

A national strategy for self care: reducing demand on the NHS

PAGB is calling for all parties to commit to **developing a national strategy for self care** in their manifestos.

Self care comprises the actions that individuals take for themselves and their families to promote, maintain and improve their health, wellbeing and wellness. It has a vital role to play in managing growing demand on NHS services, particularly A&E departments and GP surgeries. However, efforts to date have failed to empower people to take responsibility for their health, with a lack of national leadership to drive forward the self care agenda.

As demand and financial pressures on the NHS grow, now more than ever is the time to produce a national strategy for self care, incorporating the following policy recommendations:

- 1. Appoint a Minister or National Director for self care to provide national leadership and coordination**
- 2. Increase access to effective over-the-counter (OTC) medicines/products:**
 - Introduce zero-rate VAT on OTC products
 - Set a target to increase the number of POM-P/GSL reclassifications
 - Introduce “recommendation prescription” pads for GPs to suggest OTC products to patients
- 3. Empower community pharmacy to facilitate self care:**
 - Launch a national campaign to promote the expertise of pharmacists
 - Enable community pharmacists to have “write” access to people’s care records
 - Enable community pharmacists to refer people to other healthcare professionals, fast-tracked if necessary
 - Improve NHS 111 algorithms to appropriately refer more people to community pharmacy
- 4. Improve health literacy:**
 - Continue and expand national self care campaigns, such as Stay Well This Winter
 - Include health education in the PSHE school curriculum for ages 5-18
 - Include self care, and methods of supporting people to self care, in professional training curriculum for GPs and other healthcare professionals
- 5. Support people to live healthy lifestyles and prevent ill health:**
 - Recommend all adults take a daily multivitamin and fish oil supplement
 - Set ambitious targets to reduce smoking prevalence within a revised Tobacco Control Plan
 - Pledge to continue support for NHS smoking cessation services

Now is the time for action to reduce demand on the NHS

The NHS is facing one of the most challenging periods in its history. The combination of rising demand across services and an increasingly constrained financial environment means that now, more than ever, people must be empowered to take charge of their own health, understanding when they can self care and when to seek medical advice.

There are significant savings that can be found for the NHS in promoting greater understanding of the opportunities to self care:

Common self-treatable conditions:

- Headaches
- Colds
- Coughs
- Backache
- Sore throats

- **19.1%** – proportion of A&E attendances in 2014 for self-treatable conditions¹
- **£290m** – estimated annual cost of inappropriate A&E attendances^{2,3,4}
- **£2bn** – estimated annual cost of GP appointments for self-treatable conditions⁵
- **£142m** – NHS spend on prescribing paracetamol, aspirin and ibuprofen⁶
- **£3.7m** – estimated savings from reducing antibiotic prescribing for respiratory tract infections⁷
- **75%** – proportion of people directed by NHS 111 to A&E who could have been helped elsewhere⁸
- **£15.7m** – estimated annual cost of inappropriate NHS 111 A&E referrals^{9,10}

Attitudes towards self care are positive – but there is a disconnect with behaviour

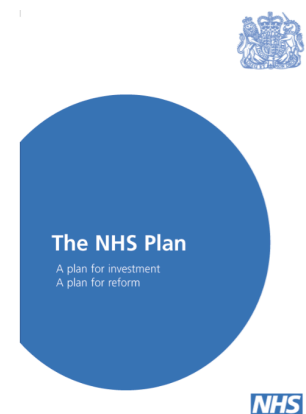
PAGB recently undertook a survey of over 5,000 adults in the UK and found:¹¹

- ✔ **92%** of people feel it is important to take responsibility for their own health to ease the burden on the NHS
- ✔ **Yet 34%** of respondents visited a GP about self-treatable conditions over the past 12 months
- ✔ **And 47%** of the population wouldn't visit their local pharmacist in the first instance about a self-treatable condition
- ✔ **Only 9%** use the wider services community pharmacies offer
- ✔ **71%** of people thought there should be better education around self-treatable conditions and relevant services to encourage more people to self care
- ✔ **Four in five** respondents would rethink which service to use if they knew the impact on the NHS

Opportunities to support the self care agenda have been missed

The value of self care has long been recognised, both in terms of saving time and money for the NHS, and helping people to live healthier lives. It has been a feature of strategic plans for the NHS for decades. Yet progress towards making self care part of everyday life has been limited.

