

Disability

Policy statement

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Disability

The World Confederation for Physical Therapy (WCPT) believes that physical therapists are equipped through their education to meet the functional needs of persons with disabilities. ¹ Physical therapists 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.

WCPT 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} WCPT 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 physical therapists in enabling optimal human functioning.

WCPT 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. WCPT supports the role of physical therapists 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

Physical therapists 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, WCPT encourages and supports member organisations to:

- ensure that physical therapist 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 physical therapist professional entry level education programmes on functioning and disability and the multifaceted nature of disability⁴
 - producing/making available educational materials about the unique opportunities physical therapists 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 WCPT, 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 physical therapy 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
 - adopting inclusive policies

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- 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 disability¹
 - 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 physical therapists 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 physical therapists 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 physical therapist 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 physical therapy services to persons living with disability and that follow the principles of:
 - universal health coverage
 - accessible information and physical environments
 - direct access to physical therapist services
 - inter-professional collaborative practice.
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Glossary (www.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

Physical activity

Prevention

Reasonable accommodation

Rehabilitation

| Approval, review and related policy information | |
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| 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. |
| Date for review: | 2023 |
| Related WCPT policies: | WCPT ethical principles WCPT policy statements: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ethical responsibilities of physical therapists and WCPT members• Standards of physical therapy practice• Patients'/clients' rights in physical therapy• Quality services• Informed consent• Diversity and inclusion• Records management: record keeping, storage, retrieval and disposal WCPT guidelines <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Guideline for standards of physical therapy practice• Guideline for records management: record keeping, storage, retrieval and disposal• Guideline for physical therapist professional entry level education. WCPT endorsements <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child• 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. World Confederation for Physical Therapy. WCPT guideline for physical therapist professional entry level education. London, UK: WCPT; 2011. www.wcpt.org/guidelines/entry-level-education (Access date 30 August 2019)
2. United Nations. Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities. New York, USA: UN; 1993. www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/standard-rules-on-the-equalization-of-opportunities-for-persons-with-disabilities.html (Access date 13 August 2019)

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3. United Nations. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. New York, USA: United Nations; 2006. www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html (Access date 16 August 2019)
 4. World Health Organization. Rehabilitation 2030: A Call for Action 2019 [Available from: www.who.int/disabilities/care/rehab-2030/en/].
 5. World Health Organization. Priority Assistive Products List (APL) 2016 [Available from: www.who.int/phi/implementation/assistive_technology/global_survey-apl/en/].

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