

Joint letter to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care and the authors of the 10-Year Health Plan

As the publication of the 10-Year Health Plan approaches, we are writing as members of the Self-Care Strategy Group to urge you to ensure that **self-care is clearly recognised and underpinned by concrete policies** within the Plan.

Self-care comprises the actions that individuals take for themselves, on behalf of and with others, to develop, protect, maintain and improve their health, wellbeing or wellness. When properly supported and integrated into the system, self-care has a proven role in:

- **Reducing pressure on NHS front-line services**, particularly GPs and A&E, by enabling individuals to self-manage their conditions and minor ailments at home. Each year, at least 25 million GP appointments and 5 million A&E visits are used for self-treatable illnesses, costing the NHS an **estimated £1.7 billion** where over-the-counter (OTC) medicines could have been used insteadⁱ
- **Supporting prevention and healthier living** by empowering people with the knowledge, confidence and tools to manage their health and wellbeing
- **Driving elective recovery**, by helping people prepare for and recover from planned procedures, and by reducing avoidable exacerbations of long-term conditions

Critically, **self-care has a central role to play in delivering each of the Government's three key shifts** to reform the health system, and therefore it must be recognised and supported within the Plan as a core component of future health policy. We have set out below how the 10 Year Plan can, and must, realise the role of self-care within the wider healthcare system.

- 1) Self-care is central to supporting the Government's ambition for a more **prevention-focused** system, by promoting early intervention and improving health and wellbeing. To maximise its impact, the Plan must embed self-care throughout the health and care system, including by:
 - Incorporating self-care information and guidance into minimum care standards, ensuring individuals have the tools to better manage their own health and wellbeing
 - Including self-care in Relationships, Health and Sex Education (RHSE) in schools and in the training of health and care professionals, building confidence and capability across generations and the workforce
 - Embedding self-care in local place-based strategies—co-designed with communities—to ensure that prevention efforts are inclusive and tailored to local needs
- 2) Self-care also supports the ambition to **deliver more care closer to home** by enabling individuals to manage minor ailments and long-term conditions, including with the support of community services. Expanding the role of pharmacy is key to this and can be achieved through the 10-Year Plan by:
 - Building on the Pharmacy First service and extending it beyond the current seven conditions, enabling community pharmacies to offer even greater support and reduce unnecessary GP and hospital attendances
 - As pharmacist competence and experience grows, the eligibility criteria of the Pharmacy First service should also be expanded to include more patients. This may require additional access to testing
 - Ensuring national public awareness campaigns are delivered at regular intervals to improve understanding of self-care and raise visibility of all pharmacy services
 - Addressing gaps in access among rural and remote communities is essential. Ensuring these communities can access equivalent services is critical to delivering care equitably

outside hospital settings, which may require tailored approaches to delivering pharmacy services in underserved areas

3) **Digital tools** have the potential to significantly enhance access to trusted self-care advice, thereby maximising the benefits of self-care outlined above. The 10 Year Plan is an opportunity to capitalise on this by:

- Mandating the creation of a dedicated, interactive self-care hub on the NHS App and website, to provide a central, reliable resource for personalised support
- Ensuring that all digital and written information is accessible, meeting a 9–11 readability level on the NHS Readability Tool and developed by PIF TICK-certified organisations. This will help ensure that information empowers all individuals equally, regardless of literacy levels or background

As you finalise the 10-Year Health Plan, we urge you to ensure that self-care is clearly recognised and supported through concrete policies that reflect its vital role in achieving the Plan's goals.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you and/or your team to further discuss how self-care can help deliver on the Plan's ambitions.

Kind regards,

The Self-Care Strategy Group

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The Self-Care Strategy Group was formed in 2019 with the aim of uniting leading pharmacy and healthcare organisations. The group's mission is to promote self-care as an essential tool for managing capacity in primary and emergency care settings.

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¹ Frontier economics, [The economic impact of over-the-counter products in the UK](#), 2023

