

European Pain Federation EFIC

Research Strategy



Why Pain Research Matters

Introduction: What is the problem?

Over 150 million people in Europe experience chronic pain, making it a major public health issue. Chronic pain affects people of all ages and can seriously affect a person's quality of life. It impacts not only physical and mental health but also work, education, and relationships. However, current care is often fragmented, and treatments can fail to meet people's needs. As a result, many people do not receive effective or coordinated care. Pain also creates major challenges for society across Europe. It affects the economy because people living with pain may find it difficult to work or may have to retire early. Chronic pain is estimated to cost European countries between 1.5% and 3% of their gross domestic product (GDP) each year, mainly due to lost productivity and increased healthcare use

Pain Research – gaps and challenges

Even though chronic pain is very common and the impact is tremendous to patients, their relatives and the society, the underlying mechanisms of chronic pain are still not well understood. There are in fact major research gaps which have not yet been solved. Therefore, pain research is of major importance. However, pain research is still underfunded and the coordination of research efforts are not optimal yet. Yes, scientists have made big discoveries about molecules, genes, and many pathophysiological mechanisms underlying pain. However, these findings often don't lead to new treatments. Research done in animal models doesn't always apply well to humans, which slows down the development of new therapies. Many clinical studies use different measures and outcomes, making it hard to compare results or draw clear conclusions. In addition, pain research is not making full use of new tools and technologies. For instance, machine learning has been used to predict when back pain might return, but these tools are not yet used in most clinics. This means helpful innovations aren't reaching the people who need them. Therefore, a major challenge of the future will be the coordination of excellent pain research that – at the end – has an impact on chronic pain in patients.

The Pain Research Strategy for Europe (PRiSE)

To respond to these challenges, the European Pain Federation (EFIC) developed a detailed plan called the Pain Research Strategy for Europe (PRiSE). The PRiSE strategy is designed to create a more coordinated approach to pain research in Europe. It was developed with input from healthcare professionals, researchers, and people who live with pain. The goal is to focus research efforts on the most important issues and improve how pain is studied and treated. Without a shared plan, pain research is often repeated or doesn't focus on what matters most. Resources may be wasted, and improvements are slow. PRiSE aims to solve these problems by bringing together different countries, research groups, and fields of study. This will help guide future funding and support more effective healthcare solutions for chronic pain. Together, this strategy outlines the key steps needed to prioritise pain research and make sure it leads to real changes in policy and healthcare.

Strategic priorities

PRiSE has identified five main research goals:

- Understand pain better by studying the many factors that influence it, including biological, psychological, and social factors.
- Study conditions that impact or are impacted by pain like depression, sleep problems, and obesity and learn how they affect pain and treatment outcomes.
- Evaluate current and newly emerging treatments, including medications, physiotherapy, and behavioural approaches, to find out what works best.
- Develop new personalised treatments that match care to the needs of individual patients, using new technologies.
- Study how pain affects society and the economy, to support better health planning and funding decisions.

These goals were shaped by a large European survey and expert input. They are designed to work alongside other major health research efforts, including mental health and long-term disease management.

From Strategy to Impact

One of the most important parts of the PRiSE strategy is making sure research leads to real change. That means studies should be useful to healthcare providers, policymakers, and people with pain. Research should also be easier to compare by using standard outcome measures and involving patients in the design of studies.

Recent research shows that using a mix of information (like clinical data, mental health scores, and brain imaging) can help predict how pain will develop. But to make this happen, researchers need good data systems and better connections between research and clinical practice.

To support this, PRiSE recommends:

- Using shared standards to measure pain
- Involving patients in research planning
- Aligning studies with international systems, like ICD-11

Conclusion: From strategy to action

Pain affects millions of people across Europe and causes major personal, social, and economic problems. With a strong research strategy, better policies, and teamwork between researchers, clinicians, and people living with pain, we can make real progress.

The PRiSE strategy provides a roadmap for achieving this. You can read the full research strategy in the European Journal of Pain [here](#).

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