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**Honorable Minister of Health,
Republic of Italy**

Subject: Strengthening the Interdisciplinary Rehabilitation Workforce for Universal Health Coverage

The World Health Organization (WHO) recognizes that a **competent, interdisciplinary rehabilitation workforce** is essential for achieving Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and meeting the health needs of all populations, particularly in the context of demographic changes and an ageing society. Rehabilitation is a core health strategy, integral to improving individuals' functioning, autonomy, and social inclusion, as reaffirmed by the World Health Assembly Resolution 76.6 and the commitments made at the recent G7 Health Ministers' meeting.

The **rehabilitation workforce**¹ encompasses a range of professions, including of **audiology, clinical psychology, occupational therapy, prosthetics and orthotics, physiotherapy, and speech and language therapy, as well as by rehabilitation specialists in medicine (physical and rehabilitation medicine or psychiatry) and nursing (rehabilitation nursing). In addition, the rehabilitation workforce often encompasses rehabilitation assistants, technicians and community-based rehabilitation workers, or other health occupations delivering rehabilitation interventions.** The precise composition and roles of this workforce should be tailored to national needs and contexts, as determined by your ministry in collaboration with relevant international professional bodies including but not limited to the World Federation of Occupational Therapists (WFOT), World Physiotherapy and the International Society of Physical and rehabilitation Medicine Doctors.

For example, the Italian Association of Occupational Therapy (AITO) highlights the vital and irreplaceable role of occupational therapists within rehabilitation pathways, both nationally and internationally. Recognized by the WHO and aligned with EU standards, occupational therapy contributes significantly to promoting autonomy, improving quality of life, and supporting individuals with functional limitations across the lifespan. Despite its strong evidence base and international recognition, the profession in Italy could face challenges due to limited educational programs, uneven regional access, and potential reforms that risk undermining its disciplinary autonomy. Strengthening occupational therapy education, research, and workforce integration is essential to ensuring high-quality, person-centered care and aligning Italy's health system with global best practices and European directives.

¹ <https://www.who.int/teams/noncommunicable-diseases/sensory-functions-disability-and-rehabilitation/rehabilitation/workforce>

To support the process of strengthening this interdisciplinary workforce, WHO offers the **Guide for Rehabilitation Workforce Evaluation (GROWE)**²—a comprehensive set of resources for evaluating and planning the rehabilitation workforce at national or subnational levels. GROWE supports stakeholders in:

- Assessing the current status and needs of the rehabilitation workforce
- Identifying gaps and opportunities for development
- Formulating actionable recommendations and strategic plans
- Establishing robust data and monitoring systems

The Ministry of Health in Italy is most welcome to engage with WHO Europe for **technical support as we are here for that**, including supporting you to conduct a GROWE assessment or other tailored assistance, to strengthen your rehabilitation workforce planning and integration within the health system. This process can help ensure that Italy's rehabilitation workforce is optimally equipped to deliver high-quality, accessible services in line with UHC and the Sustainable Development Goals.

For further information or to initiate technical collaboration, please do not hesitate to contact me at kianis@who.int. I very much look forward to supporting Italy's Ministry of Health in advancing rehabilitation as an essential component of health for all.

Grazie mille,



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² <https://www.who.int/teams/noncommunicable-diseases/sensory-functions-disability-and-rehabilitation/guide-for-rehabilitation-workforce-evaluation>
