Cureus
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Rehab Is Essential, Not Optional: Bridging National Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Day, the World Health Organization Rehabilitation 2030 Initiative, and Viksit Bharat 2047

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Review began 07/09/2026
Review ended 11/08/2026
Published 11/10/2026

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DOI: 10.7759/cureus.119404

Abstract

Rehabilitation has emerged as a fundamental component of modern healthcare, essential for optimizing function, reducing disability, and improving quality of life across the continuum of care. The observance of National Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation (PMR) Day in India on July 6, with the theme "Rehab Is Essential, Not Optional," provides a timely opportunity to reaffirm the indispensable role of rehabilitation in achieving equitable and people-centered healthcare. This editorial discusses the convergence of National PMR Day, the WHO Rehabilitation 2030 Initiative, and Viksit Bharat 2047, emphasizing that rehabilitation should no longer be perceived as an optional or post-acute intervention but as an integral component of healthcare across all levels. It highlights current challenges in rehabilitation delivery in India, explores opportunities to strengthen rehabilitation services through policy, workforce development, research, technology, and community-based care, and calls for collaborative action to position rehabilitation as a national health priority. Recognizing that rehabilitation is essential, not optional, is crucial for building a healthier, more productive, and truly inclusive India by 2047 while contributing to the global vision of rehabilitation for all.

Categories: Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation, Health Policy, Public Health
Keywords: disability, national, physical medicine & rehabilitation, universal health coverage (uhc), who rehabilitation 2030

Editorial

Every year on July 6, India observes National Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation (PMR) Day, recognizing the pivotal role of rehabilitation in restoring function, enhancing participation, and improving quality of life for individuals living with illness, injury, disability, and chronic health conditions [1]. *Rehab Is Essential, Not Optional* conveys a message that extends beyond the rehabilitation community. It reaffirms that rehabilitation is not an optional adjunct delivered after medical treatment but an essential health service that should be integrated across the continuum of care - from acute illness to long-term recovery, chronic disease management, and healthy ageing.

This message aligns seamlessly with the World Health Organization (WHO) Rehabilitation 2030 Initiative, launched in 2017 to address the growing global unmet need for rehabilitation [2]. WHO estimates that one in three people worldwide will require rehabilitation at some point during their lives, a demand driven by population ageing, increasing survival from trauma and cancer, the rising prevalence of non-communicable diseases, neurological disorders, musculoskeletal conditions, and other chronic health problems [2]. Recognizing these trends, WHO has emphasized that rehabilitation is an essential health service and a critical component of Universal Health Coverage (UHC) rather than a luxury reserved for specialized centers [2]. The initiative calls upon governments to strengthen rehabilitation leadership, integrate rehabilitation into health systems at all levels, expand the multidisciplinary rehabilitation workforce, improve financing mechanisms, strengthen research, and ensure equitable access to rehabilitation services for all populations.

The importance of rehabilitation has gained even greater international recognition following the adoption of the World Health Assembly Resolution WHA76.6: Strengthening Rehabilitation in Health Systems in 2023, which established rehabilitation as a global public health priority [2]. This landmark resolution reinforces the principles of the Rehabilitation 2030 Initiative and urges Member States to integrate rehabilitation into national health policies, emergency preparedness, financing strategies, and health workforce planning.

Advances in emergency medicine, oncology, critical care, and surgery have increased survival rates, creating a larger population living with long-term functional limitations who require comprehensive rehabilitation. Despite these growing needs, rehabilitation services remain unevenly distributed, particularly in rural and resource-limited settings, with shortages of trained rehabilitation professionals and limited public

How to cite this article
Swarnakar R (November 10, 2026) Rehab Is Essential, Not Optional: Bridging National Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Day, the World Health Organization Rehabilitation 2030 Initiative, and Viksit Bharat 2047. Cureus 18(11): e119404. DOI 10.7759/cureus.119404

awareness regarding the scope of PMR.

The vision of Viksit Bharat 2047, which aims to transform India into a developed nation by the centenary of its independence, extends beyond economic growth to encompass inclusive development, healthy populations, skilled human capital, innovation, and social equity [3]. A developed nation cannot be defined solely by its gross domestic product or technological advancement; it must also ensure that people living with disability, chronic illness, or age-related functional decline are able to participate fully in education, employment, family life, and society. Rehabilitation directly contributes to these objectives by reducing disability, restoring functional independence, facilitating return to work, promoting healthy ageing, and improving overall productivity. In this context, rehabilitation should be recognized not merely as a medical intervention but as an investment in human capital and sustainable national development.

The convergence of National PMR Day, the WHO Rehabilitation 2030 Initiative, and the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047 provides a unique opportunity to reposition rehabilitation as a national health priority. The theme *Rehab Is Essential, Not Optional* encapsulates this shared vision by emphasizing that rehabilitation must become an integral component of every health system rather than a service available only to a limited proportion of those in need. Strengthening rehabilitation services will require coordinated action from policymakers, healthcare professionals, academic institutions, researchers, patient organizations, and civil society. Investments in rehabilitation infrastructure, workforce development, assistive technology, digital health, community-based rehabilitation, and research are essential to ensure equitable access across the country.

As India advances toward the aspirations of Viksit Bharat 2047, rehabilitation must move from the periphery to the center of healthcare planning. Building a healthier, more productive, and inclusive nation will depend not only on preventing disease and prolonging life but also on restoring function, maximizing independence, and enabling meaningful participation in society [3,4]. National PMR Day therefore serves as more than an annual observance - it is a call to action for clinicians, policymakers, and society to recognize a fundamental truth: rehabilitation is essential, not optional.

Additional Information

Author Contributions

All authors have reviewed the final version to be published and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

Concept and design: Raktim Swarnakar

Acquisition, analysis, or interpretation of data: Raktim Swarnakar

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Critical review of the manuscript for important intellectual content: Raktim Swarnakar

Supervision: Raktim Swarnakar

Disclosures

Conflicts of interest: In compliance with the ICMJE uniform disclosure form, all authors declare the following: **Payment/services info:** All authors have declared that no financial support was received from any organization for the submitted work. **Financial relationships:** All authors have declared that they have no financial relationships at present or within the previous three years with any organizations that might have an interest in the submitted work. **Other relationships:** All authors have declared that there are no other relationships or activities that could appear to have influenced the submitted work.

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