

SELF-MEDICATION 2025

Healthy perspectives for the individual
and for society



IN BRIEF

Germany will change in the years to come. The attitude of people towards the topic of health will also change. Nowadays, being healthy means more than merely the absence of disease. Moreover, health is considered a key factor for self-determined and active shaping of one's life. This implies on the one hand a need for greater personal responsibility – in the sense of a healthy lifestyle and prevention – and on the other hand increased expectations concerning a type of health care which is tailored to the needs of the individual.

A health system that remains equally powerful, affordable and human under these challenges needs self-medication as a supporting pillar. When developing a framework for self-medication that meets the demands of both the individual and society in a sustainable way for the future, consideration for the human being should be at the centre of the process.

Based on such considerations, a healthy perspective for people and for society will emerge from self-medication by establishing cooperation of all public health partners.

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INTRODUCTION

Germany will change in the years and decades to come. The key development is demographic change which will further transform the work and living environment of people, together with the influences of advancing digitalisation. The health care system needs to accommodate medical progress and remain powerful, affordable and human. Health care must be adapted to people's altered living environments. In this scenario self-medication generates healthy perspectives for the individual and for the whole of society. Today, it has already become a building block for patient-oriented, comprehensive and financeable health care. The German Medicines Manufacturers' Association (BAH) wants to impart its expertise for further development of health care in the future. BAH wants to explain under which altered framework conditions the reinforcement of personal responsibility and self-medication with non-prescription medicines can be important building blocks for assurance of health care in the future.

Within these considerations, the individual with all his needs should be at the centre of all thinking and acting.



UNDERSTANDING SELF-MEDICATION AND OTC

BAH wants to initiate a discussion on views of self-medication. For clarification, BAH's understanding of the terms self-medication and OTC are given first.

SELF-MEDICATION

Self-medication means self-treatment with non-prescription medicines and certain other health products (see OTC) under one's own responsibility, with the aim of restoring or preserving physical well-being. Self-medication stands more for a behaviour than for an objectifiable product characteristic. Self-medication can be optimised with the support of a pharmacist or a medical doctor. It can often be an alternative to a physician consultation in certain disorders or supplement a medical therapy. Self-medication is the expression of active involvement of the human being in his individual process of healing and maintenance of health.

OTC*

OTC products in a narrower sense are medicines which may only be dispensed in pharmacies (pharmacy only). The criteria for OTC products include the claim for efficacy, safety and quality as well as the optimisation of administration due to the dispense and advice in pharmacies. Therefore, medicines which can also be purchased outside pharmacies as well as health products, especially substance-based medical devices and food supplements, are also perceived as OTC products in the market and by the general public. The dispensing of OTC products in pharmacies opens up the possibility that whenever necessary an alternative or a physician consultation can be recommended. ■

* Over the Counter = separating medicines which may only be purchased in pharmacies from others which can also be purchased outside pharmacies ("before the counter" = self-service area)

THESES FOR GERMANY IN 2025

Consequences of the of aging society for health care

Low birth rates and reduced mortality will lead to an aging society in Germany. This poses great challenges for the health care of tomorrow. Chronic diseases and age-related impairments will come to the forefront. Self-medication will assume a more important role, especially when it comes to the alleviation of everyday complaints.

The importance of prevention will grow: The burden of chronic diseases on the population can only be reduced by reinforced efforts.¹ In order to use the available resources efficiently, there is a need for all stakeholders of the health care system to expand their prevention and information services and for the personal responsibility of the individual to be strengthened. **This includes improving competence for self-medication in the case of minor ailments, in order to free up resources for the treatment of more serious diseases.**

Structural changes to the disadvantage of rural regions

Within the regions of Germany big differences in the age structure of the population are emerging. These differences are further promoted by the imbalances in workforce supply and demand. Urbanisation disadvantages the rural regions of Germany.² The respective municipalities will be forced to reduce their infrastructural supply which will also produce major challenges for health care.

