

MEXICO: 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]

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, Mexico 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 Mexico 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. [4]

Mexico: Overview

Eating healthy, practicing physical activity regularly, and other non-pharmaceutical treatments are emphasized across a number of medical guidelines in Mexico, including for diabetes and cardiovascular diseases. Though self-care concepts such as self-monitoring and self-management remain largely absent from the guidelines, they are increasingly being discussed in medical congresses and across the medical community. The survey conducted as part of the Self-Care Readiness Index 2022 found that practicing healthcare providers are overall supportive of self-care, with most of them recommending that patients use self-care products and practices as part of an ongoing plan for wellness and optimum health at every visit and considering that that self-care is “a core component” of their approach to support patient management. [5]

In Mexico, the concept of self-care has long been present in policy language, though policymakers remain unaware of its economic benefits. A study from 2018 by AFAMELA found that every 1\$ MXP spent among the four categories of OTC medicines for acute non-serious clinical conditions would allow for the optimization of approximately \$5 MXP by the public health sector. [6] Though not government-supported, policymakers are aware of AFAMELA’s selfcare campaign entitled “Ve Más Por Ti” (in English, “Look for Yourself”), which launched on International Self-Care Day, on 25 July 2021. Nevertheless, policymakers still take a risk-averse approach to self-medication. [7]

Mexico has been supporting a shift toward a person-centered approach to health and a bigger focus on prevention. Attention to health literacy is becoming more evident in the country, with health promotion programs indirectly addressing health literacy concepts, though there is no dedicated health literacy strategy to be found.

The country’s Primary Healthcare Methodological and Operational Framework as well as the PrevenIMSS Health Care Guidelines both emphasize prevention and co-responsibility in one’s health, along with specific references to self-care concepts. Examples of health promotion campaigns include the “Vida Saludable” campaign, which aims to educate schoolchildren about nutrition and child obesity rates, while integrating social and emotional learning (SEL) concepts into the classroom, “La Nueva Mesa” (the New Table), and Mexico’s new food labeling system. [8] [9] [10] [11]

Despite ongoing efforts, a survey conducted as part of the Self-Care Readiness Index 2022 found that 68% of Mexicans still have problems learning about their health because of difficulty understanding written information. [12] A survey conducted by ILAR found that majority of participants agreed that self-care was very relevant (52%) or relevant (32%) during the Covid-19 pandemic. However, less than half of the respondents feel that they have sufficient knowledge and tools at their disposal to practice self-care properly. [13]

On the regulatory landscape, since 2021 the Commission for the Protection of Sanitary Risks (Cofepris) became the first Spanish-speaking country to be a member of the International Council for Harmonization (ICH), one of the highest regulatory forums for pharmaceutical products. This background will allow for the standardization of regulation, surveillance and development of guidelines for pharmaceutical products. [14]

US\$7

SAVED FOR THE PUBLIC SYSTEM PER EACH US DOLLAR SPENT ON OTCS

70%

OF HEALTH PROVIDERS CONSIDERS SELF-CARE IN TREATMENT PLANS

US\$13bn

IN COST CONTAINMENT COULD BE GENERATED AS A RESULT OF PRACTISING SELF-CARE

Despite of this achievement, Mexico still struggles with a backlog in new medicines authorization, lengthy times for Rx-to-OTC switch and innovation, and delays in advertising materials approval. [15] [16]

The use of trust mechanisms such as reliance, are windows of opportunity for Cofepris to streamline access to safe, effective, and quality products, such as OTCs, whilst upgrading their regulations to comply with the ICH standards. Up until recently Cofepris installed a digital channel DIGIPRiS to accelerate the submission of documents with the aim of reducing the bureaucratic process of self-management procedures, but the benefits and results of this new modality are yet to be seen. [17]

End Notes

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Recommendations

- Educate and incentivize healthcare providers on self-care products and practices. This includes elevating the role of pharmacists in providing trusted health advice and increasing the number of health services available.
- Increase the quantity and quality of self-care information available to consumers, including verified digital health information platforms, e-labeling, as well as health prevention and promotion campaigns that embed the concept of self-care.
- Encourage the government to adopt standalone self-care strategies that would 'connect the dots' and bring more coherence across the current multitude of health policies, plans and programs that touch upon the concepts of self-care in Mexico.
- Encourage the government to make health literacy a national health priority.
- For individuals to practice effective self-care, there is a need for increased access to self-care products to reduce the economic constraints on public health systems.
- Regulatory convergence and simplification of low-risk molecules for OTC products and food supplements is necessary in Latin American region to strengthen public health and streamline product development and innovation.