



The Self-Care Solution: A Commitment to Improving Maternal, Newborn and Child Health Worldwide that Leaves No One Behind

Frequently Asked Questions

About Self-Care

1. What is self-care?

Self-care is having the knowledge and resources to direct your own health or that of a loved one. A variety of behaviors and activities are part of self-care, including daily choices on exercise, diet, hygiene and the responsible and appropriate use of medication. Self-care empowers people to manage their own health and to understand when to seek support from a healthcare professional. Self-care is foundational to healthcare and wellness.

2. What are some examples of self-care practices or activities?

Self-care encompasses a broad spectrum of activities, including many for maternal, newborn and child health:

- Access to tools and information that improve health literacy, promote better maternal, newborn and child nutrition and overall wellness.
- Healthy lifestyle choices, such as appropriate rest or physical activity.
- Eating nutritious foods for adequate growth and development before, during and after pregnancy; exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of a child's life.
- Effective use of self-care products such as bed nets for malaria and iron supplements during pregnancy
- Developing a birth plan
- Self-diagnosis, which involves making a risk assessment of warning signs and symptoms based on access to the proper information and self-care learning tools.
- Self-treatment through the responsible use of medication and self-monitoring by checking on signs and symptoms that suggest a change in health condition that may require medical attention.

3. Why is self-care important now?

Self-care has the potential to improve individual health with an impact that can last generations. Research shows that patients worldwide want to take part in maintaining their health and that of their loved ones. It also shows that adults can care for many chronic illnesses with good self-care practices.¹ Self-care enables people to also understand when to seek treatment or advice from a health care professional.²

¹ "Sustainable Health Systems, Visions, Strategies, Critical Uncertainties and Scenarios," Report from the World Economic Forum Prepared in Collaboration with McKinsey & Company, 2013

² "Self-Care in Health: We Can Define It, But Should We Also Measure It?" David Webber, Self-Care Journal, 2013



Empowering patients to care for their own health not only enables better individual and community health but it also makes health care exponentially more sustainable.³

Self-care is a vital contributor to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly in achieving Healthier Lives. As we approach the one-year anniversary of Bayer's and White Ribbon Alliance's commitment to the United Nations *Every Woman Every Child* movement, progress has been made. However, there is a need for programs with a greater emphasis on prevention, health promotion and self-care to help women and families have the knowledge and resources to care for themselves when possible.

Case for Self-Care

4. Why is self-care important in maternal, newborn & child health?

Self-care is an essential component of maternal, newborn and child health (MNCH). It empowers women and their families by providing the knowledge, skills and confidence to take control of their health and:

- Proactively maintain healthy pregnancies.
- Prevent complications.
- Protect children's health.
- Defend their rights.
- Identify emergency situations.
- Make daily choices regarding nutrition and hygiene.

MNCH self-care increases positive outcomes, leading to happy, healthy and productive mothers, children and families. It reduces negative outcomes, which decreases individual and health system costs. For example, interventions such as iron supplementation and antenatal care reduce the chances of complications, thus reducing stress and anxiety for mother and baby, alleviating the already heavy workload for providers, and improving overall quality of care.

5. Is there any measurable evidence to make the case for self-care?

Empowering patients to care for their own health makes health care exponentially more sustainable. Studies have shown that as much as 90 percent of the care a person needs to manage a chronic disease must come directly from the patient.⁴

Research has demonstrated that enabling patients to actively participate in all aspects of their care, such as choices about treatment and self-management, results in better adherence to medications and improved management of long-term conditions without increasing costs.⁵ Self-care also eases the burden on overstretched health systems, reduces costs for patient and provider, and increases health care effectiveness. By decreasing unnecessary visits to physicians, self-care allows health systems to direct human capital and other resources to more complex needs that require trained health professionals.

6. Why do we need to call for policy action to support self-care?

Previous self-care efforts have not achieved broad reform, focusing instead on disease-specific or

³ "Sustainable Health Systems, Visions, Strategies, Critical Uncertainties and Scenarios," Report from the World Economic Forum Prepared in Collaboration with McKinsey & Company, 2013

⁴ "People-Centered Care: A Policy Framework," WHO Western Pacific Region, Conference Report, 2007

⁵ "Developing Physician Communications Skills for Patient-Centered Care," *Health Affairs*, 2010



physician-specific initiatives. But self-care must start more broadly and focus on the individual in order to be effective for long-term health impact personally, societally, and over generations.

