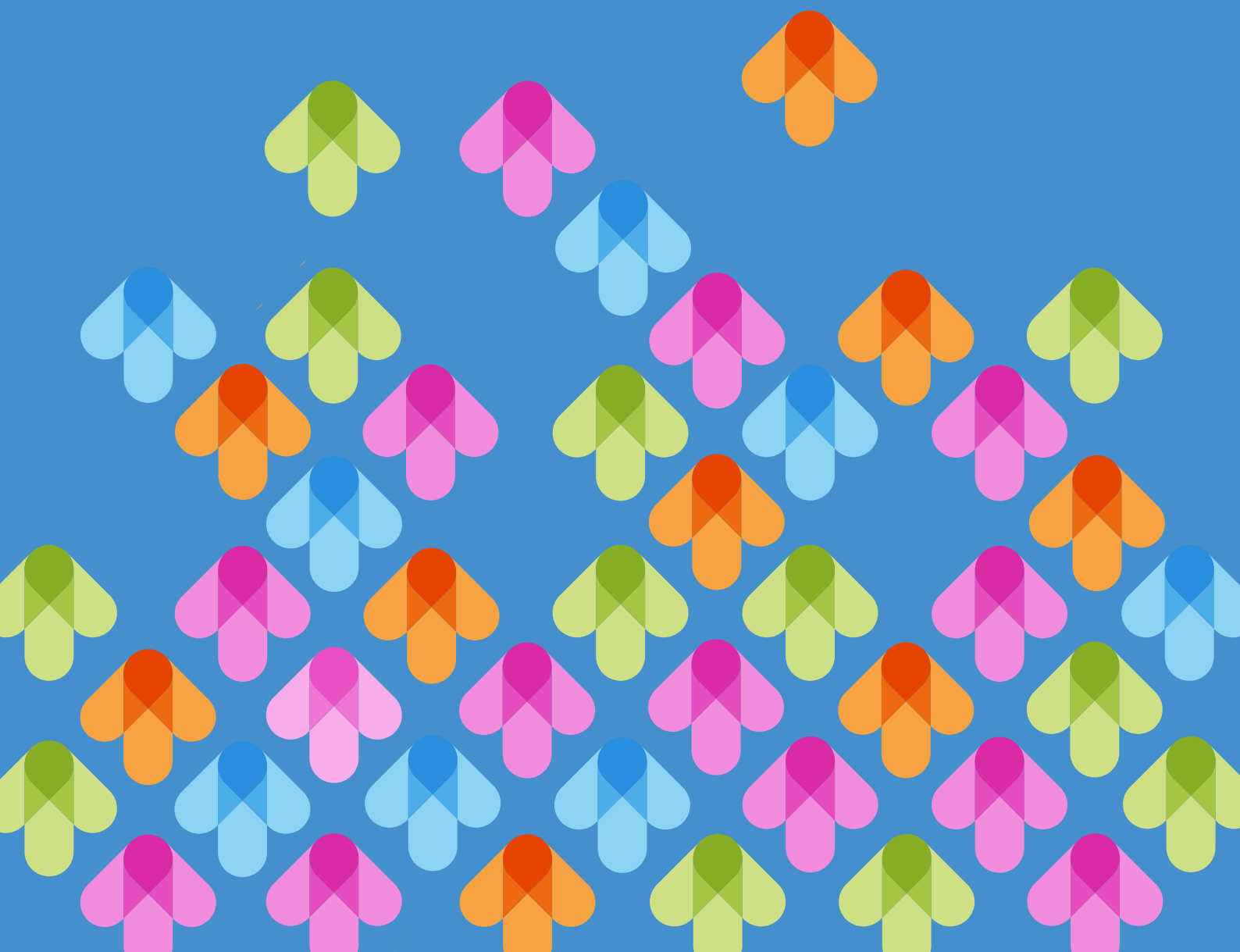


Standards of Practice for Physiotherapists

Working with adults with a learning disability

Executive Summary for Carers

Sarah Bruce & David Standley



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.

Adults with a learning disability have the same rights to access mainstream health services as the general population but they regularly receive inadequate health care.

All public services, including the health sector, have a legal obligation to make reasonable adjustments.

Most people with a learning disability will be able to access mainstream services with reasonable adjustments.

Some people will require adjustments that go beyond what is possible for mainstream service and will require access to specialist learning disability services.

Learning disability physiotherapists make the specialist adjustments required to provide physiotherapy to adults with a learning disability whose needs cannot be successfully met by mainstream services, even when reasonable adjustments are made. Either through supporting positive access to and responses from services; or by providing direct assessment and intervention.



