

# INECO Foundation: Going Global from South America in Neurosciences and Brain Health

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**T**hrough its work advancing medical care, scientific research, professional training, and community education, Institute of Cognitive Neurology (INECO) has helped reshape perceptions of brain health and its critical importance. The Foundation's journey is a story of scientific progress, as well as an inspiring example of how a non-profit from a country with limited resources can drive meaningful, lasting contributions to global science and health.

## The Creation of INECO: A Paradigm Shift in Argentina and Latin America

Founded in 2005, INECO began with a clear vision: provide high-quality medical care in cognitive neurology, neuropsychology, and neuropsychiatry while also producing pioneering research in human cognitive neuroscience. That introduced a paradigm shift, steering away from traditional psychodynamic approaches and toward cognitive neuroscience, behavioral neurology, neuropsychiatry, and evidence-based clinical psychology.

INECO began as a center for interdisciplinary collaboration, bringing together neuro-psychologists, psychiatrists, neurologists, and other clinicians with experts in basic sciences, including biologists, engineers, mathematicians, and physicists. Today, INECO operates as a specialist center for the prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and rehabilitation of cognitive and neuropsychiatric disorders. It also addresses a range of brain-related conditions through a decentralized network of centers across Argentina.

INECO's "Patients First" philosophy ensures close integration between clinical practice and research and enables the institute to stay at the forefront of both fields. Unlike larger institutions, INECO has been agile in adopting emerging technologies. INECO's research labs have made significant contributions, such as identifying brain areas involved in decision-making, social cognition, and memory, and describing the neural mechanisms underlying aggression and empathy. The foundation has also developed screening tests for early dementia diagnosis and studied the neural bases of racial prejudice and moral judgment. The Mind, Body, and Brain

Dynamics lab explores interactions between mind, body, and brain, focusing on emotional regulation and cognitive control. This lab employs computational modeling and predictive analysis, including ecological momentary assessments, and studies the neural basis of eating behavior and body image.

Overall, INECO's original and interdisciplinary research is a key driver of its global influence, supported by numerous collaborations with international experts. The institute's work has led to the development of cognitive assessment tools that are now used globally. Importantly, these tools reflect local cultural contexts, highlighting the need for data collection methods and cognitive assessments tailored to regions outside the USA and Europe.

As INECO's visibility has increased, the paradigm shift it initiated has taken root in Argentina. Psychodynamic explanations have gradually been replaced by discussions centering on brain health, with cognitive psychotherapy becoming a leading therapeutic approach. This transformation is evident in public discourse, as people increasingly use scientific, evidence-based frameworks to understand their mental health challenges. INECO's work has provided society with modern tools to better understand mental wellbeing, helping to replace outdated perspectives with informed, scientific approaches.

## Public Policy Influence

INECO established the Institute of Neurosciences and Public Policy to provide scientific insights into human behavior, improve public policies, and enhance quality of life. In collaboration with the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the institute played a key role in creating the first "Nudge Unit" and behavioral insight group for social protection and health policies in Latin America and developed a Socioemotional Development Program to strengthen socioemotional skills in children through their parents. The institute has also conducted large-scale work to apply behavioral science principles to real-world public policy challenges.

INECO also operates two additional institutes: the Institute of Neurosciences and Law and the

Institute of Neurosciences and Education. Both reflect the foundation's commitment to applying neuroscience in interdisciplinary ways to address societal challenges and improve quality of life.

INECO's efforts to help draft innovative legislation, such as the Integral Human Development and Mental Capital Promotion Bill in the Argentine Congress, serve as forward-thinking examples of how brain health can be effectively integrated into public policy. Such policies should not only address the prevention of dementia but also ensure older adults are provided with opportunities for ongoing cognitive engagement and social participation.

Public policies should focus on lifelong learning and cognitive training, reimagining retirement as an active and productive phase of life where older adults can contribute through mentorship, volunteering, and social engagement. Intergenerational programs are essential in enhancing cognitive reserve, and efforts must be made to shift society's views of older adults as valuable sources of knowledge and experience. Additionally, promoting digital inclusion by ensuring access to technology and providing digital literacy programs for older adults can expand opportunities for cognitive engagement and social connection, further enhancing brain health. Broader policy frameworks should reflect these approaches to fully support aging populations and their cognitive well-being.

### Focus on Dementia and Alzheimer's Research

INECO's work in dementia research, particularly Alzheimer's disease and frontotemporal dementia, is especially important as the region experiences one of the fastest-growing rates of dementia cases globally. The development of the INECO Frontal Screening, a neuropsychological test for early cognitive decline detection, has been widely translated and validated across diverse populations. The foundation is also involved in developing a National Alzheimer's Plan for Argentina and has used its platform to influence policymakers and raise public awareness about Alzheimer's disease.

INECO's proactive work fills a crucial gap in efforts that should be led by public institutions. It also models for low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) and some high-income countries how a private organization can contribute to public brain health initiatives, particularly those impacting older adults. By 2030, the majority of people with dementia will live in LMICs. Educating the public about risk factors for dementia — such

as alcohol abuse, smoking, diabetes, obesity, high blood pressure, air pollution, brain injuries, physical inactivity, depression, social isolation, hearing loss, lower levels of education, high cholesterol after age 40, and vision loss — helps authorities adopt comprehensive approaches to reducing dementia prevalence and improving brain health in older adults.

### Conclusion: A Legacy of Impact

INECO has grown from a modest, resource-limited foundation into a world-renowned institution, leading the fight against dementia and other neurological diseases. Through groundbreaking research, professional training, and community education, the INECO Foundation has significantly impacted public health policy and outreach in Argentina and beyond.

INECO's success underscores the crucial role private initiatives play in scientific innovation and public health, even in regions with limited resources. Its achievements highlight how world-class neurological care and research can be realized through an approach combining clinical excellence, innovative research, and community outreach. The foundation's work has not only placed Argentina on the global neuroscience map but also set a standard for similar initiatives across Latin America.

For readers of *AARP The Journal*, INECO's approach offers valuable insights into integrating brain health into broader public health strategies. The foundation's advocacy for legislative action and its collaborations with international institutions demonstrate the importance of global partnerships in advancing brain health research. INECO's story showcases how innovative health care delivery can be applied in diverse settings, potentially informing efforts to address brain health challenges in the U.S. and beyond. •



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