People living in rural areas will have to put up with longer distances to access physicians, pharmacies, educational institutions, shopping opportunities and work places. Improving self-medication will relieve the burden from the patients, as it will save travel and waiting times. **Physicians will be able to use their resources for the care of patients with more serious diseases.**

Transformation of the working environment

In the course of the demographic change less middle aged people will be in employment. Concomitantly, it will be necessary and desirable from companies' and many people's point of view that older people also continue working. However, absentee times are longer for the older working population, and in general everybody should be free to work according to his individual needs.³ This situation poses challenges on health care.

Another factor leading to transformation of the existing labor and living environment is the increasing digitalisation. Employers and employees will have to be more flexible. **Self-medication will help to improve the quality of life and organisation of everyday family and labor issues.**

Chances and risks of digitalisation

The importance of the internet as a medium of information and commerce is increasing. To date, the internet has become the first source of information on health topics. In Germany every second citizen has already searched the internet for information on diseases.⁴ However, the quantity and quality of the information provided often overtax people.⁵ Advice provided by physicians and pharmacists as the guarantors for appropriate care remains essential, and also increasingly for verification of the retrieved information. By this, physicians and pharmacists can provide orientation and a feeling of safety. Also in this context, information and communication technologies open up new options for care.

In the future the individual will even more become the designer of his own health care and use digital services as supportive information or as a service. Health is highly individual and existing information does not always match with the individual and his state of health. Supplementary advice can place this information in the individual context. **Further development of systems that use intelligent crosslinking of information, data and stakeholders will be crucial for the role of self-medication in the improvement of health care.**

Individualisation of living environments

Due to urbanisation and the aging of society, people are increasingly loosening traditional relationships with their families and surrounding neighbours. Last but not least the wish for independence leads to many people in smaller households. Whereas family members, cohabitants or neighbours may provide advice and support in case of illness, less social cohesion requires a higher degree of individual responsibility. **Self-medication can be an easily accessible and effective support for health care of these people, especially when combined with health care professionals and the use of information and communication technologies.**

Implications for self-medication

Demographic change, rural depopulation, progress in medicine and the rise of age-related diseases all pose particular challenges on health infrastructure and require (financial) resources. Cost pressures on the health system and competition for resources will further increase. This goes together with a substantial backlog of demand in the area of prevention and health education.

The health system of the future must handle the existing resources more efficiently. The stakeholders in the health system will create offers and incentives in this regard. Crosslinking of stakeholders must be optimised by using digital tools. Overall, the individual has a greater scope of personal responsibility. As much freedom as possible and as much regulation as necessary, this complies with the credo of the social market economy which is important for our country. Besides efficiency, the health care of the future must take new living realities into account and at the same time remain human. **As a central pillar of health care, self-medication will gain higher significance in the future. ■**

SELF-MEDICATION – A CENTRAL BUILDING BLOCK IN HEALTH CARE TODAY AND TOMORROW

Self-medication with medicines and health products, especially in combination with personal professional advice in pharmacies, has already become an important building block in health care. A bit more than 50 percent of all packages dispensed in pharmacies are OTC medicines.⁶ In Germany, annually three quarters of the population above 14 years of age suffer from headache or migraine and about one third contracts a common cold, two typical diseases which are predominantly treated with OTC preparations. Without self-medication the German health system would already have collapsed long ago.⁷

Currently about 100 million so called minor ailments per year are treated by physicians. According to an expertise of May+Bauer GbR, the medical necessity of a physician

consultation can be questioned in many cases.⁸ Often formal reasons, a feeling of uncertainty or subjective information deficits determine the decision in favour of a physician consultation and against self-medication.⁹ In the future existing resources will have to be used more efficiently. This applies to the costs for society as well as time resources of the individual. With a view to the challenging developments of society and demographics, the system of solidarity as well as the freedom to strive for a personal and individual design of health care under one's own responsibility can only be ensured by the promotion of self-medication with OTC medicines. Therefore, self-medication must be further developed and sustainably strengthened on different levels, i.e. on the level of the individual, society and in politics – to the advantage of the individual and society. ■

THE BENEFIT OF SELF-MEDICATION FOR THE INDIVIDUAL

More and more people watch their health. Responsible and health-interested individuals assign more and more importance to the freedom of decision making concerning their own recovery process. This wish complies with the needs of society and an increased personal responsibility of the individual.

