



SELF-CARE AND COST-EFFICIENCY

THE BIG PICTURE

Health systems worldwide are under increasing financial pressure. Persistent fiscal constraints and insufficient public financing for health are limiting governments' ability to meet the expanding health needs of their populations.

- In low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), public health spending has stagnated in recent years. Although per capita health expenditures increased by 60% between 2000 and 2022, much of this growth in LMICs was driven by a rise in out-of-pocket expenses — the most inequitable form of financing health services.¹
- Demographic transitions, a shifting disease burden, increasing demand for services, and persistent inefficiencies are driving up costs and intensifying pressure on health systems.
 - » Aging populations and the rising prevalence of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) are contributing to higher service demand, increased treatment costs, and productivity losses.²
 - » Health workforce shortages — with a projected global shortfall of 11 million health workers by 2030 — are compromising both access to and quality of services, particularly in underserved regions.³
 - » Out-of-pocket expenditures remain a major barrier to care, pushing 1.3 billion people into poverty or further impoverishment in 2019.⁴
 - » Many systems face inefficient allocation of resources, where limited budgets are often absorbed by higher-level specialist care rather than more cost-effective primary health care (PHC) and preventive services.⁵

THE ROLE OF SELF-CARE

When effectively integrated into the health system, self-care has the potential to significantly reduce the costs associated with obtaining or providing healthcare, benefiting individuals, healthcare systems, and governments.

Benefits for Health Systems

- Self-care interventions help reduce costs, improve efficiency, and maintain continuity of care. By complementing or substituting facility-based services, they ease pressure on health providers and facilities, allowing resources to be directed toward people with more complex needs.⁶

- For example, expanding access to over-the-counter (OTC) products, digital health tools, and self-administered diagnostics or treatments can reduce avoidable clinic visits and relieve the burden on frontline providers, as demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Globally, self-care interventions are estimated to generate approximately \$119 billion in monetary savings, over 10.9 billion hours in individual time savings, and 1.8 billion hours in physician time savings annually.⁷

Benefits for Individuals

- Self-care strengthens individual autonomy by enabling people to make informed decisions about their own health, while also enhancing privacy and confidentiality, all of which are particularly critical for sensitive and stigmatized conditions such as HIV and abortion.
- Self-care reduces the time, travel, and financial costs of accessing facility-based services, particularly in areas with limited health infrastructure.
- By empowering people to manage their own health, self-care can reduce the cost associated with delayed treatment, complications, and hospitalizations.

THE CALL TO ACTION

Join the Self-Care Trailblazer Group (SCTG) in urging policymakers and other key stakeholders to recognize self-care as a key solution to strengthening health systems, reducing costs and accelerating progress toward Universal Health Coverage (UHC).

- Integrate self-care interventions into primary health care and health financing mechanisms as a key strategy to improve cost efficiency, reduce pressure on overstretched services, and expand access for underserved communities. Ensure dedicated, sustained financing for self-care within health budgets to make it accessible for all.
- Advocate for the implementation of the WHO consolidated guideline on self-care interventions for health and wellbeing.
- Invest in training and equipping health providers to support self-care practices — shifting mindsets and roles to embrace self-care as a complement to facility-based services and a means to optimize resources.
- Promote multi-sectoral collaboration among government ministries, civil society, and the private sector to expand access to self-care solutions that enhance system efficiency and equity.
- Champion self-care as a smart investment to address the growing financial challenges within global health systems, positioning it as a priority in high-level global health forums.

DIG DEEPER

- [The Global Socio and Economic Value of Self-Care](#)
- [Driving Change: the push for a WHO resolution on self-care](#)
- [World Health Organization Guideline on Self-Care Interventions for Health and Well-Being](#)
- [Self Care Costing and Financing Technical Brief](#)

REFERENCES

1. Fletcher ER. Public health spending in low income countries stagnates – out of pocket costs soar. *Health Policy Watch*. 2024, healthpolicy-watch.news/public-health-spending-in-low-income-countries-stagnates-out-of-pocket-costs-soar.
2. NCD Alliance. Financing for noncommunicable diseases. NCD Alliance. [date unknown], ncdalliance.org/why-ncds/financing-ncds.
3. World Health Organization. Health workforce. Geneva: WHO; [date unknown], www.who.int/health-topics/health-workforce#tab=tab_1.
4. WHO and World Bank Group. *Tracking universal health coverage: 2023 global monitoring report*, Washington, DC: World Bank; 2023, openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/1ced1b12-896e-49f1-ab6f-f1a95325f39b.
5. Hanson K, Brikci N, Erlangga D, Alebachew A, De Allegri M, Balabanova D, et al. The Lancet Global Health Commission on financing primary health care: putting people at the centre. *Lancet Glob Health*. 2022 May;10(5):e715–e772. Erratum in: *Lancet Glob Health*. 2023 Apr;11(4):e504.
6. Global Self-Care Federation. Self-care and universal health coverage. Global Self-Care Federation; 2019, www.selfcarefederation.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/2019-09/Self-Care%20and%20UHC_FINAL.pdf.
7. Bauer C., May U. Pham T-K., Giulini-Limbach C., Schneider-Ziebe A. *The Global Social and Economic Value of Self-Care*. Global Self-Care Federation; 2022, www.selfcarefederation.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/2022-08/GSCF%20Socio-Economic%20Research%20Report%2028072022.pdf.