

Self care:

Realising the potential

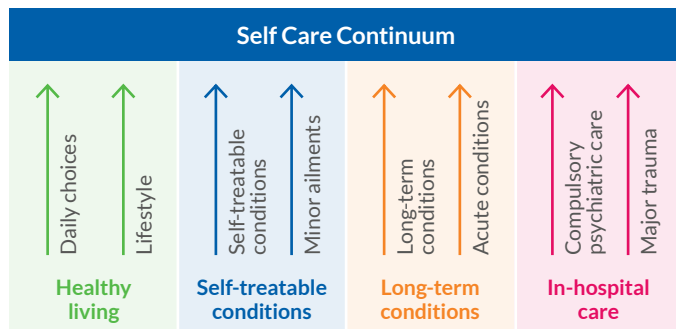
PAGB

What is self care

Self care comprises the actions that individuals take for themselves, on behalf of and with others, to develop, protect, maintain and improve their health and wellbeing or wellness. It can be described as a continuum.

Dominant self care
Individual responsibility

Dominant clinical care
Professional responsibility



Now is the time for self care

There are an estimated 18 million GP appointments every year for self-treatable conditions.¹ As primary and urgent care settings throughout the NHS try to tackle an overwhelming backlog of cases caused by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, it is important that people use these services appropriately and that appointments for self-treatable conditions are avoided to reduce pressure.



During the first national lockdown, **69% of people** who said they would not have considered practising self care prior to the pandemic were more likely to.²

In June 2021 this dropped to 54%,³ highlighting the urgency of embedding these policies now before people return to their pre-pandemic behaviour.

Current barriers and opportunities for self care

A lack of health literacy:



43%-61%

of English working-age adults routinely do not understand health information.⁴ This low level of health literacy has a direct impact on the NHS.

It is estimated that a lack of understanding costs between



3%-5%

of the annual UK health budget⁵

Systemic barriers:

- The current healthcare system is not set up in a way that facilitates access to self care. A siloed approach that separates responsibility between national institutions – or in the case of self-treatable conditions, offers no national leadership – creates challenges in ensuring the system is fully able to support self care across the care continuum
- Meanwhile, the algorithms that sit behind online symptom checkers and digital triaging technologies are often risk adverse, recommending professional care when self care is appropriate
- Further work is needed to improve interoperability of IT systems and enable pharmacists to routinely record the advice or medication they give so that it is taken account of in other health settings (e.g. by GPs and in hospital)

Untapped digital potential:

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the value of online symptom checkers, with the COVID-19 symptom checker being widely used and promoted through NHS channels. Building on this success, online symptom checkers should be expanded to support people to self care for a wider range of minor ailments.

Our vision for self care



Individuals should understand and be willing to practise self care when appropriate for their symptoms



A cultural shift should take place among healthcare professionals towards wellbeing and supporting individuals to self care

