



EMPOWERING ASEAN HEALTH:

The Strategic Role of Self-Care for a Sustainable Healthcare System

INTRODUCTION

Self-care empowers individuals to take charge of their health, manage chronic conditions, and prevent diseases, thereby fostering a healthier and more resilient society. The growing prevalence of chronic diseases and the increasing pressures on healthcare systems demand innovative solutions.

Self-care represents a viable path forward, offering not only economic benefits but also enhanced health outcomes for individuals and communities.

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The WHO defines self-care as the following^{18,19}

Self-care is the ability of individuals, families and communities to promote health, prevent disease, maintain health, and cope with illness and disability with or without the support of a healthcare provider

Promoting self-care is essential for healthy ageing, enabling individuals to manage their health proactively and prevent the onset or progression of chronic diseases. Self-care practices, such as regular physical activity, a balanced diet, and routine health monitoring, can significantly reduce the incidence of NCDs and alleviate the strain on healthcare systems.²¹

THE CONCEPT OF SELF-CARE:



Empowers individuals to take control of their health & in disease prevention



Enhances population health



Is a holistic approach to health promotion



Expands individuals' access to healthcare services



Cultivates a culture of self-reliance and shared responsibility of health



Enables primary healthcare providers to focus on delivering essential services to those in need



Alleviates pressure on higher levels of healthcare systems

ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF SELF-CARE



If self-care were to become a more regular practice against the common disease areas...

key to unlocking savings of USD 2.5 to 4.2 billion related to annual economic outcomes, and could reduce up to USD 0.6 billion for avoidable treatment costs.



Every \$1 spent on Over-The-Counter (OTC) medication...

saves the broader healthcare budget more than \$7.



Improving citizens' knowledge of self-care...

is projected to save up to USD 550 million in national healthcare costs.

Benefits of self-care for healthcare practitioners

MICRO-LEVEL BENEFITS

On a **micro-level**, by embracing self-care, individuals actively participate in their own health journey responsibility, and this can mitigate or manage the risk of chronic illnesses.

MACRO-SCALE BENEFITS

On a **macro-scale**, by better managing individual health, this reduces the frequency and need for medical interventions.

In short, self-care has been proven to reduce the strain on healthcare systems and lowers healthcare costs for both governments and consumers.

“Self-care plays a crucial role in strengthening healthcare systems. It empowers individuals, families, and communities to manage their health and well-being. By promoting self-care, we can improve primary healthcare and contribute to achieving universal health coverage. Given the context in Vietnam with an increasing burden of chronic NCDs making up about 75% of total burden of disease, the self-care becomes more crucial in managing these chronic conditions at community level. Integrating self-care into primary health care policies is essential for promoting patient empowerment and improving health outcomes.”



Dr. Nguyen Khanh Phuong
Director of Health Strategy and Policy Institute under Ministry of Health



Dr. Yolanda R. Robles, RPh, PhD
Professor, University of the Philippines Manila
President, Federation of Asian Pharmaceutical Associations

“Part of the pharmacist’s global role is to promote responsible self-care. We encourage appropriate medicine use and the adoption of healthy lifestyles. By providing individualized patient education and advice on medication-taking and healthy choices, the pharmacists support self-care and envision better health literacy, adherence to health regimens, improved health outcomes and enhanced quality of life among the populations.”



Dr. Manuel Dayrit
Professor at the Ateneo School of Medicine and Public Health; former Secretary of Health; Self-Care Study author

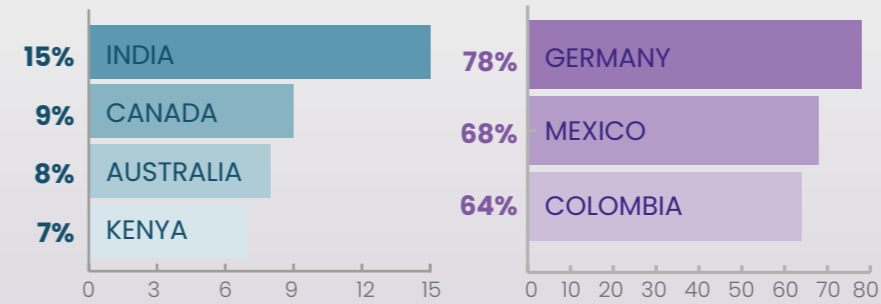
“Self-care is essential to achieve the goals of Universal Health Care in the Philippines. Self-care and health literacy go together. Health literacy is the ability of individuals to access, understand, and use information to inform health-related decisions. To strengthen health literacy among Filipinos towards better self-care, visionary leadership, effective policies, and intersectoral action should blaze a trail forward.”