This self-understanding surpasses the context of recovery, healing and alleviation of diseases. The individual develops from being purely a “health recipient” to a “health manager” who cares for the maintenance of his performance capacity and health under his own responsibility. This development creates the possibility of making health care more individual and more efficient, but for this purpose products and services should be available. In addition, the individual needs adequate and uncomplicated access to information which enables him to take his decisions.

On site pharmacies in particular will play an increasing role as low-threshold points of contact for advice and guarantor of appropriate care. Pharmacies can provide the personal attention which is important for therapeutic success and likewise offer the reassurance that potential risks and benefits in individual situations are adequately recognized. The individual profits from the high quality and

tightly crosslinked supply of trustworthy information and products. The time spared through the waived physician consultation can be used for recovery. Currently, 71 percent of the German population already confer on pharmacies a high degree of trustability.¹⁰ More self-medication frees up more resources in physicians’ offices for patients who really need a physician consultation. This also has a cost-saving effect on the compulsory health insurance system (GKV).

The individual takes his decision to consult a physician according to his own preference or based on the recommendation of a pharmacist. He expects to obtain comprehensive and balanced therapy and advice from health care professionals. This must be based on an exhaustive evaluation of the available evidence and include clinical experience. Lastly, the human as an individual must be sufficiently taken into account. ■

THE BENEFIT OF SELF-MEDICATION FOR SOCIETY

Every treatment by self-medication saves on the costs of prescribed medicines for compulsory health insurance (GKV) – for the system as a whole and for the physicians in particular – those resources can then be made available for medically more serious cases. Pursuant to calculations, the GKV and the national economy already profit from this to a high extent.¹¹

The responsibility for care should be distributed among physicians and pharmacists as health care professionals, but also the individual himself, and adjusted according to different medical requirements. This approach means the health system can be sustainably financed ensuring it continues to be of benefit to both sick people and for society. Suchlike distribution also helps to maintain comprehensive access of people to general practitioners and pharmacies.

The socio-economic added value of self-medication could for example be ensured and extended by the promotion and

development of pharmacies to local health competence and health communication centers. Such centers could provide orientation in an increasingly flexible health world and could assume a piloting function.

Finally, individually tailored therapy as well as self-medication of minor ailments raises economic productivity by the recovery or improvement of personal and professional everyday performance. This may be of special importance with a view to the anticipated erosion of the workforce in the future. ■

PREREQUISITES FOR THE OPTIMAL BENEFIT OF SELF-MEDICATION

Currently, self-medication already contributes substantially to the system and yields an added value for the individual. These facts should be implanted in public awareness. With a view to future challenges to society and the individual, and an altered self-understanding of the patient, practice of self-medication must be further developed.

Freedom of decision of the individual

Patients have options: Due to the challenges to society, the existing system of health care must be optimised efficiently. This can be achieved by a sufficiently defined autonomy of people concerning their personal well-being, in which self-determination and self-responsibility go hand in hand. In order to enable the individual to become aware of his personal responsibility, concepts must be developed for closer crosslinking of information, advice and treatments on offer, as well helping him to feel safe. In addition, he should gain the competence to appreciate and manage minor self-limiting ailments by himself.

Freedom of information

People who have knowledge, get more out of life. Personal health responsibility and self-determination need an adequate basis of information. In former times when people didn't have unlimited access to all dimensions of international health information via the internet – starting with the development of diseases via treatment options and on up to prognoses, etc. – communication on health products in Germany was restricted. This era produced the picture of the "incapable patient" which nowadays has become an anachronism. But today's patient must also be enabled to assess health-relevant information in the context of his individual situation with a sufficient degree of certainty. This can be supported with comprehensive access to professionally sound information provided by pharmacists and physicians.

Access to health services

Ideally, personal responsibility and advice complement each other. Besides access to health information, low-threshold access to services, treatments and products must also be possible. Depending on the health status or problem, access can be via health professionals such as pharmacists or physicians. This does not restrict the autonomy of the individual. Just to the contrary, a patient who expresses his wishes can contribute to the success of treatment, supported by a physician or pharmacist and their specific professional knowledge.

