

Definition for the Specialist Learning Disability Physiotherapist

“Learning disability physiotherapists provide specialist assessment, treatment and management to adults with a learning disability whose needs cannot be successfully met by mainstream services even when reasonable adjustments are made. Physiotherapists will work in collaboration with the person, their network of care, mainstream health services, and the multidisciplinary team to enhance, optimise and maintain the person’s physical presentation, function and quality of life.”

AIM:
The ‘standards of practice’ aim to improve and standardise the delivery, development and commissioning of specialist physiotherapy to adults with a learning disability across the United Kingdom.

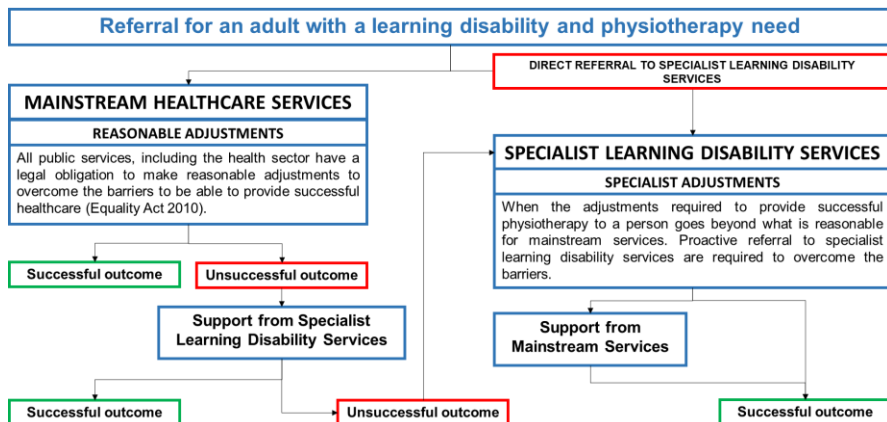
BACKGROUND:
Adults with a learning disability experience poorer health than the general population, they have a shorter life expectancy and are at greater risk of premature death. They have the same rights to access mainstream health services as the general population however, there are a number of potential barriers to them accessing successful healthcare.

REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS:
All public services, including the health sector, have a legal obligation to make reasonable adjustments to overcome potential barriers. Reasonable adjustments can mean making buildings accessible, but also making changes to policies, procedures and staff training to ensure that services work equally well for people with a learning disability. Public sector organisations should not simply wait and respond to difficulties as they emerge, the duty on them is ‘anticipatory’. Most adults with a learning disability will be able to successfully access mainstream services with reasonable adjustments.

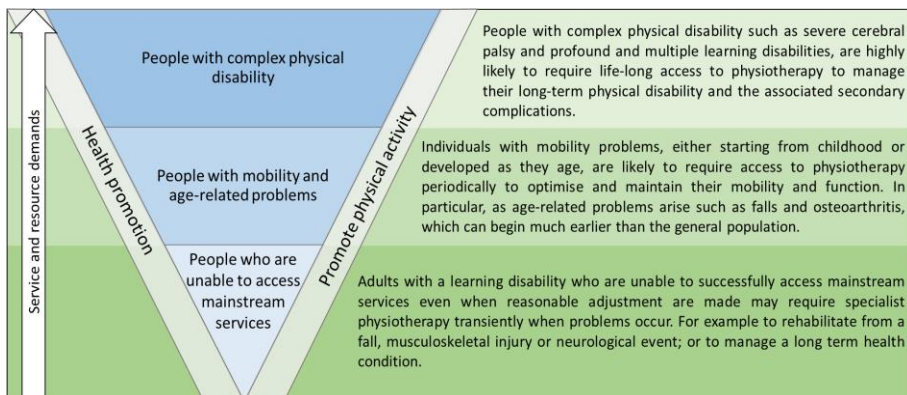
SPECIALIST ADJUSTMENTS:
Some adults with a learning disability are unable to access mainstream services even with reasonable adjustments. The adjustments required to provide successful healthcare and physiotherapy to these people go beyond what is reasonable and possible for mainstream services. Therefore, individuals will require specialist learning disability teams and physiotherapists to either support positive access to and responses from services; or to provide direct assessment and intervention.

PHYSIOTHERAPY NEEDS:
There are a number of factors that predispose adults with a learning disability to developing physiotherapy related problems. These include associated physical impairments and conditions; premature aging; increased risk of injuries and falls; poor health literacy; and leading sedentary and unhealthy lifestyles. As a result, many adults with a learning disability will require access to physiotherapy at some point within their lifetime. Thus, specialist learning disability physiotherapists have an important role to play in supporting the health and wellbeing of people with a learning disability.

Adults with a learning disability and a physiotherapy need can achieve a successful outcome via mainstream physiotherapy services with reasonable adjustments, or through learning disability physiotherapy services with specialist adjustments. Often mainstream and specialist teams will need to work in collaboration to share and combine their knowledge and skills.



