

# SUPPORTING YOUTH THROUGH SELF-CARE

COMMUNITY FORUM WRAP-UP REPORT

SELF-CARE  
TRAILBLAZER  
GROUP



## INTRODUCTION:

On April 7<sup>th</sup> 2021, the Self-Care Trailblazer Group held their very first community forum, led by youth for youth. Young people (those under 30 years old) shared their perspectives on the role of self-care and the promise it holds in addressing the health needs of adolescents and young people in an engaging panel session. Our youth facilitators continued the conversation in engaging breakout discussions where youth spoke about the specific and urgent gaps that they face in their health care journey. We are continuing to gather insights and data as we compile a comprehensive list to help inform policy recommendations that can be shared with the global community — to make advocating for youth needs in self-care an easier option!

## SETTING THE STAGE:

For young people everywhere, the obstacles to accessing health services are great. In addition to the challenges in accessing care in formal healthcare settings, many young people face additional barriers to taking care of their own health. From a lack of internet access, digital skills and data that can make digital health difficult to engage in to limited information and educational resources that make managing health challenging for youth, it is clear radical changes must be made for young people to fully engage with their own health within the healthcare system.

Self-care, while not a new healthcare practice, offers a unique opportunity for young people to engage with the health system—in an equitable, affordable, and safe way. However, many youth are not able to experience the full benefits of self-care because of a lack of knowledge about self-care approaches and health policies that don't specifically target their healthcare needs—including a lack of youth-friendly services. These barriers prevent the health system from fostering young people's health and well-being. By bringing over 50 young people from more than 10 countries together at the forum, we identified areas where we need to improve support for self-care to create real results for sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and universal health coverage.

## WHAT IS SELF-CARE AND HOW CAN IT BE IMPLEMENTED IN A WAY THAT BENEFITS YOUNG PEOPLE?

Self-care, defined by the WHO as the ability for individuals, families, and communities to promote, maintain health, prevent disease and cope with illness with or without the support of a healthcare provider. For young people specifically, self-care offers them an opportunity to engage with the health system in an equitable, affordable, safe, private, and confidential manner. Self-care addresses many of the barriers to accessing quality care services—stigma, taboo, limited access—through conventional channels.

To help shift the health system to better meet the needs of young people and reach a world where everyone has access to care, we can't afford to ignore youth voices or continue to deny the critical role they can play in ensuring their own care and wellbeing. Ensuring that youth are equipped with proper knowledge and resources to care for themselves will require youth voices at the table, lending their expertise, and needs to the conversation on how best to plan for and implement self-care. Projects and programs that are designed to promote youth health should always put youth at the center, as



they are the only ones who understand their unique circumstances which will lead to better management of their SRH.

While there are numerous ways for individuals to engage in self-care—from new diagnostics, devices, drugs, and digital health opportunities that are transforming the way people interact with the health system—there is not a uniformed plan on how to ensure young people have safe, affordable, and confidential access to needed health services, tools, information, and technology. This has put a spotlight on the untapped potential for young people to take charge of their own health in ways never before possible.

### WHAT ARE THE IMPROVED HEALTH OUTCOMES AS A RESULT OF CREATING AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR YOUTH TO ENGAGE IN SELF-CARE?

To find solutions to improve youth’s access to self-care approaches and products we sought out the guidance from the young people we want to reach. The Self-Care Trailblazer Group elevated youth voices at the community forum, seeking guidance on how best to tailor self-care approaches to young people, hear the challenges they face, and ways to reach young people.

As a result, we learned that by deliberately shifting the power of health into the hands of young people, self-care offers an opportunity for all youth to better manage their own health (including SRH), improve health outcomes, and set up the health system to effectively and efficiently achieve UHC.

- We can help the health system better meet the needs of youth by ensuring young people learn about self-care and are actively engaged in decisions concerning their own healthcare journey. Nothing for youth, without youth.
- Self-care offers young women and girls the opportunity to take the power of healthcare into their hands -- advancing gender equality and shifting current gender norms.
- Self-care has the potential to reach those hardest to reach by offering new opportunities particularly for young women and girls who lack access to care.
- Young people have a thirst for consuming information digitally and there is an increased demand for digital health options. We can leverage this to provide digital health solutions that are youth centered and educate young people about self-care interventions and behaviors.

As a follow-up to our summit, we hosted a podcast ([link to podcast](#)) with youth leaders to continue the dialogue about self-care, how to implement it, and the outcomes. This conversation format also serves as a way to reach young people through a platform regularly used by youth.

### LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We gained insights about the specific and urgent gaps youth face in their health care journey and together, explored ways that self-care can help address them through engaging discussions with youth facilitators leading the dialogue. What came out of this dialogue has informed our messaging and advocacy priorities:

#### Lessons Learned and Recommendations:



Based on input from youth the following barriers to accessing self-care were identified and they proposed the following recommendations.

- Legal restrictions related to age of consent prevents young people from fully accessing SRH self-care services. We need to ensure that policies and programs foster equality and autonomy in healthcare.
- The education system does not provide young people with sufficient and practical health education to enable them to fully engage in self-care. Working with ministries of education to place an emphasis in schools on self-care and adding it to the curriculum can increase youth's knowledge and awareness about their bodies and health and can help youth learn how to access affordable and convenient care.
- There is an unaddressed need for more health workers to reach out directly to young people and educate them about their self-care options. Government plans need to be developed for youth friendly health services and how providers should engage with young people about self-care.
- The cost of healthcare is astronomical in many countries and there is a lack of awareness by young people about accessing affordable solutions. Policies on universal health coverage need to include reimbursing the costs of self-care products and the public sector needs to ensure youth are kept in mind in their policies and programming.
- Increasing stigma associated with young people accessing many SRH services that are considered taboo prevents youth from fully engaging in their healthcare choices and accessing needed care. We must prioritize the diverse needs of young people to increase safe, affordable, confidential access to essential health services, tools, information, and technology to drive better outcomes and at the same time help overburdened healthcare systems reach youth in an effective and efficient manner.
- Many young people struggle to access digital health solutions because of a lack of access to technology and skills to use digital tools, the high cost of data and unreliable internet connections. We need policies and programs to promote innovative ways to increase access and skills to use digital health solutions that educate young people about self-care interventions and behaviors.

### Questions? Comments?

If you have additional comments or questions about the youth workstream opportunities or the SCTG, please reach out to us at [secretariat@selfcaretrailblazers.org](mailto:secretariat@selfcaretrailblazers.org).

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