loRwanda is positioning itself as a growing regional center for brain health as more than 300 international specialists convened in Kigali this week for the fourth edition of Africa MENA Brain Week, an annual conference focused on neurological and mental health care.

The meeting, running from Feb. 5 to Feb. 8, 2026, brings together psychiatrists, neurologists, neurosurgeons, nurses, medical students, researchers, patients and advocacy groups from 15 countries across Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas. Organizers say the gathering reflects Rwanda’s expanding role in medical training, research and prevention of brain-related conditions.

Unlike traditional medical conferences, Africa MENA Brain Week places strong emphasis on patient participation. Prof. Najib Kisani, a neurologist and university professor from Morocco who helped launch the event, said the model strengthens care by closing the gap between specialists and the communities they serve.

“When doctors and patients exchange directly, treatment improves and stigma decreases,” Kisani said. “Patients help guide priorities and make care more responsive.”

Rwandan health authorities say hosting the conference supports national efforts to build local capacity. Dr. Darius Gishoma, Division manager of mental health services at the Rwanda Biomedical Centre (RBC), said the event allows local professionals and trainees to learn directly from global experts while showcasing Rwanda’s progress.

“This is a knowledge-exchange platform that strengthens our workforce and informs prevention strategies,” Gishoma said. “The benefits extend well beyond the conference.”

Discussions during the meeting highlighted both treatment and prevention, with experts stressing the importance of prenatal care, diabetes prevention, reduced alcohol and drug use, and early detection of neurological conditions. Public education, participants said, remains key to reducing the burden of brain disorders across Africa.

RBC officials noted that Rwanda is steadily increasing the number of specialists in brain-related fields. Currently, 42 doctors are undergoing advanced training in

neurology, psychiatry and neurosurgery, complementing those already in practice. International partnerships formed during the conference are expected to further support training and research.

Data shared at the meeting also pointed to gradual progress in mental health outcomes. A national survey conducted in 2025 found that 18.6% of Rwandans experience mental health challenges, down from 20% in 2020, suggesting improved awareness and access to care.

As demand for brain health services grows across the continent, participants said Rwanda’s hosting of Africa MENA Brain Week signals its ambition to serve as a regional reference point for innovation, collaboration and patient-centered care.