



BACK
TO THE
FUTURE

Self-Care 2030

Insights Report
*What does the future of
health & wellbeing look like
and how do we get there?*

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Foreword



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This report is intended to be the first in an annual series that will highlight the Seven Pillars of Self-Care. With just seven years until 2030, the [International Self-Care Foundation \(ISF\)](#) theme of 'self-care for all by 2030', is being supported by gathering & reporting on the evidence base for a different pillar each year to be celebrated on International Self-Care Day (ISD).

Fittingly, ISD is held on July 24 because self-care is something that should be practiced '24/7', a nudge that

this is a practice that needs to be undertaken every day. ISF is pleased to present its 2023 insight report on how to achieve self-care for all.

As suggested in this publication, the full value of self-care at the individual, institutional & societal levels is enormous & integrating the pillars into people's daily lives, throughout their lifetime is essential. This will be best achieved when health literacy tools are universally available & validated resources are adopted by health professionals, educators & governments.

It is not coincidental that the very first Pillar is 'Knowledge & Health Literacy'. Today, there are evolving & innovative new tools to help improve access to excellent quality information that will enable sound decision-making by individuals & institutions. In this report, there is an acknowledgement that self-care creates equity in health care & building knowledge about where to obtain sound information & use of new technologies will be foundational to success.

In the UK, a coalition of the passionate, coalescing into the [Self-Care Forum](#), has striven to establish the importance of self-care in the NHS, rooted in the agency of people & patients. Although the goal of mainstreaming self-care has been achieved after 30 years, the battle is far from over. If self-care was a 'Cinderella' subject through previous lean years, health literacy remains the 'Cinderella' of the seven pillars. Yet it is rightfully the first of the seven & without it the other six will not achieve their full potential.

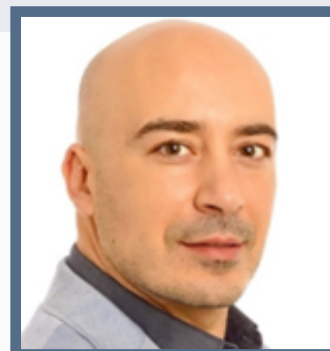
Health literacy is fundamentally about understanding. In the UK 40% adults struggle with health content & 60% with content that includes numbers & statistics. The effects of this are real, including unhealthy lifestyles, increased hospital attendances, reduced life expectancy & exacerbated health inequalities.

The goal of self-care for all can only become a reality if health literacy is addressed at every level in society. This report provides a vital boost to achieving that goal.



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Self-care is the oldest & most widely practiced type of care, but it was nearly forgotten in the last three centuries with the rise of the surgery & biomedicine movement. Academic research on self-care had also stalled for decades. It is thanks to the advocacy & diligent work of the International Self-Care Foundation & the Self-Care Forum UK that self-care maintained a voice. The [Self-Care Academic Research Unit \(SCARU\)](#) at Imperial College London was established in 2017 as a tripartite collaboration between Imperial School of Public Health, ISF & SCF. To date, SCARU remains as the only university academic unit in the world dedicated to the study of self-care. Our mission is to make the absolute case for self-care. We will do this by ensuring self-care is everybody's business.

Shortly after the establishment of SCARU, interest in self-care exploded & in particular following the publication of WHO Guideline on Self-Care Interventions in 2019. We now have an extensive international network of self-care stakeholders, culminating in the United for Self-Care Coalition spearheaded by the Global Self-Care Federation in 2023.

It's an exciting time for self-care & this report is the first in a series that will be published to celebrate the Seven Pillars of Self-Care & International Self-Care Day 24/7 (24th July) which was established by ISF & is now celebrated worldwide.

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Self-Care For All By 2030: What's Needed?

Self-care is a broad concept that encompasses a range of activities that individuals can engage in to maintain their physical & mental health & wellbeing. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), self-care involves 'the ability of individuals, families & communities to promote health, prevent disease, maintain health & cope with illness & disability with or without the support of a healthcare provider'.

Above all, self-care is about personal empowerment, choice, informed decision making & bodily autonomy.

One of the key drivers for the growth in self-care is the recognition of the limitations of the healthcare system. Individuals are increasingly turning to self-care to manage their own health needs & to delay or prevent the need for medical intervention (1–2). This trend is particularly pronounced in the management of long-term conditions, & so-called 'diseases of the lifestyle' such as type 2 diabetes, obesity & heart disease, where self-care can play a critical role in preventing the onset & progression of the condition & in reducing the risk of complications (3–5).

