



SELF-CARE

A Cost Effective Solution for Maternal, Newborn & Child Health for All

Introduction & Definition

Self-Care in health refers to the activities individuals, families and communities undertake with the intention of enhancing health, preventing disease, limiting illness and restoring health. These activities are derived from knowledge and skills from the pool of both professional and lay experience. They are undertaken by lay people on their own behalf, either separately or in participative collaboration with professionals.

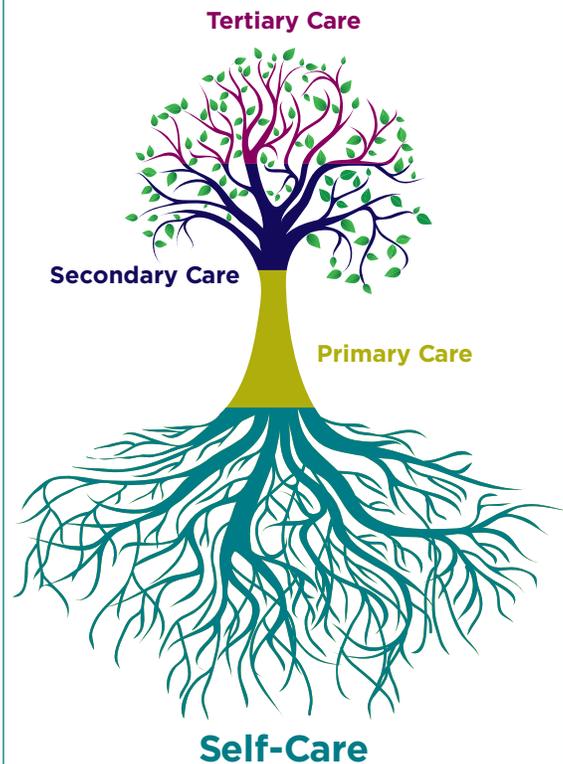
Summary

As a means to meet global maternal, newborn and child health (MNCH) targets, self-care has enormous potential. When promoted throughout the lifecycle and as an essential part of MNCH, self-care empowers women and their families with the knowledge, skills and confidence to proactively maintain healthy pregnancies, prevent complications, protect children's health, defend their rights and identify emergencies, particularly at the community and individual levels. Despite its proven potential, donors, advocates, policy-makers and practitioners often overlook self-care in favor of clinical interventions and disease-specific, top-down approaches to MNCH.

MNCH self-care includes such life-saving activities as taking iron supplements during pregnancy, reacting appropriately to warning signs of obstetric emergencies, breastfeeding and treating diarrhea correctly at home. Self-care has the potential to significantly contribute to a world where every woman—no matter her means or status—is safe and healthy before, during and after childbirth. Yet, as a pathway to gains in global MNCH, self-care needs a shared vision amongst the many stakeholders in this dynamic field, and now is the time to elevate self-care to its rightful position within global, national and district-level policymakers.

Support for self-care, however, cannot represent an abdication of government responsibility for protecting and promoting health, nor a shift of the burden of health costs onto individuals. Barriers to effective self-care practices must be seen as primarily structural, stemming from systemic failures to create the conditions necessary for self-care. Otherwise, self-care may become just one more thing that individuals, especially women, are pressured to engage in—and judged if they do not—without having access to adequate resources.

Self-Care: The Root of Health Care



Find our full policy recommendations at: whiteribbonalliance.org/self-care

Every action to achieve well-being—whether taken by a medical provider or individual—is a healthcare activity.

Global leaders have the opportunity to position self-care as a right and an essential intervention, not an add-on.

White Ribbon Alliance Bangladesh

White Ribbon Alliance Bangladesh launched a self-care project targeting the most vulnerable communities in the Patuakhali District. Facing severe natural disasters and infrastructure challenges, many women living in this area do not have access to medically trained birth attendants, quality health services, or emergency care. By involving women in the process, WRA Bangladesh will prevent maternal and newborn deaths by building the knowledge and skills of health workers so they can provide consistent, quality and respectful care to more effectively support pregnant women and their families in planning and preparing for a happy and healthy pregnancy and child birth, ultimately setting a national standard.



White Ribbon Alliance Zimbabwe

White Ribbon Alliance Zimbabwe launched a self-care project to address the high maternal mortality rate in Midlands Province. The goal is to help the government reduce preventable maternal and newborn mortality through effective birth preparedness in emergency situations, raising awareness of birth complications and informing community members of their rights to receive quality, respectful care. WRA is working closely with provincial and district health authorities to integrate self-care policies and harness lessons learned at the national level, working with the Ministry of Health and Child Care. WRA Zimbabwe is also equipping health workers, community leaders and women's groups to monitor the delivery of respectful maternity care. The project ultimately aims to integrate self-care into the full spectrum of policies that impact maternal and newborn health.



About White Ribbon Alliance

White Ribbon Alliance is a powerful network of advocates working for maternal, newborn health and rights at the local, national and global levels. With 13 National Alliances, we help citizens recognize and seize their power to demand that all women and their children receive quality, dignified care before, during and after pregnancy.