



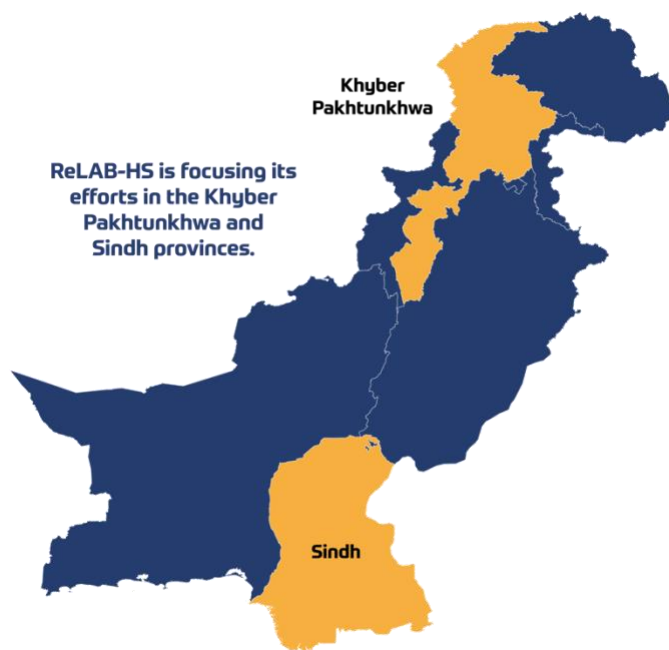
Learning, Acting, and Building for Rehabilitation in Health Systems (ReLAB-HS) – Pakistan

Our goal is to support the strengthening of health systems that are responsive to the growing needs for rehabilitation across the lifespan.

The unmet need for rehabilitation and assistive technology (AT) services is urgent and growing, particularly for persons in vulnerable situations in low- and middle-income countries and in countries affected by conflict. Funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Learning, Acting, and Building for Rehabilitation in Health Systems (ReLAB-HS) is a five-year global activity that supports the strengthening of health systems that are responsive to the growing needs for rehabilitation within populations. Pakistan is one of two countries where ReLAB-HS is working to implement context-appropriate, innovative, comprehensive, and cost-effective interventions that strengthen health systems for the provision of rehabilitation and AT. ReLAB-HS focuses on integrating rehabilitation and AT services across all levels of care within health systems.

Context

Pakistan has a population of more than 200 million people, and its health system is overburdened and faced with many challenges in trying to cater to the needs of the entire population. The country's health system is split between public and private sectors. According to Pakistan's constitution,



Rehabilitation is an essential health service along with prevention, promotion, treatment, and palliation. Rehabilitation focuses on the functioning of an individual and not the condition.



provincial governments are responsible for managing and providing health care services, while the federal government is responsible for providing health care in federally administered areas. Basic Health Units and Rural Health Centers, which operate at the primary care level, are heavily relied on as the foundation of Pakistan's health care system.

Service delivery in Pakistan is organized into preventive, promotive, curative, and rehabilitative services. Most curative and rehabilitative services are provided in secondary- and tertiary-level health facilities. Preventive and promotive services are primarily delivered through a variety of national programs, such as the Lady Health Workers Programme (Pakistan's community health workers program), primary health care facilities, and outreach initiatives. However, shortages in a skilled workforce and a fragmented health system leave gaps in rehabilitation and AT services.

Pakistan's government is committed to ensuring equitable access to rehabilitation and AT services. Yet, the government has struggled to provide rehabilitation and AT services at both the national and provincial levels. There are significant barriers to individuals' access to rehabilitation services. An insufficient rehabilitation workforce combined with the lack of appropriate equipment and limited logistical and financial resources prevent the delivery of services needed to support the timely identification of conditions that would benefit from rehabilitation. Furthermore, a lack of referral systems, poor case management, and both the limited supply of assistive products and their high cost prevent many from accessing services and products that would support improved functioning.

Pakistan's government has sought to address these gaps through the development of comprehensive policies and has led numerous international- and national-level efforts to highlight the importance of increased access to rehabilitation and AT, becoming a global advocate and international leader in revising policies to address rehabilitation and AT needs.



Primary care providers being mentored by rehabilitation professionals during a visit to the Sindh Institute of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation for practical training as part of the training on the WHO's Basic Rehabilitation Package – Clinical Resource.

Photo courtesy of Assad Abbas Malik, ReLAB-HS

Pakistan sponsored the first-ever World Health Assembly resolution on AT in 2018 and hosted the first World Health Organization (WHO) regional meeting on the importance of AT in 2018. The rapid Assistive Technology Assessment (rATA), completed in Pakistan in 2019, represents an important step in identifying unmet needs and supporting the definition and implementation of more comprehensive policies.

Approach

ReLAB-HS is working with local actors to implement context-appropriate, innovative, and cost-effective service delivery models at the primary care level. Leveraging the use of technology and investing in local structures, ReLAB-HS aims to expand access to quality rehabilitation and AT services across the lifespan. ReLAB-HS has engaged with service users, including persons with disabilities and civilian victims of conflict, providers, and health system leaders and managers at all levels of the health system to co-design practical, feasible solutions.