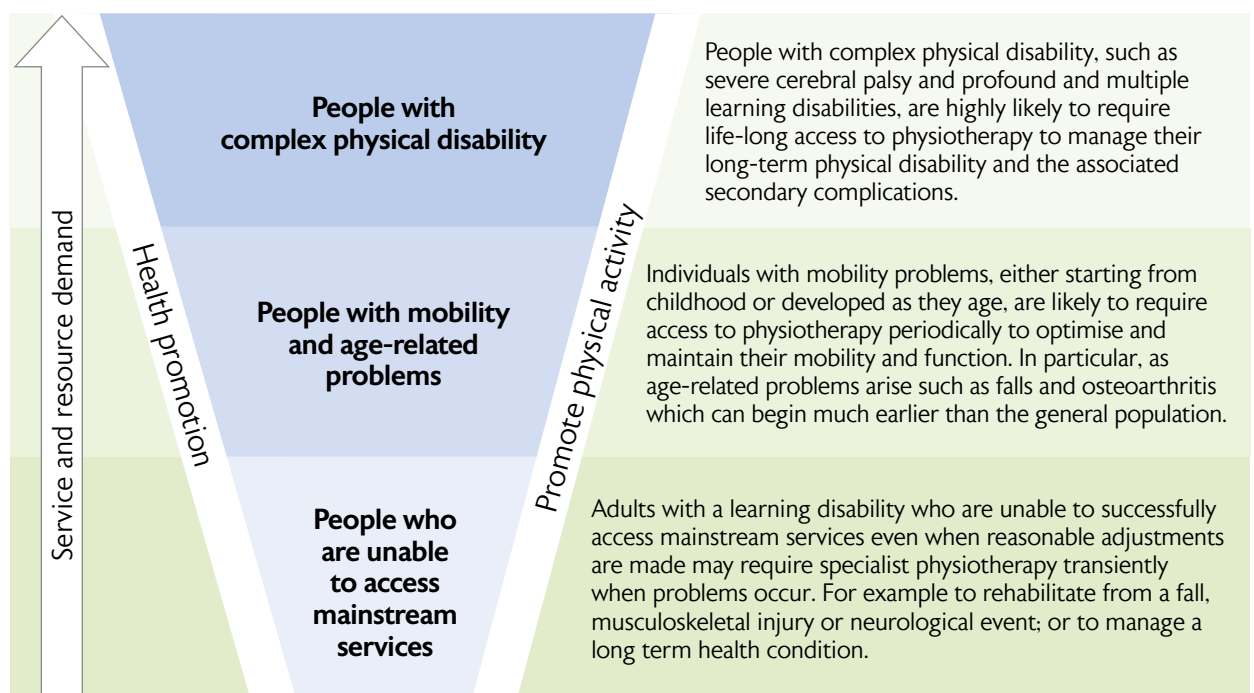
Physiotherapy needs of adults with a learning disability

There are many reasons why an adult with a learning disability may develop a physiotherapy related need. These include:

- having a physical or neurological disability such as cerebral palsy
- the impact of the person's physical and neurological disability such as increased risk of injuries and falls, and premature aging
- the person's learning disability and cognitive impairment
- making poor lifestyle choices, such as leading inactive and unhealthy lifestyles
- poor access to healthcare

Many adults with a learning disability can access mainstream physiotherapy services with reasonable adjustments. However some people are unable to successfully access mainstream services and will require access to specialist physiotherapy.

The main areas where specialist learning disability physiotherapists provide services fall into three main groups.



Therefore, specialist learning disability physiotherapists have an important role to play in supporting the health and wellbeing of people with a learning disability. They are required to both support mainstream practice and directly provide services to those with the most complex needs.



These standards of practice were developed to:

- provide a **definition** of the role of the specialist learning disability physiotherapist.
- provide best practice guidance that outlines and directs the **essential roles of the specialist learning disability physiotherapist** to improve the physiotherapy health outcomes for all adults with a learning disability.
- explore the **adjustments that specialist learning disability physiotherapists make** to provide successful physiotherapy to adults with a learning disability that go beyond what is reasonable for mainstream services.
- **raise awareness** of the role of the **specialist learning disability physiotherapist** to commissioners, service managers and mainstream health and social care professionals, to ensure that adults with a learning disability have access to specialist physiotherapy.

