

CANADA: 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]

An Economic and Social Value of Self-Care Report launched in 2022 found that the cost containment of self-care is of most significance in the North America region, with currently generates more than \$27.1 billion in savings generated through current self-care practices. Additionally, over 1.4 billion hours are saved in total due to avoided travel, waiting and consultation time, while 345 million hours are freed up for physicians to attend to people with more complex medical needs. Almost 2.6 billion working days are gained through the practice of self-care with OTC products.

Additionally, due to the high average incomes per capita in this region, welfare gains are also highly notable and can be reported as a monetary value of approximately \$600 billion in productivity gains. In the future, the value of self-care could reach a cost containment value of \$37 billion.

Moreover, through the growth in the number of productive days which may be gained, welfare gains of more than \$809 billion are projected. Focusing on time savings, about two billion hours are projected to be saved by individuals due to the avoidance of unnecessary physician visits through self-care practices while 475 million hours will be saved by physicians, enabling more than 219,000 physicians to be freed up to see people who most need them. [2]

Canada: Overview

The Self-Care Readiness Index suggests that healthcare providers in Canada are aware and supportive of self-care. For example, self-care and associated concepts appear extensively in Canadian diabetes and cardiovascular medical guidelines. Pharmacists in Canada also understand and support the concept of self-care. In 2018, the Association of Faculties of Pharmacy of Canada (AFPC) formed a Self-Care Therapeutics and Minor Ailments (SCTMA) special interest group (SIG), demonstrating growing recognition of the importance of self-care. [3]

Federal policy makers have recognized self-care through Health Canada's commitment to achieve a consistent, risk-based approach to regulating all self-care products through the Self-Care Framework. [4] A study by the Conference Board of Canada found that one billion dollars could be freed up in the Canadian healthcare system and broader economy by switching just three categories of products. The study estimated switching proton-pump inhibitors, erectile dysfunction drugs and oral contraceptives could reduce drug costs by \$458 million, save \$290 million through fewer doctor visits, and generate a \$290 million boost to Canada's workers and economy annually. [5]

A FHCP poll from 2020 found that almost all Canadians (95%) agree that "Canadians need more tools to care for themselves and a strong, resilient publicly-funded healthcare system there for when they can't." Overall, 96% of Canadians agree with the concept of self-care, and 87% believe the federal government should develop a National Self-Care Strategy. [6]

A 2017 survey by Consumer Health Products Canada (FHCP) found the health literacy of Canadians compares well with Europeans in terms of knowledge and disease prevention, though Canadians struggle more with navigating the healthcare system, while finding it easier to judge different treatment options. [7]

In November 2020, Food, Health & Consumer Products of Canada (FHCP) published a Blueprint for a National Self-Care Strategy. In the Blueprint, FHCP states that while most Canadians are already practicing self-care, they lack the appropriate tools and policy framework to maximize these efforts. The Blueprint suggests building a foundational, federal level self-care strategy through increased health literacy and changes to the regulatory and fiscal (e.g., tax) environments to optimize use of self-care products and services. [8]

Health literacy is gaining momentum on the health policy agenda. For example, Health Canada has taken initial steps toward leveraging OTC e-labelling so certain lower risk products can make "point of use" information available online instead of on product labels. [9] On July 20, 2022, Health Canada launched two new sets of regulations that will bring improvements to food labels in Canada, which bodes well with people empowerment and self-care. [10][11]

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**SAVED IN NORTH
AMERICA THROUGH
SELF-CARE PRACTICES**

96%

**OF CANADIANS AGREE WITH
THE CONCEPT OF SELF-
CARE**

87%

**OF CANADIANS WANT A
NATIONAL SELF-CARE
STRATEGY**

Recommendations

- Build on the “Blueprint for a National Self-Care Strategy” published by FHCP in order to raise awareness for self-care with policymakers and advocate for a stand-alone self-care strategy.
- Advocate for a federal-level health literacy framework, building on the Self-Care Framework of Health Canada.
- Formalize the concept of self-care in medical guidelines, similarly to what can be found in the current 2017 Comprehensive Update of the Canadian Cardiovascular Society Guidelines for the Management of Heart Failure and the Canadian Diabetes Guidelines, and provide healthcare providers with the tools and frameworks to implement self-care in their daily practice.
- Streamline the process to switch prescription products to OTC – currently, Canada’s switch process is built on overlapping federal and provincial processes, which makes switching challenging and potentially confusing to consumers.

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%202022062022.pdf

[3] AFPC Special Interest Groups. Association of Faculties of Pharmacy of Canada. Available at: <https://afpc.info/content/afpc-special-interest-groups-0>

[4] Self-Care Products. Government of Canada. Available at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/topics/self-care-products.html>

[5] Value of Consumer Health Products. The Conference Board of Canada, 2022. Available at: https://www.fhcp.ca/Portals/0/Userfiles/REGResources/SCRI%20-%20Self-Care%20Readiness%20Index/8681_EcolImpactsRxTtoOTC_RPT.pdf?ver=2022-01-24-085338-073

[6] Canadians Want a National Self-Care Strategy to Help Protect the Public Healthcare System. Abacus Data, 2022. Available at: <https://www.fhcp.ca/Portals/0/Userfiles/REGResources/SCRI%20-%20Self-Care%20Readiness%20Index/Abacus%20Release%20-%20FHCP%20-%20January%202021%20-%20v1.pdf?ver=2022-01-24-084359-603>

[7] Canadians’ Strong Health Literacy Scores Tied to Good Health Status, But Navigating Health System Remains a Challenge. Consumer Health Products Canada, 2017. Available at:

<https://selfcare.ca/wp-system1/uploads/2017/07/ISCD-New-Release-Final-EN.pdf>

[8] Ibid.

[9] Smart Label. Available at: <https://smartlabelcanada.org/ca-en>

[10] Front-of-package nutrition labelling. Health Canada. Accessed August 2022. Available at:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-labelling-changes/front-package.html#a1>

[11] About supplemented foods and their labels. Health Canada. Accessed August 2022. Available at:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-nutrition/supplemented-foods/about.html>