

SINGAPORE: 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]

The number of productive days, as well as the number of QALYs (quality life year), are the most notable gains generated through current self-care practices in East Asia and Pacific. Currently, over 8.8 billion days in productivity are saved and more than 64.7 million QALYs are gained. As a result, over \$31 billion is generated through cost containment, and over 3 billion individual hours and 500 million physician hours are saved in the region. [2] In the future, more than \$50 billion in cost containment and almost \$650 billion in welfare can potentially be generated through future self-care efforts. Additionally, more than five billion hours in individual time savings and 15 billion days could be gained in productivity. The value of self-care in terms of quality of life is also expected to significantly increase by more than 70% in comparison to current scenario. [3]

Singapore: Overview

The Ministry of Health (MOH) in 2016 introduced the "Three Beyond" strategy – namely, beyond healthcare to health, beyond hospital to community and beyond quality to value. [4] [5] [6] The "beyond healthcare to health" strategy aims to address long-term healthcare demands sustainably by promoting healthy lifestyle choices and early interventions to prevent diseases and sustain individuals in good health, all of which underpins the importance of self-care. The government recognizes that healthcare delivery guided by individuals, families, and communities is often the most effective and inexpensive, while fostering a greater sense of wellbeing. [7]

In 2014, the Health Living Masterplan was introduced to promote healthy living as a natural, easy, and accessible option for all Singaporeans. [8] To enable diabetic patients to take control of their treatment journey, MOH created a Patient Empowerment for Self-Care Framework as part of the War on Diabetes initiative in 2019. [9] The government has also set up a dedicated one-stop health portal called HealthHub to provide information on how to treat minor illnesses and manage chronic diseases. [10] [11] In 2022, MOH released the national population health strategy known as "Healthier SG". Its goal is to encourage Singaporeans to adopt healthy lifestyles by utilizing the infrastructure, technology, and community power to create One Family Physician and One Health Plan for everyone. [12]

The government has also invested in many health education and prevention campaigns and initiatives, including the "MOVE IT" campaign, My Healthy Plate[i], an easy-to-understand visual guide to help people adopt healthier eating habits by the Health Promotion Board and Local pharmacists' associations organize annual campaigns during September's Pharmacy Week to communicate key messages to public such as: Own your health, Know Your Medicines, Just Ask Your Pharmacist. [13] [14]

Recommendations

- Increase awareness and accountability towards responsible self-care by increasing self-care literacy and the prominent role of pharmacists.
- Assure the quality and accessibility of digital health information on HealthHub.
- Embed the concept of self-care into the highest possible policy recommendations in particular in the national population health strategy "Healthier Singapore" to raise awareness for self-care.
- Continue to invest in health education and prevention campaigns and initiatives in order to grow self-care literacy.

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 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
- 4 United Nations, World Population Ageing Report. United Nations, 2017.
- 5 Government of Singapore. How the Government keeps healthcare costs affordable in the face of rising global healthcare costs. Government of Singapore, 2021.
- 6 Ministry of Health Singapore [MOH]. MOH News Highlight - Smoking rates down, chronic disease prevalence remains of concern. Government of Singapore, 2021. Available at: <https://www.moh.gov.sg/news-highlights/details/smoking-rates-down-chronic-disease-prevalence-remains-of-concern>
- 7 Phan, T.P., et al., Forecasting the burden of type 2 diabetes in Singapore using a demographic epidemiological model of Singapore. *BMJ Open Diabetes Research & Care*, 2014. 2(1): p. e000012.
- 8 Tan, C.C., et al., Singapore's health-care system: key features, challenges, and shifts. *The Lancet*, 2021. 398(10305): p. 1091-1104.
- 9 Ministry of Health Singapore and Health Promotion Board [MOH and HPB], Healthy Living Master Plan. Government of Singapore, 2014.
- 10 Ministry of Health Singapore [MOH]. MOH COS 2019 Factsheet on Empowering Singaporeans to live healthily. Government of Singapore, 2019.
- 11 Healthhub. Self Care and Self Medication. 2016. Available at: <https://www.healthhub.sg/a-z/medications/39/Self-Care-and-Self-Medication>
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- 13 Ministry of Health Singapore [MOH]. Promoting overall healthier living while targeting specific sub-populations. Government of Singapore, 2022. Available at: <https://www.moh.gov.sg/news-highlights/details/promoting-overall-healthier-living-while-targeting-specific-sub-populations>
- 14 HealthHub. My Healthy Plate. Available at: <https://www.healthhub.sg/programmes/55/my-healthy-plate>
- 15 Pharmaceutical Society of Singapore [PSS]. Pharmacy Week 2021. 2021. Available at: <https://www.pss.org.sg/pharmweeksg>
- 16 Health Product Regulation Group [HPRG], Annual Report 2020/2021. 2021. p. 8.