

The Health Impacts of Casino Development in Southeast Kansas

In 2012, a health impact assessment (HIA) informed the deliberations of state policymakers as they considered legislation to reduce casino development fees in Southeast Kansas. Prior to the HIA's release, discussions about a new casino centered on the economic benefits it would bring to rural Cherokee and Crawford Counties, where more than 27% of children live in poverty compared to 18% of children statewide. The HIA changed the dynamics of the policy discussion to also include the potential effects of a new casino on the health of area residents.

The HIA found that a new casino would bring jobs to the Southeast region, which is actively working on a 17-county revitalization plan. More jobs could lead to increased quality of life and life expectancy associated with higher incomes, community stability, access to health care, and more. The HIA also found, however, that residents of Cherokee and Crawford counties are significantly less active and more overweight than the state average—factors generally associated with increased health issues and earlier deaths. The HIA also identified significant health risks associated with casino development. The risks include a potential increase in pathological gambling, which is connected to nicotine addiction, substance use, depression, and insomnia as well as higher rates of domestic violence, child abuse and neglect, unsafe sex, and divorce.

Recommendations

To maximize the economic and health benefits of a new casino, the HIA, which was conducted by the Kansas Health Institute in collaboration with the University of Kansas-Wichita School of Medicine with support from the Health Impact Project, included several recommendations:

- Train primary care physicians to screen for problem gambling behaviors at medical homes.
- Eliminate smoking within and around casino buildings.
- Strengthen local services to treat and prevent gambling addictions and related conditions.
- Enhance traffic enforcement on well-traveled roads to patrol for drivers under the influence of alcohol or other drugs.
- Operate a “safe ride” program for patrons and residents.
- Use a “loss limit” strategy to prevent substantial financial losses among casino visitors.



Results

The HIA process gave legislators and community members the opportunity to examine how placement of a casino in the region could affect residents' health outcomes. Ultimately, the casino development legislation did not pass in 2012, nor when it was reintroduced in 2013. But the conversation did change as a result of the 2012 HIA, with health considerations more fully integrated in the 2013 policy discussions.

For more on this HIA, contact:

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New Opportunities to Improve Health

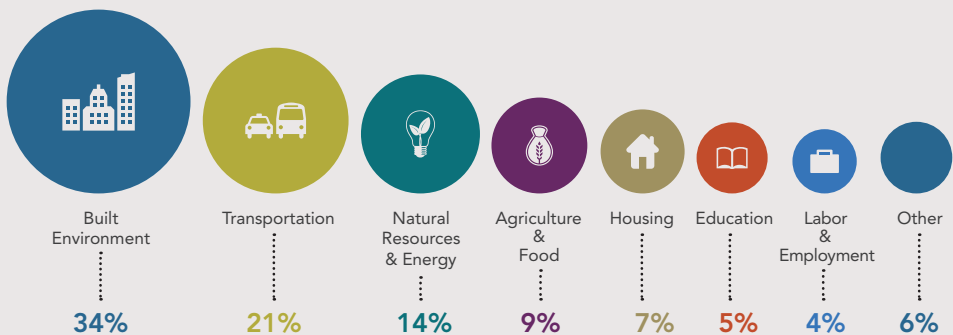
Preventable health problems are crippling the U.S. economy and its workers and their families. Heart disease and diabetes alone now account for more than 700,000 deaths in the U.S. annually and cost the nation more than \$650 billion in medical expenses, disability, missed work, and financial losses 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.

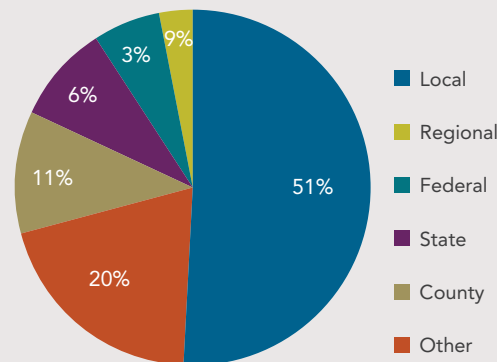
Considering health can help decision-makers leverage opportunities to improve wellness and avoid unintended consequences and associated costs. Health impact assessments, or HIAs, have proved to be an effective way to do that. HIAs bring together scientific data, public health expertise, and community 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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