SELF-CARE: Are We Ready?

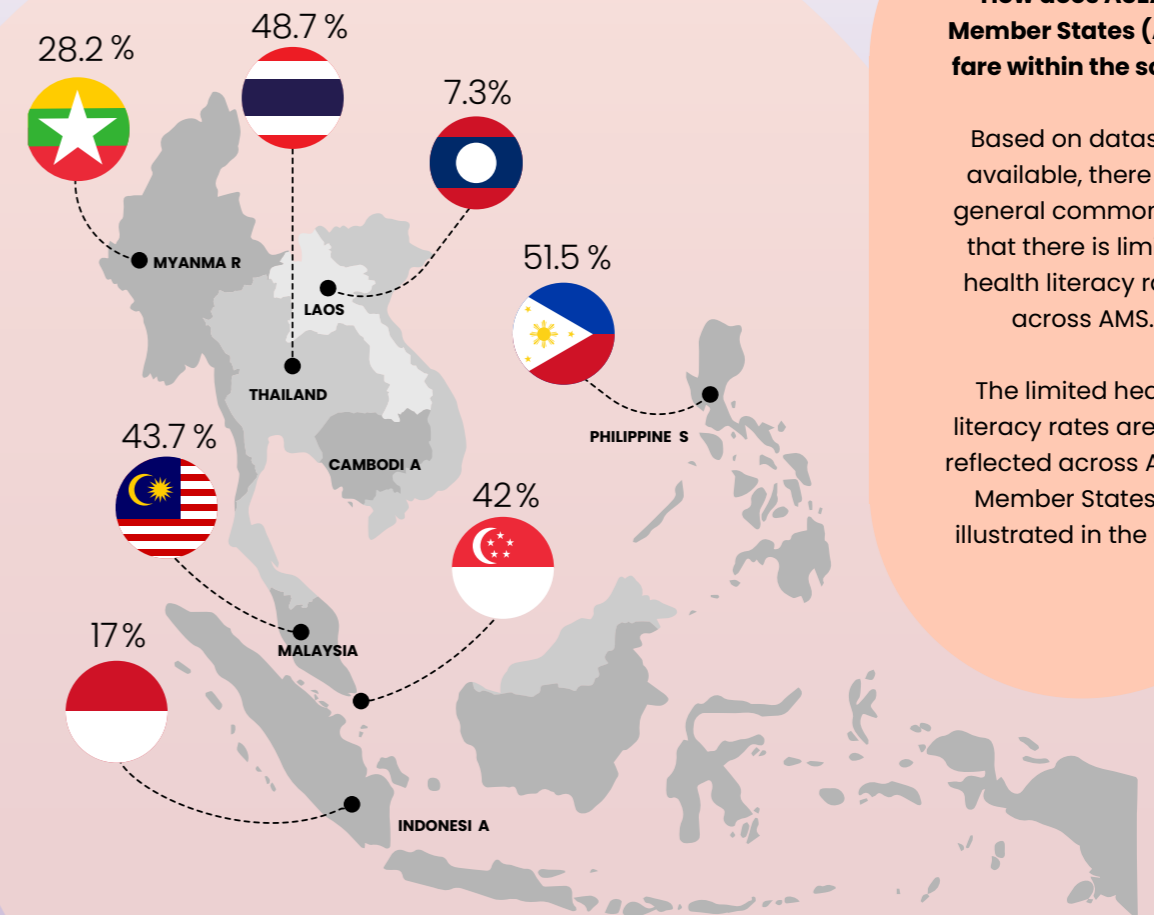
According to the consumer surveys examined in the Self Care Readiness Index, a high number of people still have problems learning about their health because of difficulty understanding written information.¹³

Globally, India, Canada, Australia and Kenya logged some of the lowest numbers in terms of comprehending health information

In contrast, people in Colombia, Mexico, and Germany logged the following results:



These countries reflected positive results, with only a small percentage citing that they never or rarely have difficulties understanding written health information.



