

The Brain Economy

We are entering a new era shaped by the rise of the brain economy, where brain capital — comprising of brain health and brain skills — serves as the cornerstone of sustainable economic growth. According to the McKinsey Health Institute (MHI), prioritizing brain health and **fostering brain capital has the potential to unlock \$26 trillion in global economic opportunities** by enhancing workforce performance, igniting innovation, and reclaiming millions of years of quality life.

Yet, this promise comes at a time of unprecedented challenges to brain health, as **brain disorders cost the global economy \$5 trillion annually** — a figure projected to soar to \$16 trillion by 2030. To meet these challenges and drive critical transitions, such as the digital and green revolutions, society urgently needs advanced brain skills to accelerate global sustainability and economic resilience.

THE CASE FOR CHANGE

Living in today's world requires resilience, especially in the face of individual and societal shifts, like technological advances, climate change, and evolving geopolitics. These changes call for rethinking our approach to the future and prioritizing key areas for long-term well-being:

- **Healthy brain development across the lifespan:** Proven brain health interventions exist, but many lack access. A lifespan approach — beginning with youth development and education — can promote brain health, enhance cognitive skills, and build brain capital. Proactive measures from childhood to aging can reduce healthcare costs, sustain productivity, and address risks of an aging population.
- **Resilient and adaptable workforces:** As technology and AI reshape the workplace, skills like creativity, resilience, and curiosity are becoming increasingly vital. The World Economic Forum's 2025 Future of Jobs Report highlights that half of the top skills on the rise are brain-related. Employers who invest in employee brain health and well-being can enhance performance and potentially boost global GDP by up to 12%.

2025 DIALOGUE SERIES

The Brain Economy Dialogue Series, organized by the World Economic Forum and the McKinsey Health Institute, aims to address the critical role of brain health in shaping economic growth and societal well-being.

These dialogues will bring together a dynamic group of stakeholders across global regions to explore the intersection of brain health with key areas such as **cardiometabolic health, health systems strengthening, youth development, healthy workforces, economic transitions such as AI and climate change, and women's health**. The Dialogue Series will inform a 2026 report on the transition to a brain economy.

OBJECTIVES

- **Enhanced understanding:** Advancing science, raising awareness, and elevating brain health as a global priority.
- **Cross-sector collaboration:** Building partnerships that promote innovation and shared responsibility.
- **Actionable commitments:** Encouraging adoption of policies and workplace health programs.
- **Resource mobilization:** Securing investments to advance brain health globally.

KEY TERMS

- **Brain health:** Encompasses mental health, substance use, stroke, Alzheimer's disease, and other neurological conditions, focusing on preventing disease and promoting optimal brain function to enable individuals to thrive.
- **Brain capital:** A form of human capital that combines brain health with essential cognitive, emotional, and social skills such as analytical thinking, creativity, adaptability, and empathy.
- **Brain economy:** An economic paradigm that prioritizes brain capital as its core asset. Driven by a neuroscience renaissance, it responds to the growing demand for brain skills—cognitive, emotional, and social—in the modern workforce.



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