

Joint statement: Integrating self-care into the global healthcare continuum to create better health outcomes for all

22 September 2021 – As a global health community, we recognise the need to take collective action on self-care to design resilient health systems. Together, we call on governments, policymakers and actors in the health system to take necessary measures to improve the overall integration of self-care into the healthcare continuum.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), self-care is *'the ability of individuals, families and communities to promote health, prevent disease, maintain health, and cope with illness and disability with or without the support of a health-care provider'*.

We share the view that a holistic approach to healthcare with self-care at its core is crucial to achieving universal health coverage and ensuring better health outcomes for all. Ultimately, encouraging individuals to take increased ownership for their health promotes the efficient use of limited healthcare resources.

We welcome encouraging regulatory flexibilities introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic that have translated into efficiencies for health systems, and we hope that these will form the basis for improved policy and regulations going forward.

We call for a global compact on self-care paving the way for a future WHO Resolution on Self-Care. Through a shared understanding of the value of self-care across countries, we believe that we will build the necessary momentum to fully integrate it into health systems for the benefit of individuals and society.

The Global Self-Care Federation's recently launched Self-Care Readiness Index – a first-of-its-kind policy and research initiative – highlights four critical enablers that support the integration of self-care into health systems.

- (1) Stakeholder support & adoption
- (2) Consumer & patient empowerment
- (3) Self-care health policy
- (4) Regulatory environment

Focusing on these fundamental elements and adopting a more coherent approach to self-care will be necessary to alleviate the burden on overstretched health systems and to improve the quality of care.

Researchers working on the SCRI identified three main themes across the 10 countries analysed.

Theme 1: Perceptions of self-care are driven by both societal values and place-based cultural norms. As a result, there is no one common understanding of self-care. Creating a common global understanding of self-care benefits will help to realize its potential for healthcare systems.

Theme 2: Self-care delivers the best value to individuals with a higher level of **health literacy enabling them to make better decisions**. All newly qualified doctors, nurses and pharmacists should have a clear understanding of self-care and how it can be used in their practice, regularly refreshed through the inclusion of self-care in ongoing professional training.

Theme 3: Self-care policy is common but disjointed leading to numerous and often 'siloes' government strategies. Smart regulations.

We look forward to working together with all relevant stakeholders and actors to promote timely access to prevention, diagnosis and treatment through ensuring the full integration of self-care into health systems.

About The Self-Care Readiness Index

The Self-Care Readiness Index (SCRI) is a first-of-its-kind research and policy initiative that explores critical enablers of self-care across various health systems around the world. It aims to support a better design of healthcare systems and build a foundation for action-oriented initiatives at all levels.

Spearheaded by The Global Self-Care Federation (GSCF), the SCRI is supported by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and forms part of the current working plan between the two bodies. The research includes a combination of in-depth qualitative and quantitative methodology supported by experts and an advisory board. It aims to provide policymakers, decision-makers and healthcare professionals with data including an innovative learning platform that could inspire new approaches to self-care.

While the levels of application or adoption of self-care in the researched countries are similar, approaches and priorities vary. The comprehensive SCRI analysis serves as a reference point to share experiences and best practice. It is also intended to act as a conversation starter and stimulate constructive dialogue between countries to refine self-care approaches.

The research reveals concrete enabling factors that can support the design of resilient health systems and fully realize the power of self-care. These range from individual and

social factors to ones oriented around policy and regulation. Their full integration will help to harness the power of self-care for health systems.

(1) Stakeholder Support & Adoption

The first enabler looks at the level of trust and adoption of self-care among healthcare providers, patients and consumers, as well as regulators and policymakers. We call for a global compact on self-care that paves the way for a future WHO Resolution on Self-Care. The understanding of the value of self-care by stakeholders across the countries will build the necessary momentum to fully integrate it into health systems.

(2) Consumer & Patient Empowerment

An individual's degree of health literacy, knowledge of health interventions, and confidence in making their own health decisions are the primary drivers of the level of use of self-care in personal decisions. There is a need to increase the amount and quality of information available to the individuals working with health care professionals. Doctors, nurses and pharmacists should receive continuous education and build competencies relevant to promoting the adoption of evidence-based self-care practices. Digital solutions become critical to achieving these goals.

(3) Self-Care Health Policy

Self-care should be included in health policies and incentives must be made available to increase the rational and responsible use of self-care technologies including self-care products and services. This means placing self-care at the epicentre of the healthcare economy. At the same time, health literacy should be considered as a public good and interventions to promote health literacy should become public health policy priority.

(4) Regulatory Environment

Streamlined and smart regulatory processes (i.e. reclassifications, advertising) drive innovation and accessibility of self-care. Transparent and non-cumbersome pathways for Rx-OTC switches can support innovation in treatments. Modern distribution through a variety of channels, both in-store and online can help individuals access self-care technologies to support their health & wellbeing journey.

Integrating self-care into the healthcare continuum alleviates burdens on the system, and ultimately improves care. Therefore, large scale collaboration between the actors and stakeholders from across healthcare systems is necessary to leverage the power of self-care.

While governments often underestimate the economic benefits of self-care programs, their integration into healthcare yields long-term positive economic benefit for health budgets and health systems in general. All actors (health departments, manufacturers, and distributors, and individuals) need to work together to ensure that individuals have timely access to information for informed decision making.

Ultimately, designing resilient health systems with a full integration of self-care would deliver better health outcomes for all.

Endorsements:



