



SELF-CARE, PRIMARY HEALTH CARE, AND UNIVERSAL HEALTH COVERAGE

THE BIG PICTURE

Despite country commitments, global progress toward universal health coverage is off track.

- World leaders have committed to achieving universal health coverage (UHC) by 2030. UHC means that all people can access a full range of essential, quality health services they need when and where needed, without facing financial hardship.
- Progress toward UHC has stalled, with staggering human costs.
 - » In 2021, more than 4.5 billion people lacked access to essential health services.¹
 - » Of the 2 billion people facing financial hardship, 1.3 billion were pushed or further pushed into poverty in 2019 due to out-of-pocket healthcare costs.²
 - » Key indicators in global health are plateauing or regressing – rates of maternal mortality have not improved since 2015, childhood immunizations have stagnated, and non-communicable diseases are rising.¹
- There is a projected shortfall of 11.1 million healthcare workers by 2030, particularly in low- and lower-middle-income countries, further hindering UHC goals.¹
- Primary health care (PHC) is widely regarded as the most inclusive, equitable, and cost-effective way to achieve UHC. It can provide up to 90 percent of health services during a person's lifetime.³ Yet PHC systems, especially in low-resource settings, are chronically underfunded, understaffed, and overstretched.
- The promise of UHC is further challenged during times of conflict, climate disaster, or health crisis, often leaving vulnerable and marginalized groups, especially women and girls, with limited access to essential health services.

THE ROLE OF SELF-CARE

Self-care is a powerful yet underutilized approach to strengthening PHC, advancing UHC, and accelerating progress toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

- The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends self-care interventions for every country and economic setting and has issued global guidance on scaling up evidence-based self-care interventions for health and well-being.
- Self-care is an integral and complementary component of PHC systems. It is not meant to replace the health care system or shift costs to individuals. Instead, it provides additional choices and options for individuals to self-manage their health.
- Self-care eases pressure on overstretched health systems, reduces costs, and improves the effectiveness of care, ultimately contributing to achieving UHC.⁴ Modeling suggests it delivers \$119 billion in global financial savings annually while freeing up 1.8 billion physician hours, allowing healthcare providers to focus on more critical conditions.⁵
- Self-care has the potential to transform healthcare by making it more accessible, equitable, resilient, and convenient. This is especially important for vulnerable and marginalized populations, including women and girls, adolescents, and young people, rural populations, those in humanitarian or climate-affected crises, and stigmatized groups, such as people living with HIV and sex workers.

THE CALL TO ACTION

Join the Self-Care Trailblazer Group (SCTG) in calling for strong policies and investment in self-care within well-functioning PHC systems to accelerate progress toward UHC.

- Support global policies, programs, financing, and regulations that aim to institutionalize self-care as an integral part of health systems, ensuring they are inclusive of vulnerable and marginalized populations, including indigenous communities.
- Ensure self-care is integrated in PHC and social protection policies, programs, and services as a means to advance UHC, supported by strong legal frameworks, financing mechanisms, and other support systems.
- Advocate for the adaptation, adoption, and implementation of the WHO self-care guideline, including in humanitarian and climate-affected settings.
- Prioritize pre- and in-service training and capacity building for healthcare providers and shape their attitude to actively supporting patient-led care.
- Ensure adequate and sustainable financing for self-care within the health system to make it affordable and accessible for all.
- Foster collaboration across sectors, including governments, civil society, and the private sector, to develop sustainable and equitable self-care interventions that drive UHC progress.
- Champion self-care as a critical accelerator of UHC at the annual World Health Assembly and in future high-level meetings on UHC.

DIG DEEPER

Consult these resources to learn more about self-care, primary healthcare, and UHC.

- Self-care interventions for sexual and reproductive health and rights to advance universal health coverage: 2023 Joint statement by HRP, WHO, UNDP, UNFPA, and the World Bank
- Self-care interventions and universal health coverage
- Untapped Potential: Unlocking Self-Care for Global Health Progress
- Self-Care for UHC Advocacy Toolkit
- The role of Self-Care in Universal Health Coverage
- World Health Organization Guideline on Self-Care Interventions for Health and Well-Being
- PSI HSS insights series- integrating self-care as a layer of the health system

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