

Self-Care 2030

Towards a seismic shift in perceiving and practising mental healthcare

- We are navigating a period of intense social, technological, and environmental change, with profound impacts on mental health.
- Against this backdrop, 'Self-Care 2030: Revolutionising Wellbeing through Self-Care for Mental Health' emerges as a crucial manifesto.
- The report, by David Skinner, Dr Austen El-Osta, and Dr Marcelo Demarzo, argues for the vital need to integrate self-care into our mental wellbeing.
- The report's heart is the Seven Pillars of Self-Care, a comprehensive approach to maintaining health and managing personal wellbeing.
- Self-care is not a response to illness but a proactive approach to maintaining and enhancing mental wellbeing.

In today's fast-paced world, where digital connectivity blurs the lines between work and home, the pressures of social media to conform are unrelenting, and socio-political divisions are ripping communities apart, mental health challenges are escalating with unprecedented force. We are navigating a period of intense social, technological, and environmental change. Each of these dimensions introduces complex

challenges that can strain mental health and the systems in place to provide the necessary care and support. Systems designed to promote mental wellbeing must deal with limited resources, inadequate training of health professionals in mental healthcare, stigma associated with mental disorders, and an underestimation of the economic impact that mental health issues pose.

Against this backdrop, the report '*Self-Care 2030: Revolutionising Wellbeing through Self-Care for Mental Health*', published by the International Self-Care Foundation (ISF) and the Self-Care Academic Research Unit (SCARU) at Imperial College London, emerges as a crucial manifesto. ISF is a charitable organisation promoting self-care and is led by its President David Skinner, Dr Austen El-Osta, the Director of SCARU, and Dr Marcelo Demarzo, Director of the Brazilian Centre for Mindfulness and Health Promotion at the Federal University of São Paulo. This report, second in the Self-Care 2030 Insights Report series, highlights the vital need to integrate self-care into developing our mental health. Moreover, it advocates for this integration as an essential component of global health strategies. To help, the authors have provided a compelling and well-structured guide for how this should happen while emphasising the need for urgent action.

What is self-care?

At an individual level, self-care is actively maintaining and promoting one's health and wellbeing using lifestyle medicine, smart technology, lifestyle behaviour modification, and other evidence-based approaches. According to the Self-Care 2030 Mental Health report, applied

more broadly, self-care is the ability of 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.

The report's heart is the Seven Pillars of Self-Care, a comprehensive approach to maintaining health and managing personal wellbeing. Each pillar focuses on a different aspect of health, from enhancing knowledge through self-care literacy to the wise and informed use of medications. Understanding and implementing these pillars can empower individuals to take proactive steps towards their health, with the knock-on effect of easing the growing burden on our

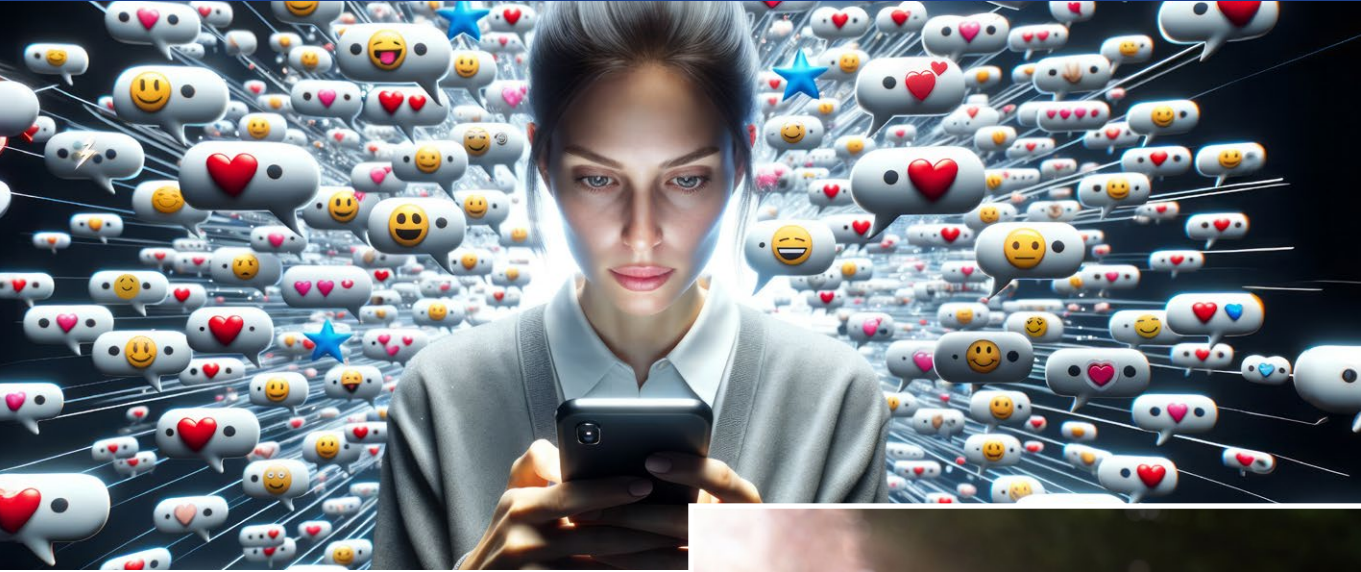
healthcare systems. This is especially the case, argue Skinner, El-Osta, and Demarzo, when it comes to managing mental health.

