

AUSTRALIA: STATUS OF SELF-CARE

The Value of Self-Care

Embedding self-care practices into the health care continuum has the potential to improve health and quality of life while simultaneously supporting health system sustainability. Self-care practices empower individuals by providing them with the information and tools to make decisions about their own health and care. An increased ownership over their own health promotes, at a systems level, the efficient use of limited healthcare resources and relieves the burden on healthcare providers - saving 1.8 billion physician hours to attend to more severe health conditions. A related impact of this is the increased focus on improving disease prevention efforts by empowering individuals to address minor ailments at home.

At the global level, current self-care activities are generating substantial monetary savings as well as healthcare workforce savings, totalling at least \$119 billion per year. The above should be coupled with a positive impact on global productivity when over-the-counter treatment is adopted at first, granting approximately 40.8 billion productive days, corresponding to a value of \$1,879 billion in welfare effects. Looking at the future, the cost saving effect is estimated to be approximately \$178.8 billion per annum, with increased productivity gains of 71.9 billion productive days per annum. If we add other positive effects brought by other self-care practices, such as the use of preventive care, oral health care and the use of vitamins and mineral supplements, the overall gain will increase further.

There are more proven self-care products and practices available today than ever before, and it is within our collective power to unleash the benefits of truly self-care enabled health systems around the world, if only we set

up adequate policy frameworks that embed self-care seamlessly into the care continuum.

Self-care belongs to individuals, families, communities, health care professionals, and policymakers at different levels and with different responsibilities. However, it is a primary responsibility of policymakers to design the enabling environment for each of the stakeholders to fulfill these responsibilities.

A deeper international focus on self-care, brought up by a WHO Resolution on Self-Care could help foster the necessary momentum to fully integrate it into health systems for the benefit of individuals and society. This should include a definition of self-care and its enablers, and the self-care interventions countries can undertake according to the WHO Guidelines on self-care interventions for health and well-being.[1]

27%

**OF AUSTRALIANS WANT
BETTER INFORMATION TO
SUFFICIENTLY MANAGE
THEIR HEALTH**

97%

**OF AUSTRALIANS BELIEVE
THEY ARE RESPONSIBLE
FOR MANAGING THEIR
OWN HEALTH**

Australia: Overview

At policy level, to date, there has been little appetite for crafting coordinated programs and strategies to support self-care across the healthcare continuum in Australia. However, recently, the release of the Self-Care Policy Blueprint in 2021 by the University of Victoria has put self-care prominently on the radar for key policymakers in Australia.[2] Further, self-care appears to be growing in importance within the Australian medical community. The Australian Medical Association put forward a statement on health literacy in 2021, calling on government to strengthen efforts around public health education with the aim of improving “self-triage” efforts and self-management of chronic conditions. [3]

In its latest report entitled “The self-care opportunity: Empowering Australia toward better health” published in July 2022, Consumer Healthcare Products Australia notes that despite the pandemic backdrop there is a relatively low level of engagement in health. The same report found that just one in five Australians (22%) rate their health literacy as high, while nearly one in three (30%) believe their health literacy is low, nevertheless nearly all Australians agree they are responsible for managing their own health (97%). [4] it was found that despite 82% of Australians agreeing they would seek pharmacist advice for common short-term health conditions the findings show they head online (50%) or organize a general practitioner (GP) consult (76%) ahead of seeking a pharmacist’s advice. The same report found that a significant proportion of Australians – more than two thirds (69%) – are choosing to engage in their own health management using digital health services to seek advice for short term health conditions. Still, the same report found that that more than a quarter of Australians (27%) believe they don’t have the information they need to sufficiently manage their health.[5]

Recommendations

- Build on the University of Victoria’s 2021 Self-Care Policy Blueprint, to establish a coherent healthcare policy and regulation supporting self-care.
- Recognize health literacy as a key enabler for health and self-care in particular, building on the work of the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care.
- Assure the quality and accessibility of digital health information.
- Enabling a favorable environment for Rx to OTC switches going forward.

End Notes

[1] WHO Guidelines on self-care interventions for health and well-being. World Health Organization, 2022. Available at:

<https://app.magicapp.org/#/guideline/Lr21gL>

[2] Self Care for Health: A National Policy Blueprint.

Mitchell Institute, 2020. Available at:

<https://www.vu.edu.au/mitchell-institute/policy-solutions/self-care-for-health-a-national-policy-blueprint>

[3] Health Literacy. Australian Medical Association Ltd., 2021. Available at:

<https://ama.com.au/sites/default/files/2021-01/Health%20Literacy%202021%20-%20AMA%20Position%20Statement.pdf>

[4] Consumer Healthcare Products Canada. The self-care opportunity Empowering Australia toward better health. July 2022. Available at:

<https://www.chpaustralia.com.au/Tenant/C0000022/Documents/Self%20Care/The%20Self-Care%20Opportunity%20-%20Report.pdf>

[5] Consumer Healthcare Products Canada. The self-care opportunity Empowering Australia toward better health. July 2022. Available at:

<https://www.chpaustralia.com.au/Tenant/C0000022/Documents/Self%20Care/The%20Self-Care%20Opportunity%20-%20Report.pdf>