



GLOBAL
SELF-CARE
FEDERATION

**SELF-CARE LITERACY:
EMPOWERING PEOPLE,
ORGANIZATIONS,
AND SYSTEMS TO
MAINTAIN AND PROMOTE
SELF-CARE FOR HEALTH
AND WELL-BEING**



RECOGNIZING THE VALUE OF SELF-CARE

“Self-care is the ability of individuals, families and communities to promote their own health, prevent disease, maintain health, and to cope with illness and disability with or without the support of a health worker.”¹

Self-care, as an enabler for better health and well-being, offers a means to improve universal health coverage through self-medication, self-management, and nutrition. Actively managing one’s health and well-being through self-care has numerous benefits, including better choice, better care, and better value.

Recent research found that a total of 10.9 billion individual hours per annum and 1.8 billion physician hours are saved through current self-care practices. By strategically prioritizing self-care in healthcare policies and improving the collective understanding of the benefits of self-care, healthcare programs will save costs.² Self-care interventions promote individuals’ active participation in their own healthcare and are a push towards greater self-determination, self-efficacy, autonomy, and engagement in health.

Ageing populations and the rise of chronic diseases as well as global healthcare worker shortage and pressures on health systems drive a greater demand for people-centered health services that include and advance self-care practices. The COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, has highlighted the unique and critical role that self-care interventions have played in mitigating disease and saving lives through personal self-care actions such as wearing masks and physical distancing, and prioritization at national levels of

self-care interventions that people can use during period of with social restrictions.

Effective self-care is grounded in people’s self-care literacy. Self-care literacy refers to the knowledge, motivation and competencies of individuals, families, and communities to promote health, prevent disease, and maintain health and to cope with illness and disability with or without the support of a healthcare provider.

Self-care delivers the greatest value when people have a high degree of self-care literacy, understand the value of care, prevention, and health promotion, and are confident and empowered to make their own decisions.

Addressing self-care literacy requires an integrated policy approach involving multiple actors, settings, and sectors with the purpose of creating conducive environments in support of health and well-being of individuals and communities.

The challenge remains, however, to present and promote self-care literacy as an urgent and necessary health policy priority. The aim is, therefore, to engage public and private stakeholders with a shared interest in providing support to help people embrace self-care in everyday life.

¹ WHO’s conceptual framework for self-care. World Health Organization, 2019.

² Economic & Social Value of Self-Care Report. Global Self-Care Federation, 2022.

FROM GAPS TO GAINS - IMPROVING SELF-CARE LITERACY FOR ALL

People with strong self-care literacy skills often enjoy better health and well-being, while those with weaker skills tend to engage in riskier behavior and have poorer health.³

Among countries covered in the Self-Care Readiness Index launched by the Global Self Care Federation in 2021 and 2022, only Australia and Germany have established a health literacy plan or framework, though those have not yet been adopted and implemented by policymakers. According to the Economist Intelligence Unit's Health Literacy report, Australia and the US stand out due to their consistent policy efforts to improve health literacy. According to the consumer surveys examined in the Self Care Readiness Index a high number of people still have problems learning about their health because of difficulty understanding written information. These figures range from 17% in Indonesia, 15% in India, 9% in Canada, 8% in Australia, and 7% in Kenya. In comparison, people in Colombia, Mexico, and Germany feel more confident understanding written health information, with 78% of respondents in Germany saying they never or rarely have difficulties, compared to 68% in Mexico and 64% in Colombia.⁴

As a modifiable determinant of health, there are multiple ways to improve self-care literacy. Interventions and structural efforts may focus on improving information, communication, and education as ways to empower people with better knowledge, motivation, and competencies to manage their health and well-being.

Special attention is needed to support people in marginalized and vulnerable situations who are, therefore, less able to access and engage in self-care activities than well-resources population groups.



³Self-Care Literacy. Global Self-Care Federation, 2022.

⁴Self-Care Readiness Index 2021. Global Self-Care Federation, 2022.

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Support and trust among all stakeholders – health care providers, patients and consumers, regulators, and policymakers – are essential to maximizing adoption of self-care behaviors and access to products.

Bridging the health literacy gap calls for wider implementation with regards to:

POLICY IMPACT by forging a broader alliance of health literacy and self-care advocates to make the case that investments in self-care and self-care literacy promote healthier populations and lower costs.

PROVISION OF CLEAR AND HIGH-QUALITY INFORMATION that is widely and easily accessible for consumers to make informed decisions and healthier choices.

EMBRACING A SYSTEMIC APPROACH by building digital, health and self-care capacity at individual, community, organisational and system levels.

ENHANCING ANALYTICAL INSIGHTS by increasing the evidence-based case for health literacy through research and integration of health literacy as an indicator in public health monitoring systems.

INCREASING GLOBAL SELF-CARE IMPACT THROUGH SELF-CARE LITERACY: A CALL TO ACTION

Health literacy is a social responsibility and a call to action is imperative. The Global Self-Care Federation, therefore, seeks to build a coalition of like-minded public and private partners who are committed to supporting self-care and self-care literacy worldwide.

Action areas may include:

- 1. The adoption of a self-care resolution at the World Health Assembly.**
- 2. A broader alliance of self-care advocates to make the case that investments in self-care result in healthier populations and lower costs.**
- 3. An increase in the quantity and quality of self-care information available to consumers.**
- 4. Governments to adopt standalone self-care strategies that bring more coherence across the current multitude of health policies, plans and programs that touch upon the concepts of self-care.**
- 5. Embed health and self-care literacy into professional education and continuing professional development as well as into workforce accreditation standards, including the deployment of multi-disciplinary teams.**
- 6. Encourage governments to make health literacy including self-care literacy a national health priority.**