

## The Introduction and Development of Community Based Rehabilitation in the Slovakia and in Latvia

In partnership with the Slovak Republic's Ministry of Health, the Slovak Republic's Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Family, the Latvian Ministry of Welfare, the Latvian Department of Health, and the Medical Academy of Latvia at Riga Stradins University.

**Dates:** March 2001 to June 2004 (Latvian activities started in February 2002)

**Primary sites:** Bratislava, Slovakia and Riga, Latvia

**Budget:** \$500,000 CAD

**Donor:** Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)

### Overview

Latvia and Slovakia have institutionally centred healthcare systems. In these systems it is common for both people with disabilities and older adults live or receive care in institutions, isolated from their communities. While these systems are capable of care provision, institutionalization removes community supports from users, making it hard for them to become independent or live full lives in their communities. The ICACBR observed low levels of interdisciplinary community based rehabilitation (CBR) services in these contexts, which presented a barrier to people with disabilities and older adults to live at home and participate in their communities.

The project activities were implemented over a three-year period, with activities in both Latvia and Slovakia. The goal was to support the reform of CBR services. The activities included:

- Creation of two CBR demonstration sites in Bratislava. These centres were used to test and teach new policies and rehabilitation techniques for rehabilitation professionals. The centres shared information and worked to identify how they could better support community needs.
- Creation of a five module course on CBR for individuals involved in rehabilitation services reform. The modules detailed how to develop a community based approach and ally with partners in policy and educational development to advocate for people with disabilities and improve services.
- Support to develop public policies that facilitated CBR implementation. The policies focused on improving the evaluation and research of CBR to serve as a foundation for health services reform.
- Creation of a multidisciplinary diploma course for future CBR professionals and existing care providers. It improved their skills and helped them transition to a community based approach.



## Background

Many countries in Central and Eastern Europe, including the countries of Latvia and Slovakia, have healthcare systems that focus on institutionally based care. Institutional care includes hospitals, homes for people with disabilities and nursing homes. Institutional healthcare systems have less support for general practitioners, family medicine or community based treatment and research groups. While institutional healthcare and rehabilitation provides robust and intensive care, it struggles to meet the needs of certain populations. Older people and people with disabilities may become isolated as they are not able to receive care while living in their community, and they often do not have the ability to engage in normal daily life. Community based approaches to care are better at facilitating community support, community integration and a high quality of life for these populations. The ICACBR had extensive experience facilitating the development, implementation, and reform of community based rehabilitation (CBR) programs in many regions, including the Balkans, and viewed this as an opportunity to integrate community-based systems into the existing model of care. The goal of this project was to create a foundation of CBR in Slovakia and Latvia, and subsequently improve the quality of life of people with disabilities.

## Rationale

Given that Latvia and Slovakia had institutionally based healthcare, the healthcare workers and social service professionals in these countries had been trained and educated to work in institutional environments. While they were skilled at working in these settings, community based settings require a different skillset and experience. Community based approaches also call for higher levels of interdisciplinary communication and referral between healthcare professionals and rehabilitation workers. These areas were targeted for improvement to allow for implementation of a community-based approach of delivery of rehabilitation services. Policy development was also identified as a priority by the project, as there was little policy surrounding rehabilitation sciences in these countries that could be used as the foundation of reform.

## Actions and Outcomes

The project worked in Slovakia with three main areas of action: creation of CBR demonstration sites, development of CBR education, and policy development. The actions and plans of the project in the region were as follows:

- **The project created two CBR demonstration sites in Bratislava.** These sites were used for policy development, testing and training, and the reorientation of existing services to use a community based approach. The first centre in Gaudeamus was a rehabilitation centre for children with special needs. The second centre in Klinika was an outpatient rehabilitation centre in a large teaching hospital. These sites communicated and collaborated to improve services.
- **A 5-module course was created by the project (200 hours of coursework) for individuals involved in the reform of rehabilitation services.** The modules were designed to increase knowledge of community-based approaches to rehabilitation and how to implement them. Specifically, the modules focused on how to form strong partnerships with other organizations and how to utilize interdisciplinary collaboration.
- The project worked with educational institutes for healthcare and social service professionals to promote the inclusion of concepts of CBR in curriculum.

