

BRAZIL: 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 for the own health promotes, at 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 approximately \$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 use of preventive care, oral health care and use of vitamins and mineral supplements, the overall gain will increase further.

There are more proven self-care products and practices available to populations 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 policymaker 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 Guideline on self-care interventions for health and well-being.[1]

Self-care in the Latin America and Caribbean region is practiced in the form of self-medication with OTC or traditional medicines, and includes notions of sustainable healthcare, health literacy and education owing to financial, geographical, and regulatory factors.[2]

The concept of self-care in Latin America is closely linked to issues regarding the sustainability of healthcare systems, which stem from increasing populations and healthcare costs, further exacerbated by a future shortage of healthcare professionals.

Health literacy has been at the forefront of making healthcare in Latin America more financially sustainable. [3] Governments in the region recognize that many of their challenges could be tackled with self-care and improving health literacy. According the Economic and Social Value of Self-Care Report, Colombia is among the countries in the region that gain the most from practicing self-care.

SELF-CARE POLICY BRIEF

Over 800 million hours are currently saved by individuals, well over two billion productive days and more than one billion QALYs are gained in the country group Colombia is part of. In the future, almost \$13 billion in cost containment could be generated, over four billion days of productive time are expected to be saved, and over one and a half billion hours in individual time savings could be achieved in the future as a result of practicing self-care and enacting self-care policies.

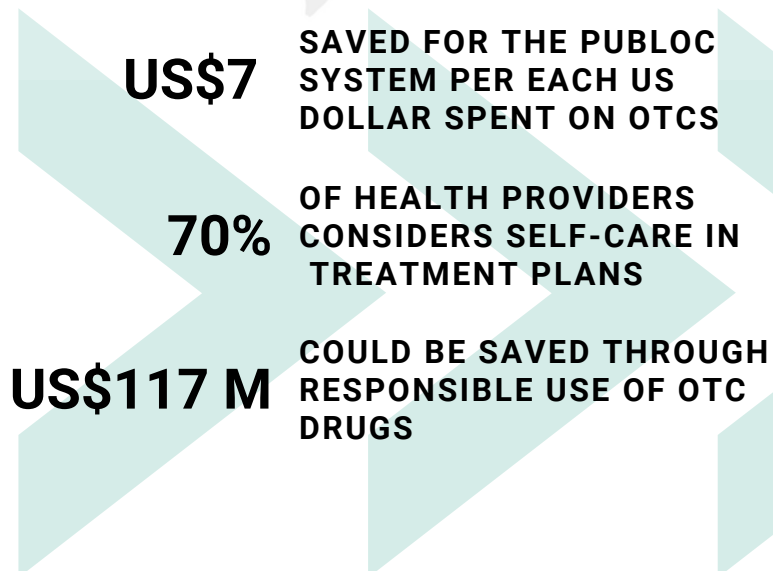
Brazil: Overview

According to an article published in the Brazilian Journal of Economics and Health (JBES), for example, every \$1 spent on OTC drugs saves \$7 for Brazil's public health system – about the same ratio as observed in similar studies in the US. In the Brazilian case, the responsible use of OTC drugs is calculated to yield net savings of R\$364 million (about US\$117 million), allowing significant funds to be directed to more complex care, treatment of chronic diseases, or the local healthcare infrastructure. [4] According to the Self-Care Readiness Index 2021, more than 70% of respondents from Brazil say their healthcare providers speak with them about self-care as part of a treatment plan for a specific medical condition sometimes or at every visit. [5]

Self-care is mentioned in many health policy documents in Brazil. For example, Brazil's Strategic Action Plan to Tackle Noncommunicable Diseases (2011-2022) mentions the importance of self-care and the rational use of medication for healthy aging, for the good management of cardiovascular diseases, and the importance of self-management for NCDs in general. [6] However, concerns that people were not self-medicating in a safe way have occurred despite national and local government campaigns emphasizing the risk of self-medication. [7][8] Brazil's National Policy on Integrative and Complementary Practices (Portuguese acronym: PNPIC) mentions self-care as a way to improve disease management and health promotion at the individual level and calls for healthcare providers to stimulate patients' self-care and autonomy in disease management. [9]

