

**Statement to agenda item 15.1 'Strengthening WHO preparedness for and response to health emergencies'**

**EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING 24– 29 January 2022**

Rehabilitation is a key health strategy that optimizes functioning and quality of life in individuals with health conditions, in interaction with their environment.

Rehabilitation has demonstrated its relevance in health emergencies, including those associated with infectious disease outbreaks like COVID-19, in the acute and sub-acute phases, as well as for long-term conditions. More than half of the 236 million people who have been diagnosed with COVID-19 do or will experience post-COVID symptoms. Most of them will need rehabilitation to facilitate long-term recovery.

In addition, rehabilitation services are essential for some groups, including some persons with disabilities, and should continue to be provided throughout outbreaks.

This pandemic will not be the last. Currently, there is a window of opportunity for policy makers to integrate rehabilitation as an essential component of pandemic preparedness and response.

Handicap International Federation, International Society of Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine, World Confederation for Physical Therapy, World Federation of Occupational Therapists, International Society for Prosthetics and Orthotics, World Federation of Chiropractic, International Spinal Cord Society, supported by the Global Rehabilitation Alliance and G-Musc call to:

- Develop technical resources and capacity to strengthen rehabilitation across the continuum of health emergencies, including the availability of rehabilitation workers in the first phase of the emergency response
- Ensure responsiveness to the rehabilitation needs of people affected by pandemics and the other groups requiring continuous access to rehabilitation, via the integration of rehabilitation services at all levels of health and via alternative modalities such as telerehabilitation.
- Leverage rehabilitation onto the agenda of the World Health Assembly. Setting commitments to advance rehabilitation cannot be further delayed.