



**Irish Pharmaceutical
Healthcare Association**

THE UNTAPPED POTENTIAL OF SELF-CARE

**A socio-economic analysis on the
value of Self-Care in Ireland**



Introduction

The Irish healthcare system faces growing pressures due to our ageing population and rising healthcare costs. In 2023 it was estimated that at least 10% of the population was unable to register with a GP as their patient lists were at full capacity.¹

Self-Care presents an opportunity to enhance public health while improving system sustainability because it empowers individuals to manage their health proactively, reducing the burden on healthcare services.

While often operating quietly in the background, Self-Care already delivers significant benefits within Ireland's healthcare system. Yet, its full potential remains underutilised. By promoting safe and responsible Self-Care practices, we can further enhance system capacity and better align with the goals of Sláintecare and the ambitions of the Common Conditions Service. Empowering patients to manage minor ailments in community settings, can ease pressures on GP and emergency services.



Self-Care benefits the wider economy

It is estimated that over 19 million minor health cases are treated by Self-Care in Ireland per year, generating savings for the healthcare system and society. In total, **€727.30 million is already saved by patients annually through the use of Self-Care.**

Bearing in mind that Medical Card and GP Only Card holders do not pay for GP visits and also prescription costs for the former, by engaging in Self-Care instead of attending their GP, these patients can make significant savings for the State. **It is estimated that for every €1 spent on OTC medicines saves on average €5.10 for the HSE and the Irish economy.**

By factoring in the savings generated by private patients, and the savings to the State for those in receipt of Medical Card and GP Cards, it is estimated that for every **€1 spent on OTC medicines saves on average €10.70 for Irish society.**

¹ McGreevy R. 'It's infuriating' - Patients describe waiting days for GP appointments. The Irish Times. 2023.

Available from: <https://www.irishtimes.com/health/2023/04/15/its-infuriating-patients-describe-waiting-days-for-gp-appointments/>

Self-Care matters because of savings for the individual:


In Ireland, the average cost of attending a GP for a minor health condition and paying for the medicines² they prescribe is **€72.81**³.


On the other hand, if someone engages in Self-Care for this same minor health condition, costs incurred by the patient is the average price of the over-the-counter medicine which is **€6.89**.

Therefore, Self-Care allows for a cost saving of **€65.92** per minor ailment case.

There are also **'time costs'** for patients which includes their travel to a GP clinic, waiting and treatment times for their appointment and possibly a pharmacy visit to collect a prescription. **By engaging in Self-Care it is estimated patients can save 1 hour 17 minutes of their own time, per GP visit.**



IRELAND GP TREATMENT		Cost (€)
	Medication Cost OTC	3.27
	Medication Cost Rx	10.46
	Treatment Cost	59.08
	Total Direct Cost	72.81

IRELAND PHARMACY TREATMENT		Cost (€)
	Medication Cost OTC	6.89
	Medication Cost Rx	0.00
	Treatment Cost	0.00
	Total Direct Cost	6.89

**Overall Cost
Difference
-€65.92**

² The cost of medicine includes both prescription of and also over-the-counter medicines which are often suggested by GPs.

³ The calculations take into account those in receipt a GP visit card or medical card, and do not pay for visits, and those who have to pay for the consultations themselves. Similarly, the calculations allowed for medical card holders who only pay prescription fee and GP Card Holders/ others who pay for their prescription medicines.

What if more Self-Care was practiced?

Engaging in more Self-Care has the potential to have a significant impact on future savings to the State and society.

It is estimated, **that a further €322 million could be saved per year through Self-Care, saving the HSE €113 million.** Patients could also save **€166 million** on costs associated with attending GPs for minor health conditions.



Self-Care can relieve the pressures on GPs

Currently, Self-Care saves 7.68 million hours per year for GPs. By engaging in more Self-Care:

11.4% OF GPs COULD POTENTIALLY BE FREED TO TREAT PATIENTS WITH MORE SERIOUS CONDITIONS.



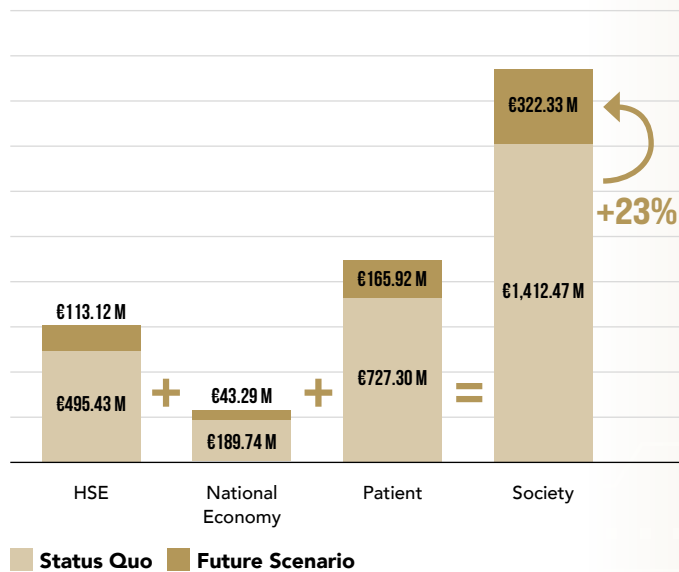
Represents approximately 500 GPs

OR

AN ADDITIONAL 1.1 WORKING HOUR PER GP PER DAY COULD POTENTIALLY BE FREED TO TREAT PATIENTS WITH MORE SERIOUS CONDITIONS.



The potential socio-economic impact of more Self-Care



Policy Recommendations to encourage Self-Care

To fully realize the benefits of Self-Care in health promotion and disease prevention, we urge policymakers to harness it to relieve pressure on a overloaded system

1.	Integrate Self-Care into Irish national health strategies , ensuring clear guidelines and education on responsible Self-Care practices.	
2.	Expand access to Self-Care products , including the reclassification of medicines from prescription to non-prescription status, especially if they are already available as non-prescription in other member states, and avoiding access irregularities in the EU.	
3.	Strengthen pharmacist-led Self-Care services , synonymous with positioning pharmacies as the first point of contact for minor health conditions, because Self-Care is not 'alone-care' and can be supported by healthcare professionals.	
4.	Invest in a regulatory landscape that incentivises safe, trustworthy and innovative digital health tools to support Self-Care decision-making and improve health literacy.	
5.	Launch public awareness campaigns on disease prevention and health literacy sessions in communities that expand on the benefits of Self-Care tools available and health system sustainability.	

BY PROMOTING SELF-CARE AS A VITAL COMPONENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND PREVENTION STRATEGIES, WE CAN BUILD A MORE SUSTAINABLE, ACCESSIBLE, AND RESILIENT HEALTHCARE SYSTEM FOR IRELAND.

This report summarizes the key findings of a recent study “The Socio-Economic Value of Self-Care in Ireland”, conducted on behalf of the Irish Pharmaceutical Healthcare Association by May und Bauer – Konzepte im Gesundheitsmarkt GbR. For more details and bibliographical references, please consult the main study which is available on the IPHA website.



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