Another factor contributing to the growth of self-care is the increasing awareness of the role that lifestyle factors, such as diet & exercise, play in maintaining overall good health. Many

individuals are taking a proactive approach to maintaining good health by making lifestyle changes that support self-care, such as exercising regularly, eating a healthy, balanced & nutritious diet & practising stress management techniques. This trend is supported by a growing body of evidence indicating that lifestyle changes can significantly improve health outcomes, particularly in the management of chronic conditions. A key driver for this has been the rising interest in widely available self-care information searches, which reached 5.5 billion in 2023.

Overall, the growth of self-care reflects a shift in the way that healthcare is perceived and delivered (6–10). Rather than being solely the domain of healthcare professionals, self-care recognises the important role that individuals play in preserving health & wellbeing. By taking an active role in monitoring their own health, individuals can use self-care to improve their quality of life, reduce their reliance on the healthcare system & ultimately contribute to the overall health & wellbeing of society while improving their lived experience.

To achieve the full potential of self-care it is crucial to raise awareness about the Seven Pillars of Self-Care (figure 1). The Seven Pillars of Self-Care (1, 4) & the Self-Care Continuum (11) are the foundations of the [Self-Care Matrix](#), which is a unifying framework of self-care published by the Self-Care Academic Research Unit (SCARU) in 2019 (figure 2). By focusing on the health-seeking behaviours relevant to these pillars, individuals would be able to shift to the left of the [Self-Care Continuum](#). So now, for the first time, we have a unifying framework that describes the totality of self-care that accounts for the person-centred activities that people can do on a day-to-day basis, to the wider context & enabling environment. Whilst all seven pillars are important, this report looks primarily at the knowledge & health literacy pillar because this is the key to the ignition of the self-care journey & is critical to empowerment & – as we will explore – to achieving Universal Health Coverage (UHC) by 2030.

'Most people already make regular self-care decisions. But if only 10% of those currently using self-care were to turn to the formal medical system, the physician burden would at least double, & cause the system to crash.'



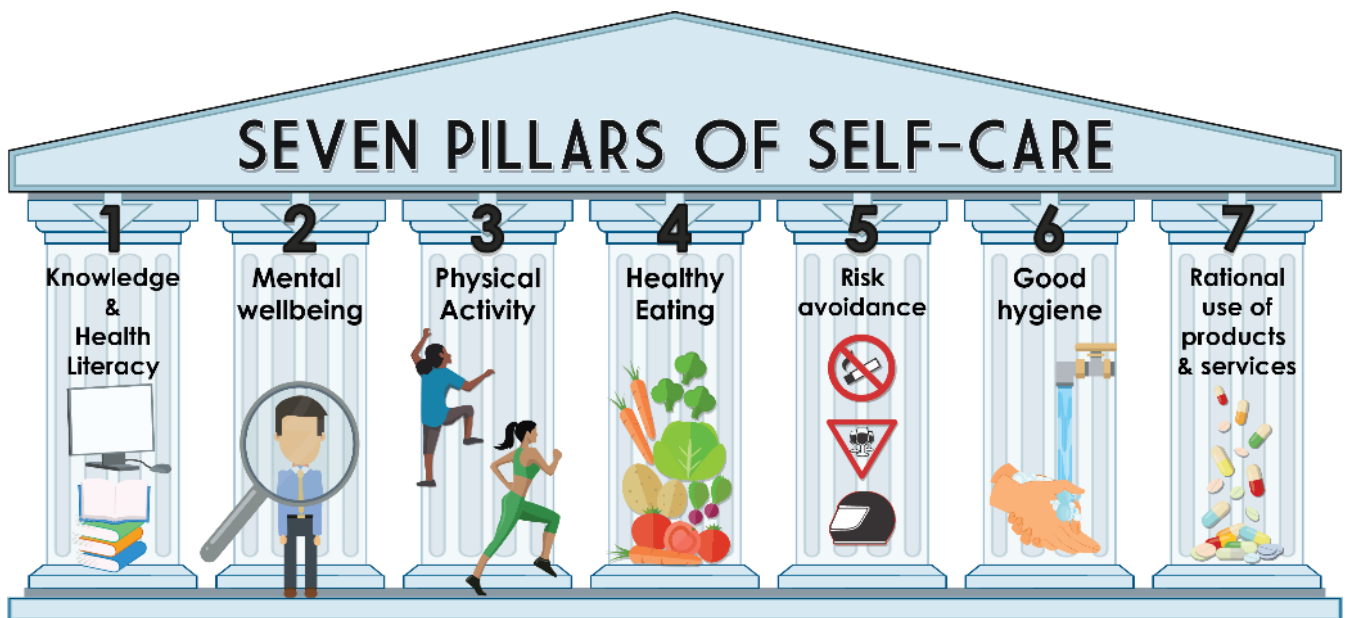


Figure 1: The seven pillars of self-care framework

Each pillar supports action to improve key aspects of mental & physical health & wellbeing. Pillar 1: Gaining health knowledge through self-care literacy; Pillar 2: Improving & maintaining good mental health; Pillar 3: Undertaking adequate physical activity to support overall health; Pillar 4: Good nutrition supporting healthy body & mind; Pillar 5: Avoiding risk behaviours like smoking & excessive alcohol use; Pillar 6: Good hygiene practices to avoid infections & toxicity; Pillar 7: Responsible use of medicines, devices & medical support systems.

