

The Need to Scale Up Rehabilitation

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Introduction: Rising prevalence of non-communicable diseases, the ageing population, and improved access to emergency, trauma and medical care correspond with a growing demand for rehabilitation services. However, there is a substantial and ever-increasing unmet need for rehabilitation worldwide, which is particularly profound in low- and middle-income countries.

Objective: To draw attention of Occupational Therapists to the increasing needs for rehabilitation and highlight the role of rehabilitation in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Approach: With its objective of optimizing functioning, rehabilitation supports those with health conditions to remain as independent as possible, to participate in education, to be economically productive, and fulfil meaningful life roles. As such, the availability of accessible and affordable rehabilitation plays a fundamental role in achieving SDGs.

Result: The barriers to scaling up rehabilitation indicate a need for greater awareness and advocacy, increased investment into rehabilitation workforce and infrastructure, and improved leadership and governance structures. The magnitude and scope of unmet rehabilitation needs signals an urgent need for concerted and coordinated global action by all stakeholders.

Conclusion: The WHO global disability action plan 2014-2021 lays out actions for WHO, Member States and partners towards the objective of strengthening and extending rehabilitation. The SDGs and their emphasis on equity and universal health coverage offer a window of opportunity for strengthening of rehabilitation in countries. Rehabilitation 2030: A Call for Action provides strategic direction for coordinated action to raise the profile of rehabilitation as a health strategy relevant to the whole population, across the lifespan and across the continuum of care.