Confidence in the efficacy and tolerability of products

Confidence is the foundation. For health care under one's own responsibility it is particularly important that people have confidence in the products they take in order to achieve the desired success. In this context OTC medicines have a particular importance and status. The requirements determining their efficacy, quality and safety must not be reduced. Today, and in the future, people expect from pharmaceutical manufacturers that medicines are effective, safe and easy to administer. The standards for the assessment of external evidence must be further adapted to the reality of self-medication. The established system which ensures the safety of medicines (pharmacovigilance system) must be maintained as a guarantor for consumer protection.

The same applies to the “pharmacy-only” principle for non-prescription medicines. This principle combines a low-threshold access to effective and tolerable self-medication with professional advice, with the purpose of finding the optimal medication for an individual health situation. Confidence can also be created by a stronger relationship between people and their physician or pharmacist as guarantors for appropriate care. The green prescription can be a suitable link between the physician, pharmacist and patient to create confidence.

Beyond the confidence in the quality of products assured by regulatory provisions, brands provide further orientation and trust in the area of health care. This trust is likewise important with a view to the diversity of information.

Access to innovations

Access to innovative services and products should also be provided within self-medication. This is important for continuous improvement and corresponds to an adequate and equitable provision of health care. Innovation includes further development of prescription only to non-prescription, “pharmacy-only” medicines (e.g. OTC switches; reclassification from prescription to non-prescription status). When considering such developments, more focus should be placed on inherent potential benefits in this regard. This also promotes confidence in the performance of the health system.

Political framework

Policy can set the technical and regulatory as well as socio-communicative framework for more high-quality self-medication. First of all, this requires public and political recognition of self-medication with OTC medicines as an important pillar of health care. On the one hand OTC medicines fulfil the wish of the individual for self-management of health and individualisation, and on the other hand they contribute substantially to sustainable financeability of the system.

However, further development of self-medication needs more support from policy than recognition of its individual and socio-economic benefit. On the one hand, policy must ensure low-threshold access to self-medication and a reasonable integration of medical progress by an adequate legal framework. On the other hand, policy must strengthen the confidence of people in this kind of treatment by reliable and transparent regulatory surroundings and preserve comprehensive access to professional pharmaceutical and medical advice. This framework includes definition of the medical and social limitations of self-medication.

Humanity

Health has physical and emotional implications for the individual: If people want to improve or restore their health under their own responsibility, they need other people who not only support them professionally and show them the right way to take, but who encourage them, place trust in them and motivate them to adhere to the treatment. Any kind of optimisation of the system must therefore not only ensure low-threshold access to products, services and innovations, but also make this access human in the classical meaning. ■

CONCLUSION

Health is a central basic need of human beings. Self-medication is an important instrument to fulfill this need. Self-medication is relevant for medicine, society, economy and health policy. It is not practiced as an end in itself and should therefore be assessed with a view to the individual person as well as in the subordinate context of health care and the health system. With the prospect of future challenges, health-related personal responsibility of the individual should be strengthened. Self-medication will therefore gain more relevance as an important building block of health care. People can realize their wish for more self-determination of their health with self-medication. They get actively involved in their individual healing and health maintenance processes with the aid of OTC medicines under their own responsibility. This does not contradict the freedom of people to experience orientation and support for their decisions. Pharmacy, with its low-threshold, time saving and easy access to qualified and personal advice can contribute crucially to responsible handling and optimisation of self-medication by the individual. By this, self-medication and pharmacies make a symbiotic contribution to effective and efficient health care of the individual. Besides the benefits to the individual, self-medication with OTC medicines from pharmacies is also beneficial for health economy, national economy and finally society. Currently, self-medication already saves enormous amounts for payers and large resources for the health system. Self-medication helps to restore balance in times of increasing scarcity of resources. Self-medication can also be a building block for the reduction of absenteeism and by this help to preserve competitiveness of Germany as an industrial location.

Policy, society and the individual should recognize that self-medication supported by pharmacies is lived consumer protection and that it implies great potential for the individual and for society, not only to accept the above-mentioned challenges, but to transform them to an added value for the individual and for a functioning shared risk community.