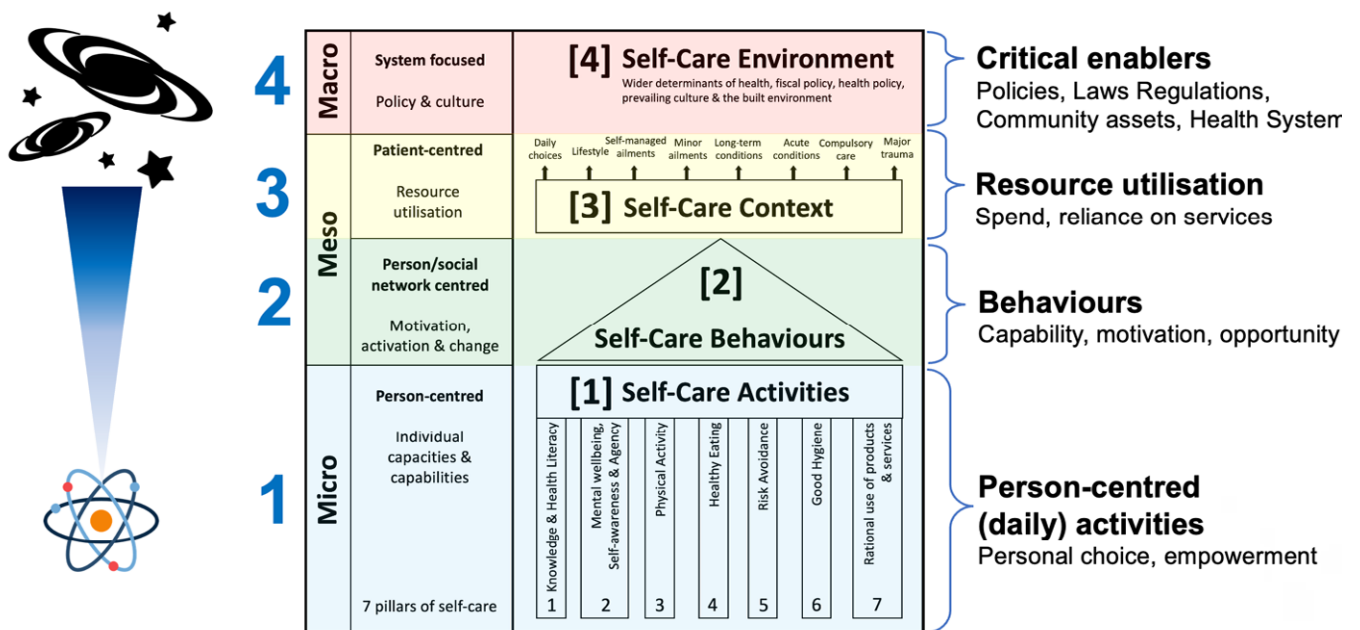


Figure 2: The self-care matrix: A unifying framework for self-care

The four cardinal dimensions of self-care can be juxtaposed on a matrix to illustrate the relationship between them. The schema also shows diagrammatically how self-care activities, behaviours & activation & reliance on resources (i.e., dimensions 1–3) are sequentially connected, whereas the self-care environment (i.e., dimension 4) exerts an omnidirectional influence on the other three cardinal dimensions of self-care. The Self-Care Continuum (the 3rd dimension in SCM) was originally developed by the Self-Care Forum & considers the inverse relationship between self-care & resource utilisation. It shows the ideal placement of an individual as being on the far left of the continuum since they usually do not require significant support from healthcare professionals as they go about their daily life.



Democratising Access To Self-Care Knowledge & Health Literacy

Democratising access to self-care knowledge & health literacy by 2030 is a goal that fundamentally looks towards a future when universal access to the right type of healthcare at the right time is made available to all people from across the ages & to all walks of life. This speaks directly to universal health coverage (UHC) & health equity. Pillar 1 (self-care literacy) is critical to achieving this goal.

