

Rehabilitation: global need and challenges

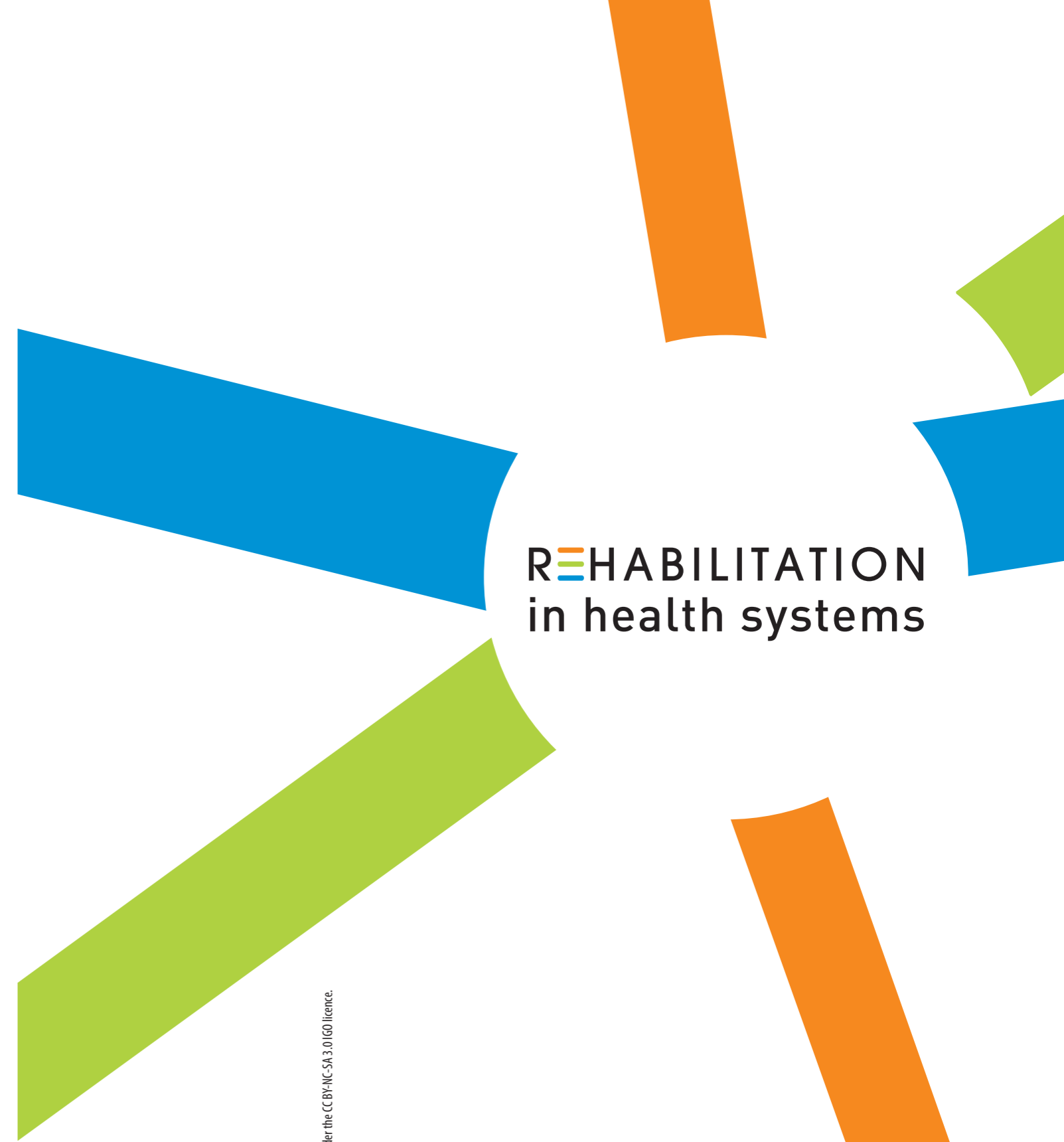
Historically, rehabilitation services have been a low priority for many governments, especially those with limited health investment, resulting in underdeveloped, poorly coordinated services. Yet global trends in health and ageing signal the need for a major scaling up of rehabilitation services in countries around the world and in low- and middle-income countries in particular. Investment in rehabilitation allows people with a health condition to achieve and maintain optimal functioning, by improving their health and by increasing their participation in life, such as education and work, thus increasing their economic productivity. Strengthening rehabilitation is fundamental to responding to the increasing demand and ensuring that rehabilitation is available and affordable for those who require it.

Aims of rehabilitation

Rehabilitation consists of a set of measures that assist individuals who experience, or are likely to experience, disability to achieve and maintain optimal functioning in interaction with their environment. Rehabilitation thus maximizes people's ability to live, work and learn to their best potential. Evidence also suggests that rehabilitation can reduce the functional difficulties associated with ageing and improve quality of life.

