

# Rehabilitation

## Policy statement

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# Rehabilitation

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines rehabilitation as “a set of interventions designed to optimize functioning and reduce disability in individuals with health conditions in interaction with their environment.”

(1) Rehabilitation is an essential part of health care and is integral to achieving universal health coverage.

Access to rehabilitation services is vital for people with a wide range of health conditions or injuries, throughout all stages of the life span, and during the phases of acute, sub-acute and long-term health care.

The need for rehabilitation is increasing globally, due to the rising prevalence of noncommunicable diseases, consequences of injuries and an ageing population. (2, 3) This need is largely unmet globally, especially in many low and middle-income countries/territories. A growing body of evidence suggests that one third of the world’s population have conditions that would benefit from rehabilitation. (3) Globally, women are less likely to access rehabilitation, and when they do are more likely to experience poorer outcomes. (4)

World Physiotherapy encourages the development of rehabilitation services to address individual and populations’ needs. Further, World Physiotherapy supports WHO’s encouragement of national efforts to strengthen health systems to provide rehabilitation, making services available to everyone at all levels of health care, whenever needed, including prevention and health promotion as part of the rehabilitation process. (5) It is important to educate health professionals, service users, and the public about the crucial role of physiotherapists and the benefits of their interventions in rehabilitation services through a range of activities including, advocacy, public relations, and information exchange.

A rehabilitation team may include physiotherapists, audiologists, doctors, nurses, dieticians, orthotists and prosthetists, occupational therapists, psychologist and speech and language therapists. Workforce data suggests that physiotherapists are a key component of rehabilitation services and often the largest and most established healthcare profession within the rehabilitation team, although large workforce supply disparities can be found across different countries for relatively equivalent levels of population need. (6, 7)

World Physiotherapy supports internationally relevant statements, such as the Rehabilitation 2030: A Call for Action (8, 9) and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3, ensuring healthy lives and promoting the wellbeing for all at all ages. (10)

World Physiotherapy believes that:

- physiotherapists play a vital role in the rehabilitation process reducing health-related problems associated with functional limitations and optimising outcomes, activities, participation and environmental factors for persons in need of rehabilitation (11)
- physiotherapist entry level education programmes should enable the graduate to attain the requisite knowledge, skills, attitudes and competencies to play a vital role in the delivery of rehabilitation services (12-14)
- physiotherapy is an essential part of the health and community/welfare rehabilitation services and delivery systems (13)
- physiotherapists, as autonomous practitioners, practise in collaboration with other health professionals to manage and provide physiotherapy as a part of rehabilitation services to patients/clients. (12, 15-17)
- physiotherapists have an important role in championing the ongoing development of an interdisciplinary rehabilitation workforce
- physiotherapists can play a role in an integrated approach to the provision of assistive technology, where and when needed

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- physiotherapists with the appropriate training, experience and competencies have the required professional skills to lead rehabilitation teams; this could include:
    - overseeing the operation and development of the team and service
    - managing complex resource procurement and allocation
    - having a specialist level of relevant knowledge and skills that are applied in a range of leadership responsibilities across the service (15)

The need for rehabilitation has been highlighted further by the COVID-19 pandemic which:

- interrupted established rehabilitation services for long-term conditions and therefore increased functional limitations for those previously accessing these services;
- caused delays to non-urgent planned treatment for pre-existing conditions leading to increased morbidity and functional limitations; and
- led to the emerging needs of those experiencing Long Covid. (18-23)

World Physiotherapy will continue to work strategically, building new alliances with international organisations and maximising existing relationships with others such as WHO, Humanity & Inclusion, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and the World Rehabilitation Alliance (WRA)(24) to support the development and provision of rehabilitation services globally.

World Physiotherapy encourages and strongly supports its member organisations to:

- monitor and evaluate the rehabilitation needs of the population in their countries/territories;
- advocate the vital role of physiotherapy within rehabilitation services, recognising that physiotherapists are well placed to advise, lead, develop and implement appropriate and effective rehabilitation programmes for individuals and targeted populations, such as the elderly, people with long-term conditions, those with disability or athletes;
- advocate for rehabilitation services to have sufficient resources to support them;
- be involved in the development of national health workforce planning, management and development strategies to ensure the implementation of rehabilitation services; (25)
- advocate for the involvement of physiotherapists in research to better understand effective rehabilitation interventions within their national health care sectors;
- support global initiatives on rehabilitation and emphasise the evidence for the efficacy of physiotherapy interventions within the rehabilitation process;
- support interprofessional collaborative practice and person-centred integrated service delivery that are necessary for successful rehabilitation processes including, where appropriate, empowerment for self-management;
- promote the use of evidence informed best physiotherapy practice in delivering rehabilitation services;
- educate health professionals, service users, and the public about the crucial role of physiotherapists and the benefits of their interventions in rehabilitation services through a range of activities including, advocacy, public relations, and information exchange, and how this contributes to reduce health inequalities.

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[Glossary \(https://world.physio/resources/glossary\)](https://world.physio/resources/glossary)

**Autonomy**

**Disability**

**Interprofessional collaborative practice**

**Noncommunicable diseases**

**Prevention**

**Rehabilitation**

Approval, review and related policy information	
<b>Date adopted:</b>	Approved at the 20 <sup>th</sup> WCPT General Meeting in 2023.
<b>Date for review:</b>	2027
<b>Related World Physiotherapy policies:</b>	<p>World Physiotherapy policy statements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Community based rehabilitation</li><li>• Disability</li><li>• Health workforce planning</li><li>• Physical therapists as exercise and physical activity experts across the life span</li><li>• Primary health care</li><li>• Relationship with other professionals</li></ul> <p>World Physiotherapy endorsements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities</li><li>• The United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities</li></ul>

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