At the Self-Care Trailblazer Group (SCTG), we want to ensure that we are operating off of a common set of terms and we have a shared language. The SCTG is using the common terms, definitions, and frameworks adopted by the World Health Organization (WHO) to facilitate alignment with the WHO consolidated guideline on self-care.

Definitions have evolved over the last half century and there isn’t one common definition for self-care – it can differ depending on the context. There is also overlap in some of the terms. And while these definitions focus on how people practice self-care, it is important to remember that self-care is influenced and exists within a larger enabling environment.\(^1\)\(^2\)

### SELF-CARE

WHO defines self-care 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.” Self-care enables people to exercise greater autonomy, power, and control of their health, and improve their health and well-being. Self-care includes self-awareness, self-testing, and self-managed care, which includes many forms of self-care.

- **Digital self-care:** Digital technologies that promote and facilitate services or information for people seeking self-motivated health behaviors. The four principles of digital self-care are user experience, data privacy and confidentiality, quality assurance, and accountability and responsibility.\(^4\)
- **Self-administration:** Taking medication on one’s own at home, clinic, or pharmacy, or in a private location.
- **Self-awareness:** Involves people gaining a deeper understanding of their bodies, health status, and health conditions to optimize health and well-being.
- **Self-collection:** Collecting specimens and often also performing the test and reading and interpreting results on their own while using instructions for use, which are required as part of the self-test.
- **Self-determination:** People’s right to make decisions with regard to the medical care they receive.\(^5\)
- **Self-diagnosis:** Identifying illnesses or conditions outside a healthcare setting by recognizing symptoms and/or using self-screening or self-education tools. This can be used to make health decisions and manage symptoms.

\(^1\) [https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240030909](https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240030909)
\(^2\) WHO includes the following factors as part of the enabling environment that determines individuals’ access to and use of health services and their outcomes: trained health workforce, regulated quality products and interventions, commodity security, health financing, access to justice, economic empowerment, education, information, protection from violence, coercion, stigma and discrimination, psychosocial support, supportive laws and policies, and health literacy.
\(^4\) [https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/325480/9789241550550-eng.pdf?ua=1](https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/325480/9789241550550-eng.pdf?ua=1)
• **Self-education:** The process a person undertakes to gain health-related information or learn more about and become informed about a health condition or health status.

• **Self-efficacy:** People’s belief in their capacity to execute behaviors necessary to produce specific outcomes.  

• **Self-examination:** An inspection done in a private setting to determine if there are any changes or concerns to one’s own body.

• **Self-help:** People taking action(s) to improve their health status.

• **Self-injection:** Administering medication through a shot into the skin or muscle. A doctor, nurse, or health worker provides detailed instructions on safely administering the injection by yourself or partner, friend, or family member.

• **Self-manageable conditions:** Any illness or symptoms that can be recognized by individuals and managed with self-medication or lifestyle changes such as diet, exercise, and risk reduction.

• **Self-managed care:** When a person on their own or through the support of someone outside of the formal health system (such as a friend or partner) oversees their health and health conditions on a day-to-day basis.

• **Self-medication:** Administering medicine on one’s own or with the help of a loved one to treat self-manageable conditions.

• **Self-monitoring:** Using clinical parameters, symptom measures, and daily activities to assess one’s health.

• **Self-regulation:** The active role that individuals play in enhancing their health and preventing or managing the effects of illness.

• **Self-sampling:** Users collecting their own health sample or with the help of a friend or family member for it to be analyzed by healthcare professionals.

• **Self-screening:** Conducting an exam or using tools to identify signs or symptoms of a health issue.

• **Self-testing:** Enables a person to have autonomy and choice by using a user-initiated diagnostic or device to gain knowledge about their own health status or health conditions.

• **Self-treatment:** Caring for a health condition on one’s own or through the support of someone outside of the formal health system.

---

1. [https://www.apa.org/pi/aids/resources/education/self-efficacy](https://www.apa.org/pi/aids/resources/education/self-efficacy)
3. WHO and other authors have used the term self-regulation in the context of healthcare, recognizing that historically the term has also been used to refer to self-regulation by an industry or group of organizations.
CONSOLIDATED GUIDELINES

WHO brings together all relevant WHO guidance, research, and evidence in a specific area to provide recommendations that span different populations, settings, and interventions.

DIGITAL HEALTH

The consensus definition of digital health is, “the systematic application of information and communications technologies, computer science, and data to support informed decision-making by individuals, the health workforce, and health systems, to strengthen resilience to disease and improve health and wellness for all.”

HEALTH SYSTEM

The WHO defines health systems as “all activities whose primary purpose is to promote, restore, and maintain health.” The World Bank has a slightly different definition and defines health systems as “the combination of resources, organization, financing, and management that culminate in the delivery of health services to the population.” The World Bank Strategy for Health, Nutrition, and Population Results can be found here.

PEOPLE-CENTERED HEALTH-SERVICES

WHO defines people-centered care as “an approach to care that consciously adopts the perspectives of individuals, families, and communities, and sees them as participants as well as beneficiaries of trusted health systems that respond to their needs and preferences in humane and holistic ways. People-centred care requires that people have the education and support they need to make decisions and participate in their own care. It is organized around the health needs and expectations of people rather than diseases.”

PRIMARY HEALTHCARE

WHO defines primary health care as “a whole-of-society approach to health that aims at ensuring the highest possible level of health and well-being and their equitable distribution by focusing on people’s needs and as early as possible along the continuum from health promotion and disease prevention to treatment, rehabilitation and palliative care, and as close as feasible to people’s everyday environment.”

UNIVERSAL HEALTH COVERAGE (UHC)

WHO defines UHC as, “all people have access to the health services they need, when and where they need them, without financial hardship. It includes the full range of essential health services, from health promotion to prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, and palliative care.”

The SCTG offers more resources to learn about self-care at our website.

JOIN THE #SELFCARE4UHC MOVEMENT

selfcaretrailblazers.org  secretariat@selfcaretrailblazers.org

@SelfCare4UHC

1 Consensus definition developed by Health Data Collaborative Digital Health and Interoperability Working Group.
2 https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5594415/

12 https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/primary-health-care
13 https://www.who.int/health-topics/universal-health-coverage#tab=tab_1