



Self-Care
**SOCIO-ECONOMIC
RESEARCH**



2026

**Self-Care Can Unlock
50% More
Economic and Societal
Benefits by 2040**

**New GSCF Report Highlights Policy Approaches That Can
Support Governments on the Path Toward Universal Health Care**

Why Self-Care Matters

Responsible self-care, a complementary pillar of strong health systems, **empowers individuals to stay healthy, prevent disease and manage illness effectively**, supporting longer, healthier and more productive lives. The WHO defines self-care as the ability of individuals to promote health, prevent disease, maintain wellbeing and manage illness, with or without the support of a healthcare professional. GSCF's updated Economic and Social Impact study shows that **responsible self-care delivers substantial and measurable social and economic benefits across all health system contexts**. As such, self-care has **an important role to play in meeting global aspirations for universal health coverage (UHC)**.

As individuals, we can reduce unnecessary visits to the doctor by taking non-prescription treatments for common conditions such as migraines, allergies, coughs, colds and sore throats. We can also manage some of our own preventative care, such as taking vitamins, minerals and supplements, stopping smoking, improving oral health and preventing sexually transmitted infections (STIs). In many cases, this self-care might be the only healthcare available due to limited primary healthcare infrastructure, making it essential. For others, managing our own health is timely, convenient and removes an unnecessary burden from our health systems. This is important, because fiscal consolidation, workforce shortages and multilateral restructuring have all put increasing pressure on health systems, particularly when combined with aging populations, infectious disease burden and the growing prevalence of NCD's.

Investing in self-care is, therefore, a strategic lever for sustainable health systems, more resilient societies and stronger economies. Self-care is already delivering meaningful gains.

A new GSCF report will present evidence showing there is as much as 50% more potential still to be unlocked by 2040.

This briefing outlines where we are today. The full report, to be launched in May, will show the full potential of self-care interventions, and what policy decisions are needed to realise that potential.

CURRENT ANNUAL SAVINGS THROUGH SELF-CARE GLOBALLY:



\$144 bn

HEALTH SYSTEMS SAVINGS



2.20 bn

PHYSICIAN TIME SAVING (HOURS)



+800,000

ADDITIONAL DOCTORS WOULD BE NEEDED WORLDWIDE IF SELF-CARE DID NOT EXIST



24 mn QUALY

QUALYS (QUALITY-ADJUSTED LIFE YEARS) GAINED



\$1.974 tn

WELFARE GAINS ATTRIBUTABLE TO HIGHER PRODUCTIVITY



43.6 bn

ADDITIONAL PRODUCTIVE DAYS WORLDWIDE



13 bn

INDIVIDUAL HOURS SAVED FROM TRAVEL AND WAITING TIME

Self-Care in Different Contexts

The 2022 GSCF Economic & Social Value of Self-Care study established a global evidence base demonstrating that, while variable, self-care using non-prescription medicines delivers health and social benefits across all health systems. The same underlying methodology continues to underpin the updated analysis and extended outlook to 2040¹.

Countries are grouped into three broad categories: high-, middle- and low-income² because access to healthcare and its affordability varies widely. Across these groups, self-care fulfills two core functions: it increases efficiency where systems are strong and enables access where formal services are limited, supporting progress toward Universal Health Coverage (UHC)³.



HIGH-INCOME COUNTRIES: Self-Care as First Treatment Option

Self-care is often the first line of treatment for minor conditions, rather than a visit to the doctor.

Key benefits include:

- Substantial cost savings for health systems.
- Significant reduction in physician workload.
- Time saved for individuals.
- Stronger personal responsibility and health literacy.

In these countries, self-care acts as an **efficient complement** to well-developed health-care systems.

MIDDLE-INCOME COUNTRIES: Hybrid Patterns

Middle-income countries show mixed characteristics, reflecting transitional health-system structures.

LOW-INCOME COUNTRIES: Self-Care as Only Treatment Option

For many, self-care is the **only available form of care**.

Key benefits include:

- Helping maintain the ability to work.
- Reducing the burden of untreated health conditions.
- Immediate quality of life improvements.
- Preventing serious complications in the absence of formal care.

In this context, self-care **enables care**.

