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News Release

New Economist Enterprise research highlights why integrating self-care into health systems matters

- New research by Economist Enterprise, supported by Bayer, highlights the potential of self-care to become a more integrated component of modern health systems
- The research underscores that self-care works best when it is integrated into formal health systems, with reliable information, affordable access and clear referral pathways
- The next phase of self-care policy involves moving from recognition to practical support: helping people use self-care safely and affordably

Leverkusen, July 23, 2026 – Self-care, when effectively integrated into health systems, can improve health outcomes, expand access to healthcare services and reduce pressure on overstretched health systems, according to new research by Economist Enterprise. The research, supported by Bayer and published in a report titled “[Making self-care work: integrating self-care into health systems](#)”, cites existing evidence estimating that self-care practices can deliver approximately US\$ 179 billion in annual economic benefits while helping countries move towards universal health coverage (UHC).¹

As healthcare systems face growing pressure from ageing populations, chronic diseases, workforce shortages and unequal access to care, self-care is increasingly recognized as a route to improve health outcomes, expand access and support more sustainable healthcare delivery. The research underscores that self-care works best when effectively integrated into formal health systems, with reliable information, affordable access and clear referral pathways.

¹ Global Self-Care Federation. The Global Social and Economic Value of Self-Care. Global Self-Care Federation. 2022. Accessed May 7, 2026.
<https://www.selfcarefederation.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/2022-10/Self-Care-Readiness-Index-Report-2022-digital-18102022.pdf>

Dr Manjulaa Narasimhan, Scientist, The Department of Sexual, Reproductive, Maternal, Child, Adolescent Health and Ageing, World Health Organization (WHO), says in the research, “Self-care is the first line of action for all healthcare. With evidence, supportive policy and trained health and care workers, self-care can contribute to improving health and wellbeing for all.”

Self-care strengthens health systems when it is well supported

Defined broadly by the WHO as the ability of individuals, families and communities to manage health and wellbeing, self-care spans a wide spectrum—from everyday health behaviors and preventive practices to digital tools, self-monitoring, and the use of over-the-counter medicines. This broad definition also presents challenges, particularly in governance, measurement, and consistent integration across health systems, says the Economist Enterprise research.

It goes on to say that self-care works best as part of a supported path through health systems, rather than a substitute for them. Well-supported self-care enabled by reliable information, affordable access, and clear referral pathways can:

- Improve access to healthcare services
- Strengthen prevention and early intervention
- Enhance patient agency and engagement
- Reduce pressure on health systems

“Self-care solutions, including digital tools, safe and affordable over-the-counter medicines, nutritional supplements and educational information, are fundamental to filling global healthcare gaps. They are the first line of defense for people and healthcare systems”, says Julio Triana, Member of the Bayer Board of Management and President Consumer Health, speaking in a separate Economist Enterprise interview on the future of self-care. “We want to empower people to be the CEOs of their own health, take ownership of their wellbeing and play an active role in treatment and prevention. Trusted self-care can help expand access and strengthen healthcare systems, but it must be supported by evidence-based information, strong standards and clear pathways to professional care.”

Effective self-care depends on action, trusted support and accountability

According to the research, three priorities will be critical to making self-care a more effective part of mainstream healthcare:

- **Turn policy commitments into action:** As self-care gains recognition across health systems, countries need clear governance structures, defined responsibilities and stronger coordination across stakeholders to translate policy ambition into practical implementation.
- **Expand access through trusted and equitable support:** Affordable products and services, reliable information, appropriate financing mechanisms and culturally relevant support systems will be essential to ensure self-care improves access without widening existing health inequalities.
- **Strengthen evidence, measurement and accountability:** As self-care becomes more common across homes, pharmacies and digital platforms, health systems will need stronger mechanisms to measure outcomes, monitor safety and generate evidence that can guide future policy and investment decisions.

The research found that countries are already demonstrating how self-care can be embedded within broader healthcare delivery systems. Germany uses “green prescriptions,” enabling doctors to formally recommend over-the-counter medicines as part of guided self-treatment.² Indonesia’s GERMAS movement promotes healthy living, hygiene and responsible medicine use across schools, workplaces and communities.³

Speaking about the complementarity of self-care and institutional healthcare, Greg Perry, Director General, Global Self-Care Federation, says, “Self-care does not seek to shift responsibility away from health systems. On the contrary, evidence-based self-care products, services, and non-prescription medicines, combined with trusted information, create headroom for referral pathways that connect people to timely facility-based care when needed.”

The findings of the Economist Enterprise research suggest that, with stronger governance, financing, accountability and support systems in place, self-care can become a more cost-effective and complementary entry point into more preventive and proactive health systems.

² Global Self-Care Federation. Self-care Readiness Index 2.0. Global Self-Care Federation; 2024. Accessed May 7, 2026. <https://www.selfcarefederation.org/sites/default/files/2024-10/self-care-readiness-index-report-2022-05122022-v2.pdf>

³ Global Self-Care Federation. Self-care Readiness Index 2.0. Global Self-Care Federation; 2024. Accessed May 7, 2026. <https://www.selfcarefederation.org/sites/default/files/2024-10/self-care-readiness-index-report-2022-05122022-v2.pdf>

To learn more, you can access the full research, via the Economist Enterprise research hub through this link: [“Making self-care work: integrating self-care into health systems”](#).

About the research

Making self-care work: integrating self-care into health systems, a report produced by Economist Enterprise and supported by Bayer, explores why self-care is increasingly recognized as a route to improve health outcomes, expand access, reduce pressure on overstretched health systems, and support progress toward universal health coverage. Drawing on desk research and expert interviews, the report examines how self-care can be defined, governed, financed, measured, and integrated into health systems so that it functions as a safe, equitable, and supported entry point to care, rather than a substitute for formal health services.

About Economist Enterprise

[Economist Enterprise](#) is the arm of The Economist Group that provides services to businesses, government agencies and financial institutions. Its work is grounded in The Economist Group's values of independence, integrity and progress. Economist Enterprise gives organizations the tools to make better decisions, take confident action and demonstrate leadership on a global stage.

About Bayer

Bayer is a global enterprise with core competencies in the life science fields of health care and nutrition. In line with its mission, “Health for all, Hunger for none,” the company's products and services are designed to help people and the planet thrive by supporting efforts to master the major challenges presented by a growing and aging global population. Bayer is committed to driving sustainable development and generating a positive impact with its businesses. At the same time, the Group aims to increase its earning power and create value through innovation and growth. The Bayer brand stands for trust, reliability and quality throughout the world. In fiscal 2025, the Group employed around 88,000 people and had sales of 45.6 billion euros. R&D expenses amounted to 5.8 billion euros. For more information, go to www.bayer.com.

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