

# Regulation of the physiotherapy profession

Policy statement

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**Recommended citation:** World Physiotherapy. Policy statement: Regulation of the physiotherapy profession. London, UK: World Physiotherapy; 2023. Available from: <https://world.physio/policy/ps-regulation>

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# Regulation of the physiotherapy profession

World Physiotherapy advocates for regulation of the physiotherapy profession through recognised and valued systems. These systems should assure protection of the public through mechanisms including responsible self-governance of physiotherapists.

Models of professional regulation vary between countries and are influenced by many factors, including the system of government, legislation, the health system and the history of the profession. In order to be effective, any system of regulation must take into account the economic, political and cultural context in which the system is being implemented.

World Physiotherapy recognises that physiotherapists may be regulated through a legislated system that includes licensing or registration by the profession or an external regulatory authority. Alternatively, in some countries, the profession is regulated by physiotherapists meeting membership criteria for the professional organisation.

Physiotherapy is an internationally recognised health profession which must only be practised by qualified physiotherapists.(1) Where required by state or national legislation, they are entitled to hold a valid registration/licence to practise physiotherapy and/or use the title physiotherapist (2). In the absence of regulatory legislation, physiotherapists are recognised through their eligibility for membership in the World Physiotherapy member organisation in that country, in so far as one exists.

World Physiotherapy encourages member organisations to work towards a system of regulation that focuses on the public interest. Such a system will promote trust and confidence in the profession. The system can achieve this through mechanisms that ensure only physiotherapists, who are duly educated and competent, are able to use the title physiotherapist or physical therapist (2)

Effective regulation is characterised by six key elements:

- assurance qualified physiotherapists meet entry level standards of practice, graduating from education programmes that provide quality education
- assurance of standards of continuing professional competence or proficiency
- presence of standards of professional ethics and conduct
- maintenance of a register of licensed/regulated/recognised physiotherapists
- mechanisms to address non-compliance with the established standards of practice
- mechanisms to address new or advanced scopes of practice not benchmarked at entry level standards of practice

These key elements are inter-related and represent the pillars that underpin regulatory approaches that serve the public interest, in particular to protect the safety of the public. In many cases, effective regulation can be achieved by embedding standards of professional education, performance, conduct and competence within the system of regulation. These standards, together with mechanisms to monitor and foster practitioner compliance and manage non-compliance, provide the means by which the profession can protect the public.

World Physiotherapy encourages member organisations to ensure that a mechanism is in place by which the public can report or make a complaint about a licensed/regulated/recognised physiotherapist to an appropriate authority. Contemporary complaint mechanisms include dispute resolution methods such as mediation and conciliation rather than only “command and control” methods or more punitive approaches.

World Physiotherapy encourages member organisations to work towards regulation systems that:

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- define the qualifications required for licensure/regulation/recognition to practise physiotherapy
  - restrict use of the titles physiotherapist and physical therapist to licensed/registered/recognised physiotherapists (2)
  - set and monitor standards of competence to practise physiotherapy
  - establish processes to assure the competence of applicants seeking recognition to practise the profession
  - establish processes to assure that licensed/registered/recognised physiotherapists maintain competence, such as requirements for continuing professional development and for maintenance of practice
  - set and monitor standards for the practice of physiotherapy by recognised/registered/ licensed physiotherapists
  - establish processes to deal with complaints regarding licensed/registered/recognised physiotherapists
  - establish processes to deal with the findings of investigations into complaints relating to licensed/registered/recognised physiotherapists
  - support cooperative discussions with the regulatory body, ensuring the impartiality and independence of the regulator, whilst developing, securing, implementing and maintaining engagement with high standards of education, practice and professionalism

World Physiotherapy encourages member organisations to support systems of regulation where requirements to practise physiotherapy are:

- the same for all applicants regardless of nationality, race, ethnicity, culture, gender, sexual orientation, creed or social status (3)
- based upon fair, objective and transparent criteria related to professional education, experience and/or assessment of competence
- not more burdensome than necessary to assure that only competent physiotherapists are able to use the title and practise as a physiotherapist or physical therapist (2)
- not used for the sole purpose of restricting the supply of physiotherapists in the country concerned
- communicated in plain language
- inclusive of responsible self-governance of physiotherapists

World Physiotherapy encourages member organisations to advise their members of the World Physiotherapy guideline for the development of a system of legislation/regulation/recognition.

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[Glossary \(https://world.physio/resources/glossary\)](https://world.physio/resources/glossary)

**Accreditation**

**Competence**

**Codes of practice/conduct**

**Equity**

**Licence/registration**

**Professional ethics**

**Professional regulation**

**Protection of title**

**Regulated profession**

**Regulatory authority**

**Standards of practice**

<b>Approval, review and related policy information</b>	
<b>Date adopted:</b>	Approved at the 17th General Meeting of WCPT in June 2011. Replaced the Position Statement: regulation and reciprocity, approved at the 14th General Meeting of WCPT May 1999 which was revised and re-approved at the 16th General Meeting of WCPT June 2007. Standalone policy statement on reciprocity developed 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>• Protection of title</li><li>• Education</li><li>• Reciprocity – mutual professional recognition</li><li>• Standards of physiotherapy practice</li><li>• Diversity and inclusion</li></ul> World Physiotherapy guidelines: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Guideline for standards of physiotherapist practice</li><li>• Guideline for the development of a system of legislation/regulation/recognition of physiotherapists</li></ul>

## References

1. World Physiotherapy. Policy statement: Education. London, UK2023 [6 Nov 2023]. Available from: <https://world.physio/policy/ps-education>.
2. World Physiotherapy. Policy statement: Protection of title. London, UK: World Physiotherapy; 2019 [6 Nov 2023]. Available from: <https://world.physio/policy/ps-protection-title>.
3. World Physiotherapy. Policy statement: Diversity and inclusion. London, UK: World Physiotherapy; 2019 [6 Nov 2023]. Available from: <https://world.physio/policy/ps-diversity>.

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