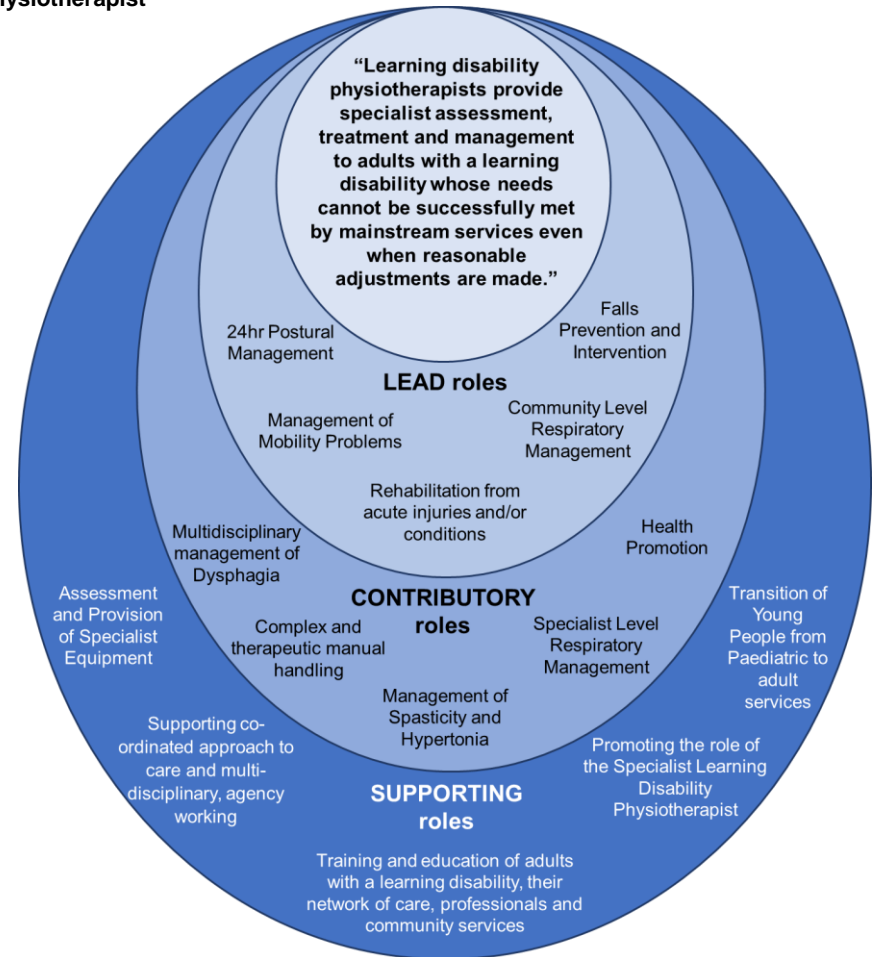
The main areas where specialist learning disability physiotherapists provide services:



PROACTIVE SPECIALIST LEARNING DISABILITY PHYSIOTHERAPY CAN DELIVER HIGH-QUALITY COST-EFFECTIVE INTERVENTIONS THAT ARE PERSON CENTRED AND NEEDS LED

Specialist Learning Disability Physiotherapists will make the **ADJUSTMENTS** required to provide successful physiotherapy to adults with a learning disability that go beyond what is **REASONABLE** and **POSSIBLE** for mainstream services.

Onion Diagram illustrating the roles of the Specialist Learning Disability Physiotherapist



Lead Roles	Contributory Roles	Supporting Roles
It is ESSENTIAL that specialist learning disability physiotherapists take lead responsibility to deliver these roles.	Specialist learning disability physiotherapists will contribute to and work in collaboration with members of the multidisciplinary team or mainstream services to deliver these roles.	These roles underpin the successful provision of the lead and contributory roles.

DELIVERING THE DEFINITION:

For **specialist learning disability physiotherapy service leads and physiotherapists to deliver the new definition it is essential that they:**

1. Are accessible and equitable to ALL adults with a learning disability and a physiotherapy need that cannot be met successfully by mainstream services even when reasonable adjustments are made.
2. Are based on clinical need, not on an assumed level of a person’s learning disability.
3. Support positive access to and responses from mainstream physiotherapy and relevant healthcare services.
4. Develop links; open lines of communication; and direct referral pathways with local health and social care services critical to the delivery of physiotherapy services to adults with a learning disability.
5. Are proactive in identifying, managing and monitoring adults with a learning disability who are at high risk of developing physiotherapy problems.
6. Work with the multidisciplinary team in the early detection and treatment of the common health problems of adults with a learning disability to address health inequalities.

IMPLEMENTING THE STANDARDS OF PRACTICE:

Physiotherapists will need to implement the standards of practice in their local area. They will need to develop an understanding of the demand and gaps in current services; the local population of adults with a learning disability; and the relevant health and social care services. This information is critical to be able to target and prioritise resources appropriately and manage risk as well as develop evidence based arguments for service development.

CONCLUSION:

Physiotherapists are an integral part of community learning disability teams and are **ESSENTIAL** to meeting the health and physiotherapy needs of adults with a learning disability. There is widespread evidence and expert opinion that specialist learning disability physiotherapy has a positive impact on health outcomes, quality of life and the experiences of the adult with a learning disability and their network of care; as well as having potential cost savings for health and social care. The standards of practice provides the evidence and tools to demonstrate these benefits and to improve the quality and performance of physiotherapy services for adults with a learning disability across the United Kingdom.