- **The project sought to collaborate with the government to develop public health policies** that are reflective of the populations they seek to serve. **The Ministry of Labour, Social Welfare, and Family introduced CBR concepts in legislation for social services reform** in the Slovak Republic as a result of participation in the 5-module course.
- **The project supported research initiatives about CBR and disability to create a foundation of evidence that could be used in policy generation.** Both the Trnava University and Comenius University in Bratislava committed to running surveys about the attitudes of their students and faculty towards disability.
- The ICACBR pushed for the inclusion of a “Latvia CBR development project” in the Slovak Republic Contribution Agreement.

The Latvian component of the project had four primary areas of action in the reorientation of existing rehabilitation centres, education of CBR workers, policy development and research, and gender equality. The project activities in Latvia had the objectives listed below:

- **The creation of a “Multidisciplinary CBR Diploma Course”** to provide learning opportunities for future CBR professionals.
- **The development of a Master’s of Rehabilitation in the Community program** for nurses, physical therapists, social workers, and physicians. This program was intended further healthcare workers’ understanding of CBR and encourage them to become involved with CBR reform in Latvia.
- **The project sought to facilitate on-site continuing education for CBR at existing rehabilitation centres.** This initiative was designed with health, education, and policy components. These education initiatives promoted independent CBR reform at each centre where they were implemented.
- **The provision of CBR workshops for rehabilitation professionals,** led by both Canadian and Latvian teams. The project also sought to create and disseminate CBR learning resources and training modules for educators and people with disabilities. The ICACBR made partnerships with the Latvia Medical Academy and Riga Stradina University to facilitate this goal.
- **The project sought to improve and oversee CBR graduate studies, and to provide a framework to continue CBR programs effectively after the project had withdrawn.** A Memorandum of Understanding between the Latvia Medical Academy and Queen’s University was formalized, allowing long-term collaboration to work towards this goal after the implementation of the project itself.
- **The project aimed to ensure full participation of women at all levels of project initiatives,** including women with disabilities and female rehabilitation professionals.
- The project worked with local partners to include CBR as a priority of healthcare reform.
- **The project worked to develop policies for people with disabilities to live independently and be integrated into their communities.** The project did research to ensure that policy initiatives were suitable for the needs of the Latvian community. A paper titled "Strategy for the Development of Comprehensive Rehabilitation Services in Latvia" was created that provided an overview of the current/future needs of the Latvian population.

## Conclusion

The integration of older adults and people with disabilities into their communities can improve their quality of life and allow them to fully participate in community life. Community based rehabilitation is an

important step in facilitating the inclusion of these populations, and the Introduction and Development of Community Based Rehabilitation in the Slovakia and in Latvia project contributed to reform of rehabilitation services in both Latvia and Slovakia. By improving education and working towards the formation of academic partnerships that will outlive the project, the project was implemented with practises that were sustainable and had potential for positive long-term impacts on CBR in Latvia and Slovakia.

### Partners

Implementing partners: Slovak Republic's Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Labour, Slovak Republic's Social Welfare and Family, Latvian Ministry of Welfare, Department of Health, and the Medical Academy of Latvia at Riga Stradins University.

Community collaborators: Comenius University in Bratislava, Trnava University in Trnava, 2 CBR demonstration sites in Gaudeamus and Klinika, Ministry of Labour, Social Welfare and Family, Latvia Medical Academy, Riga Stradina University.

International collaborators: Various non-governmental organizations (NGOS).

### Sources and Project Resources

1. The Introduction and Development of Community Based Rehabilitation in the Slovakia and in Latvia website archive\*
2. The Introduction and Development of Community Based Rehabilitation in the Slovakia and in Latvia full project details\*
3. Introduction of Community Based Rehabilitation Modules 1-6
  - a. Module 1 – Introduction to Development of Community Based Rehabilitation
  - b. Module 2 – Rehabilitation in Health and Social Systems: Planning, Organizing and Financing of Community Based Rehabilitation and Disability Services
  - c. Module 3 - Measuring Change in CBR: Strategies for Evaluation and Research
  - d. Module 4 – Advocacy: Creating Constituencies for Change
  - e. Module 5 – Building Management Skills
  - f. Module 6 – Information Systems for Disability and Rehabilitation

\*used to generate this report