

# Physiotherapist support personnel

Policy statement

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# Physiotherapist support personnel

World Physiotherapy advocates that policies for using physiotherapist support personnel have to be determined at a national level. Physiotherapy is an internationally recognised health profession. It may be practised only by qualified and, where required by state or national legislation, duly licensed/registered physiotherapists. World Physiotherapy advocates that where physiotherapist support personnel are utilised, ongoing direction and supervision from a physiotherapist are essential in the provision of quality physiotherapy services. The degree of direction and supervision necessary for assuring quality physiotherapy services is dependent upon many factors, including the education, experiences, and responsibilities of the parties involved, the needs of the patient/client and the organisational structure in which the physiotherapy services are provided.

World Physiotherapy acknowledges the different stances held by member organisations about the inclusion of support personnel as part of the physiotherapy workforce, including the fact that member organisations may not support the employment of physiotherapist support personnel in direct patient/client physiotherapy services whilst others have carefully defined career pathways specifically for support personnel.

The term support personnel is used in a generic sense to encompass a range of employment classifications such as physiotherapist assistant, physiotherapist aide, physiotherapist technician or physiotherapist helper.

Where physiotherapist support personnel are employed, World Physiotherapy advocates that member organisations should ensure that:

- support personnel be referred to as only “physiotherapist assistant, physiotherapist aide, physiotherapist technician or physiotherapist helper” and not “physiotherapy assistant, aide, technician or helper”
- physiotherapist support personnel only assist the physiotherapist in administration of physiotherapist selected interventions/treatment and only in a properly conducted physiotherapy service under the ongoing direction and supervision of the physiotherapist
- nature and frequency of supervision of physiotherapist support personnel is appropriate to the circumstances and in line with local guidelines
- the physiotherapy profession is actively involved in human resource discussions, decisions and policy changes concerning the potential use of physiotherapist support personnel and their roles and required competencies
- member organisations use effective consumer and marketing policies to assure that employers, governments and the community understand the role and limitations of support personnel that such support personnel do not replace a qualified physiotherapist
- services employing physiotherapist support personnel ensure they are always clearly identified so it is evident to the patient/client that the person is not a physiotherapist.
- the scope of work for physiotherapist support personnel must be clearly identified to ensure compliance with state or national legislation/regulation/recognition
- physiotherapist support personnel are adequately trained to perform effectively and safely any direct intervention/treatment identified by the member organisation as being within the scope of physiotherapist support personnel
- physiotherapist support personnel have access to continuing professional development (CPD)
- the ethical principles guiding the conduct of physiotherapists should contain specific reference to the proper use of physiotherapist support personnel in direct patient/client intervention/treatment (1, 2)

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- providing membership to physiotherapist support personnel has been considered

World Physiotherapy advocates that, regardless of the setting in which the physiotherapy service is provided, the following responsibilities must be carried out only by the physiotherapist and may not be delegated to physiotherapist support personnel:

- interpreting referrals when available
- performing the patient/client initial and follow-up examination/assessment, evaluating the data from the examination/assessment, establishing the diagnosis and prognosis/plan, and providing interventions/treatments that cannot be delegated
- developing or modifying the plan that is based on the initial examination/ assessment or re-examination and that includes the physiotherapy anticipated goals and expected outcomes
- determining when the physiotherapist's expertise and decision-making is required to provide the intervention/treatment and when it may be appropriate to delegate to the physiotherapist support personnel
- determining the most appropriate utilisation of the physiotherapist support personnel that provides for the delivery of a service that is safe, effective and efficient
- establishing the discharge plan and documenting the discharge summary

In jurisdictions where regulation is mature and functioning well the feasibility of introducing regulation of physiotherapist support personnel should be considered.

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**Glossary** (<https://world.physio/resources/glossary>)

**Assessment**

**Continuing professional development (CPD)**

**Diagnosis**

**Goals (clinical)**

**Physiotherapy**

**Professional regulation**

**Prognosis**

**Scope of practice**

**Support personnel**

**Workforce**

Approval, review and related policy information	
<b>Date adopted:</b>	Originally approved at the 13th General Meeting of WCPT June 1995. Revised and re-approved at the 16th General Meeting of WCPT June 2007. Revised and re-approved at the 17th General Meeting of WCPT June 2011. Revised and re-approved at the 18th General Meeting of WCPT May 2015. Revised and re-approved at the 19th General Meeting of WCPT May 2019 Revised and re-approved at the 20 <sup>th</sup> General meeting of WCPT May 2023.
<b>Date for review:</b>	2027
<b>Related World Physiotherapy policies:</b>	World Physiotherapy policy statements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Description of physiotherapy</li> <li>• Ethical principles and the responsibilities of physiotherapists and member organisations</li> <li>• Health workforce</li> <li>• Relationships with other health professionals</li> <li>• Regulation of the physiotherapy profession</li> </ul> World Physiotherapy guideline: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WCPT guideline for the development of a system of legislation/regulation/recognition of physiotherapists</li> </ul>

**References**

1. World Physiotherapy. Policy statement: Ethical principles and responsibilities of physiotherapists and member organisations London, UK: World Physiotherapy; 2022 [24 Nov 2023]. Available from: <https://world.physio/policy/policy-statement-ethical-responsibilities-and-principles>.
2. World Physiotherapy. Policy statement: Physiotherapist practice specialisation. London, UK: World Physiotherapy; 2023 [24 Nov 2023]. Available from: <https://world.physio/policy/ps-specialisation>.

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