How does ASEAN Member States (AMS) fare within the scale?

Based on datasets available, there is a general commonality that there is limited health literacy rates across AMS.

The limited health literacy rates are also reflected across ASEAN Member States as illustrated in the map

Health Literacy Rates across ASEAN Member States ^{16 17}

Advancing self-care across the ASEAN region faces barriers that have contributed to its underutilisation despite its merits. The two main obstacles are identified as follows:

- Relatively low health literacy levels among citizens.⁷
- Disproportionate regulatory barriers hindering the full potential of self-care.

To shine the spotlight on self-care and realise its benefits for healthcare systems and practitioners, key recommendations by the Council are as follows:

- Implement educational campaigns to empower consumers and encourage responsible self-medication
 - Facilitate open dialogues to identify and overcome existing barriers to self-care adoption
 - Support research initiatives to gather evidence for policy development and decision-making in self-care promotion
 - Elevate the roles of pharmacist in providing reliable information on self-care and trusted health advice so consumers and patients empowering their self-care or active self-treatment to manage chronic conditions
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- Advocate for re-classification or switching of prescription medications to over-the-counter status to broaden patient access based on risk profile and international guidance
 - Simplify registration processes and streamline advertising/promotional approvals to expedite the availability of self-care options for consumers
 - Promote ASEAN region-wide classification for switching from prescription (Rx) to Over-The-Counter (OTC) medication
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- Encourage the implementation of e-labelling initiatives to provide consumers with accessible and personalised information on healthcare products
 - Support the development and adoption of e-pharmacies and e-commerce to improve access to medications and healthcare products
 - Promote the use of digital devices, apps, and software to facilitate self-monitoring, health management, and access to healthcare resources and information
 - Promote the use of track-and-trace systems to facilitate real-time updates of product information and ensure product authenticity and in turn, safeguard patient's safety