Systemic and structural changes are necessary in global, national and local health policy systems to address obstacles to self-care and set out tangible ways to integrate self-care into health systems. To be truly effective in changing health outcomes, self-care relies on a supportive government and community environment that empowers people to trust themselves, know their rights and take actions to improve their health and the health of their community.

Partnership between Bayer and the White Ribbon Alliance as Part of the United Nations Every Woman Every Child Initiative

7. What will Bayer and the White Ribbon Alliance work to accomplish?

Bayer and White Ribbon Alliance (WRA) have partnered on a three-year initiative to support the reduction and prevention of maternal, newborn and child mortality in developing countries. On July 18, on the occasion of the High Level Political Forum, the partnership released critical policy recommendations and announced the launch of two community implementation programs. This announcement comes at the one-year anniversary of the Bayer/White Ribbon Alliance commitment in support of the *Every Woman Every Child* movement and will contribute to the success of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The programs will help underserved women and their families gain the self-care knowledge, skills and confidence to take charge of their personal and family health before, during and after childbirth – throughout a lifetime. The implementation effort, led by White Ribbon Alliance, will focus on critical health issues and barriers to care, including nutrition, prevention and minor treatments; hygiene; and self-care policy advancement and advocacy. The partnership includes the jointly released self-care policy paper that underscores the potential power of self-care to drive forward recommended global policies and interventions.

8. What has Bayer invested in the initiative?

Bayer believes that the promotion of self-care is important for better individual health and more sustainable health care systems. The promotion of self-care is consistent with our mission of Science for a Better Life - in this case applying health knowledge for a better life. Specifically, this work will focus on improving self-care programs for mothers and their children and will contribute to best practice learning and expanded partnerships in self-care. It will start with two community-based self-care intervention programs in Bangladesh and Zimbabwe, and has been established through a three-year \$1.3 million commitment from Bayer that will support the work being done by the White Ribbon Alliance and the United Nations.

9. What are the plans for the partnership's on-ground work?

Specific projects in Bangladesh and Zimbabwe that champion self-care in maternal, newborn, and child health will begin this year. Specifically, the programs will:

- Improve birth preparedness and increase awareness and knowledge of birth complications.
- Establish community systems and groups to respond to pregnancy and child birth emergencies, promote birth preparedness, essential newborn care and arrange for transportation for pregnant women.
- Strengthen health facilities' responsiveness and accountability to help women with child birth, complications and emergencies.



- Empower women and groups supporting pregnant women to address women's issues and advance self-care public policy – most importantly around sexual and reproductive health.

10. What is discussed in the newly released policy paper?

Self-Care: A Cost Effective Solution for Maternal, Newborn & Child Health for All calls for everyone to be “Champions of Self-care,” underscoring the potential power of self-care to drive forward recommended global policies and interventions. Bayer and WRA have outlined the systemic and structural changes necessary in global, national and local health policy systems to address obstacles to self-care in MNCH and set out tangible ways to integrate self-care into health systems.

Previous self-care efforts have not achieved broad reform, focusing instead on disease-specific or physician-specific initiatives. But self-care must start more broadly and focus on the individual in order to be effective for long-term health impact personally, societally, and over generations.

Key elements that must be addressed to make a lasting impact:

- There is a powerful role for the World Health Organization and other international agencies to play in supporting the research, measurement, education and promotion of self-care for women as empowered agents of their own care.
- National governments must commit to enabling self-care. It is foundational to healthcare and individuals' wellness. Not only that, but it's a smart investment - we've seen in Australia that self-care saves AUD \$10.4 billion annually, but governments must take steps to support it to realize these savings. This includes from encouraging intra-government collaboration with Education and Science ministries to supporting innovation such as mobile health applications for maternal, newborn and child self-care.
- With the knowledge gap as a persistent issue, there is a clear role for professional associations and training institutions to implement educational initiatives around counseling skills and support to improve patient health literacy. These associations and groups should also issue guidelines that outline self-care and the importance of the provider-patient relationship in bolstering self-care effectiveness.
- We must ensure that maternal newborn and child health advocates and donors continue to support long-term, cross-sector initiatives, especially among the advocacy community, to impact systemic change for the enabling of self-care.

###