



**World
Physiotherapy**
Europe region

**Position Statement –
The Role of Physiotherapists in
Meeting Sustainable Development
Goals and Delivering Sustainable
Clinical Practice**

Professional Practice Working Group (PPWG)

APPROVED

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POSITION STATEMENT - THE ROLE OF PHYSIOTHERAPISTS IN MEETING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND DELIVERING SUSTAINABLE CLINICAL PRACTICE

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The position of the Europe Region of World Physiotherapy is that physiotherapists are uniquely positioned to advance the United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through their commitment to health promotion, disease prevention, patient empowerment, education and environmentally conscious clinical practice. Physiotherapists directly support SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and contribute to several other goals, including SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), and SDG 13 (Climate Action). The paper briefly outlines the role in delivering sustainable clinical practice.

Health promotion and disease prevention: The most sustainable healthcare is that which is never needed. Physiotherapists have a pivotal role in promoting health, preventing disease, and tackling the causes of illness and inequalities. By prioritising preventive care—such as falls prevention programmes, lifestyle interventions and physical activity promotion—physiotherapists reduce the need for resource-intensive treatments, thereby lowering the environmental impact of healthcare¹⁻⁵.

Patient Empowerment and Self-Care: Empowering patients to manage their own health is central to sustainable clinical practice. Physiotherapists educate and support individuals to adopt healthier lifestyles, manage chronic conditions and engage in self-care. This approach not only improves health outcomes but also reduces the frequency of in-person visits, travel, and reliance on pharmaceuticals, all of which contribute to a lower carbon footprint²⁻⁵.

Lean Service Delivery and Efficient Resource Use: Through streamlining care systems, by minimising wasteful activities and using resources efficiently, physiotherapists can further support sustainable practice²⁻⁵. Central to this is the provision of evidence-based care and the avoidance of low-value or non-beneficial interventions, in line with international initiatives such as *Choosing Wisely*⁶.

Low Carbon Alternatives: Physiotherapy is inherently a low-carbon profession, relying on non-pharmacological, low-cost and low-carbon treatments. By prioritising interventions with minimal environmental impact—such as exercise prescription and rehabilitation over surgery or medication—physiotherapists help reduce healthcare emissions^{2-5, 7}.

Education: There is opportunity to embed SDGs into the curriculum of entry-to-practice physiotherapy programmes^{8,9}. This prepares and enables future physiotherapists to understand and actively contribute to global health priorities and develop a broader perspective on the social, environmental and economic factors that influence healthcare systems¹⁰.

Advocacy and Leadership: Through advocating for greener models of healthcare, and participating in policy development, physiotherapists are well positioned to drive systemic change¹¹.

Environmental Stewardship in Clinical Practice: Efficient management of buildings, equipment, energy, water, and waste is increasingly part of physiotherapy practice. Physiotherapists are encouraged to incorporate sustainability into workplace induction, drive climate-conscious practice, and continuously seek ways to reduce their environmental impact⁴.

Physiotherapists have an essential role in advancing sustainable healthcare and achieving the UN's SDGs¹². Through health promotion, disease prevention, patient empowerment, education and environmentally conscious clinical practice, physiotherapists help create healthier communities, reduce inequalities, and minimise the environmental impact of healthcare. Their leadership, advocacy and commitment to sustainability position physiotherapists at the heart of global efforts to build resilient, equitable, and climate-conscious health systems.

Slides demonstrating the professional implications of sustainable healthcare have been developed by the Europe Region and are available here (**Anex 12b – 15th General Meeting of the Europe Region**).

This paper was developed following a recommendation approved at the 2024 General Meeting to implement actions identified in the *Harmonisation of Sustainable Development Goals within the profession in Europe* (approved 2022 and 2024 (with glossary)).

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