RECOMMENDATION

1 Establish an enabling environment to promote self-care and health literacy across ASEAN

RECOMMENDATION

2 Improve processes to maximise opportunities & broaden access

RECOMMENDATION

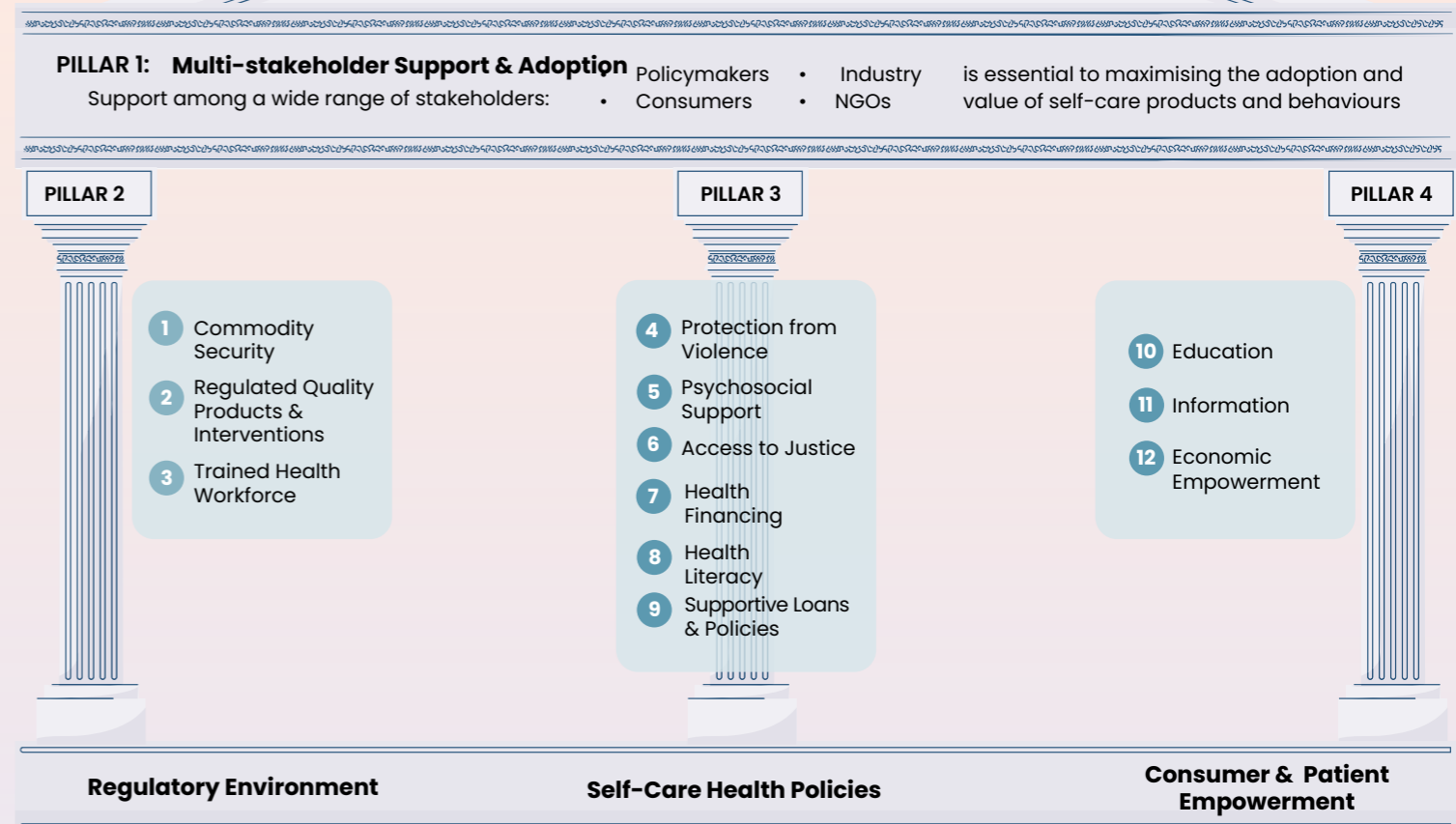
3 Leverage on digitalisation & digital solutions to make health-care more accessible for consumers & HCPs

RECOMMENDATION

1 Establish an enabling environment to promote self-care and health literacy across ASEAN

Due to the cross-cutting nature of all twelve elements identified by WHO, approaches designed to develop the enabling environment of self-care cannot be viewed in isolation. Rather, the EU-ABC proposes the following pragmatic recommendations which are all-encompassing to address the four broad pillars conceptualised by GSCF.

AT A GLANCE:
Enabling Environment for Self-Care



Regulations determine the ability of the self-care industry to drive innovation, empower consumers, and realise the value of its medicinal, non-medicinal, nutritive, and device products for the health system

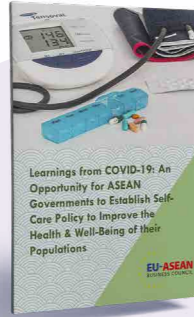
Health policy is influenced by policymakers' perceptions and decisions related to self-care, including recognition of self-care products' and practices' economic value, and policies to promote self-care as an affordable health solution

Self-care products and practices deliver the greatest value when consumers and patients are empowered to understand their health, make their own health decisions, and use self-care products confidently

- Implement simple and easy to understand educational campaigns to empower consumers and HCPs to encourage responsible self-medication and self-care.
- Facilitate open dialogues to identify and overcome existing barriers to self-care adoption
- Support research initiatives to gather evidence for policy development and decision-making in self-care promotion.

RECOMMENDATION

2 Improve processes to maximise opportunities & broaden access



IMPORTANCE OF SELF-MEDICATION



Self-medication is an important component of responsible self-care and accessibility to over-the-counter (OTC) and general sales list (GSL) medicines form a critical part of that.

The Council believes that the following merits warrants prompt action to transform prescription drugs (Rx) to OTC:

- 1 Increases patient access to medication for treatment of common ailments and minor health conditions
- 2 Generates cost savings for the purchase of medication without the need for consultation
- 3 Contributes to improved public health outcomes by promoting early intervention and preventive care
- 4 Encourages the adoption of self-care practices and reduces burden on healthcare systems through early intervention

1 Remove disproportionate regulatory barriers and maximise opportunities for mutual recognition, notification and self-certification across AMS.

