

Healthy Brains Global Initiative

Meeting Proceedings

March 18th, 2021 | Virtual



INTRODUCTION

The Healthy Brains Global Initiative (HBGI) convened its fourth Global Leadership Meeting virtually on March 18th, 2021.

The Global Leadership Meetings have traditionally provided a forum for global leaders and key stakeholders in the mental and neurological health fields to steer the development of HBGI. With the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, these meetings have shifted to an online format.

Unlike previous Global Leadership Meetings, this meeting had a more technical focus, reflecting HBGI's progress in moving from "concept to concrete" in envisioning a world where no one is limited by their mental or neurological health conditions and that healthy brain span is equivalent to life span.

The meeting provided the opportunity for HBGI to update members on its progress and to invite feedback on shaping its scientific strategy and global approach. Please see below for a meeting overview and summary of key recommendations.

MEETING OVERVIEW

The meeting opened with remarks and updates from Co-Chairs Garen Staglin and Victor Dzau. Speaker Paul Stoffels, Chief Scientific Officer of Johnson & Johnson gave his endorsement of the initiative, sharing his thoughts on the societal burden of mental illness and how COVID-19 has shown the potential to mobilize public-private partnerships. Gene Block of the University of California, Los Angeles, gave a first keynote, **How COVID-19 has reshaped the urgency for brain health research**, with a particular focus on COVID-19's effects on youth and adolescents. The second [keynote](#), **How to increase involvement of people with lived experiences in brain health research**, by Charlene Sunkel of the Global Mental Health Peer Network discussed the imperative to embed lived experiences at all stages of research.

The first panel, "**HBGI – A Global Approach**", united a wide range of experts to discuss how HBGI will enable interdisciplinary scientific research at a global scale. Benjamin Jenson of the Camber Collective [presented](#) HBGI's proposed global approach, consisting of setting up a network of global cohorts informed by living lab principles and unified by a global architecture containing harmonized data on a shared data platform (Figure 1). Hussein Manji of Johnson & Johnson led a panel of three experts, Brenda Penninx of Amsterdam UMC, Inez Jabalpurwala of Viral Neuro Exploration, and Oliver Harrison of Koa Health, in a robust discussion on the need for and practical considerations around HBGI's global approach.

Overall, panelists enthusiastically endorsed the approach and its potential to change the brain health field through its global scope, interdisciplinary nature, and use of digital technology.

VOICES OF OUR SPEAKERS

“It’s the sheer dimensionality of the human brain that makes it so wonderful...and it’s that dimensionality that needs to be reflected in the approaches we take.”

“Building up cohorts is something that requires time...in the end this is something we really do for the next generation of scientists.”

“The scope of HBGI is quite broad...it will yield a big step forward. It’s unique and something that’s really necessary.”

“The brain is not neatly divided into diseases, nor is it two siloes of neurology and psychiatry.”

Panelists also expressed an appreciation for HBGI’s work thinking through many of the issues associated with a global approach before commencement of research. They cautioned that not taking the required time to build in the necessary data privacy parameters or ensuring data is cleaned and standardized could mean duplicating the existing fragmentation of research in the field.

Suggestions to ensure truly inclusive research included creating a multi-tiered approach to cohort development based on different research capacities.

Finally, panelists also encouraged HBGI to build a hypothesis-driven infrastructure that is both dynamic and adaptive in incorporating innovations. They suggested this ecosystem be grounded in living lab principles to ensure it remains user-centered and shared their own experiences developing national cohorts and

living labs across a variety of health conditions.

HBGI’s innovative approach addresses the most pressing unmet needs and challenges we see in the global research ecosystem while building on and collaborating with existing global efforts for harmonization and data sharing.

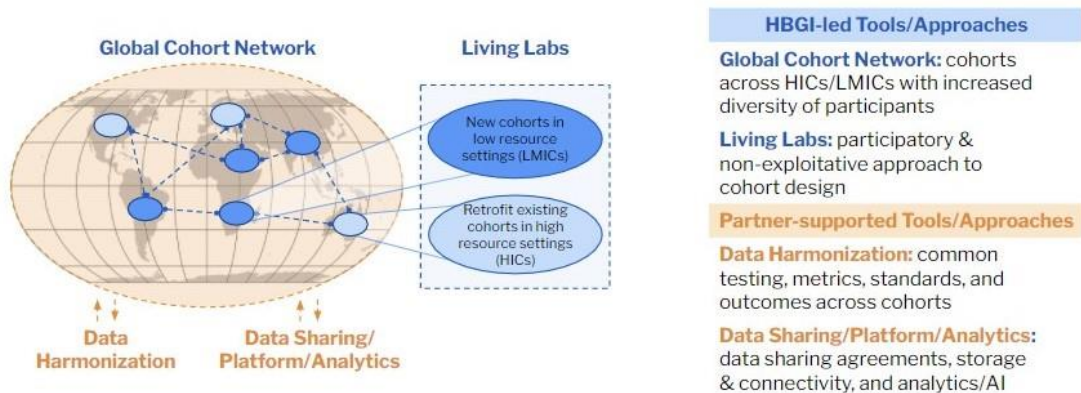


Figure 1: Slide from [HBGI – A Global Approach Presentation](#)

