

KENYA: 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]

About \$1 billion per year are currently being saved by healthcare systems in the Sub-Saharan region as a result of people practicing self-care. 141 million hours of individuals' time are being saved and 7 million hours of physicians' time thanks to self-care. In the future, gains from self-care could be doubled (in contrast to current gains). In addition to almost \$4.0 billion in monetary savings from the cost containment, the five billion days saved in productive time may translate into welfare gains of over \$31.5 billion.

Moreover, an estimated 514 million hours will be saved for individuals as a result of not having to see a physician. These time gains can be associated with the elimination of travel and waiting times and may also lead to increased quality of life. The overall impact on quality of life is expected to increase from one million currently to almost three million. [2]

Kenya: Overview

The Self-Care Readiness Index 2022, which covers Kenya, suggests high levels of awareness and support for self-care among healthcare providers, but lower awareness and support among the general population and policymakers. For example, self-care and its concepts appear a handful of times through Kenya's cardiovascular care and diabetes care guidelines. Healthcare providers said that though there are no government-established guidelines for self-care, self-care practices are included in care or treatment guidelines in their place of work, ranging from pharmacies to clinics and hospitals. Interviews with experts suggest that people in Kenya and policymakers associate self-care with the management of chronic conditions and self-medication, but rarely with prevention and health awareness.

Experts suggested that resources, including digital ones, that could support self-care are still rare. In a Digital Self-Care report published by the Self-Care Trailblazer Group, self-care is primarily associated with sexual and reproductive health. [3] In 2017, Kenya adopted HIV testing guidelines, in which HIV self-testing is included in order to reach people who are HIV-positive without knowing it (about 20% in 2018). [4] [5]

Self-care appears by proxy in most of health policies, though concepts such as people's empowerment and self-reliance. In particular, primary healthcare networks play a key role in this regard, and the government has launched a number of programs at the community-level in order to empower and educate people about their health. The Kenya Primary Health Care Strategic Framework, for instance, which launched in 2019, has put a greater focus on multidisciplinary care teams that work more closely with patients to empower them, and a greater focus on prevention and health promotion than there used to be. [6] The goal of the Community Health Strategy is the empowerment of individuals, families and communities to attain the highest possible standard of health with the strengthening of community health service delivery across all health domains towards the attainment of a strong, equitable, holistic and sustainable community health structures. [7]

Kenya's Health Policy (2014-2030) [8] mentions that "the sector shall ensure that households are empowered to take responsibility for their own health and well-being, and are facilitated and capacitated to participate actively in the management of their local healthcare systems." It also says that it "recognizes the role an individual plays through adoption of appropriate health practices and healthcare-seeking behaviors as key in the realization of the country's health goals." The government also launched a number of other health policy plans targeting the prevention of non-communicable diseases, supporting healthy diets and physical activity, which bode well with self-care.

USD\$1 BN

**PER YEAR OF SAVINGS DUE
TO SELF-CARE PRACTICES
IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA**

514 M

**PHYSICIAN HOURS SAVED
THROUGH FURTHER USE OF
SELF-CARE IN THE REGION**

Recommendations

- Increase awareness towards responsible self-care by increasing self-care literacy and highlighting a prominent role for nurses, front-line healthcare workers and pharmacists.
- Build on the work done on sexual health and self-care to increase awareness about all facets of self-care.
- Increase the access to OTCs through harmonized regulatory frameworks.

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 Socio-Economic Research: The Global Social and Economic Value of Self-Care. Global Self Care Federation, 2022. Available at: https://www.selfcarefederation.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/2022-06/FINAL_GSCF%20Socio-Economic%20Research%20Report%2022062022.pdf

[3] Self-Care Trailblazer Group. Digital Self-Care: A Framework for Design, Implementation, and Evaluation. Population Services International, 2020. Available at: <https://www.psi.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Digital-Self-Care.pdf>

[4] Sørensen K, et al. Health literacy and public health: a systematic review and integration of definitions and models. BMC Public Health, 2012. Available at: <https://bmcpublichealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1471-2458-12-80>

[5] Little, K, Rosenberg , S. Update on Kenya HIVST landscape. PSI, 2020. Available at: <https://www.psi.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Update-on-Kenya-HIV-Self-Testing-Landscape.pdf>

[6] Ministry of Health, Kenya. Kenya Primary Health Care Strategic Framework, 2019-2024. Republic of Kenya, 2020. Available at: <https://www.health.go.ke/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Kenya-Primary-Healthcare-Strategic-Framework-Signed.pdf>

[7] Ministry of Health, Kenya. Kenya Community Health Strategy 2020-2025. Republic of Kenya, 2021. Available at: https://www.health.go.ke/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Kenya-Community-Health-Strategy-Final-Signed-off_2020-25.pdf

[8] Ministry of Health, Kenya. Kenya Health Policy 2014 - 2030. Republic of Kenya, 2014. Available at: <https://www.ncikenya.or.ke/documents/kenya-health-policy.pdf>