2 Advocate for re-classification or switching of prescription medications to over-the-counter status to broaden patient access

3 Develop a clear drug classification regime with transparent methodology for medicines to move through various categories from prescription only to OTC (e.g.. Thailand)

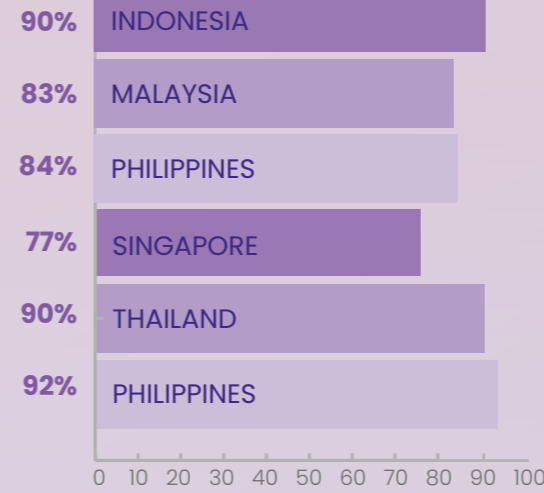
4 Simplify registration processes and streamlining advertising or promotional approvals to expedite the availability of self-care options for consumers (e.g. Singapore)



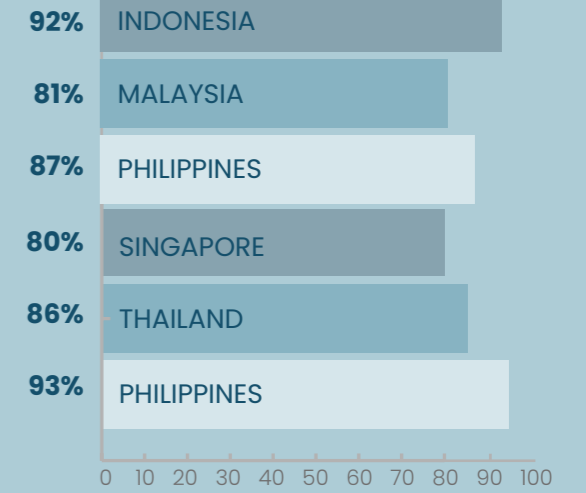
RECOMMENDATION

3 Leverage on digitalisation & digital solutions to make health-care more accessible for consumers & HCPs

Digital labelling has been increasingly prevalent in Southeast Asia, with an 83% increase in the use of QR codes observed between 2014 and 2018. Additionally, COVID-19 has accelerated the use of QR codes, with stronger consumer sentiments that physical labels are lacking in terms of providing easy-to-read and simplified information on products.



