

COLOMBIA: 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 to 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.

Over 800 million hours are currently saved by individuals, well over two billion productive days and more than one billion QAL Vs 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.

Colombia: Overview

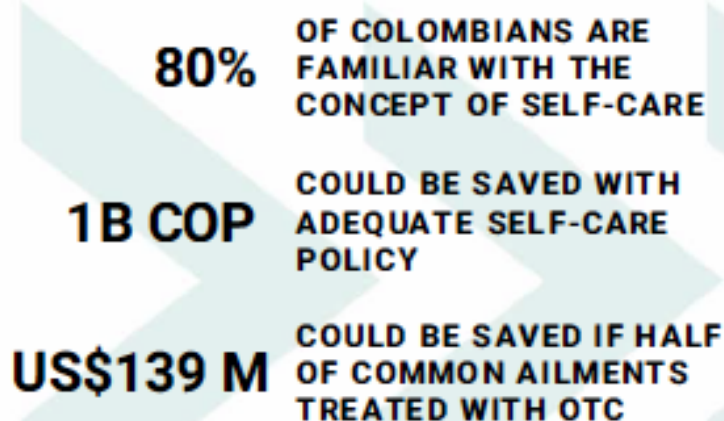
According to a recent study, 80% of the population is familiar with the concept of self-care, but this varies by socioeconomic level, with more affluent citizens expressing a greater degree of knowledge around the concept. An adequate self-care policy could save, in a conservative scenario, \$1 BN pesos per year to the health system, which, added to decongestion, would translate into better care for all and lower expenditures for the health system. [4] If 50% of the cases of common cold, acute diarrhea, vulvovaginal candidiasis and low back pain were treated with OTC medications instead of the Public Health facilities, the State would have a potential saving of US\$ 139 million per year. If only 10% of these cases were treated with OTCs, the savings would be more than US\$ 28 million.

The Colombian government recently launched its new Ten-Year Public Health Plan 2022-2031, in which wellness is expected to be a big part of the plan, with focused efforts on behavior change, a major element of self-care [5]. As with the previous Ten-Year Public Health Plan [6], the new Plan will also refer to self-care as an object of rights and duties and will mention the need to foster a culture of self-care under a cross-cutting pillar of "human behavior". The government already promotes a human-centered approach to care through collaboration across healthcare players and community actors in order to "add value, generate well-being, protect life and prove the quality of life of the population." [7] Health literacy is expected to be included in the new Ten-Year Public Health Plan as well. Self-care campaigns run by the Colombian SelfCare Association (Asociación Nacional de Empresarios de Colombia (ANDI)) and the Latin

American Association of Responsible Self-Care (ILAR) have been very well-received by both the population and policy-makers.

Issues around self-care were as well subject of a conversation between Andres Duarte, Executive Director of ANDI, and Colombian President Duque in 2020: during a dedicated interview, they talked about self-care, including mental wellbeing and the importance of healthy habits. Colombia's Ministry of Health and Social Protection contains "Health Recommendations" pages [8] on physical activity, nutrition, tobacco use, healthy weight management, hand washing, oral visual and auditory health and healthy work environments as well as information on non-communicable diseases. [9] The pages promote factual evidence in support of healthy behavior recommendations and encourage ownership over symptoms such as promoting frequent blood sugar checks. [10]

The Ministry of Health and Social Protection published a "Self-care for patient's safety guide", where self-care is defined as "the daily practices and decisions about them that an individual, family or group makes to take care of their health; these practices are 'skills' learned throughout life, of continuous use, that are employed by a person, family or group. These practices are 'skills' learned throughout life, of continuous use, that people chose to use freely, for the purpose of strengthening or restoring health and preventing disease; these practices are embedded in a cultural context." [11]



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. Icted 2021 Aug 17. Available at: <https://fifarma.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/FIFARMA-Healthcare-Sustainability-Working-Documents.pdf>
- [3] Arrighi E, Ruiz de Castilla CM, Paredes F, Mejía R, Sorensen K, Gunther C, et al. Scoping health literacy in Latin America. Glob Health Promot. 2021 Jun 29;17(2):99-104.
- [4] Santa María, M, Escobar, A and González, T. Autocuidado en Colombia: Estudio de opinión pública y cálculos fiscales. Available at: <http://www.andi.com.co/uploads/12/12/0/Mauricio%20Santamaria%20Salamanca.pdf>
- [5] Ten-Year Public Health Plan. Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Colombia. Available at: <https://www.minsalud.gov.co/PlanDecenal/Paginas/home2013.aspx>
- [6] Ten-Year Public Health Plan 2012-2021. Background and situation analysis. Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Colombia. Available at: <https://www.minsalud.gov.co/sites/rid/Lists/BibliotecaDigital/RIDE/VS/ED/PSP/antecedentes%20PDSP.pdf>
- [7] <https://www.sispro.gov.co/observatorios/oncalidadsalud/Paginas/humanizacion.aspx>
- [8] Modos, condiciones y estilos de vida saludables. Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Colombia. Available at: <https://www.minsalud.gov.co/salud/Paginas/habitos-saludables.aspx>
- [9] Cancer. Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Colombia. Available at: <https://www.minsalud.gov.co/saludpublica/PENT/Paginas/Preve-nciondel-cancer.aspx>
- [10] ¿Qué es la diabetes? Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Colombia. Available at: <https://www.minsalud.gov.co/salud/publica/PENT/Paginas/diabetes.aspx>
- [11] ILUSTRAR AL PACIENTE EN EL AUTOCUIDADO DE SU SEGURIDAD. Minisalud, Todos por un Nuevo País. Available at: <https://www.minsalud.gov.co/sites/rid/Lists/BibliotecaDigital/RIDE/CA/Ilustrar-al-paciente-en-autocuidado-seguridad.pdf>