

Empowering Lives of People with SCI: Unlocking the Transformative Potential of the World Health Assembly's Resolution on Rehabilitation

Carlotte Kiekens, MD

In 2017, the World Health Organization (WHO) initiated the Rehabilitation 2030 call for action, leading to the unanimous adoption of the resolution on "Strengthening Rehabilitation in Health Systems" by the World Health Assembly (WHA), the highest health policy-setting body, in May 2023. This resolution aims to upscale rehabilitation services to address global needs arising from an ageing population, non-communicable diseases, and emerging infectious diseases, as highlighted by the Global Burden of Disease Study 2019. This study revealed that one-third of the global population could benefit from rehabilitation, yet many countries lack essential rehabilitation services. The incidence of SCI was 0,9 million cases with an estimated 6,2 million YLDs, and 20,6 million individuals were living with SCI. Moreover, absolute counts increased substantially from 1990 to 2019, with a considerable geographical heterogeneity in SCI's demographic, spatial, and temporal patterns. Critical aspects of the WHA resolution include requests for Member States, international organisations, and the WHO Director-General to focus on research, innovation, workforce development, and quality service integration at all levels of health care. The path to implementation involves advocacy, supported by the World Rehabilitation Alliance (WRA), encouraging investment in research and innovation, including health policy and systems research, for evidence-based decision-making. Cochrane Rehabilitation is working hard to enhance methodology in rehabilitation research to increase the availability of high-quality evidence. The third Global Rehabilitation 2030 meeting in July 2023 introduced five WHO tools to aid in implementing the resolution, such as the Package of Interventions for SCI, the Routine Health Information Systems - Rehabilitation toolkit and the Guide for Rehabilitation Workforce Evaluation. Rehabilitation professionals, academics and civil society, including ISCoS, can contribute by implementing these and advising healthcare authorities. The ultimate goal is to integrate rehabilitation universally into health systems, thereby enhancing individuals' overall well-being and socio-economic participation.