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The global burden of mental health challenges

The authors detail the extensive impact of mental disorders, a leading cause of disability worldwide, which not only diminishes the quality of life but also

places significant strains on health services. Their report illustrates the dual crisis of increased mental health issues and the concurrent disruption in mental health services, a situation exacerbated by



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recent global events such as the COVID-19 pandemic. This section lays bare the stark reality of mental health challenges, emphasising the necessity of robust, accessible self-care strategies to alleviate these pressures. Critical to this is shifting focus.

The report defines mental health not merely as the absence of mental illness but as a state of wellbeing where individuals realise their own potential, can cope with everyday stresses of life, work productively, and contribute to their communities. This nuanced understanding is crucial for framing self-care not just as a response to illness but as a proactive approach to maintaining and enhancing mental wellbeing.

The link between mental health and self-care

Perhaps the core of the report, this section outlines how self-care directly impacts mental health. It details the Seven Pillars of Self-Care, with a particular focus on mental wellbeing, self-awareness, and agency in self-care practices. The authors argue that self-care enables individuals to manage stress, reduce depression and anxiety, and maintain overall mental wellness through regular engagement in mindful practices, physical activity, and social interaction.

Skinner, El-Osta, and Demarzo also discuss the various factors influencing how individuals engage in self-care, including personal beliefs about health, social support systems, and access to health resources. These factors can be facilitators – or barriers – to effective self-care. The authors offer insights into how individuals and communities can overcome any barriers through targeted interventions and policies.



Self-care directly impacts mental health.

The *Self-Care 2030 Mental Health Report* offers a wealth of guidance. It outlines a range of self-care strategies explicitly tailored for mental health. These strategies are categorised into psychological, social, and physical, each underpinned by evidence-based practices that individuals can adopt to improve their mental health. In this way, it serves as a practical guide for readers, providing actionable advice on integrating self-care into their daily routines.

The future of mental healthcare

The authors encourage us to reflect on the future trajectory of mental health care, emphasising the growing importance of self-care in the public health discourse. Their report calls for increased investment in self-care initiatives, broader educational programmes, and policy reforms that recognise and support self-care as a public health imperative.

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In essence, Self-Care 2030 Mental Health is not just a report but a manifesto for change, advocating a seismic shift in how we perceive and practice mental healthcare. Through the dedicated efforts of its authors and the actionable insights it provides, the report aims to catalyse a shift towards a society where self-care is embedded in every aspect of life, supporting mental wellbeing for everybody.

Personal response

You're advocating a seismic shift in how we perceive and practice mental healthcare. That won't be easy; where is a good place for governments and state health institutions to start?

Mental health and wellbeing is the second pillar of self-care (after health literacy). Governments and state health institutions looking to revolutionise mental healthcare should start by building robust foundational policies that promote mental health awareness to help destigmatise mental health issues. This requires a concerted approach, including the integration of mental health services into primary healthcare settings to ensure accessibility and reduce stigma. Training healthcare providers in recognising and treating mental health issues is crucial. Investing in mental health infrastructure, such as providing adequate funding for mental health services and establishing national mental health programmes, is also vital. This foundational work sets the stage for more innovative practices and ensures a supportive environment where mental health care is viewed as equally important as physical healthcare.