Self-care literacy is the ability to access, understand, evaluate & utilise one's knowledge & resources necessary to engage in self-care behaviours that promote health & wellbeing (12). This includes having the correct knowledge, skills & confidence to make informed decisions about one's health & access appropriate resources to support self-care. It is an essential skill in the era of consumer empowerment, self-care & digital health. It allows individuals to make informed decisions about their health & wellbeing, & to access the resources necessary to make better choices about their health. Self-care literacy also has the potential to improve health equity, as it can provide individuals with access to the knowledge & resources needed to make informed decisions about their health & wellbeing needs.

Health equity, in turn, is concerned with the fair & equitable distribution of resources, access & outcomes across populations, regardless of race, gender or socioeconomic status. Health equity is essential to improving the world's health, as it ensures everyone has access to the resources

& tools needed to remain healthy. Improving health equity by 2030 will require a comprehensive approach & universal access to self-care resources is needed to improve knowledge & health literacy.

Self-care literacy can also improve health equity by providing individuals with access to the evidence-based knowledge & resources they need to make informed decisions about their & their dependants' health. By providing individuals with access to educational resources, they can better understand their own health & wellbeing needs & make informed decisions to drive their health & wellbeing journey. This can lead to improved health outcomes, an increase in the quality of life, a better-lived experience & improved health equity.

A key recommendation to promote self-care capability & health literacy by 2030 is concerned with embedding self-care education throughout the life course. Educational programmes can include separate modules for each of the Seven Pillars of Self-Care to promote health & wellness, as well as the prevention & management of chronic diseases. The International Self-Care Foundation & the [Self-Care Academic Research Unit \(SCARU\)](#) are working with partners to develop a basic minimum set of self-care literacy tools & resources suitable for different age groups & earmarked for dissemination in different settings (e.g., home, school, community, higher education & the workplace setting).

Health Literacy

'Health literacy is defined as people's knowledge, motivation & competencies to access, understand, appraise & apply health information in everyday life concerning healthcare, disease prevention & health promotion.' ([European Health Parliament, Committee on Health Literacy and Self-Care](#))

Self-Care Literacy

Understanding & knowledge about one's own wellbeing, enabling informed & intentional self-care practices for physical, mental & emotional health.



How Self-Care Literacy Can Improve Health Equity & Wellbeing



Self-care literacy can empower individuals to take control of their health & wellbeing journey & can also transmit across the social network to positively impact the lives of the people we care for. With self-care literacy, individuals can better understand their health & can access the information & engagement they need to make better choices that improve care & boost value. This can lead to improved health outcomes while reducing the burden on scarce healthcare resources.

Access to quality assured self-care information can help individuals make informed decisions about their health. This also includes deciding on when best to access healthcare providers, medication, treatments & other resources. For example, self-care & health literacy can help people determine:

- *What can an informed person do for themselves?*
- *Is there a particular self-care product (e.g., vitamin, mineral, supplement, an over-the-counter medicine or Smartphone Application) or service that is helpful?*
- *What support do they need?*
- *At what point should they seek help from a healthcare professional and how?*
- *What healthcare professional is best positioned to provide help for their condition or concern?*

Whilst there is a need to develop sound information about various conditions & prevention measures that can easily be accessed, understood & applied daily, people also

need to have better knowledge about where & how they can access support from others.

Technology, the pervasive use of smartphones & social media tools have the potential to revolutionise how individuals access health information, make informed decisions & manage their own care. However, careful consideration must be given to ensure that emergent tools such as technology-driven solutions are accurate, reliable & ethically implemented to maximise their benefits. One of the key opportunities offered by artificial intelligence (AI) in the domain of self-care & health literacy is the ability to provide personalised & accessible information (19). AI-powered chatbots & virtual assistants can engage in interactive conversations with individuals, answering their health-related questions, providing relevant resources & offering guidance on self-care practices. This immediate access to information coupled with the use of wearables, digital tools & AI-assisted clinical coaching approaches could revolutionise the way people engage with their health & wellbeing journey.

For healthcare providers & health systems, improvements in individual self-care capability & health literacy levels can lead to reduced costs, increased efficiencies & improved outcomes. This can lead to improved patient satisfaction & improved health outcomes. In this way, self-care & health literacy can vastly improve the health & wealth of individuals, communities & the nation.

Strategies For Increasing Self-Care Capability & Health Literacy



Enhancing self-care capability & health literacy requires education & awareness campaigns that provide accessible & culturally sensitive health information through various mediums. Clear communication & plain language are crucial to ensure understanding among diverse populations (11, 13). Healthcare providers also play a key role by engaging in shared decision-making, offering personalised guidance & teaching self-care techniques.

