

The International Society of Wheelchair Professionals (ISWP): A resource aiming to improve wheelchair services worldwide

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International Society of Wheelchair Professionals (ISWP) members participate in a 2018 global wheelchair sector stakeholders' meeting organized by USAID, World Learning, and ISWP. The stakeholders pictured are experts in wheelchair policy, training and management of personnel and provision services, and products. Photo credit: Photo Shoppee/World Learning/Special Programs to Address the Needs of Survivors Grant Solicitation and Management (SPANS/GSM)/Bangalore, India. Used by permission and with consent.

Rehabilitation conferences often have an opening theme of 'look how far we have come', but the closing message is 'look how far we have to go'. This was true for the 2018 European Seating Symposium (EES), in Dublin, Ireland focusing on mobility and postural support devices. 'Before and after' pictures of products over the last 30 years suggest that technology has become more available in more contexts, including a recent wave of DIY technology with the ubiquity of 3D printing and scanning tools to produce custom equipment. The impressive evolution of this technology is not the whole story; in practice, many people do not have access, and policy and training efforts related to both service and rehabilitation equipment are often inadequate to ensure users receive appropriate products (MacLachlan et al., 2018).

This disparity will increase as those who require assistive technology (AT) will double by 2050, to 2 billion users. Meanwhile, 90% of users do not have access, and live in less-resourced settings (World Health Organization (WHO), 2018). Addressing this disparity is the aim of the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, signed by 187 countries worldwide, and Sustainable Development Goals, that ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all, at all ages (UN, 2006). In May 2018, a World Health Assembly

resolution was adopted by the UN member states to develop, implement and strengthen policies and programs to improve access to AT.

The need for wheelchairs is just as great. The WHO suggests that 68 million people need wheelchairs in less-resourced settings. The problem is multi-faceted, but a core barrier is lack of access to appropriate training, including for occupational therapists, and limited capacity to provide wheelchairs worldwide. An appropriate wheelchair can prevent secondary health complications, enhance quality of life, and facilitate access to human rights such as education, healthcare, and employment (WHO, 2008).

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Lack of training is more prevalent in low- and middle-income countries where the incidence of disability is higher and more wheelchairs are needed.

To address the service provision and training needs, the WHO developed *Guidelines on Provision of Manual Wheelchairs in Less-Resourced Settings* and a series of Wheelchair Service Provision Training Packages (WHO, 2008). Non-governmental organizations worldwide like Handicap International and Motivation, and funders and strategic partners like USAID, have helped disseminate WHO materials and implement programs worldwide.

To promote better coordination and scale efforts across organizations, the International Society of Wheelchair Professionals (ISWP) was founded in 2015 to serve as global resource for wheelchair service standards and provision through advocacy, education, standards, evidence-based practice, innovation and a platform for information exchange. Some of the preliminary successes include development and validation of a basic wheelchair knowledge test (Gartz et al., 2017); a hybrid course, as a valid learning method to scale wheelchair trainings across countries and regions for global capacity-building (Burrola-Mendez et al., 2018); a Seating and Mobility Academic Resource Toolkit to promote the sharing and integration of wheelchair training resources in universities (Rushton in ESS, 2018); a training management platform for the wheelchair sector (Goldberg in ESS, 2018); a product catalog and product standards to promote the availability and quality of contextually appropriate wheelchairs, worldwide (Mhatre et al., 2017); and policy promotion in affiliate countries, including Romania and the Philippines (Gowran in ESS, 2018). The ISWP's strategic plan promotes activities in six focal areas: advocacy, education, product quality standards, evidence-based practice, global information resource, and management. A mostly all-volunteer force of over 80 people, four working groups, and an advisory board will help us achieve goals in all areas.

We invite you to join us at wheelchairnet.org and wheelchairnetwork.org, where you can read about our progress so far, promote your knowledge and skills, be trained on the latest evidence, share or contribute to new resources, or volunteer. We believe this international, multidisciplinary collaboration will lead to innovations in service and products that will improve the mobility

and community participation of wheelchair users worldwide.

Research ethics

Research approval was not required for this editorial. Informed consent was not relevant to this editorial.

Declaration of conflicting interests

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