How can governments encourage citizens to embrace self-care with respect to mental health and wellbeing?

Mental health is the key psychosocial domain relevant to self-care. Governments can encourage self-care to promote better mental health by first ensuring that the concept is understood and accepted. This can be achieved through widespread educational campaigns including leveraging the microlearning approach that highlights the importance of mental health and the effectiveness of self-care practices. Governments can also incentivise participation by offering free or subsidised programmes such as mindfulness workshops, stress management seminars and physical activities that have mental health benefits. Ensuring that these resources are easily accessible and culturally sensitive will help in gaining wider acceptance. By incorporating self-care strategies into public health advisories and creating supportive environments in workplaces and schools, governments can promote the normalisation of mental health self-care across all settings, including in the workplace.

What barriers could governments encounter in this regard, and what can they do to get around those barriers?

Governments may face several barriers, including cultural stigma, underfunding and a lack of trained professionals. There is also the danger of thinking of only one cardinal aspect of self-care, instead of the totality of self-care as all the pillars are somewhat interconnected. To overcome these, it is vital to engage with communities to change cultural attitudes toward mental health through education and visible leadership advocating for mental healthcare. Increasing funding is also crucial to expand services and infrastructure. Governments can also

focus on training paraprofessionals and leveraging technology such as telehealth to mitigate the shortage of mental health professionals. Collaborative efforts with non-governmental organisations and the private sector can also provide additional resources and innovation in tackling these barriers.

What messaging is necessary to encourage self-care with respect to mental health and wellbeing at an individual level?

Clear, relatable, and actionable messaging is essential to encourage and normalise the adoption of health-seeking self-care behaviours to promote mental health and wellbeing. It should also emphasise the normalcy of discussing and maintaining mental health and the effectiveness of self-care practices in enhancing personal wellbeing. Messages should always be framed positively, highlighting the benefits of good mental health rather than the consequences of neglecting it. Campaigns should also use diverse media platforms to reach different demographics and include testimonials from individuals who have successfully incorporated self-care into their lives. It's also important to provide practical steps and resources, making it easy for individuals to start and maintain a healthy and sustainable self-care routine. However, while messaging is important, it is also crucial to consider that our ability to feel connected to our community directly influences our love for self and our ability or desire to self-care. This is why policymakers are increasingly looking at social connections, social isolation and loneliness as a key public health concern, as these exacerbated significantly since the advent of COVID and ensuing lockdowns.

Describe a near future where increased investment in self-care initiatives, broader educational programmes and policy reforms recognising and supporting self-care as a public health imperative have shaped a country's healthcare.

It's inevitable that governments will direct significant funding to promote the uptake of evidence-based self-care initiatives, coupled to educational programmes and supportive policy reforms. This will be a future where the country's healthcare landscape is dramatically transformed and mental health awareness would be at an all-time high, with self-care practices being as routine as physical exercise. We described this future in some detail in our *Self-Care 2030 Insights Report* published last year. Schools and workplaces would regularly incorporate mental health education and practices into their daily routines, making mental wellbeing a communal priority. Health systems would also be proactive, with resources readily available to support individuals in maintaining their mental health. The stigma surrounding mental health would be significantly reduced, encouraging a society where people feel empowered to seek help and share their experiences without fear of judgment. Technology will play a crucial role no doubt and some people would say that the future is already here!

Details



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Bio

David Skinner is President of the International Self-care Foundation (ISF). He is a biochemist with over 34 years of leading a major Canadian self-care organisation (now the Food, Health, and Consumer Products of Canada) and was a Director of the Global Self-care Federation (GSCF), an international trade association based near Geneva, Switzerland, from 1983 to 2013.

Further reading

Demarzo, M, El-Osta, A, and Skinner, D, (2024) *Self-Care 2030: Revolutionising wellbeing through self-care for mental health, Insights Report*, Vol 2 of 7.

