



Health Impact Assessment



Health impact assessment (HIA) is commonly defined as “a combination of procedures, methods, and tools by which a policy, program, or project may be judged as to its potential effects on the health of a population, and the distribution of those effects within the population” (1999 Gothenburg consensus statement, <http://www.euro.who.int/document/PAE/Gothenburgpaper.pdf> [PDF - 138 KB] (<http://www.euro.who.int/document/PAE/Gothenburgpaper.pdf>)).

HIA is used to evaluate objectively the potential health effects of a project or policy before it is built or implemented. HIA can provide recommendations to increase positive health outcomes and minimize adverse health outcomes. The HIA framework is used to bring potential public health impacts and considerations to the decision-making process for plans, projects, and policies that fall outside of traditional public health arenas, such as transportation and land use.

The major steps in conducting an HIA include

- Screening (identify projects or policies for which an HIA would be useful),
- Scoping (identify which health effects to consider),
- Assessing risks and benefits (identify which people may be affected and how they may be affected),
- Developing recommendations (suggest changes to proposals to promote positive or mitigate adverse health effects),
- Reporting (present the results to decision-makers), and
- Evaluating (determine the affect of the HIA on the decision).

HIA is similar in some ways to environmental impact assessment (EIA). The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires federal agencies to consider the environmental impact of their proposed actions on social, cultural, economic, and natural resources prior to implementation. Proposed actions may include projects, programs, policies, or plans. HIA, unlike EIA can be a voluntary or a regulatory process that focuses on health outcomes such as obesity, physical inactivity, asthma, injuries, and social equity. HIA has been used within EIA processes to assess potential impacts to the human environment. For more information on NEPA, visit the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Web site at <http://www.epa.gov/oecaerth/basics/nepa.html> (<http://www.epa.gov/oecaerth/basics/nepa.html>).

For more information CDC’s participation in the NEPA process, [click here \(NEPA.htm\)](#).


HIA consists of a diverse array of qualitative and quantitative methods and tools. Desktop and rapid HIAs can be completed in a few days or weeks while comprehensive HIAs may require months. The decision to conduct a rapid or a full HIA is often determined by available time and resources.

In the United States, HIA is a rapidly emerging practice. HIA in the United States is being conducted and advanced through efforts at the San Francisco Department of Public Health, Alaska Inter-Tribal Council, the University of California Los Angeles, King County in Washington state, Multnomah County in Oregon, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Pew Charitable Trusts, CDC, and other federal, state, tribal, and local partners.

HIA is also regularly performed in Europe, Canada, and elsewhere. Some countries have mandated HIA as part of a regulatory process; others use it on a voluntary basis.

For more information about health impact assessment, refer to the following resources:

Fact Sheet

- Health Impact Assessment fact sheet  [PDF - 80 KB] (http://www.cdc.gov/healthyplaces/publications/Health_Impact_Assessment2.pdf)
This CDC fact sheet describes the Health Impact Assessment process and its value in objectively evaluating a project or policy before it is built or implemented.



National Center for Environmental Health Division of Emergency and Environmental Health Services

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HIA can be used to evaluate objectively the potential health effects of a project or policy before it is built or implemented. It can provide recommendations to increase positive health outcomes and minimize adverse health outcomes. A major benefit of the HIA process is that it brings public health issues to the attention of persons who make decisions about areas that fall outside of traditional public health arenas, such as transportation or land use.

Major Steps

The major steps in conducting an HIA include

- screening (identify projects or policies for which an HIA would be useful),
- scoping (identify which health effects to consider),
- assessing risks and benefits (identify which people may be affected and how they may be affected),
- reporting (present the results to decision-makers), and
- evaluating (determine the affect of the HIA on the decision process).

HIAs are similar in some ways to environmental impact assessments (EIAs), which are mandated processes that focus on environmental outcomes such as air and water quality. However, unlike EIAs, HIAs can be voluntary or regulatory processes that focus on health outcomes such as obesity, physical inactivity, asthma, injuries, and social equity. An HIA encompasses a heterogeneous array of qualitative and quantitative methods and tools. Rapid HIAs can be completed in a few days or weeks; full HIAs may require months to complete. The decision to conduct a rapid or a full HIA is often determined by the available time and resources.

Numerous HIAs have been performed in Europe, Canada, and elsewhere. Some countries have mandated HIA as part of a regulatory process; others have used it in on a voluntary basis. In the United States, interest in the topic is growing, with HIA work being performed by the University of California, Los Angeles, the San Francisco Department of Public Health, and CDC. In October 2004, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and CDC hosted a workshop of domestic and international HIA experts in Princeton to identify the steps needed to move the field of HIA forward in the United States. A workshop summary is being prepared for publication.

Continued on next page

Health Impact Assessment, Continued

Resources

For more information about HIA, refer to the following resources:

- Dannenberg AL, Bhatia R, Cole BL, et al. Growing the field of health impact assessment in the United States: an agenda for research and practice. *Am J Public Health*. 2006;96(2):262–70.
- Health Impact Assessment Gateway (www.hiagateway.org.uk)
- World Health Organization Health Impact Assessment (<http://www.who.int/hia/en/>)
- International Health Impact Assessment Consortium (<http://www.ihia.org.uk/>)
- National Association of County and City Health Officials (http://www.naccho.org/topics/hpd/land_use_planning/LUP_HealthImpactAssessment.cfm)

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