APEAL OF DIGITAL LABELLING TOWARDS CONSUMERS

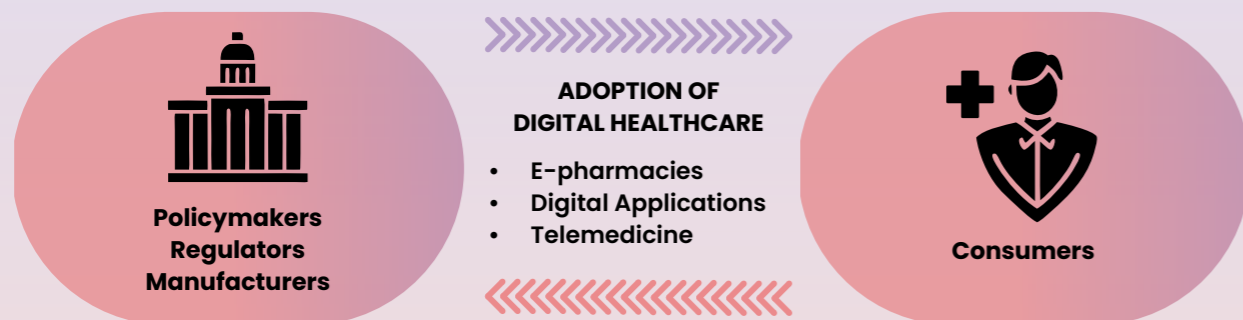
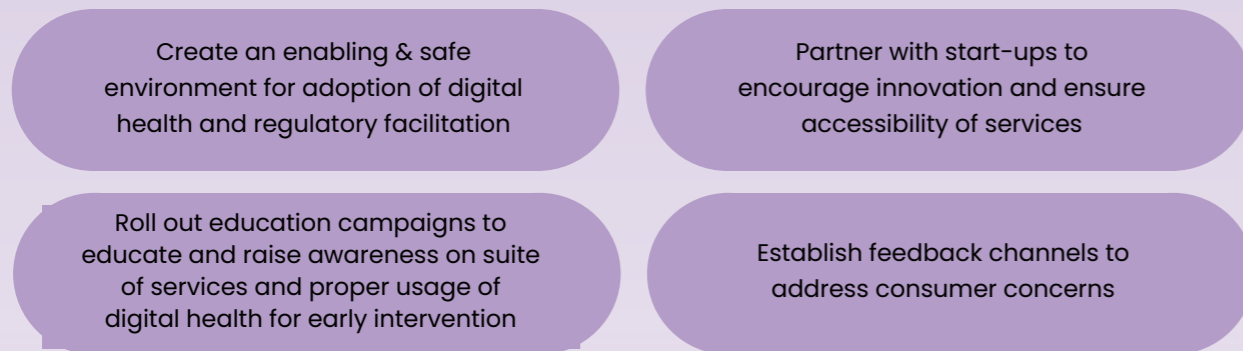


CONSUMER WILLINGNESS TO USE DIGITAL LABELLING

- A Encourage the shift and implementation of e-labelling initiatives to provide consumers with accessible real time information on healthcare products; multilingual support, improved readability, visual demonstrations, inclusivity and personalised content.
- B Support the development and adoption of e-pharmacies and wider ecommerce channels to improve access to self-care medications and healthcare products
- C Promote the use of digital devices, apps, and software to facilitate self-monitoring, health management, and access to healthcare resources and information.
- D Promote the use of track-and-trace systems to facilitate real-time updates of product information and ensure product authenticity and in turn, safeguard patient's safety

A Safe & Enabling Environment for Self-Care

The call by the WHO for integrative approaches, involving a range of community-based organisations across sectors, to develop health literacy interventions, is an applicable lesson in enhancing healthcare resilience. Their rally is clear: a whole-of-society approach is needed to curate effective responses via to ensure healthcare services are more accessible and user friendly.



Healthier population & economically productive workforce

Economic gains and channelling of economic resources to improve healthcare systems

Reduced burden on HCPs to avail resources for treatment of diseases for patients who need them most

Verify legitimacy and regulatory compliance of e-pharmacies and digital health tools before making purchase or engaging services

Cost-savings

Better health outcomes

Increased accessibility to healthcare



- addressing risk factors and their related diseases, and
- other relevant conditions

affecting the health of the ASEAN people by promoting healthy lifestyles throughout the life course.

- health system development** in order to
- increase access to safe, quality, and affordable, holistic care.

EU-ABC MEMBER INITIATIVES TO ENHANCE SELF-CARE

IMPROVING HEALTH LITERACY: A Whole-of-Society Approach

The Council and our members are strong proponents of a public-private partnership (PPP) model to strengthen healthcare delivery and simplify health education to those who need them most. Below, we highlight a case study to showcase how PPP address healthcare needs specific to local communities:



In the Philippines and Vietnam, Opella. (previously known as Sanofi Consumer Healthcare (CHC)), is addressing the critical issue of childhood diarrhoea caused by inadequate access to clean food, water, and hygiene.

Here's how the industry have been contributing and making a difference:



Hygiene Education and Infrastructure

Sanofi Consumer Healthcare partnered through Enterogermina to provide hygiene education in schools, emphasizing the importance of gut health through proper hygiene practices and lifestyle changes.



Vietnam

The programme includes constructing proper restroom facilities in schools. These facilities improve sanitation and support to reduce the risk of infections. To date Sanofi CHC has build over 134 Toilet Rooms & 80 Hand Wash Facilities reaching over 40 million consumers.



