

Are We Ageing Well as a Global Health Profession?

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The theme for World Physiotherapy Day, to be celebrated on 8 September 2025, is *The role of physiotherapy and physical activity in healthy ageing*. One of the key messages in this context is “Getting older does not mean you must stop or do less of what you enjoy. Healthy ageing means staying active, maintaining relationships and doing what you value as you get older” (World Physiotherapy, 2025c). To ensure successful outcomes from the campaign, the profession itself needs to be in good health by staying active, strengthening healthy relationships, and growing in a direction that not only meets the needs of the profession, but also contributes to improving global health outcomes. So how healthy is the global physiotherapy profession and how well are we doing?

Despite our age, the global profession is staying active! Next year World Physiotherapy (registered as the World Confederation for Physical Therapy, WCPT) celebrates its 75th anniversary, having held its first meeting in Copenhagen in September 1951. New Zealand was one of the 11 founding members. By 2007 there were 100 member organisations and membership has now grown to 129, representing more than 610,000 physiotherapists around the globe. Despite New Zealand’s comparatively small size, over the past 75 years members of the profession in New Zealand have been active internationally: Glen Park was WCPT president (1967–1970); others have taken on a range of leadership roles within World Physiotherapy, including positions on the executive board, congress programme committees, special interest groups, the Asia Western Pacific Regional Executive, and more.

Besides growth in membership and leadership, another sign of healthy ageing in the profession is the sharing of new knowledge. World Physiotherapy holds a congress every two years – over 4,000 delegates attended the World Congress 2025 at the end of May in Tokyo. The scientific programme included more than 60 hours of simultaneous presentations, conversations, and collaborations within the 145 main sessions, hundreds of ePoster and printed poster presentations, and networking sessions. Importantly, besides scientific outcomes from research into clinical practice, other themes including ethics, diversity, equity, artificial intelligence, Indigenous initiatives and sustainable physiotherapy were prominent. Such themes are important for the evolution of the global profession. In support of this, World Physiotherapy has policies, guidelines, and standards that are an integral part of the ongoing development of physiotherapy by informing education, professional practice, ethical and social issues, and planning (World Physiotherapy, 2025a). Furthermore, there is a growing global network for environmental physiotherapy, through the Environmental Physiotherapy Association. New Zealand has a prominent

role in this Association: all four of the New Zealand education institutes that offer entry-level physiotherapy programmes are participants in the international network, which aims to include environmental physiotherapy, planetary health, and sustainability education in entry-level curricula. As well, Physiotherapy New Zealand is one of the supporting organisations (Environmental Physiotherapy Association, 2025).

Maintaining and fostering relationships is another component of healthy ageing. As the international voice of the profession, World Physiotherapy continues to strengthen its partnership with groups such as *Physiopedia* and *Pedro* – benefits are then passed on to individual physiotherapists within each of the 129 member organisations. Furthermore, World Physiotherapy collaborates directly with other international organisations including the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Health Professions Alliance (WHPA). The latter, which comprises the international organisations for the medical, dental, pharmacy, nursing, and physiotherapy professions, is a powerful voice, speaking for over 41 million health care professionals (World Health Professions Alliance, 2025). During the WHO’s 78th World Health Assembly in Geneva in May, WHPA contributed to debates on matters such as the need to continue to support investment in health professionals and shared its concerns at an Assembly side event to reaffirm a critical message: “Investing in health professionals is not a cost, but a cornerstone of resilient, high-quality healthcare systems and the path to universal health coverage” (World Physiotherapy, 2025b).

Healthy ageing also involves sound investment in strategy, teamwork, and people. World Physiotherapy has recently invested in its own team by employing new staff whose role will include leading the implementation and evaluation of global development projects and initiatives (World Physiotherapy, 2025d). An important component of its role will be to strengthen inter-professional relationships, which is a key factor in improving health outcomes for the global population (World Health Organization, 2010).

At a country level, Physiotherapy New Zealand speaks for the profession, but as individual physiotherapists we all have a responsibility to support its work, to collaborate with other health and social care professions, and to ensure *The role of physiotherapy and physical activity in healthy ageing* has a positive impact on healthy ageing for all in New Zealand.

So, are we aging well as a global health profession? On reflection, as we near 75 years of age, we are staying active, strengthening relationships and collaborations, and

beginning to focus more on what the profession values for a sustainable future. "Getting older does not mean you must stop or do less of what you enjoy" (World Physiotherapy, 2025c). Healthy ageing requires us all in New Zealand to actively contribute to the growth of the profession and, importantly, to promote physiotherapy as a key contributor to WHO's goal of universal health coverage.

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