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REHABILITATION

Ageing populations and rising noncommunicable disease rates have increased the demand for rehabilitation services in the Western Pacific Region. By 2050, one in four people will be 60 years of age or older. From 2006 to 2016, strokes have increased by more than 50% and diabetes prevalence by more than 13%. The demand for rehabilitation services will only grow as more people, living longer and managing chronic illnesses, seek to maintain their quality of life, participate in their communities and care for themselves.

Health systems are often focused on prevention and curative treatment services, with little regard for rehabilitation. In many countries in the Region, inadequate rehabilitation services limit people's ability to recover following treatment, making it difficult to resume school or work and look after themselves. The lack of services often causes financial hardship by shifting the burden of rehabilitation to families and individuals. However, these issues can be addressed if rehabilitation services are included in the continuum of care and strengthened as part of universal health coverage. This approach can help millions of people recover from injury or illness, manage long-term disease or disability, and age with health and dignity.

The Regional Committee for the Western Pacific is requested to consider for endorsement the draft *Western Pacific Regional Framework on Rehabilitation*.

1. CURRENT SITUATION

Rehabilitation is an essential health strategy that supports people's recovery from illness or injury, improves quality of life following curative treatments and supports people with disability to participate in daily activities.

Rehabilitation takes on a more essential role as stronger health systems help people live longer, often with chronic illness or impairment. The *World Report on Disability* endorsed in 2013 by the World Health Assembly (resolution [WHA66.9](#)) and the *WHO Global Disability Action Plan 2014–2021* both stress the importance of rehabilitation. They recognize that rehabilitation is an essential part of universal health coverage (UHC) and the continuum of care for all people who experience illness, injury or impairment.

Rehabilitation also enables children and adults to receive an education, maintain employment, participate in their community and manage their own care at home. WHO reaffirmed this view during a February 2017 two-day conference at WHO headquarters titled [Rehabilitation 2030: A Call for Action](#). Member States and development partners committed to raise the profile of rehabilitation.

Despite growing demand, there is sporadic coverage and inconsistent quality of rehabilitation services in the Western Pacific Region – an issue that will become more acute with rising noncommunicable disease (NCD) rates and ageing populations. Over one quarter of the Region's people will be aged 60 years or older by 2050, and the prevalence of NCDs has increased drastically. According to data from the [Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation](#), between 2006 and 2016 in the Region, ischaemic stroke incidence rose by 53.2%, diabetes by 13.1%, and cardiovascular and respiratory diseases by 35.5% and 16.7%, respectively.

These health issues, combined with the ongoing threat of injury and communicable disease, are challenging to address with the limited coverage and uneven quality of rehabilitation services across the Region.¹ It is vital that health systems be oriented so that people can be active and healthy and contribute to their communities, both socially and economically, while remaining independent for as long as possible.

Laws and regulations governing rehabilitation services are weak in some countries, thus limiting the full development of services and resulting in inadequate service delivery. Rehabilitation services are delivered across sectors, so coordination among stakeholders must be strengthened across ministries of health and social affairs, or similar agencies that share responsibility for rehabilitation

¹ See [Rehabilitation and Disability in the Western Pacific](#) (WHO, 2017).

services, as well as with the non-State actors, such as nongovernmental organizations, that deliver rehabilitation services in various settings.

The rehabilitation workforce is also weak in some countries, especially where governments employ few rehabilitation professionals. These weaknesses are partly the result of a lack of rehabilitation personnel to drive service development. The issue is compounded by poor integration of rehabilitation data into health information systems, as well as a limited understanding of the importance of measuring the functioning of people in order to support their health and well-being.

The draft *Western Pacific Regional Framework on Rehabilitation* aims to improve access to quality rehabilitation services. The Framework proposes a menu of practical actions to inform decision-making, foster regional collaboration, and support individuals and families to attain and maintain health and well-being. In developing the Framework, WHO held various consultations with Member States from December 2016 to June 2018, and a consultation with global experts in March 2018 in Manila, Philippines.

2. ISSUES

2.1 Strengthen rehabilitation to address escalating demands including ageing populations

In the Western Pacific Region, governments are facing health and demographic challenges related to ageing populations, with consequent chronic illness and impairment for many older people. Both high- and middle-income countries in the Region face these issues, with unmet demand for rehabilitation services greater in middle-income countries.

NCDs, such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease, are on the rise despite prevention campaigns focused on NCD risk factors. With the combined burden of NCDs and other health conditions associated with ageing populations, demand is increasing in the Region for health services that support healthy ageing and the management of chronic disease. Curative interventions are not enough to ensure the health and well-being of people with chronic or age-related health conditions. Rehabilitation services address the demands of ageing populations and those affected by the rise of NCDs by promoting functioning and well-being beyond medical treatments.

As health systems develop and strengthen to meet the demands of evolving health priorities, they must also adapt to serve individuals and families now living longer and managing chronic disease, impairment and disability.

2.2 Improve quality of life by including rehabilitation in health system response

Rehabilitation should be part of UHC and the continuum of care for everyone. Now it often is not included as an essential part of basic health-care packages. With medical advances allowing people to survive injury and illness in increasing numbers, now is the time to focus on rehabilitation services that support quality of life.

When rehabilitation services are weak or non-existent, the burden of support for individuals in need falls on families and caregivers, especially women and girls. By strengthening rehabilitation services, Member States can help ensure their citizens enjoy good quality of life as they age, without undue hardship for their families.

Rehabilitation services directly support individuals and families so that they can participate in school, work or community activities. Rehabilitation services also enable people to live independently in their own community, rather than being institutionalized due to impaired daily functioning.

2.3 Enable communities and countries to prosper through improving access to rehabilitation

Rehabilitation services are a powerful tool for individuals and families to restore health and well-being while recovering from illness or injury and help people manage long-term health conditions. Rehabilitation allows people to maximize daily functioning to handle basic but essential skills, such as communication, mobility and caring for themselves. The benefits of rehabilitation extend beyond basics to other areas of life, such as school and work.

The community also gains as individuals with improved functioning participate more in community life, education and employment.

Rehabilitation services support people at all ages: an older person ageing safely and independently at home; a child with disability going to school; or a single mother returning to work after an injury. Supporting Member States in strengthening rehabilitation services enables people to participate in community life and prosper, taking another step together towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

3. ACTIONS PROPOSED

The Regional Committee for the Western Pacific is requested to consider for endorsement the draft *Western Pacific Regional Framework on Rehabilitation*.