Definition of a 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.*

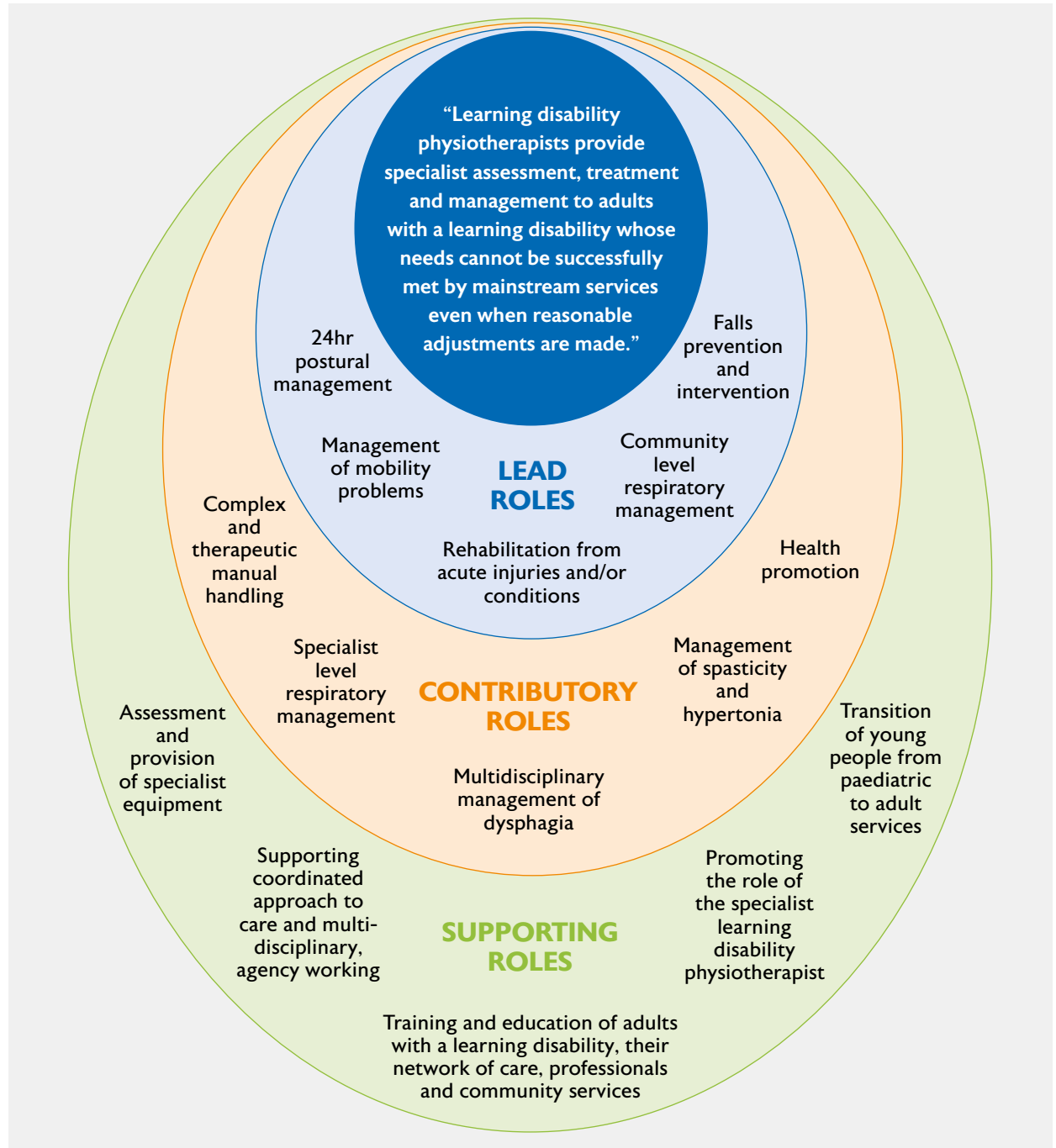
Physiotherapists will work in collaboration with the person, their network of care, mainstream health services, and the multidisciplinary team to enhance, optimise and maintain the person's physical presentation, function and quality of life. ”



The Roles of Specialist Learning Disability Physiotherapy Services

The provision of specialist learning disability physiotherapy can be categorised into three main roles, Lead, Contributory and Supporting with five further facets to each of these roles.

For specialist learning disability physiotherapy services to deliver the definition of the specialist learning disability physiotherapist it is essential they deliver on these roles.



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

Reasonable adjustments

Most adults with a learning disability will be able to successfully access mainstream physiotherapy services with **reasonable adjustments**. A reasonable adjustment is a change that has been made to a service so that people with a learning disability can use them like anyone else. This may include:

- having a longer appointment time
- involving the person and their care network
- staff training
- providing easy read information