Integrating technology, such as mobile apps & online platforms, enables real-time tracking, personalised recommendations & access to reliable health resources. Community-based interventions & peer support networks can also foster self-care capability through group activities, knowledge exchange & practical skill development.

Collaboration between governments, healthcare providers & communities is essential to promote self-care capability

& health literacy & to ensure that individuals have the knowledge & skills for informed decision-making about their health & wellbeing journey.

Several strategies & programmes can be used to increase self-care & health literacy by 2030, including:

1. **Streamlining access to educational resources**, including online materials & 'microcontent' videos.
2. **Leveraging technology solutions including smartphone apps, online symptom checkers, wearables & remote monitoring devices & tools** to help people make informed decisions about their health.
3. **Promoting policy change** that supports access to healthcare, reduces cost barriers & promotes preventive care & health equity.
4. **Empowering policymakers** to support self-care literacy, health equity & wellbeing can be advanced via effective policies.

Education & Technology Solutions For Increasing Self-Care Capability

Digital tools offer immense potential in improving health literacy & self-care capability by providing accessible information, personalised support & interactive resources in a way that makes sense. Websites, smartphone apps & wearable devices can help to streamline reliable health information, personalised recommendations & real-time monitoring of health parameters. Interactive resources, remote consultations & online communities can also facilitate knowledge sharing & peer support. Gamification elements & training programs make learning about health literacy engaging & effective. Medical technologies, including point-of-care test devices, can also offer immediate results & in this way facilitate self-monitoring & drive personalised self-care planning (18,19).

There are numerous ways that digital tools could enhance health literacy & self-care capability:

1. **Streamline access to reliable information**, including microcontent to learn about various health conditions, treatments & preventive measures.
2. **Personalised health recommendations** to provide actionable insights based on individual preferences & health goals. These recommendations can include tailored diet plans, exercise routines, medication reminders & self-care techniques.
3. **Real-time tracking & monitoring** using wearables & mobile apps to monitor various health parameters, such as

heart rate, sleep patterns & physical activity levels.

4. **Interactive self-care resources** including engaging videos, tutorials & virtual simulations to educate individuals about self-care practices.
5. **Remote consultations & telehealth** including video consultations, chatbots or online forums where individuals can seek guidance, clarify doubts & receive personalised advice regarding their health concerns.
6. **Peer support & online communities** where individuals can share experiences, exchange knowledge & provide emotional support. These communities foster a sense of belonging, motivation & empowerment.
7. **Health literacy training & gamification** to make learning & self-care engaging & enjoyable.

Given the near pervasive use of technology, tackling digital inequalities in the context of health literacy is essential to ensuring equitable access to information & resources for all individuals. Even in developed countries, up to 25% of the most vulnerable communities continue to suffer from digital exclusion. To abate this, it is crucial to work towards reducing digital inequalities in health literacy & empowering individuals from all backgrounds to access, understand & utilise digital health resources effectively. It is crucial to recognise that equitable access to digital health information is a fundamental aspect of promoting health equity & improving health outcomes for all.

Video Blog



Online Training



Mobile App



Online Consultation



Where Will The Future Take Us?

The world is rapidly changing, increasingly driven by technological advancements, demographic shifts and changing societal values. Society 5.0 represents the next phase of this evolution, where technology is leveraged to create a society that is not only highly efficient but also places the wellbeing of its citizens at the forefront.

In the future, technology will play an even more important role in how we practice self-care. The future will be characterised by HealthTech innovations that will drive the emergence of the Self-Driven Healthcare (SDH) movement (18, 19). This will usher in a new society – Society 5.0 – which will be dominated by the pervasive use of artificial intelligence, 3D printing, drones, nontechnology & genetic engineering (19).

Technology already shapes every aspect of our life, but how will AI and the emergence of Society 5.0 impact the way we self-care? In the not-so-distant future, it is easy to imagine that autonomous drones may be utilised to deliver OTC medicines & products directly to individuals, revolutionising the self-care experience. This is the topic we cover in the [Self-Driven Healthcare \(SDH\) 2030 sister report](#).



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In the future, self-care will continue to play a pivotal role in improving health equity & enhancing wellbeing (18, 19). Self-care & health literacy have the potential to empower individuals to take control of their health, make informed decisions about their care & ease the pressure on scarce health & social care resources.

Self-care & health literacy will provide tremendous benefits & value to individuals, healthcare providers & health systems in the form of the improvement of population health & a significant reduction in the costs of delivery of health. Raising awareness about the Seven Pillars of Self-Care offers a solid foundation for achieving this goal.



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Resources

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