The BAH therefore strives for an active and targeted promotion of self-medication. This can obviously only be achieved by an integrative approach, involving all relevant stakeholders. The BAH is ready to provide its expertise to policy, with the aim of creating a suitable framework for self-medication which acknowledges the described challenges and potentials. New concepts should pave the way to a scenario in which every citizen of this country can assume responsibility for his own health, without being left alone and cut off from external personal support. Simultaneously, self-medication creates more open space for physician offices for necessary medical consultations and by this has a cost saving effect on the compulsory health care system (GKV).

Self-medication with OTC medicines stands for healthy perspectives for the individual and for society.



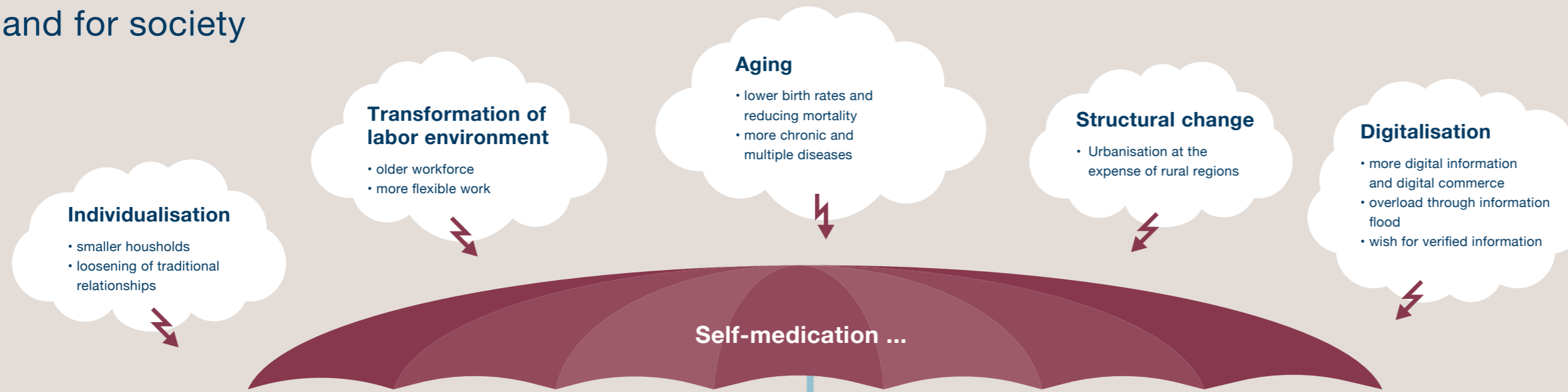
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Healthy perspectives

For the individual and for society

DEVELOPMENTS AND INFLUENCES OF SOCIETY



BENEFIT

- ... as easily accessible effective help
- ... improves quality of life and daily arrangements
- ... creates open space for the treatment of serious diseases
- ... leads to shorter travel and waiting times in physician offices
- ... leads to more intelligent crosslinking and higher quality of care

