



SELF-CARE AND HEALTH LITERACY

THE BIG PICTURE

Effective self-care is grounded in people's health literacy, making this foundational pillar of self-care a critical area for policy attention and investment.

- Health literacy is the key in the ignition of self-care. It refers to the knowledge, motivation and competencies of individuals, families and communities to promote health, prevent disease, manage illness and maintain well-being, with or without the support of a health and care provider.¹ Health literacy extends beyond just acquiring useful knowledge to also having the confidence and capability to apply that knowledge to positively impact people's daily lives, their personal health and wellbeing journey.
- Self-care literacy includes awareness of the other important pillars of self-care, including: **1)** health literacy, **2)** mental wellbeing, **3)** healthy eating, **4)** physical activity, **5)** risk avoidance, **6)** good hygiene practices and **7)** the rational use of products and services. It also includes health literacy and other literacy types e.g., digital literacy, which is key to one's ability to engage with technology.

Globally, health literacy specifically in the context of promoting self-care is rapidly gaining attention due to several factors.^{1,2,3}

- Evidence shows that people with strong health literacy are more likely to take preventive action, make informed decisions and maintain better health and wellbeing. Conversely, those with limited health literacy may engage in riskier behaviors and experience worse health outcomes.
- Many education systems do not traditionally equip individuals with the skills to understand and apply health information. Modern health systems are also becoming even more complex and often difficult to navigate with many touchpoints being replaced with technology or 'digital first' access points.
- These challenges are particularly acute in low- and middle-income countries, where barriers such as limited access to services, low literacy levels, linguistic and cultural diversity coupled with overstretched health systems further constrain one's ability to self-care.
- Strengthening health literacy, with a renewed focus on self-care and empowerment, is critical to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and transforming health systems to deliver quality, people-centered and equitable care.²

THE ROLE OF HEALTH LITERACY IN SELF-CARE

Self-care delivers the greatest value when people are health-literate, understand the importance of prevention and health promotion, and feel empowered to make informed decisions.¹

- Health literacy is a key enabler of self-care. It empowers individuals and communities to confidently manage their health and know when and how to seek care.
- Self-care practices enhance autonomy, agency and decision-making. When individuals have the knowledge and confidence to manage their own health, they are more likely to recognize symptoms, interpret information correctly, and seek timely care. On the other hand, low health literacy can contribute to poor self-management, delayed care and increased health risks.
- Self-care literacy is especially important for the safe and responsible use of self-care tools, products and services, including over-the-counter medicines, self-diagnostics and digital health technologies.⁴
- Health literacy also plays a critical role in reducing barriers to care. When individuals have the necessary information and skills to understand and use self-care tools, they are more likely to overcome challenges related to stigma, cost, convenience and to know how to navigate the digital health landscape, especially when it comes to consent and to sharing anonymized or confidential data.
- In contexts where access to traditional health services is limited, health-literate individuals are better positioned to make informed decisions and engage safely in safe and effective self-care practices.
- Evidence shows that improved health literacy enhances self-efficacy and long-term self-care behaviors, particularly in managing chronic conditions, leading to better outcomes and economic benefits for individuals and healthcare systems.⁵

THE CALL TO ACTION

Please join the Self-Care Trailblazer Group (SCTG) to promote self-care literacy for all.

1. Encourage governments to make health literacy and self-care promotion a priority policy by integrating it into national health strategies, primary healthcare policies and health programs.
2. Emphasize that investing in self-care and health literacy can lower costs, and promote a healthier, happier and more empowered population.
3. Invest in self-care literacy initiatives that reflect community needs, cultures and languages. These initiatives should be co-created with local actors to promote ownership and sustainability.
4. Build literacy across all stakeholders by equipping individuals, providers and policymakers with tools, training, and resources to support informed self-care.
5. Embed health literacy in education, workforce training and promote uptake using accreditation schemes.
6. Embed mechanisms to strengthen data and evidence by integrating health literacy indicators into monitoring systems.
7. Make health literacy a national priority to promote self-care journey of people across the age groups and from all walks of life.

DIG DEEPER

- [The Seven Pillars of Self-Care](#)
- [Health Literacy Interactive Dashboard](#)
- [Health Literacy Fact Sheets](#)
- [Self-Care Literacy: empowering people, organizations, and systems to maintain and promote self-care](#)

REFERENCES

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