

Summary report on the

WHO-EM/WRH/112/E

# Meeting on strengthening self-care interventions for sexual and reproductive health in the Eastern Mediterranean Region

Virtual meeting  
6 May 2021



REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE

World Health  
Organization

Eastern Mediterranean

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## **1. Introduction**

On 6 May 2021, the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean in collaboration with WHO headquarters held a virtual meeting on strengthening self-care interventions for sexual and reproductive health in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region. The aim of the meeting was to support the adoption and implementation of self-care interventions for sexual and reproductive health and the dissemination of regional examples of self-care interventions for sexual and reproductive health to countries of the Region.

The specific objectives of the workshop were to:

- share the key messages and recommendations of the 2019 WHO consolidated guideline on self-care interventions for sexual and reproductive health;
- discuss country updates and progress in the implementation of self-care interventions for sexual and reproductive health;
- disseminate to countries articles from the Region published in the international journal Health Research Policy and Systems; and
- agree on the future steps to adopt or strengthen self-care interventions for sexual and reproductive health in the Region.

The meeting was attended by 45 participants from eight countries of the Region, including Egypt, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, occupied Palestinian territory and Pakistan. This included policy-makers, programme managers, researchers, academics, nongovernmental organization staff and representatives from the Concept Foundation, International Pharmaceutical Federation and Pan African Organization Against AIDS.

The meeting was inaugurated by Dr Maha El-Adawy, Director, Healthier Populations, WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, who highlighted the importance of self-care for ensuring the continuity of

sexual and reproductive health services during the COVID-19 pandemic, and for the scaling-up and sustainability of health care provision. She emphasized the role of self-care interventions in promoting sexual and reproductive health, preventing disease, maintaining health, coping with illness and disability, and ensuring equitable health coverage and better quality of care.

## **2. Summary of discussions**

Participants were updated on the dissemination and implementation of the WHO consolidated guideline on self-care interventions for sexual and reproductive health and rights<sup>1</sup> in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. It was emphasized that self-care interventions should be seen as an extension of health system delivery and considered a vital service for ensuring equitable sexual and reproductive health coverage.

It was noted that self-care encompasses different areas, including self-management, self-testing and self-awareness, and pointed out that WHO's conceptual framework takes a people-centred approach that seeks to promote health, rather than a purely disease-focused approach. Although the health sector remains responsible for health care, and self-care should not cause an extra burden on individuals, it was explained that self-care can offer an opportunity for people to improve their ability to manage, control and contribute to their health and well-being, while also providing an opportunity to minimize the burden on the health care system.

It was highlighted that the WHO guideline was developed taking into consideration political and cultural sensitivities, and includes evidence-based recommendations and good practice guidance on the programmatic, operational and service delivery issues that need to be

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<sup>1</sup> [WHO consolidated guideline on self-care interventions for health: sexual and reproductive health and rights](#). Geneva: World Health Organization; 2019.

addressed to promote and increase the uptake and use of self-care interventions for advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Documented experiences in self-care interventions for sexual and reproductive health from countries of the Region were presented and discussed. These were published as the following articles in a supplement of the Health Research Policy and Systems journal in April 2021.<sup>2</sup> The articles included the following:

- Sexual and reproductive health self-care interventions in the Eastern Mediterranean Region: Findings from a cross-sectional values and preferences survey to inform WHO normative guidance on self-care interventions.
- The role of community pharmacists in increasing access and use of self-care for sexual and reproductive health interventions in the Eastern Mediterranean Region: examples from Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Somalia.
- The role of partners in promoting self-care for misoprostol and subcutaneous DMPA in Pakistan.
- Community-led HIV self-testing for men who have sex with men in Lebanon: lessons learned and impact of COVID-19.
- Regulatory standards and processes for over-the-counter availability of hormonal contraception and drugs for medical abortion in five countries in the Eastern Mediterranean Region.
- The role of parliamentarians in promoting self-care for sexual and reproductive health and rights: applying COVID-19 lens in the Eastern Mediterranean Region.
- Changing national health policies for introduction, uptake and scale-up of self-care interventions for sexual and reproductive health and rights in the Eastern Mediterranean Region.

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<sup>2</sup> Health Res Policy Syst. 2021. Apr 21;19(Suppl 1):57. doi:10.1186/s12961-020-00659-w.

In discussion, there was agreement that partnerships are essential for the implementation and scale-up of self-care interventions for sexual and reproductive health because they help to advocate for needs, identify challenges and opportunities, introduce and integrate self-care into practice, and build the capacity of the health care system and the sustainability of interventions.

### **3. Conclusions**

Self-care interventions for sexual and reproductive health are essential for ensuring equitable sexual, reproductive and maternal health coverage and responding to people's needs. By adopting the five recommended WHO self-care interventions, self-care offers an opportunity for women and couples to improve their ability to manage and improve their health and well-being.

Self-care interventions for sexual and reproductive health need to be adapted based on political and social context and commitment, health system resilience and the availability of sexual and reproductive health essential medicine and commodities.

The implementation of self-care interventions depends on policy dialogue, planning, security and working with local partners to ensure quality self-care interventions for sexual and reproductive health, a rational use of the available resources and the prioritization of vulnerable populations.



#### **4. Recommendations**

##### *To Member States*

1. Consider the five self-care interventions for sexual and reproductive health recommended by WHO.
2. Use countries' documented experiences in self-care interventions for sexual and reproductive health to advocate for implementing self-care interventions.
3. Collaborate and coordinate with relevant partners and stakeholders to ensure the scale-up and sustainability of self-care interventions for sexual and reproductive health.
4. Secure the sexual and reproductive health resources and commodities needed for self-care interventions for sexual and reproductive health.
5. Document and disseminate successful practices in self-care interventions for sexual and reproductive health.

##### *To WHO*

6. Provide technical support and guidance to Member States to strengthen the adoption and implementation of quality self-care interventions for sexual and reproductive health.
7. Document and share successful practices within and among countries of the Region and globally.
8. Share up-to-date guidance and recommendations with Member States to support national efforts to adopt self-care interventions for improving sexual and reproductive health.



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