



## DISABILITY AND REHABILITATION: ESSENTIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR EQUITABLE, ACCESSIBLE AND POVERTY-REDUCING HEALTH CARE IN SOUTH AFRICA SAHR KWIK SKWIZ SERIES

### This KWIK SKWIZ:



summarises Chapter 7 of the 2014/15 South African Health Review.

- Disability is a universal aspect of the health/illness experience, with strong links to the quadruple burden of disease in South Africa, and intersects with other vulnerabilities such as gender, race, poverty and rural location.
- People with disabilities and their families experience greater health risks and systematically worse access to health care compared with their non-disabled peers.
- The disability grant is frequently the main intervention offered to people whose health condition or impairment can no longer be remediated with curative care. While the grant is undoubtedly beneficial in compensating for the additional costs and lost productive capacity related to impairment, it has not helped to change the prevailing thinking within the health system that relegates people with disabilities to being 'cared for', rather than supported (and expected) to play full and active roles in society.
- By conceptualising disability as arising from the interactions between a health condition and environmental and personal factors, the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health has brought about a shift in much health sector thinking, from considering individual pathology in isolation towards a broader understanding of health and function in context.
- South Africa has ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), which binds the State to realising the right to health care and rehabilitation for all, yet much work remains to be done in building a health system that ensures this right for all South Africans, without discrimination.
- Primary health care (PHC) re-engineering offers an important opportunity to realise these rights, but disability should be integrated into every aspect of services, with rehabilitation workers as key members of PHC teams.
- Rehabilitation must be made available as a core component of essential health care, and integrated into all programmes and planning at primary care level. Rehabilitation has inherent linkages across health conditions and various healthcare activities, and can no longer be considered an 'add-on' or vertical service.
- As the experience of disability intersects with priority health conditions such as HIV/AIDS and non-communicable diseases, there is reason to believe that the effectiveness of

other programmes may be curtailed, unless disability is factored into health system design. The current health status of and healthcare utilisation by people with disabilities must be investigated in order to identify existing inequities and monitor progress.

- At the heart of Community-Based Rehabilitation philosophy is the commitment to enabling the full participation of people with disabilities as citizens. Capacity-building and organisational support is needed to expand the number and diversity of people with disabilities who engage actively with government, and public consultations, dissemination of information and other civic activities should be accessible to all.
- Health systems strengthening should now look to the universal design of facilities and activities, the incorporation of disability considerations into all health programmes, and the resourcing of rehabilitation services, particularly at PHC level, as a matter of urgency.

**SOURCE:**

Sherry K. Disability and rehabilitation: essential considerations for equitable, accessible and poverty-reducing health care in South Africa. In: Padarath A, King J, English R, editors. South African Health Review 2014/15. Durban: Health Systems Trust; 2015.

URL:

<http://www.hst.org.za/publications/south-african-health-review-201415>

**HST welcomes comments on this publication.**

**Please send input to:**

The Editor

Health Systems Trust

34 Essex Terrace, Westville 3630

Tel: +27 (0)31 266 9090

Fax: +27 (0)31 266 9199

Email: editor@hst.org.za