

WHO actions toward disabled persons

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The first-ever *World report on disability* estimates that there are more than one billion people with disability worldwide, about 15% of the global population. The prevalence of disability is rising because of ageing populations and the global increase in chronic disease conditions, and is higher in low-income countries than in high-income countries. In fact, the outcome document of the first-ever United Nations General Assembly high-level meeting on disability and development held in September 2013, estimated that 80% of people with disability live in developing countries. Relevant outcome of this historical meeting was a commitment to global disability inclusive development agendas and urgent action to improve health care, rehabilitation, and strengthen data on disability.

The World Health Organization (WHO) recognizes that “people with disability face widespread barriers to accessing services, and experience poorer health outcomes, lower educational achievement, less economic participation and higher rates of poverty than people without disabilities. Many of these barriers are avoidable and the disadvantage associated with disability can be overcome. Better health for people with disability, through improved access to health services, is a crucial enabling factor to participation and positive outcomes in areas such as education, employment, and family, community and public life. Good health also contributes to the achievement of broader global sustainable development goals”.

The Action Plan 2014-2021: better health for all people with disabilities is a comprehensive WHO action plan, with measurable outcomes, based on the evidence in the World report on disability and is in line with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). The vision of the action plan is a world in which all persons with disabilities and their families live in dignity, with equal rights and opportunities, and are able to achieve their full potential. The overall goal is to contribute to achieving optimal health, functioning, well-being and human rights for all persons with disabilities.

The WHO Action Plan has three main goals:

1. to remove barriers and improve access to health services and programmes;
2. to strengthen and extend rehabilitation, habilitation, assistive technology, assistance and support services, and community-based rehabilitation; and
3. to strengthen collection of relevant and internationally comparable data on disability and support research on disability and related services.

In order to improve access to health services, some of the recommended actions include the development and/or reform of health and disability laws, policies, strategies and plans for consistency with the principles of the CRPD, the removal of barriers to financing and affordability, and face specific challenges to the quality of health care experienced by persons with disabilities.

Provision of adequate financial resources to ensure the provision of services guaranteeing access to a range of assistance and support services, development and maintenance of a sustainable workforce, availability of appropriate assistive technologies, as well as engaging, supporting and building the capacity of persons with disabilities and their families and/or informal caregivers are some of the actions to expand and to strengthen rehabilitation and habilitation services.

In order to support research on disability, it is key to improve disability data collection through the development and application of a standardized model disability survey, to reform national data collection systems based on the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF), to strengthen research on priority issues in disability and also to strengthen and build human resource capacity in the area of disability research in a range of disciplines.

The International Society of Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine (ISPRM) holds an official relation with the WHO, and has been the catalyst to build human resource capacity in principles and practice of clinical research for the past nine years.

Increased collective action will provide a long term impact for people with disability, including less unmet health care needs, improvements in health outcomes, and better data to understand and monitor the situation of people with disability in all countries.

References

World Health Organization, World Bank. World report on disability. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2011. <http://www.who.int/disabilities/actionplan/en/>