¹ May, U., Bauer, C., Schneider-Ziebe, A., Giuliani-Limbach, C. (2023): Self-care with non-prescription medicines to improve health care access and quality of life in low- and middle-income countries: systematic review and methodological approach. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2023.1220984>

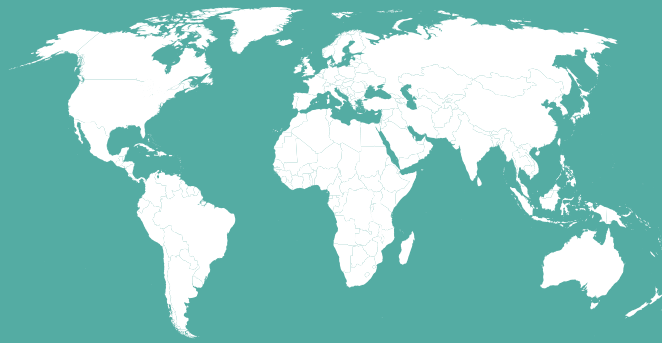
² For this purpose, five parameters were selected:
1. National Health Care Service Coverage in population
2. Income Group
3. Health Care Expenditure p.c.
4. Physicians per 1,000 population
5. GDP p.c.

The Value of Self-Care for Individuals

Annual Savings show clearly that self-care generates measurable economic and social benefits for individuals, health systems and economies. A key component of this value is welfare gains, defined in this study as the monetary value of the productive days gained through self-care. By supporting earlier recovery and sustained productivity, self-care delivers benefits that extend beyond the individual to the wider economy. Per-capita metrics further strengthen the case for self-care.

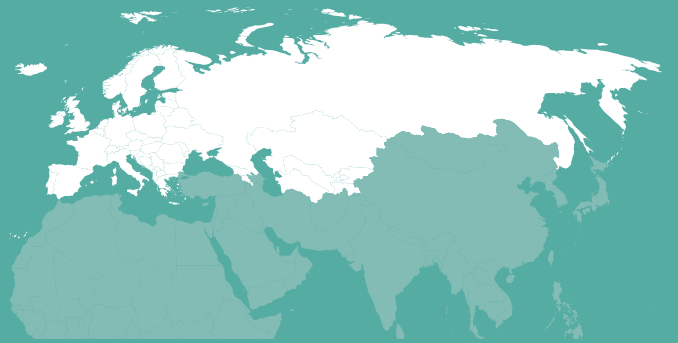


KEY IMPACTFUL EXAMPLES INCLUDE:



GLOBALLY

Self-care results in an average of **six additional productive days per person per year**. By choosing self-care rather than no treatment, individuals recover sooner and gain working days.



EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

Individuals save an average of **four hours each year**, by avoiding unnecessary consultation appointments - reducing travel, waiting and consultation time - while **53 minutes** of physician time per person is freed for more complex cases.



LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Welfare gains by approximately **\$144 per person per year**.



SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

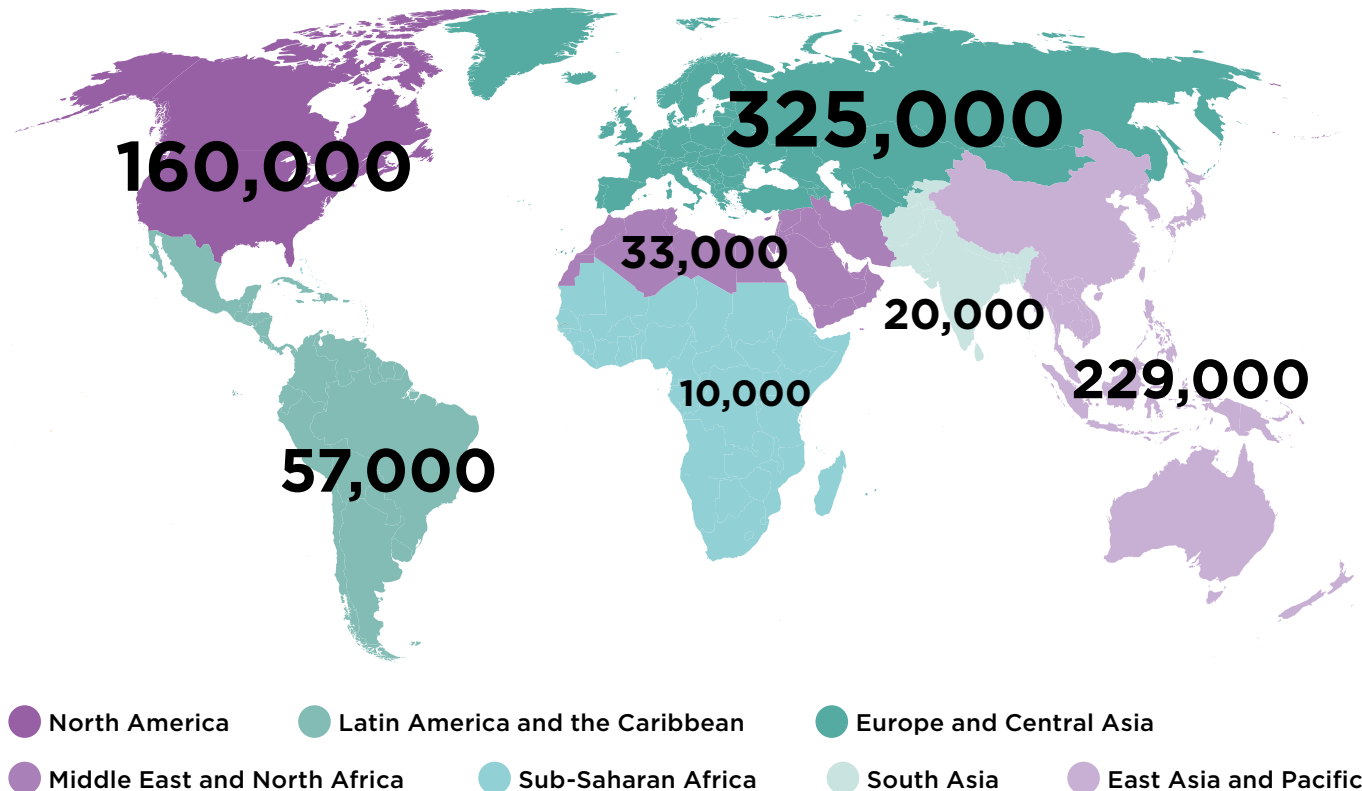
This productivity effect amounts to **only three days**, reflecting limited access to self-care despite high potential need.

These regional differences are mainly driven by demographics, policy uptake and access.

Impact of Self-Care on Physician Demand

The WHO estimates a **projected shortfall of 11 million health workers by 2030**, mostly in low-and lower-middle income countries³. We have to use clinical capacity wisely. And responsible self-care can play a direct and measurable role⁴.

THE ILLUSTRATION BELOW SHOWS THE ADDITIONAL NUMBER OF FULL-TIME PHYSICIANS NEEDED IN THE ABSENCE OF SELF-CARE:



Self-care, therefore, plays a critical role in preserving scarce clinical capacity. **And since it frees up approximately 2.20 billion hours of physician time annually**, it enables physicians to focus on individuals with more severe health conditions and on prevention.

However, the **full potential of self-care has not yet been realized**.

Further strengthening the self-care environment could unlock additional capacity, easing unnecessary pressure on physician time and supporting more resilient health systems.



³ WHO. Health Workforce. 2026. Available from: https://www.who.int/health-topics/health-workforce#tab=tab_1

⁴ WHO. Self-care for health and wellbeing. 2026. https://www.who.int/health-topics/self-care#tab=tab_1

