

Section 2: Benefits of rehabilitative care

BENEFITS OF REHABILITATIVE CARE

Rehabilitative care...

- **... is an essential element of client-centered, integrated care.** People may require rehabilitative care as a result of illness, injury, disability, pain, chronic disease or aging. This can include a broad range of interventions that help to restore and maximize functional and cognitive abilities. Rehabilitation professionals develop comprehensive, goal-directed plans with patients and families that assess and address all aspects of a person's needs, including their physical, cognitive and psychosocial needs.
- **... is provided in settings across the continuum of care.** Rehab professionals (audiologists, dietitians, kinesiologists, nurses, occupational therapists, physiatrists, physiotherapists, psychologists, social workers, speech-language pathologists) and other rehab professionals are located in primary care (family health teams, community health centres), the community (schools, ambulatory care, home care, retirement homes), hospitals (acute and post-acute) and long-term care. Rehab professionals are key members of interprofessional teams and rehabilitative care is integral to bundled care for many populations.
- **... contributes to seamless transitions and supports successful return to community settings.** Rehab plans assess function and what individuals require to transition to the next level of care. This may include cognitive and/or physical rehabilitation, skills re-training for activities of daily living, modifications to the home environment, psychosocial counseling, prescription of assistive devices, caregiver support and exercise programs. Rehabilitation helps individuals adjust to new levels of function and manage complex conditions. Rehabilitation professionals work with individuals to help them adapt their skills, reintegrate into the community and remain at home.
- **... improves quality of life for children and their families:** More than 1 in 10 youths in Canada have one or more disabilities.¹ Rehab enables children and youth to learn and develop life skills, be creative and interact with their environment/community.^{2,3}

COSTS/RISKS OF NOT PROVIDING REHABILITATIVE CARE

According to the WHO's World Report on Disability,⁴ estimating unmet rehabilitation needs is difficult due to a lack of rigorous data. Nevertheless, the current evidence on the benefits of rehabilitative care suggests that the absence of rehabilitative care services can lead to negative consequences at both the patient and system level.

At a patient level, unmet rehabilitative care needs can limit an individual's performance of activities of daily living and level of independence. Participation in vocational, social and/or recreational activities may also be limited. Without access to rehabilitative care, an individual may also experience a deterioration in health and poor overall quality of life.⁴ Moreover, limited or delayed access to rehabilitative care can set in motion a cascade of inter-related negative consequences. For example, an injury or physical impairment that is not addressed through rehabilitative care can lead to loss of function, which in turn can lead to further injury, restrictions in the ability to use assistive devices, increased dependency and reduced psychosocial functioning.⁵

At a system level, the absence of a rehabilitative care approach and interventions can result in longer hospital stays, delays in discharge, increases in alternate level of care (ALC) days and risk of readmission, all of which contribute to financial and social costs for the system.^{4, 6} From a broader perspective, the absence of rehabilitative care can have other economic consequences such as those associated with a smaller workforce or restricted level of workforce participation as a result of injury, impairment or disability, or sick time.

Adequate rehabilitative care services must be provided in order to avoid these negative consequences. In Ontario, responding to the demand for rehabilitative care services has been challenging due to a number of factors including lengthy waitlists, geographical distance, funding limits and rationing of services.

REHABILITATIVE CARE IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19

Rehabilitative care plays an important role in addressing the impact of COVID-19 on patients in acute care, post-acute and home and community settings. Patients may experience a number of impairments resulting from the management of the virus and the virus itself. The effects of ventilation, sedation, and prolonged bed rest can result in physical deconditioning and impairments that affect swallowing, mobility, cognition and mental health among other potential consequences.^{7, 8} Those who are older or who have pre-existing medical conditions (e.g., cancer, chronic kidney disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, serious heart conditions,

type 2 diabetes mellitus) are at an increased risk of severe illness and may experience poorer outcomes and greater residual impairments following COVID-19.⁹ The effects of COVID-19 may persist over the long-term (e.g., reduced exercise capacity and independence in performing activities of daily living; poorer quality of life) due to the multifaceted and complex consequences of post intensive care syndrome and its effects on physical and cognitive functioning and mental health.^{10, 11}

Within this context, the role of rehabilitative care includes but is not limited to:

- assessing for impairments in functioning (e.g., physical, cognitive, swallowing, communication, respiratory, psychosocial, activities of daily living)
- determining and implementing a treatment plan within the patient’s current environment
- formulating discharge plans for rehabilitative care as the patient transitions to the next level of care or to home.

When planning for or providing rehabilitative care, infection prevention protocols must be considered. As a result, rehabilitative care may be delivered face-to-face, via tele-rehab methods or by a combination of both. The RCA has developed several [COVID-19 rehab resources](#) and recently released [a guidance document on rehabilitative care best practices for frail seniors within the context of COVID-19](#).

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