

08 Feb 2022 | Analysis

France's Self-Care Market 2021: Wellness Innovation Delivers 'Exceptional Year'

by [David Ridley](#)

Dietary supplement and self-care medical device innovation helped France's self-care market return to health in 2021. Backed up by renewed growth in the OTC medicines segment, sales of self-care products increased by 7.1% to €3.72bn.

Double-digit growth in both dietary supplement and OTC medical device segments delivered an "exceptional year" for France's self-care market in 2021, according to the country's consumer healthcare industry association, NèreS.

Sales of dietary supplements and self-care medical devices – which includes items such as at-home COVID-19 tests and thermometers – grew by 10.4% to €1.06bn (\$1.21bn) and 15.3% to €801m respectively last year, the association reported.

Backed up by a return to growth in sales of OTC medicines – which increased by 2.2% to €1.85bn – France's self-care market expanded by 7.1% to €3.72bn. (Also see "[French OTC Sales Tumble In 2020](#)" - HBW Insight, 15 Feb, 2021.)

Prevention and Innovation

"This development was expected," NèreS commented, "given the trends observed in recent years."

The association pointed to two factors that had helped delivered such good results.

What Were France's Biggest Self-Care Companies, Categories And Brands In 2021?

By [David Ridley](#)

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France's consumer healthcare industry association, NèreS, recently published its 2021 self-care market data. In this data-driven article, HBW Insight looks at the year's biggest self-care companies, categories and

Firstly, French consumers have been increasingly focusing on prevention, NèreS said, which is reflected in self-care medical device and dietary supplements growth.

brands.

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Well over a third of self-care products sold in community pharmacies without a prescription now have a preventive purpose, it added.

Secondly, the self-care medical devices and dietary supplements sectors have been quicker to adapt to changing consumer habits and demands, NèreS continued.

Just over a third of the self-care medical devices market, for example, is made up of products launched since 2019, while in the dietary supplements market its 28.9%, NèreS explained.

By contrast, only 1.7% of OTC medicines currently on the French self-care market were launched since 2019, it pointed out.

Self-Care Conservatism

“This figure is explained by a restrictive regulatory framework for OTC medicines, particularly with regard to Rx-to-OTC switches,” NèreS said.

“A few health scandals have shaped the current legal and regulatory framework, with a stronger emphasis on the notion of the ‘precaution principle’ and the personal responsibility of policy makers,” NèreS executive director Luc Besançon told HBW Insight in a recent interview.

“Consequently, many Ministers of Health or government officials (such the directors of our medicines agency) have had to defend their decisions (or absence of decision) in front of a court,” he said. “This situation has had an impact on how liberalization is considered by policy makers in France.”

Besançon also pointed to France’s generous reimbursement system as another factor holding back growth in the OTC medicines segment. (Also see "[France ‘Not Receptive’ To Self-Care, But Wellness And E-Commerce Trends Are Driving Change](#)" - HBW Insight, 13 Jan, 2022.)

“For many years, many OTC medicines have been reimbursed provided that they are prescribed by a medical doctor, Besançon explained. “Currently almost 60% of the OTC market is prescribed and 56% of all OTC medicines are reimbursed by the national health insurance system.”

“There is therefore a well-established expectation among consumers that healthcare is fully covered and that if (OTC) medicines are not reimbursed, they are not effective,” he said.

At a regulatory level, despite a national emphasis on well-being, illness prevention and the self-management of chronic conditions, he added. “The concept of self-care as such, and self-care products, are not reflected in any governmental policies.”

Distribution Problems

Aside from being risk-averse, the French government also fails to see the economic value of self-care, a recent report by the Global Self-Care Federation found. (Also see "[Government Skepticism And Over Regulation Holding Back Self-Care In France – GSCF Analysis](#)" - HBW Insight, 13 Jan, 2022.)

NèreS has published a number of studies showing the economic benefits of self-care, but the trade group says that the government is “not receptive,” the GSCF’s Self-Care Readiness Index reports, “despite repeated asks from the industry.”

France also has some of the Europe’s most restrictive access policies, the GSCF report says. “All drugs, whether prescription-only or OTC, may only be sold in pharmacies and dispensed by pharmacists or pharmacy technicians.”

Furthermore, thanks to a restrictive reading of European Union regulations, online sales of OTC drugs are in France limited to websites owned by brick-and-mortar pharmacies, and the government forbids the use of online platforms as intermediates between patients and community pharmacies, the GSCF points out.