Philippines

Sanofi supports the Todo Tatag learning playground, which educates children about hygiene practices. Additionally, a school bus serves as a mobile handwashing station providing hygiene education. To date Sanofi CHC has built 57 Hand Wash Facilities, 9 Water Filter & 2 Water Tanks and 3 community kitchens and reached over 14 million consumers through this campaign.



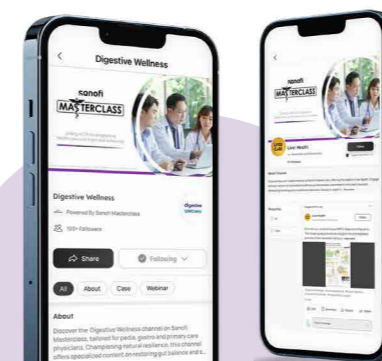
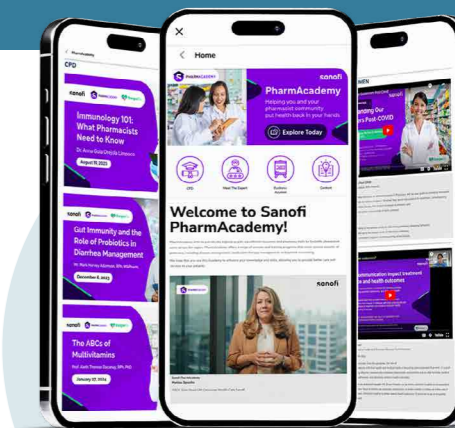
Collaboration with NGOs

Sanofi collaborates with Save the Children in the Philippines and the Hope Foundation in Vietnam to implement these initiatives.

In Southeast Asia, pharmacies serve as the primary point of care for patients, surpassing doctor visits by a factor of 10.³⁰ To improve health literacy among pharmacists, Opella. collaborated with SwipeRx to create PharmAcademy.

This platform offers CPD-accredited disease education modules, soft skills training, and convenient access to product information for pharmacists and pharmacies in Vietnam, the Philippines, and Indonesia. For Indonesia, it also includes e-commerce feature allowing easy access to Sanofi products to pharmacists.

Since its launch, the partnership has significantly increased access to health literacy information and medicines, particularly benefiting small to medium-sized pharmacies that are typically harder to reach.



Going further, Opella. have partnered with Docquity to launch Sanofi Masterclass, supporting the health literacy journey of doctors and specialists in Philippines and Vietnam.

Through these digital innovations, Sanofi CHC has conducted educational sessions, and have trained over 11,000 doctors and pharmacists to date.

The Nutrient Gap Initiative¹²

As part of Bayer's mission "Health for All, Hunger for None," Bayer launched The Nutrient Gap Initiative (NGI) to expand access to essential vitamins and minerals to 50 million people in underserved communities per year by 2030. With the leadership in agriculture & nutritional supplements, Bayer is uniquely positioned to help improve access to nutritious food and safety-net supplementation.



The Nutrient Gap Initiative helps close the nutrient gap by addressing the three main barriers to accessing essential vitamins and minerals:

INTERVENTION

EDUCATION

ADVOCACY



Since its launch in 2021, The Nutrient Gap Initiative has impacted more than 20 million people in underserved communities.

Partnership with Vitamin Angels

This holistic partnership aims in expanding access to Multiple Micronutrient Supplementation (MMS or prenatal vitamins). Vitamin Angels is a public health nutrition organization working to improve health and economic equity by increasing access to nutrition interventions for underserved pregnant women and children globally.

The programme incorporates local interventions with a 180-day supply of MMS, a custom-made nutrition curriculum for healthcare providers and moms-to-be as well as work with local governments to incorporate MMS as the standard of care. The programme directly impacts 4 million mothers and their babies annually.



Reckitt is committed to elevating the role of pharmacists in providing reliable information on self-care and trusted health advice, empowering consumers and patients to proactively manage their health conditions.

