

Promoting self-care to support primary care recovery

Each year, at least **25 million GP appointments** and **5 million A&E** visits are used for self-treatable illnesses, such as headaches, colds, allergies and indigestion. If the individuals using these appointments were empowered to self-care instead, it could save the NHS at least **£1.7bn** per year in costs. Eliminating these appointments could also save the economy an additional **£350m** per year as employees would not need to take time out from work for unnecessary NHS treatment.

As such, PAGB is calling for political parties to ensure self-care is an integral component of efforts to reduce pressures on the NHS and build a sustainable healthcare system for the future.

To capitalise on this opportunity, the future Government should take steps to:

- 1. Improve patient awareness of and confidence in self-care.** Increasing patient understanding of primary care services and the role of self-care by:
 - Upholding the commitment set out in NHS England's delivery plan for recovery access to primary care to develop a national campaign to increase public understanding of the full range of primary care services and when and how to access them appropriately
 - Ensuring that the campaign takes into account variable levels of health literacy when communicating why and how to access self-care advice, and the support available in community pharmacies
- 2. Leverage digital tools.** Utilising the full opportunities presented by digital tools to better support and promote self-care by:
 - Making information on self-care for minor ailments easily accessible via the NHS app and NHS website
 - Encouraging integrated care systems to include information about self-care on their websites by providing national guidance on information to include
 - Maximising opportunities to deliver self-care advice and information via the NHS 111 online and telephone service, including by reviewing the pathway and algorithm to ensure advice on self-care is delivered at all appropriate stages of the triage process
- 3. Create a supportive self-care environment.** Empowering community pharmacy to facilitate self-care by:
 - Fully integrating community pharmacy within the primary care system, leveraging the Primary Care Networks to incentivise greater collaboration between GPs and community pharmacists
 - Ensuring the UK remains a global leader in the reclassification of medicines from prescription-only to over-the-counter, maximising timely access to effective medicines
 - Continuing to support the work of the newly formed Reclassification Alliance

Self-care comprises the actions that individuals take for themselves, on behalf of and with others to protect, maintain and improve their health, wellbeing and wellness. When correctly done, policies to support self-care have the **triple benefit of reducing demand on the NHS, reducing health inequalities among the public and empowering people to take ownership of their health.**

Over-the-counter medicines help to unlock the benefits of self-care

OTCs are medicines, self-care medical devices and food supplements that can be sold at pharmacies, or retail outlets such as supermarkets and convenience stores, without a prescription.

In July 2023 PAGB launched a [ground-breaking report](#) that provided the most up-to-date figures to quantify the economic value of the over-the-counter (OTC) sector. OTCs were found to play a vital role in people's lives, positively impacting their quality of life and empowering people to self-care and allowing them to treat self-treatable conditions at home:ⁱ



96% of people in the UK experience at least one self-treatable condition annually



The report made clear the significant benefits and savings that the OTC sector can also bring to the NHS, including:

- **£6.4 billion** saved annually in avoided prescription and appointment costs
- **£1.7 billion** saved annually by substituting GP and A&E appointments with OTC usage
- **£1.4 billion** that could be saved by a 5% reduction in NHS from reclassification



Beyond individual and healthcare system benefits, OTC products were also found to positively impact the broader UK economy, including:

- **£18 billion** annual savings, by reducing absenteeism and avoiding productivity losses
- **£3.5 billion** contribution by the OTC sector to the UK economy each year

Learn more

At PAGB, the consumer healthcare association, we have a proud history of support self-care in the UK. We are an active member of the [Self-Care Strategy Group](#), a collective of leading health and pharmacy organisation committed to advancing the self-care policy agenda. We are likewise a leading voice in the newly established Reclassification Alliance and have recently undertaken our own audit on furthering [digital tools in self-care](#).

Ahead of the next general election, we are keen to meet with all parties to share our expertise in these areas and ensure that self-care is considered and incorporated into all planning on how we solve the challenges facing primary care within the NHS going forward.

If you would be interested in a meeting to discuss self-care further, please contact Farhana Hawthorn (she/her), Head of Public Affairs and Communications on farhana.hawthorn@pagb.co.uk.

ⁱ PAGB, 2023. *The economic value of the over-the-counter sector*. Available at: <https://www.pagb.co.uk/latest-news/economic-value-2/>