



HEALTH IMPACT
PROJECT
ADVANCING SMARTER POLICIES FOR HEALTHIER COMMUNITIES



Health Impacts of Federal Proposal to Reduce Housing Inspections in Ohio

As part of a larger federal initiative to reduce agency duplication and improve coordination, federal funders of affordable housing are proposing to align inspection schedules and, as a result, reduce the frequency of inspections, saving them an estimated \$24 million. A health impact assessment (HIA) to determine how this federal pilot program may affect residents' health was done in Ohio—one of six states where the pilot is being implemented. With more than 150,000 rental units, Ohio has one of the largest and most diverse portfolios of affordable housing in the nation.

While reducing affordable housing inspections may make sense financially, the HIA found that there are health implications for residents. Research has shown that living in poorly maintained housing contributes to asthma, chronic disease, obesity, depression, and anxiety—and the prevalence of these health problems is higher in affordable housing communities than in similar market-rate, multi-family housing communities.

Key Findings

The HIA, which was conducted by the Ohio Housing Finance Agency and The Ohio State University with support from the Health Impact Project, includes several findings:

- More than 85% of physical inspections found health-related quality issues (such as safety hazards, pests, mold, faulty plumbing and appliances, and poor air quality).
- While the evidence is limited that remediating housing violations improves health outcomes, there is evidence of health benefits—in the form of improved asthma control, reduced exposure to lead and pesticides, and reduction in some injuries—from some housing quality improvements.
- Inconsistencies among inspections makes it difficult to determine whether or not fewer inspections would result in more violations remaining unidentified.
- Some residents reported that frequent inspections help them engage with their landlords more effectively around property conditions and the need for repairs.



Recommendations

Key recommendations based on the HIA's findings include:

- Property inspection processes and tools should be standardized among inspection agencies to optimize health and improve consistency of reporting and remediation of violations.
- Ongoing training of inspectors is needed to increase the consistency and quality of inspection reports and to help inspectors recognize housing violations that have health implications for residents, particularly older adults and those living with disabilities or mental illness.
- The scheduling of physical inspections should be evaluated to identify how proposals to reduce inspections may affect health outcomes, particularly among the most vulnerable residents.
- The age and size of affordable housing properties should influence the frequency of physical inspections, with older and larger properties being inspected most often.

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New Opportunities to Improve Health

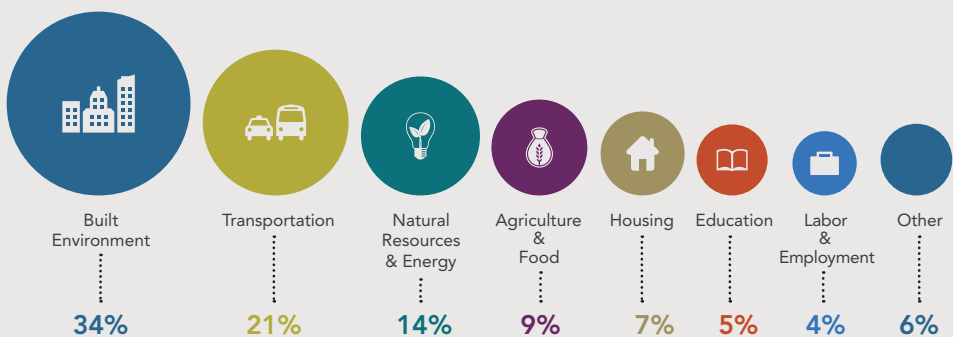
Preventable health problems are crippling the U.S. economy and its workers and their families. Heart disease and diabetes alone now account for more than 700,000 deaths in the U.S. annually and cost the nation more than \$650 billion in medical expenses, disability, missed work, and financial losses associated with premature death. For the first time in U.S. history, data suggest that today's children may live shorter lives than their parents.

Many of the most urgent health problems facing our nation—such as obesity, asthma, diabetes, heart disease, and injuries—are shaped by the conditions in which we live and work. There is a large and untapped opportunity to improve Americans' well-being and address skyrocketing medical costs by bringing health into the decisions that shape the world outside the doctor's office. For example, well-designed and maintained housing can help prevent asthma and serious falls. Transportation projects and land use plans can minimize the risk of traffic injuries and allow people to be more active by including safe routes for pedestrians. And educational policies that lead to academic success can have the unanticipated benefit of reducing the risk of many illnesses and their related medical costs by expanding opportunities for employment and increasing access to better housing and other amenities throughout a person's life.

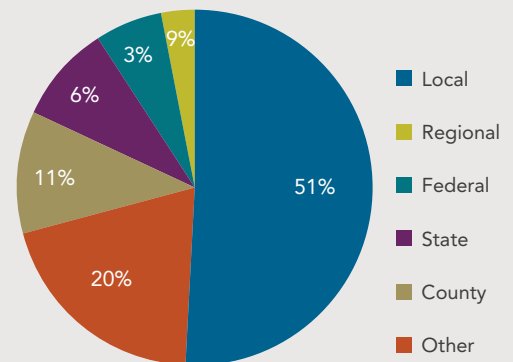
Considering health can help decision-makers leverage opportunities to improve wellness and avoid unintended consequences and associated costs. Health impact assessments, or HIAs, have proved to be an effective way to do that. HIAs bring together scientific data, public health expertise, and community input to inform decisions on proposed laws, regulations, projects, and plans in transportation, energy, education, economic policy, and other sectors.

HIP-Supported Health Impact Assessments in Action Across the U.S.

In what sectors have HIAs been done?



HIAs are used to inform decisions at what levels?



Health Impact Project: Advancing Smarter Policies for Healthier Communities

Launched in 2009, the Health Impact Project, a collaboration of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and The Pew Charitable Trusts, is a national initiative designed to bring health into decision-making through the use of HIAs. The project works with government agencies and policymakers to help them implement HIAs; partners with foundations to fund HIAs; provides training and technical assistance; conducts research and policy analysis to support the field; and convenes the National HIA Meeting. The project also partners with foundations to guide and support regional HIA initiatives and collaborates with government agencies and nonprofits around the United States to find practical ways to build health into decisions.

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