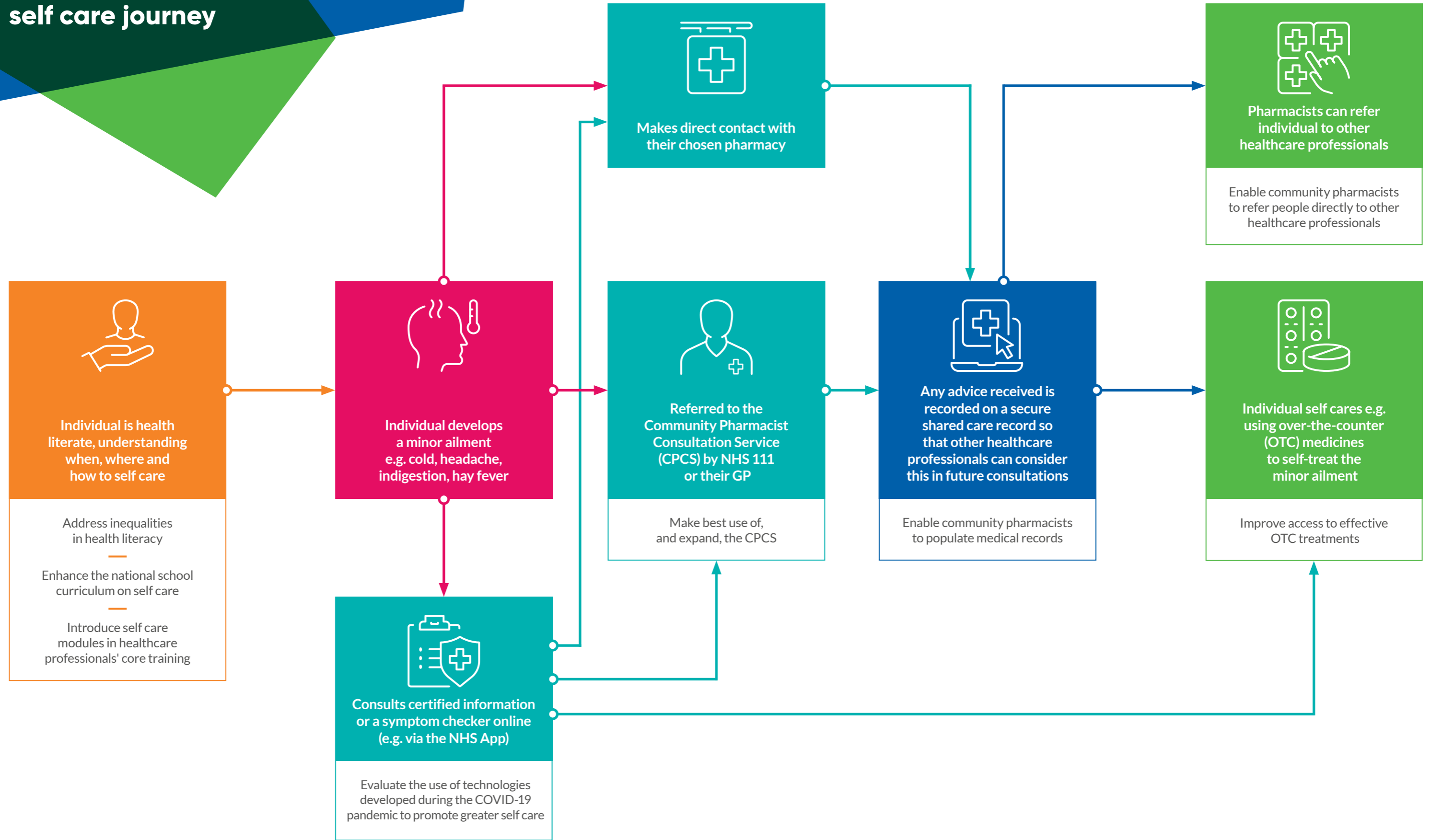


The system should be designed to support self care, with pharmacy fully integrated into the primary care pathway



Digital technology should be used to its fullest potential to encourage and empower people to self care

The optimal self care journey



Ensure better support for Primary Care Networks (PCNs) to deliver self care

Implement a national strategy for self care

To realise this self care journey, the Government must work with stakeholders to:

- 1 Address inequalities in health literacy
- 2 Enhance the national curriculum for primary and secondary age children on self care
- 3 Introduce self care modules in healthcare professionals' training curricula and continuing professional development
- 4 Make best use of, and expand, the Community Pharmacist Consultation Service (CPCS)
- 5 Improve access to effective over-the counter treatments to further promote self care behaviour and the role of the pharmacist as an expert healthcare professional
- 6 Enable community pharmacists to refer people directly to other healthcare professionals
- 7 Ensure better support for Primary Care Networks (PCNs) to deliver self care
- 8 Evaluate the use of technologies that have been developed during the COVID-19 pandemic to promote greater self care
- 9 Enable community pharmacists to populate medical records

Case Study

Dr. Me is a health promotion programme that teaches primary school aged children how to self care for common self-treatable conditions in order to encourage patient empowerment and education from a young age.

The results of a study into the Dr. Me project suggest it can improve children's knowledge of self care and increase their confidence in managing self-treatable conditions.⁶



Since its launch in October 2019, there have been over 230,000 referrals for minor ailments made to the CPCS from NHS 111.⁷

As this programme evolves, pharmacy groups and government should work together to adapt it further to maximise the opportunities to direct people to self care.



About PAGB

PAGB, the consumer health association, is the UK trade association representing the manufacturers of branded over-the-counter (OTC) medicines, self care medical devices and food supplements. These products can be bought from a pharmacy or other retail outlets without a prescription and help people to stay healthy and self care for self-treatable conditions which do not require consultation with a medical professional.

For more information on PAGB please visit www.pagb.co.uk. If you would like to discuss the issues outlined here in more detail, please email selfcare@pagb.co.uk.

References

- 1 Practice Business, *NHS campaign aims to drive patients to pharmacists*, 2019. Available at: <https://practicebusiness.co.uk/nhs-campaign-aims-to-drive-patients-to-pharmacists/>
- 2 PAGB, *PAGB Self Care Survey 2020*, 2020. Available at: <https://www.pagb.co.uk/policy/self-care/self-care-survey-report-download-pagb/>
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- 4 NHS England (2016), *Does health literacy matter?* Available at: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/blog/jonathan-berry/>
- 5 Klause Eichler et al, *The costs of limited health literacy: a systematic review*. International Journal of Public Health 54, 2009. Available at: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s00038-009-0058-2>
- 6 Fung C.Y, *Dr. Me project: Teaching children self-care for self-limiting illnesses in primary schools*, Future Healthcare Journal, June 2020, Vol.7, No 2: 105-8. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7296582/>
- 7 UK Parliament. UIN 116398, tabled on 17 November 2020. Available at: <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-11-17/116398>