



Qualified Exercise Professionals

Background

In 2024, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) reported \$5.3 trillion in annual health care costs. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) reports that 90% of the \$5.3 trillion is spent on chronic diseases. U.S. health policy is placing greater emphasis on prevention and chronic disease management. Programs that provide primary prevention, secondary prevention, or maintenance services must be delivered by appropriately qualified exercise professionals.

ACSM recognizes that US credentialing terminology, workforce availability, and access differ from those in other countries. There is a compelling need to support the commonly shared global goal of ensuring optimal health through physical activity while ensuring clarity around this terminology in the US.

Exercise professionals support individuals across the health care continuum, from health promotion and primary and secondary prevention of chronic disease to chronic disease management and long-term self-management. Because everyone has unique needs, abilities, and goals structured exercise programs must connect them with an appropriately qualified professional. Exercise professionals must synthesize their education, training, experience, and professional credentials to develop safe, individualized programs.

The appropriate professional depends on the specific services required and the complexity of the individual's medical history. Baccalaureate- and graduate-prepared exercise professionals are essential when appropriate exercise requires knowledge of pathology, disease progression, medications, contraindications, and individualized exercise prescription. They are skilled in applying structured exercise and education to support risk-factor modification and strengthen long-term self-management. They are skilled in applying structured exercise and education to support risk-factor modification and strengthen long-term self-management. The ultimate goal is to provide the support needed for individuals to transition toward independent exercise and risk-factor management.

Cardiopulmonary rehabilitation provides a well-established framework for this continuum. Individuals with elevated clinical risk (e.g., recent cardiac event) who require medically supervised exercise or physiologic monitoring are best served by the expertise of a clinical exercise physiologist. As clinical risk decreases over time and self-management capacity improves, exercise physiologists can use structured exercise and education programs to prepare individuals for life-long, independent exercise and long-term risk management. Maintenance and community-based exercise programs provide lower-cost

pathways towards meeting these goals and can be supported by both exercise physiologists and certified personal trainers.

This continuum illustrates the necessity of a more comprehensive approach to identify qualified professionals who are appropriately prepared to provide exercise services. The emerging term of qualified exercise professional (QEP) provides that framework. A QEP is defined not by a single professional title, but by whether the individual's education, certification, and experience are appropriate for the population and services being provided.

Further, QEPs must be readily identifiable and independently verifiable. Professional registration integrates accredited academic preparation, supervised experience, professional certification, and ongoing continuing education into a recognizable professional designation. The United States Registry of Exercise Professionals (USREPS) serves this function. USREPS is professional registry of certified exercise professionals from organizations that adhere to common accreditation standards and require certificants to maintain their credentials in good standing through continuing education and adherence to professional and ethical requirements. USREPS is comparable to registration systems for registered nurses and registered dietitians.

ACSM Position

The American College of Sports Medicine® (ACSM) recognizes qualified exercise professional (QEP) as a broad term for exercise professionals whose qualifications are appropriate for the needs of the individual and the complexity of the services provided. ACSM supports access to structured exercise programs across the continuum of health, from health promotion and disease prevention to chronic disease management and long-term self-management. Because individuals present with different needs, risks and goals, the qualifications of the exercise professional should be commensurate with the services delivered and the relevant medical history of the individual. ACSM considers professional registration integral to the QEP framework for identifying and independently verifying exercise professionals who meet established standards.