Entitled “HBGI’s Scientific Research Agenda”, the second panel began with a [presentation](#) from Toby Kasper of the HBGI management team to share the latest thinking around HBGI’s scientific strategy and research priorities for funding (Figure 2). Shekhar Saxena of the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health moderated a panel consisting of Pallab Maulik of The George Institute for Global Health, Naeem Dalal from the Zambia Medical Association, and Kate Martin from the Wellcome Trust.

Panelists discussed questions around where HBGI should initially focus across the care continuum; what initial research questions the initiative should consider; and how to be cognizant of needs in

different regions. They also discussed the question of whether a funder’s priorities should have the potential to alter the HBGI scientific research agenda.

The panelists reiterated the need to unite a wide range of stakeholders, from policymakers to researchers to people with lived experiences, in order to successfully effect change. They especially focused on the need to bring in people with lived experiences at all stages of the process, including priority-setting.

Panelists also emphasized the importance of a truly global representation. To ensure inclusion across all countries panelists said, significant regional disparities must be taken into account, such as access, or the lack thereof, to services, differing disease prevalence (for example the high rate of epilepsy in low- and middle-income countries), and widespread stigma. They also highlighted a need to increase mental health literacy across all sectors of society.

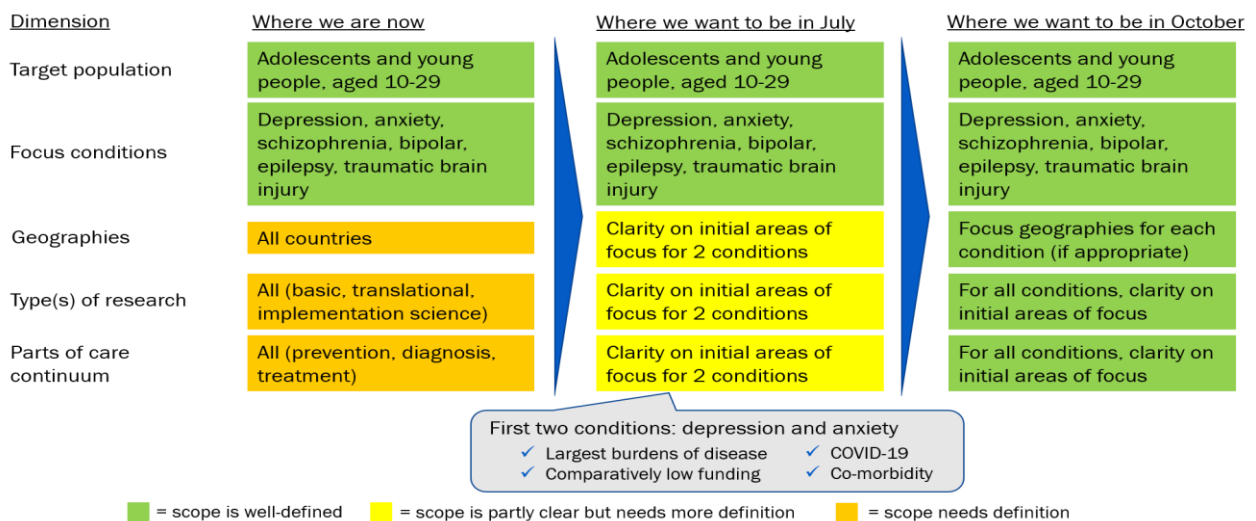


Figure 2: Slide from [HBGI's Scientific Research Agenda presentation](#)

Interim CEO Brad Herbert thanked all panelists and audience participants in his **Concluding Remarks**. He reaffirmed his commitment to HBGI’s principles of changing the way brain health research is done in order to improve people’s lives. He also appreciated a quote from one of the panelists that sums up HBGI’s past few months as a startup organization operating in the midst of COVID-19: “Expect the unexpected.”

Finally, Co-Chair Garen Staglin shared a few closing remarks and expressed his hope that HBGI will convene the next Global Leadership Meeting in person.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Challenge the traditional approach to research

To move the needle in brain health research, HBGI must unite stakeholders from across the world, including policymakers, scientists, and people with lived experiences; study a wide range of mental and neurological health conditions; and consider factors from social determinants of health to stigma. This approach, while ambitious, is necessary to create cross subject understanding and improve outcomes in brain health research.

