

BRAINFOOD policy meeting report

On 22 September 2022 a final meeting was held in Brussels of the EBRA BRAINFOOD cluster with the title: What actions improve nutrition for brain health for European citizens? The meeting was attended by 90 stakeholders ranging from scientists and clinicians to patient organizations and consultants. The meeting started with introductions of Prof Felice Jacka (Australia, Food and Mood center), Prof Eline van der Beek (Nutricia Research, Lausanne) and Prof Louise Dye (Health psychologist, Leeds). It was shown that nutritional interventions for brain health are cost effective and improve mental health of people suffering from depression. The full potential of nutrition for brain health has not been utilized. This was the topic of a panel discussion.

It was concluded that healthy nutrition for brain health is a responsibility of policy. For the food industry/private sector there is little or no return on investment for research in this area, except for specific food components, where an application for a health claim is possible. Therefore, the responsibility to generate the scientific evidence relies on public funding from the European Commission and the member states.

Healthy nutrition for the brain requires access to safe, nutritious and affordable diets throughout life for all citizens. What a healthy diet is, depends on life stage (infancy, pregnancy, adolescence and elderly) and it is not a matter of losing weight because the mechanisms underlying obesity and mental disease differ.

Most citizens report they would change their diet if it is proven that is better for their mental health. In order for better education for promotion of healthier eating we first need more evidence to show the link between diet and brain health. To eat healthy is not your own responsibility! Money devaluation for instance results in poorer diets.

Further reading:

Nutritional psychiatry: Towards improving mental health by what you eat. Adan RAH, van der Beek EM, Buitelaar JK, Cryan JF, Hebebrand J, Higgs S, Schellekens H, Dickson SL. Eur Neuropsychopharmacol. 2019 Dec;29(12):1321-1332.

Towards new nutritional policies for brain health: A research perspective on future actions. Adan RAH, Cirulli F, Dye L, Higgs S, Aarts K, van der Beek EM, Buitelaar JK, Destrebecq F, De Witte E, Hartmann T, Korosi A, Libuda L, Dickson SL. Brain Behav Immun. 2022 Oct;105:201-203