



Health Professionals: Actions to Promote RMNCH Self-Care

830 women die every day from preventable causes related to pregnancy and childbirth. More than 2.7 million children die every year in their first month of life and a similar number are stillborn. Most are preventable.

Self-Care is a set of activities that individuals, families and communities can undertake throughout their lives to enhance health and prevent disease. As an essential part of reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health (RMNCH), self-care empowers women and their families with knowledge, skills and confidence to proactively maintain health.

Despite its proven potential, self-care is often overlooked in favor of clinical interventions and disease-specific, top-down approaches to RMNCH. But for health professionals—including doctors, midwives, nurses and other health workers—supporting self-care is a smart investment. Self-care programs empower and educate women and can ease financial and human resource burdens for communities and facilities.

White Ribbon Alliance has created this simple menu of actions that health professionals or their associations can take to support self-care within their country. This tool should be used in partnership with decision makers, advocates and program implementers to enhance the quality of women's and children's health and help realize health rights.



“As a result of the training,
we now offer woman-
centered care and are rated
among the best maternity
institutions in the country.”

—Gretel Mahere, Senior
District Nursing Officer,
Kwekwe, Zimbabwe.

Health Professionals

Building a generation of women and girls who practice self-care will require health professionals to proactively engage citizens in self-care, mobilize leaders and enhance health policies and programs. Here are some practical actions that health professionals can take to promote self-care in their communities and countries.

1. Promote Self-care Among Citizens: We know that strong relationships between citizens and health professionals lead to better health strategies and dialogue for sustainable results.

As a health professional you can:

Promote RMNCH healthy behaviors during International Self-Care Day on July 24th

Distribute self-care best practices which foster wellness for women and families. This should include the reasons why activities such as attending antenatal visits, following nutrition recommendations and understanding the full range of family planning options are beneficial to individuals and vital for healthy communities.

Promote self-care as a standard for patient interaction

Incorporate a focus on self-care into ongoing dialogues with patients. Call for the adoption of the [Respectful Maternity Care Charter](#) into national and subnational frameworks as a standard for patient interaction.

Integrate self-care into public health campaigns

Health professionals are uniquely positioned to lead and legitimize positive public health knowledge. By linking and leveraging conversations with other health professionals and individuals, health professionals can share and encourage positive self-care behaviors.

Gather women’s input about their RMNCH self-care needs

Be a leader for positive women-centered community norms by publicly acknowledging women’s RMNCH wants and needs. Attend women’s groups and foster relationships with female leaders for RMNCH self-care.

2. Mobilize Stakeholders to Take Action: Become a leader among leaders by engaging other stakeholders at all levels to understand and promote self-care.

As a health professional you can:

Convene local health care professionals

Bring together health care professionals including village health workers, nurses, midwives and doctors to discuss gaps in services and self-care solutions. Make sure to include women and families in the discussion to promote coordination and best practices.

Define self-care as a health tool to reach global health goals

Self-care isn't a siloed action or program, rather a tool to be integrated into all levels of RMNCH health discussion. Define and highlight collaboration between efforts to educate and support health professionals and individual self-care.

Collect evidence of effective self-care activities in your facilities

Document and disseminate lessons learned from existing self-care approaches with other health professionals.

3. Enhance Policies and Programs: Health Professionals can make self-care an integral part of health approaches. To read more about specific policy recommendations, please click [here](#) for our policy paper.

As a health professional you can:

Increase self-care education and literacy through curricula

Integrate self-care education and approaches into existing health professional curricula. Self-care topics include reproductive health rights and health literacy for girls and adolescents.

Develop self-care training curriculum

Enhance training for health providers by integrating RMNCH self-care approaches, including a women's centered approach through respectful maternity care, into annual health worker training requirements. Connect with health professionals in other countries to share best practices and approaches.

Leverage current health standards to promote self-care in communities

Incorporate self-care into conversations regarding health standards, such as nutrition policies, baby registry processes, and access to antenatal visits. Share best practices with program implementers and advocates to promote awareness of policies and programs.



Conclusion

White Ribbon Alliance thanks all health professionals who have committed to creating a world where women and families have quality and respectful care. We know that when empowered with knowledge and confidence, women make the best health decisions for themselves and their families. Self-care is an approach that realizes White Ribbon Alliance's strategy to educate and empower people about health and rights and ultimately deliver new or improved policies and practices that are driven by women's needs.

If you would like assistance or support implementing any of the above actions, please contact White Ribbon Alliance at info@whiteribbonalliance.org or click [here](#) to visit the resource page.



Since the completion of the self-care community project in Kwekwe, Zimbabwe, WRA Zimbabwe has been approached by the National Director of Nurses to implement the curriculum into the national framework. Zimbabwe is committed to training more health providers to take a women-centered approach, specifically leveraging the self-care approach developed by WRA Zimbabwe.

