Policy statement

Disaster management

The World Confederation for Physical Therapy (WCPT) recognises that disasters resulting from natural, environmental and technological hazards (includes biological, geological, hydrometeorological and socio-natural hazards) have a major and long-lasting impact on people and the countries in which they live.

WCPT encourages member organisations to facilitate the contribution of physical therapists, as experts in physical therapy intervention/treatment including rehabilitation, to national and local disaster preparedness and management strategies. Physical therapists should:

- be involved in the process of developing policies and plans that help areas, countries and regions prepare for disasters
- be involved in preventive education and measures before, during and after disasters
- provide interventions/treatment, including rehabilitation to those affected by disasters
- ensure that populations affected have access to physical therapy intervention/treatment, including rehabilitation services to achieve the highest attainable level of health and function

WCPT encourages member organisations to:

- work with national governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), aid agencies and others to develop disaster prevention plans, preparedness and response strategies, provision of coordinated responses to situations
- facilitate discussion, share resources and provide guidance to individual physical therapists wishing to respond/volunteer in emergency relief situations
- encourage professional entry level physical therapy programmes to include disaster management in their curricula
Glossary

**Disaster** — “a serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society involving widespread human, material, economic or environmental losses and impacts, which exceeds the ability of the affected community or society to cope using its own resources.”¹

**Disaster preparedness** — pre-disaster activities that are undertaken within the context of disaster risk management and are based on sound risk analysis. This includes the development/enhancement of an overall preparedness strategy, policy, institutional structure, warning and forecasting capabilities, and plans that define measures geared to helping at-risk communities safeguard their lives and assets by being alert to hazards and taking appropriate action in the face of an imminent threat or an actual disaster.¹

**Disaster prevention** — “is the outright avoidance of adverse impacts of hazards and related disasters. Prevention expresses the concept and intention to completely avoid potential adverse impacts through action taken in advance. Examples include dams or embankments that eliminate flood risks, land-use regulations that do not permit any settlement in high risk zones, and seismic engineering designs that ensure the survival and function of a critical building in any likely earthquake. Very often the complete avoidance of losses is not feasible and the task transforms to that of mitigation. Partly for this reason, the terms prevention and mitigation are sometimes used interchangeably in casual use.”¹

**Environmental hazard** — “a hazard originating from technological or industrial conditions, including accidents, dangerous procedures, infrastructure failures or specific human activities, that may cause loss of life, injury, illness or other health impacts, property damage, loss of livelihoods and services, social and economic disruption, or environmental damage (e.g. industrial pollution, nuclear radiation, toxic wastes, dam failures, transport accidents, factory explosions, fires, and chemical spills).”¹

**Hazard** — “a dangerous phenomenon, substance, human activity or condition that may cause loss of life, injury or other health impacts, property damage, loss of livelihoods and services, social and economic disruption, or environmental damage.”¹

**Hydrometeorological hazard** — “a process or phenomenon of atmospheric, hydrological or oceanographic nature that may cause loss of life, injury or other health impacts, property damage, loss of livelihoods and services, social and economic disruption, or environmental damage (includes tropical cyclones, thunderstorms, hailstorms, tornados, blizzards, heavy snowfall, avalanches, coastal storm surges, floods including flash floods, drought, heatwaves and cold spells).”¹

**Natural hazard** — “a dangerous phenomenon, substance, human activity or condition that may cause loss of life, injury or other health impacts, property damage, loss of livelihoods and services, social and economic disruption, or environmental damage. Natural hazards are a subset of all hazards. The term is used to describe actual hazard events as well as the latent hazard conditions that may give rise to future events. Natural hazard events can be characterized by their magnitude or intensity, speed of onset, duration, and area of extent. For example, earthquakes have short durations and usually affect a relatively small region, whereas droughts are slow to develop and fade away and often affect large regions. In some
cases hazards may be coupled, as in the flood caused by a hurricane or the tsunami that is created by an earthquake.\(^1\)

**Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO)** — “is an organised entity that is functionally independent of, and does not represent, a government or state. This term is normally applied to organisations devoted to humanitarian and human rights causes.”\(^2\)

**Socio-natural hazard** — “the phenomenon of increased occurrence of certain geophysical and hydrometeorological hazard events, such as landslides, flooding, land subsidence and drought, that arise from the interaction of natural hazards with overexploited or degraded land and environmental resources. This term is used for the circumstances where human activity is increasing the occurrence of certain hazards beyond their natural probabilities. Evidence points to a growing disaster burden from such hazards. Socio-natural hazards can be reduced and avoided through wise management of land and environmental resources.”\(^1\)

**Technological hazard** — “a hazard originating from technological or industrial conditions, including accidents, dangerous procedures, infrastructure failures or specific human activities, that may cause loss of life, injury, illness or other health impacts, property damage, loss of livelihoods and services, social and economic disruption, or environmental damage (eg industrial pollution, nuclear radiation, toxic wastes, dam failures, transport accidents, factory explosions, fires, and chemical spills).”\(^1\)

### Approval, review and related policy information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date adopted:</th>
<th>Adopted at the 16th General Meeting of WCPT June 2007. Revised and re-approved at the 17th General Meeting of WCPT June 2011.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date for review:</td>
<td>2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Related WCPT policies:</td>
<td>WCPT ethical principles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>WCPT policy statements:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Health human resource</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Primary health care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Relationships with other health professionals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Torture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Description of physical therapy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WCPT endorsement:</td>
<td>• The United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Page 3 of 4
References