ReLAB-HS is working with the national and provincial governments to transform health

systems in Pakistan to integrate rehabilitation and AT services, adapt to new challenges, share learnings, and support scale-up. Engaging stakeholders through the Global Rehabilitation Leadership Institute (GRLI), ReLAB-HS aims to inspire a new generation of rehabilitation leaders to strengthen strategic planning and effective governance within health systems. Gender equality and social inclusion serves as a cross-cutting theme to address marginalization and discrimination fueled by overlapping factors, such as gender, ethnicity, race, wealth, disability, age, and education. ReLAB-HS is engaging groups in vulnerable situations, including women and girls, in the design and delivery of local solutions. Through this inclusive approach, Re-LAB-HS is playing an important role in promoting equal rights, opportunities, and respect for all.

Geographic Focus and Activities

In Pakistan, ReLAB-HS is focusing its efforts in the Swat district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province and in the Thatta district of Sindh province. Since its inception, ReLAB-HS has consciously engaged with relevant stakeholders at national, provincial, and local levels to introduce the activity, develop the foundation for collaboration, and strengthen the government's capacity to support the integration of rehabilitation and AT.

In close partnership with key stakeholders, ReLAB-HS has worked to achieve the following:

- Collaborated with the WHO and the Pakistan Health Services Academy to support the Government of Pakistan to conduct the Systematic Assessment of Rehabilitation Situation (STARS), inclusive of the Assistive Technology Capacity Assessment (ATA-C) and the Guide for Rehabilitation Workforce Evaluation (GROWE), which will inform the development of national and provincial strategic plans to guide and reinforce efforts to enhance access to rehabilitation and AT services
- In collaboration with Aga Khan University, generated evidence on rehabilitation policy and prioritization by assessing the policy



Health workers assist a patient in using the parallel bars to support her in walking.

Photo courtesy of Rehman Medical Institute Peshawar

environment for rehabilitation, and on the feasibility of integrating rehabilitation at the community and primary care level

- In collaboration with Khyber Medical University, investigated the insights and perspectives of physiotherapists on the current performance and capacity of the rehabilitation workforce at the district level, which will contribute to the limited global knowledge on rehabilitation workforce performance and inform the development of the rehabilitation and AT strategic plans
- Supported rehabilitation professional associations and training institutions in using the International Rehabilitation and Education Training Toolkit to create plans that will strengthen professional regulation, academic and training programs, and continuing professional development to support the development of a skilled rehabilitation workforce in line with international standards

- Delivered the first interprofessional clinical skills training program on spinal cord injury to rehabilitation professionals from Sindh and KP through a blended learning approach of online courses and mentoring and in-person training at the Paraplegic Center Peshawar
- Established four Networks of Care—district-level “networks” of public and private health care entities that are connected to support the integration of rehabilitation services within primary care and improve the coordination of care between different levels of the health system
- With local health and rehabilitation stakeholders in Swat and Thatta, co-designed an improved rehabilitation and AT service delivery model, inclusive of a clear referral mechanism, to support the integration of quality rehabilitation services into local health systems
- Identified priority areas of focus for integrating rehabilitation and AT into each district and developed corresponding action plans to enhance integration and the quality of care delivered
- Strengthened the capacity of Lady Health Workers in Swat and Thatta to identify individuals in need of rehabilitation and AT services and refer them to appropriate services, working to bridge the gap between communities and services
- Expanded the skill sets of primary health care providers in district-level health facilities to identify and refer individuals in need of rehabilitation and AT services, and to provide basic rehabilitation and AT services using the WHO’s Basic Rehabilitation Package Clinical Resource and the Training in Assistive Products (TAP)
- Delivered the WHO’s TAP to PHC providers and rehabilitation and AT professionals in Thatta

- Delivered a wheelchair service training for rehabilitation and AT providers in Swat, strengthening the capacity of rehabilitation personnel in the rehabilitation department of the Saidu Group of Teaching Hospitals to receive wheelchair referrals

In Numbers

As a result of ReLAB-HS's contributions to date:

- Over **4,350** more people have improved access to rehabilitation and AT services.
- Over **3,700*** trainings on rehabilitation and AT have been completed.
- **16** rehabilitation and AT quality and integration processes have been strengthened in two local networks.
- **Eight** organizations have adopted the International Rehabilitation Education and Training Toolkit.

Implementing Partners

ReLAB-HS is led by the Johns Hopkins International Injury Research Unit at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. Other global partners include Humanity & Inclusion, Momentum Wheels for Humanity, the Nossal Institute for Global Health at the University of Melbourne, and Physiopedia. The consortium is working in close partnership with national, regional, and district actors to catalyze and strengthen the national agenda for rehabilitation in the health system.

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*Reflects the number of course completions, as trainees may have completed one or more courses



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Our partners

