Rehabilitation - a core health service

What is rehabilitation?
Rehabilitation is a health service that addresses the impact of the health condition on the person’s life, with a focus on improving their ‘everyday functioning’ and reducing the experience of disability. Generally, rehabilitation focuses on how an individual does things (e.g. move around, exercise, get dressed, eat, speak, think) and not the disease. It does this through a strong emphasis on educating and empowering people to manage their health condition, adjust to the situation and remain active.

Who provides rehabilitation?
Rehabilitation is delivered by qualified health personnel, primarily physiotherapists, physiatrists, occupational therapists, speech and language therapists, psychologists and prosthetists and orthotists.

Who benefits from rehabilitation?
Rehabilitation can be for anyone, from babies to older people. There are many common health conditions that benefit from rehabilitation. For example, neck, back, shoulder and knee pain, stroke, mental health conditions, people with limited vision or hearing, children with developmental difficulties or disabilities, older people with difficulties moving or thinking, young people with sports injuries, people with heart disease, amputation, or people who experience serious injuries, such as spinal cord injury. Almost all health conditions can benefit from rehabilitation.

Why is rehabilitation a good investment?
Rehabilitation helps people be more active, able and well, which improves health, happiness and quality of life. It can also prevent people from experiencing complications and from being re-admitted to hospital. People who can do everyday things better can contribute more to their family, community and society. In this way, there are many social and economic benefits to rehabilitation.

Myanmar has realized all this – and decided to move swiftly to develop a national rehabilitation strategy 2019-2023, with the support of WHO & partners.
Need for rehabilitation

The need for rehabilitation is increasing globally. This is due to health trends where people live longer with chronic disease, increasing incidence of injuries and of people surviving injury, as well as ageing populations and expansion of medical and surgical interventions which need rehabilitation for good outcomes.

According to the Global Burden of Disease Study*, the prevalence of conditions associated with disability -- and hence rehabilitation need -- increased in Myanmar over the last 20 years.

Rehabilitation 2030 Initiative by WHO

In February 2017, WHO launched the Rehabilitation 2030 Initiative with a ‘Call for Action’ to governments and civil societies to strengthen rehabilitation to meet population needs. This initiative supports countries to expand access to rehabilitation by strengthening and integrating rehabilitation into health systems and services.

Myanmar National Rehabilitation Strategic Plan 2019-2023

In September 2019, Ministry of Health & Sports and Ministry of Social Welfare & Resettlement together launched Myanmar’s national strategy for rehabilitation, with the support of WHO and partners. This strategy responds to the significant unmet need for rehabilitation that exists across the country. It focuses on key priorities, i.e. increasing access to services, strengthening rehabilitation workforce and expanding access to assistive products. The strategic plan has five core objectives:

1. strengthen rehabilitation leadership, planning, generation of information & evidence
2. expand access to quality rehabilitation care along a continuum, including specialised rehabilitation
3. increase access to assistive products
4. strengthen, expand rehabilitation workforce
5. integrate rehabilitation across health services.

Implementation has commenced, a suitable monitoring framework developed. Next steps are to support implementation, where partners can partake. Further, regular monitoring and review of progress will be vital for success.