



Canadian
Physiotherapy
Association

Association
canadienne de
physiothérapie

Position Statement

Population Health

The Canadian Physiotherapy Association (CPA) endorses a population health approach to address the present and future health needs of Canadians. Physiotherapists, as essential primary health providers, must consider population health needs and incorporate population health approaches into program planning and treatment interventions in order to have the greatest impact on clients' and communities' health status and health outcomes.

BACKGROUND

The Public Health Agency of Canada defines population health as “an approach to health that aims to improve the health of the entire population and to reduce health inequities among population groups. In order to reach these objectives, it looks at and acts upon the broad range of factors and conditions that have an influence on our health... Health is considered a capacity or resource rather than a state, a definition which corresponds more to the notion of being able to pursue one's goals, to acquire skills and education, and to grow.”¹

A population health approach asserts that “health is determined by complex interactions between social and economic factors, the physical environment and individual behaviour. These factors are referred to as determinants of health.”²

The determinants of health include factors such as: income and social status; education, employment, physical environments and social networks, genetics, culture, gender and health services.³ It is the combined influence of the determinants that determines health status or ‘the capacity of people to adapt to, respond to, or control life's challenges and changes.’⁴

¹ Public Health Agency of Canada. What is population health? Available at: <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ph-sp/phdd/approach/index.html>. Accessed August 29, 2006.

² Public Health Agency of Canada. What determines health? Available at: <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ph-sp/phdd/determinants/index.html#determinants>. Accessed August 29, 2006.

³ Public Health Agency of Canada. Determinants of health. Available at: <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ph-sp/phdd/determinants/index.html#determinants>. Accessed August 29, 2006.

⁴ Frankish, CJ, Green LW, Ratner PA, Chomik T, Larsen C. Health Impact Assessment as a Tool for Population Health Promotion and Public Policy.

Health Canada. 1996. Available from: <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ph-sp/phdd/impact/index.html>. Accessed August 29, 2006.

A POPULATION HEALTH APPROACH AND PHYSIOTHERAPISTS

Physiotherapists have the essential competencies to identify risk factors for disease and disability in individuals and their environment and through collaboration with their clients and other health providers to develop programs and interventions that proactively address these population health needs.⁵

Health promotion and disease/disability/injury prevention are important components of physiotherapy approaches and interventions. As such, the planning for physiotherapy services and physiotherapy caseload management should consider present and future population health needs in conjunction with the management of illness, injury and disability. Program and service development and planning should be based on the unique and specific needs of the communities/populations being served.

Physiotherapists understand the effect of the determinants of health on health outcomes, as well as how they can positively affect the determinants of health in their daily professional practice. Using a client-centered approach, physiotherapists are sensitive to their clients, and adapt their assessment and treatment approaches to include the range of life experiences each client brings to the therapeutic relationship, including employment, family environment, education, and physical and mental health.

A population health approach shifts the emphasis from solely treating disease/disability/injury to include promoting health and considering all the factors which influence the health of both individuals and communities. The CPA believes that by integrating a population health approach in planning for and developing physiotherapy services, physiotherapists will make an additional important contribution to improve the health outcomes of Canadians.

National Office

Canadian Physiotherapy Association
955 Green Valley Crescent, Suite 270
Ottawa, ON K2C 3V4
T: 613-564-5454
TF: 1-800-387-8679
F: 613-564-1577
www.physiotherapy.ca

⁵ Canadian Physiotherapy Association. Primary Health Care. Available at:
<http://www.physiotherapy.ca/public.asp?WCE=C=47|K=222537|RefreshT=222559|RefreshS=LeftNav|RefreshD=2225591>.
Accessed September 5, 2006.