Health education as an important element of the Brazilian government's health strategy, too. [10] The government considers the PSE – a collaboration between the Ministries of Education and Health – an innovative approach to the integration of education and health policy that, "treats health and education as part of a comprehensive training for citizenship and the full enjoyment of human rights." [11]

Finally, Brazil liberalized its regulations governing Rx-to-OTC switches in 2016. Under the revised rules, once an active ingredient has been deemed safe for OTC use, all products with the same active ingredient can be reclassified as OTC. Nevertheless, switching guidelines are still non-existent. [12]



Recommendations

- Ensure individual empowerment through increased awareness and responsibility towards responsible self-care, through digital and self-care literacy.
- Enhance the use of communication technologies to provide credible information about health and self-care in particular.
- Provide healthcare providers with the tools and frameworks to implement self-care in their daily practice, including pharmacists.
- Regulatory convergence and simplification of low-risk molecules for OTC products and food supplements, in particular establishing Rx-to-OTC switching guidelines.

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] FIFARMA. Healthcare Sustainability in Latin America & the Role of the Pharmaceutical Industry. FIFARMA; 2019 [cited 2021 Aug 17. Available at: <https://fifarma.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/FIFARMA-Healthcare-Sustainability-Working-Document.pdf>

[3] Arrighi E, Ruiz de Castilla EM, Peres F, Mejía R, Sørensen K, Gunther C, et al. Scoping health literacy in Latin America. *Glob Health Promot.* 2021 Jun 25;175797592110168.

[4] Antonio Cesar Rodrigues. "Use of non-prescription drugs and savings generated for health systems: a review." *Brazilian Journal of Economics and Health (JBES)*, Volume 9, Number 1. April 2017. Available at:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/317074927_Utilizacao_de_medicamentos_isentos_de_prescricao_e_economias_geradas_para_os_sistemas_de_saude_uma_revisao

[5] Self-Care Readiness Index 2021. Global Self-Care Federation. September 2021. Available at:

<https://www.selfcarefederation.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/2021-09/Self-Care%20Readiness%20Index%20Report%20170921%20%281%29.pdf>

[6] "Strategic Action Plan to Tackle Noncommunicable Diseases (NCD) in Brazil 2011-2022." Ministry of Health Brazil. 2011.

Available at: https://www.iccp-portal.org/system/files/plans/BRA_B3_Plano%20DCNT%20-%20ingl%C3%AAs.pdf

[1] "Rio launches campaign against self-medication." *JurisWay.* 2013. Available at: https://www.jurisway.org.br/en/article.asp?id_dh=10681

[1] "Exaggerated? Check the leaflet before selfmedicating." *Brazil National Health Surveillance Agency – Anvisa.* 2019. Available at: <https://www.gov.br/anvisa/pt-br/assuntos/noticias-anvisa/2019/exagerou-confira-a-bula-antes-de-se-automedicar>

[1] National Policy on Integrative and Complementary Practices of the SUS." *Ministry of Health Brazil.* 2008. Available at: <https://bit.ly/39Re0Hr>

[1] A. Carvalho. "Health promotion in Brazil." *International Union for Health Promotion and Education.* 2007. Available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/10253823070140010201x>

[1] Decree No. 6.286. *Brazilian Legislature SubCommittee for Legal Affairs.* 2007. Available at:

http://portal.mec.gov.br/index.php?option=com_docman&view=download&alias=1726-saudenaescola-decreto6286-pdf&category_slug=documentos-pdf&Itemid=30192

[1] OTC Yearbook 2019, Nicholas Hall & Company; Association of the European Self-Care Industry (AESGP) proprietary databank; "Traditional Medicines & OTC Products: Brazil". *PharmaBoardroom.* Accessed February 2021. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3rqeBG9>