In partnership with the International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP), Reckitt organises educational resources focused on self-care, emphasising individual management in areas such as Digestive Health, Respiratory Health, Antimicrobial Resistance, Pain, and Sexual Health. FIP has developed several digital assets to promote self-care, including:



Six short (10-minute) videos on behaviour change in self-care



A multi-speaker digital event titled "Promoting and Communicating the Value of Self-Care: Self-Care Does Not Mean No Care"



A multi-speaker digital event discussing "Pharmacists' Role in Supporting Health Behaviour Change"

BREAKING BARRIERS: Reckitt's Approach to Self-Care in Vietnam through Safe Sex Education



Reckitt champions open dialogues to identify and overcome barriers to self-care adoption through strategic public-private partnerships.

Vietnam faces public health challenges, ranking among the top five countries with the highest abortion rates and the top two ASEAN countries with the highest growth rate of HIV/AIDS. To tackle these issues, Reckitt owned Durex, a market leader in condoms and lubricants, partnered with the Vietnam Administration of HIV/AIDS Control, local publisher Vietcetera, NGO PATH, and social enterprise Glink. Together, they addressed sex-taboo topics and transformed "safe sex education" into provocative edutainment through:

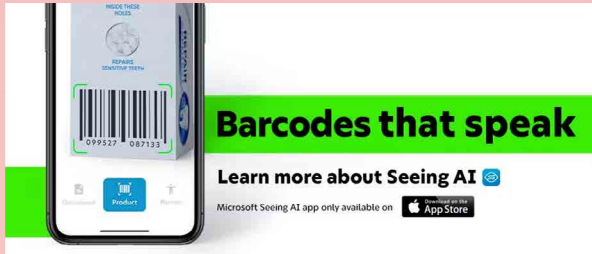
Social Media Campaigns:

Healthcare professionals (HCPs) and Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) shared insights on safe sex through the "Coimo" podcast on Vietcetera. Over the past three years, this initiative has garnered 5.2 million views on YouTube and over 100 million views on Facebook and TikTok.

Unitour – Safe Sex Talks

Conducted over the past four years, these talks have reached more than 80 schools and 40,000+ university, college, and high school students, promoting safe sex education across Vietnam.

Seeing AI Application Haleon



Making product information accessible for individuals who are blind or visually impaired is a crucial step towards inclusivity. Recognising this need, a collaboration between Haleon and Microsoft aims to bridge this gap. Millions of people globally face challenges in accessing product information due to blindness, visual impairment, or difficulties in reading, which can lead to errors in purchasing or using products.

To address these issues, Microsoft has expanded the functionality of its Seeing AI app, a free application designed to narrate the world for the visually impaired community. This innovative app now includes features that make product information audible, allowing users to easily access and understand the details they need.

By partnering with Microsoft to enhance the Seeing AI app, Haleon strives to ensure that everyone, regardless of their visual abilities, can make informed decisions about the products they use. Haleon provides detailed on pack information to Microsoft for over 1500 products across the USA and the UK, ultimately promoting better everyday health and accessibility for all.

HALEON

eZTracker⁵⁰
Zuellig Pharma

ZUELLIG PHARMA
making healthcare more accessible

The eZTracker is the first blockchain-based application in Asia, launched by Zuellig Pharma since 2020.

This digital label allows patients to: trace the origins of products and authenticity by scanning a code on the packaging; and address the growing challenge of counterfeit health products in the local healthcare and aesthetics industry.⁵¹

With eZTracker, Zuellig Pharma and medicine manufacturers are immediately notified if an unregistered product is detected, allowing this to be brought up with the relevant authorities.

This app is currently available in Malaysia, Brunei, South Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong and Thailand, with over 6 million products on the blockchain and more than 60,000 users consisting of patients and doctors verifying the authenticity of their medicines.

In 2022, eZTracker tracked 19 million worth of suspected counterfeits and diversions with 208,000 scans of suspected counterfeits and diversions.⁵² Further, deployment of the eZTracker application has allowed Zuellig Pharma to generate 350,000 e-label codes in 2023 alone, empowering pharma manufacturers to seamlessly update product leaflets digitally.

In addition to battling counterfeit, these initiatives have also reduced the reliance of paper by pharma companies, and minimised storage requirements and carbon emissions associated with transporting paper records.



Creating
Digital IDs

Activate
Traceability