2. Consider the needs of all geographies

A theme throughout the discussions was the importance of ensuring inclusion of historically underrepresented countries. When setting up global cohorts or setting its research priorities, HBGI must be cognizant of research capacities and needs of different regions. Moreover, when possible, this should be done through empowering or consulting with people from those communities to build a truly inclusive research agenda.

3. Value lived experience

By valuing lived experience as a form of expertise, HBGI must ensure that the organization does research that is responsive to people's needs and geared towards having a real impact on the lives of those living with mental and neurological health conditions. HBGI must take advantage of the opportunity as a research funder to set a standard by collaborating with people with lived experiences as partners in developing its research agenda and global approach.

4. Recognize the COVID-19 imperative

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated brain health conditions and exposed existing inequities within those conditions across the globe. However, it has also galvanized the field of digital health and shown that international collaboration can happen rapidly in response to an urgent need. HBGI must recognize this unique environment, understanding that right now is both the most opportune and necessary time to transform the field of brain health research.

VOICES OF OUR SPEAKERS

“Global collaboration is necessary if you want to achieve brain health for all.”

“We understand the complexity of understanding the brain not just as one system but as one system within the human system and impacted by the environment. We have to converge many different fields and disciplines: researchers, people with lived experience, industry, governments, all of that has to come together.”

“80% of clinical trials are happening in developed countries. Implication of that is that priority setting has been largely driven by those countries.”

“We have to see people with lived experience as critical partners who bring knowledge, expertise, and insight.”

ADDENDUM A: List of Attendees

First Name	Last Name	Organization	Role in Meeting
Victor	Dzau	National Academy of Medicine	Co-Chair of HBGI
Garen	Staglin	One Mind	Co-Chair of HBGI
Paul	Stoffels	Johnson & Johnson	Welcome Speaker
Gene	Block	University of California, Los Angeles	Keynote Speaker
Charlene	Sunkel	Global Mental Health Peer Network	Keynote Speaker
Benjamin	Jenson	Camber Collective	Presenter
Inez	Jabalpurwala	Viral Neuro Exploration	Panelist
Brenda	Penninx	Amsterdam UMC	Panelist
Oliver	Harrison	Koa Health	Panelist
Naeem	Dalal	Zambia Medical Association	Panelist
Kate	Martin	Wellcome Trust	Panelist
Pallab	Maulik	The George Institute for Global Health	Panelist
Husseini	Manji	Johnson & Johnson	Moderator
Shekhar	Saxena	Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health	Moderator
Kimberly	Allen	Via Positiva	Participant
Cara	Altimus	Milken Institute	Participant
Daniel	Arbess	Xerion Investment	Participant
Shelli	Avenevoli	National Institute for Mental Health (NIMH)	Participant
Arnaud	Bernaert	World Economic Forum	Participant
Bill	Carson	Otsuka Pharmaceutical Development and Commercialization	Participant
Dave	Chen	Klein Financial Corporation	Participant
Sadia	Chowdhury	Freelance Consultant	Participant

Miyoung	Chun	Alzheimer's X / MIT Sloan School of Management	Participant
Valerie	Conn	Scientific Philanthropy Alliance	Participant
Kenza	Coubrough	Rocket Science Health	Participant
Murali	Doraiswamy	Duke University	Participant
Tarun	Dua	World Health Organization	Participant
Harris	Eyre	CNSDose	Participant
Sarah	Fisher	Johnson & Johnson	Participant
Norm	Friedland	Fulsky Partners	Participant
Josh	Gordon	National Institute for Mental Health (NIMH)	Participant
Mona	Hicks	One Mind	Participant
Zeinab	Hijazi	UNICEF	Participant
Yueqin	Huang	Institute of Mental Health/ The Sixth Hospital, Peking University, Beijing	Participant
Tom	Insel	Humanest Care	Participant
Damian	Juma	Youth Advocate	Participant
Danielle	Kemmer	International Association for Mental Health Research Funders (IAMHRF)	Participant
Sanchana	Krishnan	NYU	Participant
Alissa	Kurzman	High Lantern Group	Participant
David	Ndetei	University of Nairobi	Participant
Emily	Queen	citiesRISE	Participant
Jonathan	Rosand	Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard	Participant
Jake	Segal		Participant
Mel	Spigelman	TB Alliance	Participant
Melissa	Stevens	Milken Institute	Participant
Raliza	Stoyanova	Wellcome Trust	Participant
George	Vradenburg	UsAgainstAlzheimer's	Participant
Shuranjeet	Takhar	Taraki	Participant
Miranda	Wolpert	Wellcome Trust	Participant

Brad	Herbert	HBGI	Interim CEO
Toby	Kasper	HBGI	Secretariat
Saskia	Castelein	HBGI	Secretariat
Mariel	Sander	HBGI	Secretariat
Kim	Cryns	Johnson & Johnson	Secretariat (Secondment)