



# SELF-CARE AND THE HEALTH WORKFORCE

## THE BIG PICTURE

The growing mismatch between the number of health workers\* needed to provide essential health services and the availability of trained personnel poses a significant threat to health systems worldwide.

- The global health workforce is facing an unprecedented crisis, with an estimated shortfall of 11 million health workers by 2030, predominantly in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).<sup>1</sup>
- This shortage is widely recognized as a major barrier to achieving universal health coverage (UHC) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).<sup>2</sup>
- At the same time, the need for health workers is rising and becoming increasingly complex due to demographic shifts, including ageing populations and workforce, an increasing burden of non-communicable diseases, and more frequent health emergencies, further straining overstretched health systems.<sup>3</sup>
- The consequences include: limited access to services, compromised quality of care, and burnout among health workers.<sup>4</sup>
- In many settings, health workers are overburdened with tasks that could be managed at the individual, household, or community level, further reducing their ability to provide essential care.
- Yet, many are not adequately trained to support clients who wish to self-care, limiting their ability to empower individuals and communities.

## THE ROLE OF HEALTH LITERACY IN SELF-CARE

Self-care can ease the burden on health workers and optimize the use of limited healthcare resources.

- Self-care enables individuals, families, and communities to take an active role in promoting wellness, preventing disease, and managing illness, complementing formal healthcare services and helping to bridge access gaps.
- It is increasingly recognized as essential to address workforce shortages, adapt to demographic shifts, and improve health system resilience.<sup>5</sup>
- Self-care supports broader task-sharing efforts by enabling individuals or less specialized providers to take on routine care, allowing highly trained health workers to focus on more complex cases.
- When integrated and regulated effectively, self-care becomes an integral part of the health system, not a replacement, offering people options to manage their health safely and effectively.

\* The World Health Organization (WHO) defines health workers as “all people engaged in activities whose primary intent is to enhance health”, including doctors, nurses, midwives, public health professionals, community health workers, and others (WHO, 2022: [www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/occupational-health--health-workers](http://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/occupational-health--health-workers)).

- Self-care interventions, including self-administered diagnostics, over-the-counter medication, and digital health tools, enable individuals to manage aspects of their health independently, reducing unnecessary visits to healthcare facilities and easing provider workloads.
- Global modeling suggests self-care could save up to 1.8 billion hours in physician time worldwide (5), easing provider workloads and improving system efficiency.
- Beyond relieving pressure on health systems, self-care enhances the client experience and health outcomes by offering greater privacy, helping individuals manage their health between clinical visits, and supporting more personalized and proactive care.
- Health workers, including pharmacists, play a key role in realizing the potential of self-care interventions. Their support, education, and guidance ensure safe practices and reinforce the critical link between self-care and the broader health system, maximizing benefits for both individuals and providers.

## THE CALL TO ACTION

Join the Self-Care Trailblazer Group (SCTG) to elevate self-care as a key strategy to support health workers and advance more resilient, people-centered health systems.

- Integrate self-care within relevant policies and strategies, recognizing it as a complementary approach that supports the health workforce, enhances system efficiency, and expands access to care. This includes advancing policy and regulatory reforms to enable wider access to high-quality self-care interventions, such as over-the-counter essential medicines and self-diagnostics, through community pharmacies and other channels.
- Expand access and generate demand for self-care by advocating for investing in mobile health tools, telemedicine, health literacy programs, and behavior change communication strategies that build awareness, normalize self-care practices, and support safe self-care adoption.
- Empower health workers as self-care champions by integrating self-care into pre-service and in-service training, fostering provider attitudes that view self-care as a complement, not a threat, to their professional role, and equipping them with practical tools and ongoing mentorship to support safe and confident self-care adoption.
- Ensure private sector providers, including pharmacists, are included in policy, regulatory, and implementation strategies to strengthen access to self-care solutions.
- Ensure professional health associations are recognized as key partners and leveraged as platforms to engage health providers in the institutionalization of self-care.

## DIG DEEPER

- [Self-Care Competency Framework – Global Competency Standards for Health and Care Workers to Support People’s Self-Care](#)
- [The Global Socio and Economic Value of Self- Care](#)
- [World Health Organization Guideline on Self-Care Interventions for Health and Well-Being](#)
- [Empowering Self-Care: A handbook for pharmacists](#)
- [FIP Knowledge and Skills Reference Guide for Pharmacists supporting Self-Care](#)
- [FIP Statement of Policy. Pharmacy: Gateway to Care](#)
- [A midwife shares her experience in championing the self-injectable contraception](#)

## REFERENCES

1. World Health Organization. *Health workforce*. Geneva: WHO; [date unknown]. [www.who.int/health-topics/health-workforce#tab=tab\\_1](http://www.who.int/health-topics/health-workforce#tab=tab_1).
2. Boniol M, Kunjumen T, Nair TS, Siyam A, Campbell J, Diallo K. The global health workforce stock and distribution in 2020 and 2030: a threat to equity and ‘universal’ health coverage? *BMJ Glob Health*. 2022 Jun;7(6):e009316. doi: 10.1136/bmjgh-2022-009316. PMID: 35760437; PMCID: PMC9237893.
3. Agyeman-Manu K, Khalif A, Ndashimye E, al-Mandhari A, Ghebreyesus TA. Prioritising the health and care workforce shortage: protect, invest, together. *Lancet Glob Health*. 2023;11(8):e1162–4.
4. 4Džakula A, Relić D. Health workforce shortage - doing the right things or doing things right? *Croat Med J*. 2022 Apr 30;63(2):107-109.
5. 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](http://www.selfcarefederation.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/2022-08/GSCF%20Socio-Economic%20Research%20Report%2028072022.pdf).

