



Policy statement

Disability (draft pending approval at the 18th General Meeting of WCPT in 2015)

The World Confederation for Physical Therapy (WCPT) believes that physical therapists are equipped through their education to meet the functional needs of persons with disabilities.¹ Physical therapists play a vital role in preventing health and health-related problems associated with disability and optimise functional outcomes for persons with disability.

WCPT endorses the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities² and the United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities.³ WCPT encourages its member organisations to promote the implementation and monitoring of these conventions; to support national efforts to establish, strengthen, and maintain the services, systems, and policies required to meet the needs of all people and populations and to advocate for the role of physical therapists in enabling optimal human functioning.

WCPT unreservedly supports the rights of persons with disabilities to opportunities, choices, and independence, and to take on roles in society on an equal basis with others. WCPT supports the role of physical therapists in facilitating the attainment of these rights.

Physical therapists provide evidence-based, inclusive, and restorative interventions that reduce the incidence and impact of disease and disability, promote health and quality of life. These interventions help people maintain and/or improve physical activity, functional independence, and participation in their usual and customary roles.

In line with its policies and guidelines, WCPT encourages and supports member organisations to:

- ensure that physical therapist professional education programmes include comprehensive coverage of the knowledge, skills and attitudes that are relevant to examining and providing interventions (including those addressing environmental factors) for persons with disabilities;
- meet the needs of those with disability by:

- including curriculum content in all physical therapist professional entry level education programmes on functioning and disability and the multifaceted nature of disability⁴
- producing/making available educational materials about the unique opportunities physical therapists have to prevent disability and improve functioning across the life span
- producing/making available education and practice resources about disability and rehabilitation
- including content on evidence based interventions at WCPT, regional, and national conferences
- providing continuing education programmes on functioning, disability, and rehabilitation;
- support, whenever possible, involvement of persons with disabilities in the planning, conducting, and reporting of physical therapy research;
- support, wherever possible, involvement of persons with disabilities in advising on policy, curriculum and service development;
- support the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the profession by:
 - ensuring decisions on admission or readmission to the profession are based on competence to practise, not disability
 - adopting inclusive policies
 - making reasonable accommodations
 - promoting the profession as a career that is inclusive of persons with disabilities;
- promote the use of the best evidence to support inclusion of persons with disability in societies by:
 - utilising existing databases and evidence based literature on clinical and cost effective interventions
 - promoting the collection and publication of data using international standard classifications including the ICF for data on functioning and disability¹
 - publicising funding sources for research on disability and rehabilitation;
- promote the ethical treatment of all, regardless of their level of functioning, by raising awareness of:
 - the need to treat people on the basis of capacity and potential, national laws, regulations, and the professional standards of practice that govern the profession
 - international declarations and laws in areas such as human rights, equal opportunity, and discrimination;
- educate health professional communities, service users, and the public about the role and benefits of physical therapists as crucial members of inter-professional teams by:

- publishing information on disability prevention and rehabilitation in professional publications
- raising awareness within inter-professional collaborative teams of the important role of physical therapists in preventing functional loss associated with potentially disabling conditions
- referring to and collaborating with other professions when appropriate
- exchanging disability-relevant information, for example through websites and forums;
- advocate for physical therapist involvement in the development of national policies, programmes, services and systems;
- advocate for national policies, programmes, services, and systems that facilitate the effective delivery of physical therapy services to persons living with disability and that follow the principles of:
 - universal health coverage
 - accessible information and physical environments
 - direct access to physical therapist services
 - inter-professional collaborative practice.

Glossary

Capacity — describes an individual's ability to execute a task or an action.⁴

Disability — is the umbrella term for impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions that results from the interaction between an individual's health condition and the personal and environmental contextual factors. Personal factors are the particular background of an individual's life and living, and comprise features of the individual that are not part of a health condition or health states, such as: gender, race, age, fitness, lifestyle, habits, coping styles, social background, education, profession, past and current experience, overall behaviour pattern, character style, individual psychological assets, and other characteristics, all or any of which may play a role in disability in any level. Environmental factors are external factors that make up the physical, social and attitudinal environment in which people live and conduct their lives. Disability can be described at three levels: body (impairment of body function or structure), person (activity limitations), and society (participation restrictions).⁴

Interprofessional team — is a group of professional practitioners from different backgrounds who meet jointly established goals for patients/clients.⁵

Participation — is involvement in a life situation.⁴

Reasonable accommodation — is the "necessary and appropriate modification and adjustments not imposing a disproportionate or undue burden, where needed in a particular case, to ensure to persons with disabilities the enjoyment or exercise on an equal basis with others of all human rights and fundamental freedoms".⁶

Rehabilitation — is “a set of measures that assist individuals who experience, or are likely to experience, disability to achieve and maintain optimal functioning in interaction with their environments. A distinction is sometimes made between habilitation, which aims to help those who acquire disabilities congenitally or early in life to develop maximal functioning; and rehabilitation, where those who have experienced a loss in function are assisted to regain maximal functioning.”⁷ In WCPT documents the term ‘rehabilitation’ covers both types of intervention.

Approval, review and related policy information	
Date adopted:	Pending approval at the 18th General Meeting of WCPT in 2015
Date for review:	
Related WCPT policies:	<p>WCPT ethical principles</p> <p>WCPT policy statements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ethical responsibilities of physical therapists and WCPT members ▪ Standards of physical therapy practice ▪ Patients'/clients' rights in physical therapy ▪ Quality services ▪ Informed consent ▪ Records management: record keeping, storage, retrieval and disposal <p>WCPT guidelines</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Guideline for standards of physical therapy practice ▪ Guideline for records management: record keeping, storage, retrieval and disposal ▪ Guideline for physical therapist professional entry level education. <p>WCPT endorsements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child • The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities • The United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities

References

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2. The United Nations. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. New York, USA: UN; 2006. (Access date 17 December 2013)
3. The United Nations. Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities. New York, USA: UN; 19 (Access date 17 December 2013)
4. World Confederation for Physical Therapy. WCPT guideline for physical therapist professional entry level education. London, UK: WCPT; 2011. (Access date 17 December 2013)
5. World Health Professions Alliance. WHPA statement on interprofessional collaborative practice. Ferney Voltaire, France; WHPA: 2013
http://www.whpa.org/WHPA_Statement_collaborative_practice.pdf (Access date 20 May 2013)
6. United Nations Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities. New York: United Nations. 2006. <http://www.un.org/disabilities/convention/conventionfull.shtml> (Access date 11 April 2014)
7. World Health Organization. World Report on Disability. Geneva: WHO; 2012

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