative honors early-career scientists who serve as first authors on high-impact, peer-reviewed international publications. We are proud to host Linbi Cai (Switzerland) at the FENS Forum 2026, where they will officially accept the prestigious award and present a special Young Investigators lecture on their breakthrough findings to the international scientific community.