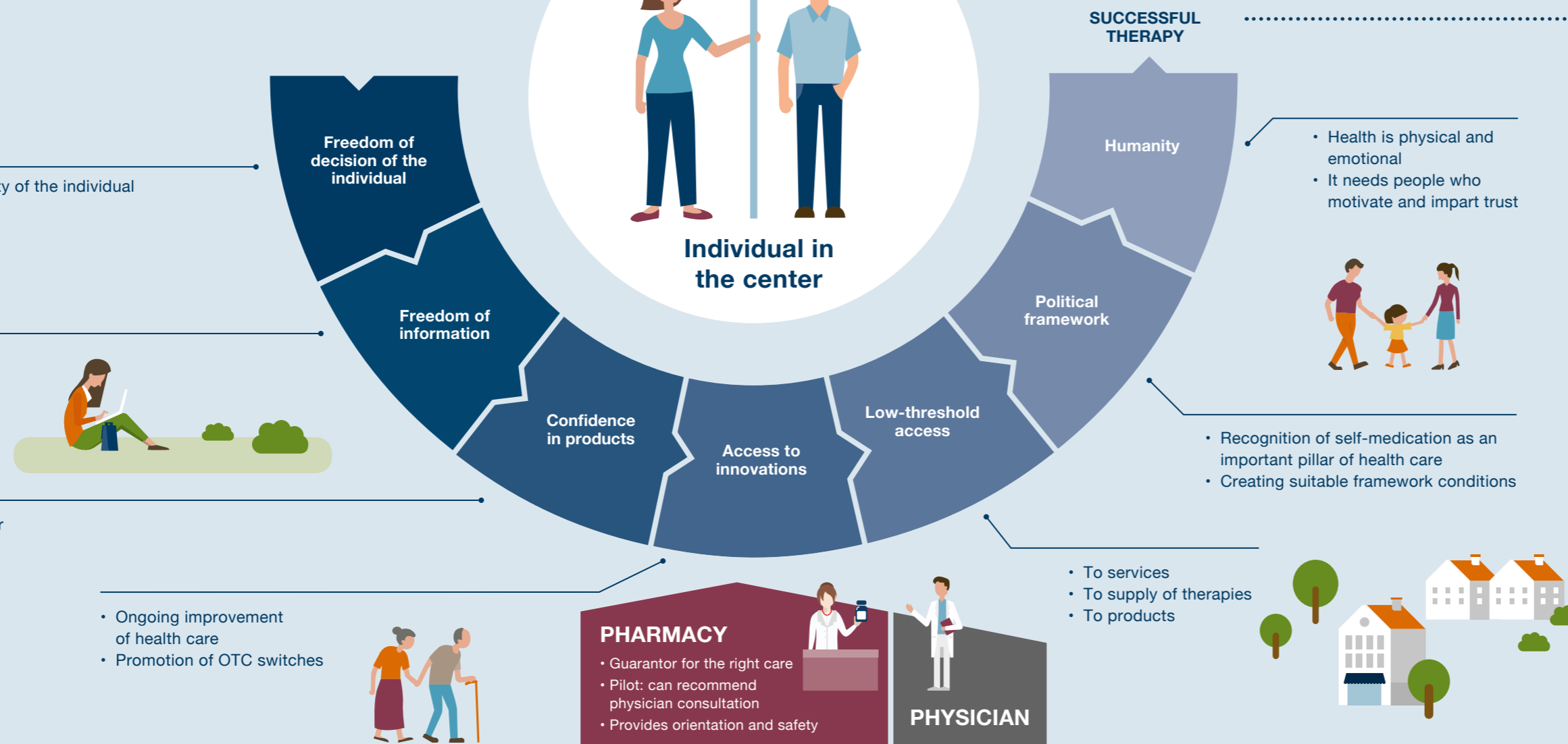
PREREQUISITES FOR POWERFUL SELF-MEDICATION

- Strengthening personal responsibility of the individual
- Strengthening health competence

- Access to qualified information

- Maintain regulatory requirements for efficacy, safety and quality
- Maintain "pharmacy-only" principle
- Brands allow for orientation

- Ongoing improvement of health care
- Promotion of OTC switches



Self-medication 2025

Cost pressures on health systems will further increase. Besides the backlog of demand in terms of health education and prevention, self-medication as a central pillar of health care will gain higher significance in the future.

Benefit of self-medication for society

- More resources for serious diseases
- Sustainable financeability of the health system
- Less physician consultations relieve burden from employees and employers
- Economic stimuli for health economy

Individual benefit of self-medication

- Individual and efficient design of personal health care
- Substantial time savings by waiving travel and waiting time for physician consultation

CONCLUSION

Self-medication must be developed on the individual, society and political level and be promoted sustainably to the advantage of the individual and society.

YOU WANT TO SHAPE THE FUTURE OF PHARMACEUTICAL SUPPLY WITH US?

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Note:

For reasons of readability, we have waived the simultaneous use of male and female forms of the language. All person terms nevertheless apply to both genders.

ABOUT US

By company membership the German Medicines Manufacturers' Association (BAH) is the leading trade organisation of the pharmaceutical industry in Germany. It represents the interests of more than 450 member companies which create about 80,000 jobs in Germany. Globally operating medicines manufacturers are as involved in the manifold activities of the association as the broadly represented medium-sized businesses. BAH caters for both prescription medicines ('Rx') and non-prescription medicines ('OTC'), as well as substance-based medical devices.



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