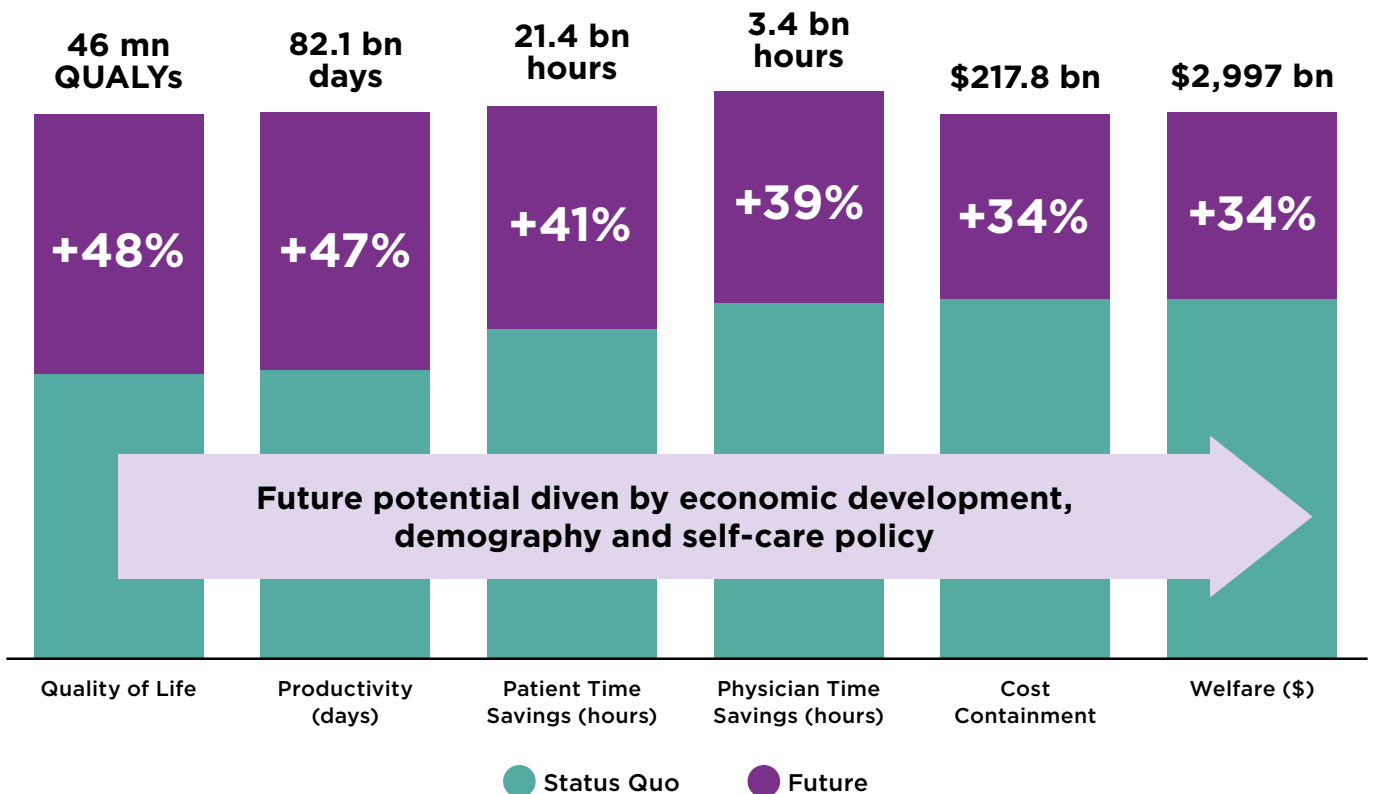


Unlocking Future Potential (to 2040)

Progress since 2022 shows that self-care uptake is moving in the right direction, but at an uneven pace. This underlines the need for **deliberate policy action, rather than passive evolution**. This includes policies that strengthen **health literacy, ensure equitable access to quality-assured non-prescription medicines, and other self-care products, and embed digital tools within trusted regulatory and professional frameworks**.

Adoption of these policies would mean the global benefits of self-care could increase significantly by up to 50% by 2040:

ADDITIONAL IMPACT OF SELF-CARE WORLDWIDE BY 2040 VS 2026 BASELINE:



These quality of life and productivity benefits will be particularly prevalent as access to self-care expands in countries with less developed health systems.

Outlook

Self-care enables wider access to healthcare and strengthens health systems, in turn supporting societies and individuals to live in better health.

The measurable benefits today include reducing pressure on health systems, improving access to care, and supporting productivity and quality of life, while reinforcing progress towards **universal health coverage**.

Future gains are neither automatic nor guaranteed.



Realizing the potential of self-care will depend on the adoption of supportive policies by governments across the world, which could result in the social and economic benefits increasing by up to 50% by 2040.

Self-care is, therefore, a strategic investment in health, equity and system resilience.

Ongoing research is conducted by research institute May + Bauer GmbH & Co. KG. The report published in May will look more closely at quality of life, prevention and access. As this evidence base grows, additional and substantial benefits are likely to become increasingly visible and quantifiable.



The Global Self-Care Federation exists to create a healthier world through better self-care. We represent associations and manufacturers in the self-care industry, working closely with our members and relevant stakeholder groups to ensure evidence-based self-care products and solutions are recognized as key contributors to health for individuals and systems worldwide. Our work ensures key policy and decision-makers embrace self-care, recognize its values and use its broad range of benefits as the building blocks to deliver better and more sustainable health outcomes for all.

We represent the self-care and self-medication industry and endeavour to contribute to the World Health Organization's public health goals through our specialized expertise. GSCF is a non-state actor in official relations with WHO.

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