World Physiotherapy
Europe region

Position Statement –
Access to Physiotherapy Services

Professional Practice Working Group (PPWG)

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POSITION STATEMENT – ACCESS TO PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES

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The position of the Europe Region of World Physiotherapy is that access to physiotherapy services should be ensured, and timely and equitable. Access is not only an ethical imperative but is also fundamental for sustainable and efficient healthcare[1-2] and resilient disaster management[3-7]. As World Physiotherapy states "physiotherapists form a key link between disaster response and recovery and should play a role in rehabilitation, capacity building and planning service delivery, accessibility and inclusion"[8]. All patients should receive prompt, effective physiotherapy, free from administrative, geographic or financial barriers, regardless of socioeconomic status or location; yet delays and restrictions persist[9]. Inequitable access increases disability, costs and inefficiency. Public policies must remove these barriers to ensure universal access and maximise both patient outcomes and system sustainability[10].

Evidence clearly demonstrates that facilitating faster, equitable and more direct access to physiotherapy services leads to significant advantages for both patients and the healthcare system including:

- accelerated recovery[12]
- improved outcomes[11,12]
- prevention of complication[9]
- reduced waiting times for treatment[11]
- improved patient satisfaction[13]
- reduced health care costs[12]

These findings support implementing policies that facilitate prompt patient access to physiotherapy services. This can be achieved by improving elements of patient-centred care such as simplifying referral pathways and reducing administrative barriers.

In aligning with the World Health Organization (WHO) position, the Europe Region of World Physiotherapy believes that rapid and equitable access to rehabilitation is a fundamental human right. Ensuring access to physiotherapy must be sustained by the healthcare system, creating direct access or efficient pathways to physiotherapy. Furthermore, physiotherapy must be universally and promptly accessible and formally integrated into essential healthcare packages. Continuous and transparent monitoring of access and equity is essential to ensure that all populations benefit fully and fairly from physiotherapy[10-12, 14-19].

Rapid and equitable access to physiotherapy is essential for optimising clinical outcomes, preventing disability, increasing patient satisfaction and reducing costs. It is the responsibility of every health system to eliminate barriers and promote policies that guarantee this fundamental right.

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