

# Disability

## Policy statement

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# Disability

World Physiotherapy believes that physiotherapists are equipped through their education to meet the functional needs of persons with disabilities(1). Physiotherapists play a vital role in preventing and reducing health and health-related problems associated with disability and optimise functional outcomes, activities, participation and environmental factors for persons with disability.

World Physiotherapy endorses the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities. (2, 3) World Physiotherapy 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 physiotherapists in enabling optimal human functioning.

World Physiotherapy unreservedly supports the rights of persons with disabilities to opportunities, choices, self-determination and independence, and to take on roles in society on an equal basis with others. World Physiotherapy supports the role of physiotherapists in facilitating the attainment of these rights. The Rehabilitation 2030: A Call for Action highlights the unmet need for rehabilitation worldwide. (4) More than 1 billion people with disabilities need one or more assistive products. (5)

Physiotherapists provide evidence-based, inclusive, and rehabilitative interventions that reduce the incidence and impact of disease and disability, promote health and quality of life. These interventions help people to maintain and/or improve physical activity, functional independence, participation and reduce loss in their usual and customary roles to reach full potential.

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

- ensure that physiotherapist professional education programmes include comprehensive coverage of the knowledge, skills and attitudes that are relevant to examining and providing treatment/interventions/education (including those addressing environmental factors) for persons with disabilities;
- meet the needs of those with disability by:
  - including curriculum content in all physiotherapist professional entry level education programmes on functioning and disability and the multifaceted nature of disability<sup>4</sup>
  - producing/making available educational materials about the unique opportunities physiotherapists 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 World Physiotherapy, regional, and national conferences
  - providing continuing education programmes on functioning, disability, and rehabilitation;
- support involvement of persons with disabilities in the planning, conducting, and reporting of physiotherapy research;
- support 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

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- 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 disability<sup>1</sup>
    - 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 physiotherapists 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 physiotherapists 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 physiotherapist 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 physiotherapy services to persons living with disability and that follow the principles of:
    - universal health coverage
    - accessible information and physical environments
    - direct access to physiotherapist services
    - inter-professional collaborative practice.
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**Glossary** (<https://world.physio/resources/glossary>)

**Assistive products and technology**

**Capacity**

**Disability**

**Disease**

**Diversity**

**Equity**

**Evidence-based practice (EBP)**

**Health promotion**

**Inclusion**

**International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF)**

**Interprofessional team**

**Participation**

**Physical activity**

**Prevention**

**Reasonable accommodation**

**Rehabilitation**

Approval, review and related policy information	
<b>Date adopted:</b>	Approved at the 18th General Meeting of WCPT May 2015. Reviewed and re-approved at the 19th General Meeting of WCPT May 2019. Reviewed 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>	<p>World Physiotherapy policy statements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ethical principles and the responsibilities of physiotherapists and member organisations</li> <li>• Standards of physiotherapist practice</li> <li>• Patients'/clients' rights in physiotherapy</li> <li>• Quality services</li> <li>• Informed consent</li> <li>• Diversity and inclusion</li> <li>• Physiotherapy documentation and records management</li> </ul> <p>World Physiotherapy guidelines</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guideline for standards of physiotherapist practice</li> <li>• Guideline for physiotherapy documentation and records management</li> </ul> <p>World Physiotherapy endorsements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child</li> <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> <p>Physiotherapist education framework</p>

## References

1. World Physiotherapy. Physiotherapist education framework. London, UK: World Physiotherapy; 2021 [3 Nov 2023]. Available from: <https://world.physio/what-we-do/education>.
2. United Nations. Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities. New York, USA: UN; 1993 [24 Nov 2023]. Available from: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/standard-rules-on-the-equalization-of-opportunities-for-persons-with-disabilities.html>.
3. United Nations. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. New York, USA: United Nations; 2006 [24 Nov 2023]. Available from: <https://social.desa.un.org/issues/disability/crpd/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-crpd>.
4. World Health Organization. Rehabilitation 2030: A Call for Action 2019 [24 Nov 2023]. Available from: <https://www.who.int/initiatives/rehabilitation-2030>.
5. World Health Organization. Priority Assistive Products List (APL) 2016 [24 Nov 2023]. Available from: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/priority-assistive-products-list>.

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