Overarching principles

- **Rehabilitation contributes to the provision of comprehensive person-centred care.**
Rehabilitation is an integral component of health services, which ensures that people can realize their full functional potential in the environments in which they live and work.
- **Rehabilitation services are relevant along the continuum of care.**
Rehabilitation includes interventions for the prevention of impairment and deterioration in the acute phase of care as well as for optimization and maintenance of functioning in the post-acute and long-term phases of care.
- **Rehabilitation is part of universal health coverage; efforts should therefore be made to increase the quality, accessibility and affordability of services.**
Efforts to achieve universal health coverage should include actions and policies to improve the quality, accessibility and affordability of rehabilitation, thus acknowledging its importance as a health service.
- **Policies and interventions are required to address the scope and intensity of needs for rehabilitation services in various population groups and geographical areas, so that high-quality rehabilitation services are accessible and affordable to everyone who needs them.**
People experience various barriers to accessing rehabilitation services. Therefore, specific requirements in the population and strategies to address them should be identified so that the health system can ensure equitable availability of services.



REHABILITATION
in health systems

REHABILITATION

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Recommendations for strengthening

REHABILITATION in health systems



Ministry of Health

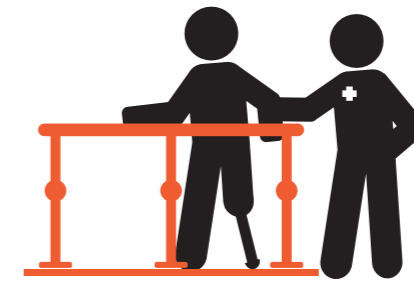
Integrate rehabilitation into the health system

Rehabilitation is currently not effectively integrated into the health system in many parts of the world and this has been attributed in part to how and by whom rehabilitation is administered. For rehabilitation to be effectively integrated into the health system, it needs clearly designated and strong governance. In most situations, the ministry of health will be the most appropriate agency for governing rehabilitation, with strong links to other relevant sectors, such as social welfare, education and labour.



Ensure hospitals include specialized rehabilitation units for inpatients with complex needs

Specialized rehabilitation wards provide intensive, highly specialized interventions for restoring functioning to patients with complex rehabilitation needs. In a number of instances, the results are superior to those of rehabilitation provided in general wards, such as in the context of lower-limb amputation, spinal cord injury and stroke and in the care of older people. Establishment or extension of specialized rehabilitation units should be based on the context of the health system, specifically the availability of rehabilitation workforce and funding.



Ensure adequate training is offered to users to whom assistive products are provided

It is important to train users in effective, safe use and maintenance of assistive products over time, when necessary. Especially in the context of complex needs, rehabilitation providers can ensure that the products that people receive are suitable for them and their environment and are adapted as the needs of the users evolve.

Integrate rehabilitation services into and between primary, secondary and tertiary levels of health systems

The underdevelopment of rehabilitation in many countries has often resulted in services being offered only at selected levels of health systems. Rehabilitation is, however, required at all levels, for identification of needs and for an effective continuum of care throughout a person's recovery. Standardized referral pathways and other coordination mechanisms between levels help to ensure good transition of care for optimal outcomes.



Ensure both community and hospital rehabilitation services are available

Rehabilitation in both hospital and community settings is necessary to ensure timely intervention and access to services. Rehabilitation in hospital settings enables early intervention, which can speed recovery, optimize outcomes and facilitate smooth, timely discharge. Many people require rehabilitation well beyond discharge from hospital, while other users may require services solely in the community. People with developmental, sensory or cognitive impairment, for example, may benefit from long-term interventions that are often best delivered at home, school or in the workplace.



Ensure financial resources are allocated to rehabilitation services

How health systems allocate financial resources significantly affects service delivery, yet many countries do not allocate specific budgets for rehabilitation services. Allocation of resources for rehabilitation can increase both the availability and the quality of rehabilitation services and minimize out-of-pocket expenses, which is a significant barrier to service utilization.



Ensure the availability of a multi-disciplinary rehabilitation workforce

A multi-disciplinary workforce in health systems ensures that the range of rehabilitation needs within the population can be met. Multi-disciplinary rehabilitation interventions have been shown to be effective in the management of many chronic, complex or severe conditions that may significantly impact multiple domains of functioning (vision, communication, mobility and cognition). As different rehabilitation disciplines require specific skills, a multi-disciplinary workforce can significantly improve quality of care and improve health outcomes. Long-term investment in the education, development and retention of a multi-disciplinary rehabilitation workforce should thus be factored in health sector planning and budgets.



Implement financing and procurement policies that ensure assistive products are available to everyone who needs them

Assistive products, such as mobility devices, hearing aids and white canes, play an important role in improving functioning and increasing independence and participation; however, accessing such products can be difficult, particularly in some low- and middle-income countries where as little as 5–15% of the population have access to the products they need.



Where health insurance exists or is to become available, ensure rehabilitation services are covered

Health insurance is a common mechanism for decreasing financial barriers to health services, yet inclusion of rehabilitation in insurance coverage is variable. When health insurance includes rehabilitation, access to and use of rehabilitation services is increased. Because health insurance protects only a minority of the population in many parts of the world, this mechanism of financial protection should be part of broader initiatives to improve the affordability of rehabilitation services.