

Physiotherapists as exercise and physical activity experts across the life span

Policy statement

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World Physiotherapy believes that with growing numbers of people leading increasingly sedentary lifestyles and that physical inactivity is one of the leading risk factors for non-communicable diseases leading to morbidity, disability and mortality, it is imperative that effective strategies for exercise and physical activity across the lifespan are implemented. As experts in movement and exercise and with a thorough knowledge of risk factors and pathology and their effects on all systems, physiotherapists are the ideal professionals to promote, guide, prescribe and manage physical activity and exercise activities and efforts.

Physical activity and exercise promote wellbeing and fitness and they are important contributing factors in the prevention and management of long-term conditions. They are powerful interventions for strength, power, endurance, flexibility, balance, relaxation, mental wellbeing, and the remediation of patho-physiology, pain, impairments, activity limitations and participation restrictions. Physiotherapists play a vital role in guiding and progressing safe and effective physical activity and exercise for those with long-term conditions, co-morbidities and those starting out on increasing their levels of physical activity and exercise.

To promote the role of physiotherapists as exercise and physical activity experts, World Physiotherapy encourages and supports member organisations to do the following:

- Assure a comprehensive knowledge base in physiotherapist professional education, particularly regarding the examination/assessment and intervention/treatment of patients'/clients' exercise and physical activity needs across the life span. This will be accomplished through, but not limited to:
 - the curriculum content on exercise and physical activity in all physiotherapist entry level professional education programmes (1, 2)
 - inclusion in the curriculum of the multifaceted nature of physiological changes that occur across the age span
 - educational materials about the unique opportunities physiotherapists have to promote physical and mental wellbeing for patients/clients through exercise
 - educational and practice resources about exercise and physical activity for patients/clients
 - inclusion of evidence based exercise education programmes for patient/clients at World Physiotherapy, regional and national conferences
 - continuing professional development opportunities on exercise prescription for patients/clients
- Support practice guidelines for safe and effective exercise parameters for patients/clients across the life span including:
 - guidelines for safe exercise programmes for patients/clients based on available evidence
 - guidelines for screening programmes (eg community, school, older people programmes) assessing exercise needs
- Enable consistent integration of the best evidence to support exercise across the life span by:
 - utilising existing databases and evidence-based literature on exercise for patients/clients
 - publicising funding sources for research on exercise programmes for patients/clients
- Educate professional communities about the role and benefits of physiotherapists as exercise and physical activity experts for patients/clients across the life span through:
 - information in professional publications on exercise for patients/clients

- regional networking groups
- raising awareness within the medical and other health professions of the important role of physiotherapists as exercise experts in the provision of exercise programmes for patients/clients
- information exchange (eg websites, forums) between physiotherapists on exercise for patients/clients
- Establish the physiotherapists role as a “train the trainer” for other professions working with exercise programmes to provide high quality services for the clients. Educate consumer communities on the role and benefits of physiotherapists as exercise and physical activity experts for patients/clients across the life span through:
 - coordinating communications strategies to inform the public
 - providing resource materials (eg websites, brochures, interactive formats) for the public on the role of physiotherapists in exercise and activity programmes;
 - establishing links with related organisations and groups (eg World Health Organization, schools, retired persons’ groups, osteoporosis groups, diabetes foundations) to cooperate and develop common goals and promote the role of physiotherapists as exercise and physical activity experts for patients/clients.

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

Evidence-based practice (EBP)

Exercise

Physical activity

Approval, review and related policy information	
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Date for review:	2027
Related World Physiotherapy policies:	World Physiotherapy policy statements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary health care • Education World Physiotherapy physiotherapist education framework

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. World Physiotherapy. Guidance for developing a curriculum for physiotherapist entry level education programme London: World Physiotherapy; 2022 [29 Nov 2023]. Available from: https://world.physio/sites/default/files/2022-09/Curriculum_framework_guidance_FINAL.pdf.

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