

Noncommunicable diseases

Policy statement

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Noncommunicable diseases

The United Nations has identified cardiovascular disease, chronic respiratory disease, diabetes, and some forms of cancer, and their concomitant risk factors (tobacco, harmful use of alcohol, unhealthy diet, insufficient physical activity, overweight/obesity, raised blood pressure; raised blood sugar; and raised cholesterol) as the noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) leading to the highest incidences of mortality around the world. (1) (2) However, other NCDs including, but not limited to, musculoskeletal (eg osteoarthritis, osteoporosis), neuromuscular (eg Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis), and mental health disorders (eg dementia, schizophrenia) contribute to the high incidence of disability around the world. The effectiveness of physiotherapy in preventing and managing NCDs and risk factors is well evidenced. (3)

World Physiotherapy believes that physiotherapists are equipped through their education to meet the needs of people with or at risk of NCDs. Physiotherapists provide evidence-based interventions that can reduce the incidence of NCDs and associated disability and mortality. They play a vital role in preventing and managing NCDs by:

- providing evidence based primary and secondary prevention programmes;
- promoting health, a healthy lifestyle and quality of life; and
- improving and maintaining physical activity levels and functional independence.

World Physiotherapy recognises that:

- the increasing incidence of NCDs imposes a burden on individuals, families, societies and health systems;
- NCDs manifest in a range of conditions, including musculoskeletal and mental health conditions;
- measures to prevent NCDs are vital;
- NCDs and their risk factors have an impact across all populations in all geographic areas regardless of income level;
- prevention of NCDs and risk factors will decrease rates of mortality; and
- prevention of NCDs and risk factors will decrease the prevalence and severity of disability.

World Physiotherapy encourages and supports its member organisations to:

- advocate for exercise and physical activity as the low cost and universally available means of reducing the risk factors for NCDs;
- advocate that physiotherapists are well placed to advise on appropriate and effective physical activity programmes for individuals and targeted populations, such as the elderly, people with long-term conditions or those with disability (including intellectual disability);
- advocate that sufficient resources should be allocated to confronting those NCDs that can be prevented and treated by physiotherapists;
- advocate that musculoskeletal and mental health conditions are considered in national NCD strategies
- advocate for equality of opportunities and rights when it comes to the allocation of resources to physiotherapy to prevent and treat NCDs;
- advocate for national policies, programmes, services and systems that enable physiotherapy services to be delivered effectively to people with NCDs and/or their risk factors;

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- advocate for physiotherapist involvement in the development and delivery of evidence based, affordable, cost effective, population-wide physical activity programmes across health and related service systems (eg social, education, and community services);
 - advocate for the involvement of physiotherapists in research which contributes to understanding effective interventions, including prevention, for NCDs and their risk factors;
 - promote the involvement of physiotherapists in the development and implementation of national NCD plans;
 - advocate for public policies and practices that empower individuals, families, and communities to make healthy choices and lead healthy lives;
 - support global initiatives on NCDs and emphasise the evidence for the efficacy of physical activity in the prevention of NCDs and their risk factors;
 - support interprofessional collaborative practice and person-centred integrated service delivery that are necessary for successful prevention and management of NCDs and their risk factors;
 - promote the use of the best evidence in preventing and managing NCDs and their risk factors by:
 - utilising existing databases and evidence-based literature on clinical and cost effective interventions;
 - publicising funding sources for research on the efficacy of physiotherapy in the prevention and management of NCDs and their risk factors;
 - educate health professional communities, service users, and the public about the crucial roles of physiotherapists and the benefits of their interventions in combating the NCD epidemic through:
 - publishing information in professional publications;
 - raising awareness of the important role of physiotherapists in the prevention of disability and mortality associated with NCDs and their risk factors;
 - promoting and using a health promotion approach to empower people and involve them in decisions about health behaviours to reduce their NCD risk;
 - exchanging information within the physiotherapy community (eg through websites and forums) on the prevention and management of NCDs and their risk factors, including a focus on reducing inactivity and sedentary behaviours.

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

Disability

Equity

Evidence-based practice (EBP)

Health promotion

Interprofessional collaborative practice

Noncommunicable disease (NCD)

Physical activity

Prevention

Approval, review and related policy information	
Date adopted:	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 th General Meeting of WCPT May 2023.
Date for review:	2027
Related World Physiotherapy policies:	<p>World Physiotherapy policy statements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethical principles and the responsibilities of physiotherapists and member organisations • Standards of physiotherapist practice • Patients'/clients' rights in physiotherapy • Physiotherapists as exercise experts across the lifespan <p>World Physiotherapy guidelines</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guideline for standards of physiotherapist practice <p>World Physiotherapy endorsements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities • The United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities

References

1. United Nations. Political declaration of the third high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases 2018 [24 Nov 2023]. Available from: <https://ncdalliance.org/resources/political-declaration-of-the-third-high-level-meeting-of-the-general-assembly-on-the-prevention-and-control-of-non-communicable-diseases>.
2. World Health Organization. Noncommunicable diseases 2023 [24 Nov 2023]. Available from: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/noncommunicable-diseases>.
3. United Nations. Sustainable Development Goals New York, USA2018 [2 Nov 2023]. Available from: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>.

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