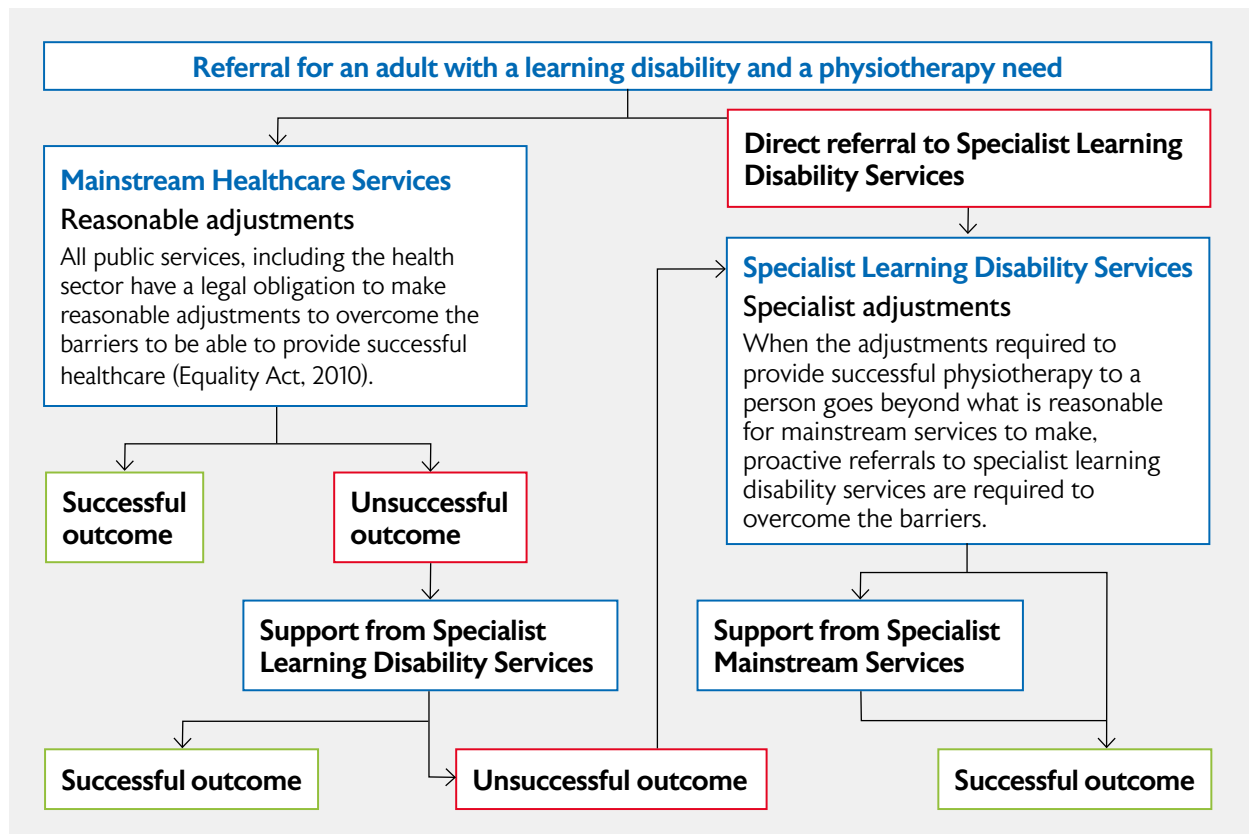
Specialist adjustments

Some adults with a learning disability are unable to access mainstream services even with reasonable adjustments. The barriers to accessing mainstream services are often wide ranging and the adjustments required to provide successful physiotherapy may go beyond what is possible for mainstream services.

Therefore, the adult with a learning disability may require tailored adjustments that require specialist knowledge: skills, services and a model of working which facilitates the development of relationships with the adult and their care network. These individuals will require support from specialist learning disability physiotherapists. Learning disability physiotherapists will provide the **specialist adjustments** needed to either:

- support positive access to and responses from services
- or to provide direct assessment and intervention

The pathway for an adult with a learning disability who has a physiotherapy need can be via mainstream physiotherapy services; or through specialist learning disability physiotherapy services.





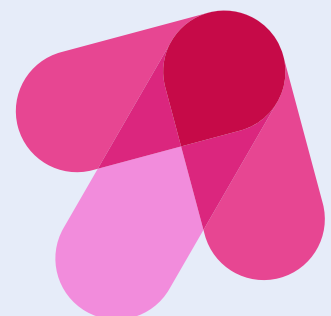
Physiotherapists are an integral part of specialist learning disability teams and are critical to meeting the physiotherapy needs of adults with a learning disability.



To improve and standardise the delivery, development and commissioning of specialist physiotherapy to adults with a learning disability across the UK, physiotherapists working in community learning disability teams will need to implement the standards of practice into their local area.



There is widespread evidence and opinion that the proactive specialist physiotherapy has a positive impact on the health outcomes; quality of care; and experiences of the adult with a learning disability and their care network.



Authors:

Sarah Bruce, Lead Clinician Physiotherapist
sarah.bruce@gstt.nhs.uk

David Standley, Clinical Specialist Physiotherapist
david.standley@gstt.nhs.uk

Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust
Community Adults with Learning Disability Team

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