In 2000, the Government asserted in *The NHS Plan* that “*The frontline in healthcare is the home*”,¹² and in its 2005 report *Self Care – A Real Choice* that “*Patients and the public have said that they want more support to self care.*”¹³ However, since these publications, there has been little progress in addressing the barriers to people self caring:



- Confusing and inconsistent information on what services are available, driving people to their local A&E or GP as they don't know where else to go
- Poor health literacy, leaving people unable to process and understand basic information to make appropriate health decisions¹⁴
- Low awareness of the role and expertise of pharmacists and other health professional to support self care¹⁵
- Lack of awareness of services designed to triage patients, such as NHS 111, in certain parts of the country^{16, 17}
- Expectation that the NHS can be used even if a person's condition isn't serious¹⁸

In order to overcome these barriers, a system-wide and coordinated approach must be taken to encourage everyday behavioural change. Whilst some progress has been made in supporting people living with long-term conditions to manage their own health, for example through the NHS Self Care Support Programme, there has been a notable lack of national leadership to coordinate the scope and scale of the opportunities to promote self care across the spectrum.

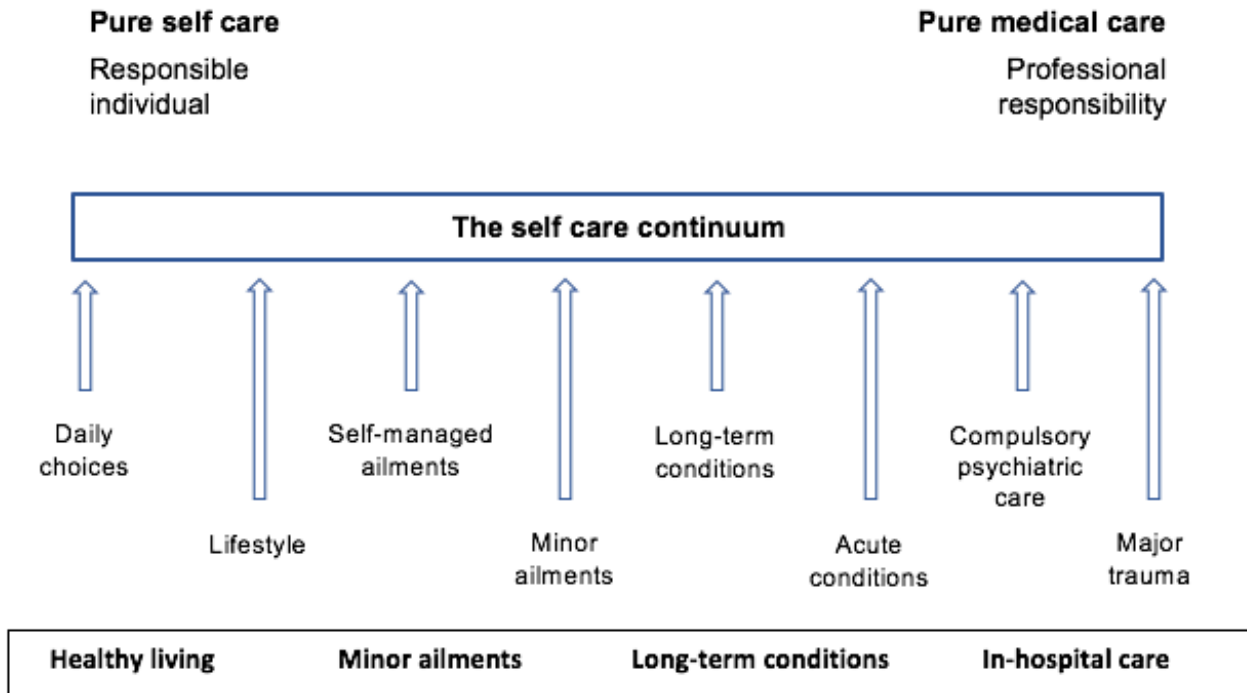


The *Five Year Forward View* recognised the need to “*Build the public's understanding that pharmacies and on-line resources can help them deal with coughs, colds and other minor ailments without the need for a GP appointment or A&E visit*”.¹⁹ Yet, the APPG for Primary Care and Public Health heard evidence from senior health officials in its 2016 inquiry into the *Five Year Forward View* that progress towards the new model of empowerment, engagement and self care has been disappointing.²⁰ The recently published *Next Steps on the NHS Five Year Forward View* acknowledges the role of self care as a cornerstone of prevention; however, it fails to deliver the leadership required to drive behavioural change across the nation.²¹

This is particularly pertinent when it comes to supporting the public to self care for self-treatable conditions. There are significant opportunities to manage demand and drive savings in our health services through greater public understanding of how and when to self care, and where to seek advice in doing so. NHS England sees its role as primarily supporting people when they are in the system. It is therefore the Department of Health's role to bring together NHS England and Public Health England to develop a strategy for self care.

What is self care?

Self care can be defined as a spectrum, ranging from promoting everyday wellbeing, through taking care of self-treatable conditions, to the management of long-term conditions and recovery after major trauma:



Source: Self Care Forum, <http://www.selfcareforum.org/about-us/what-do-we-mean-by-self-care-and-why-is-good-for-people/>

About PAGB

PAGB (Proprietary Association of Great Britain) is the UK trade association which represents the manufacturers of branded over-the counter medicines, self care medical devices and food supplements.

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