



HEALTH IMPACT PROJECT

ADVANCING SMARTER POLICIES FOR HEALTHIER COMMUNITIES



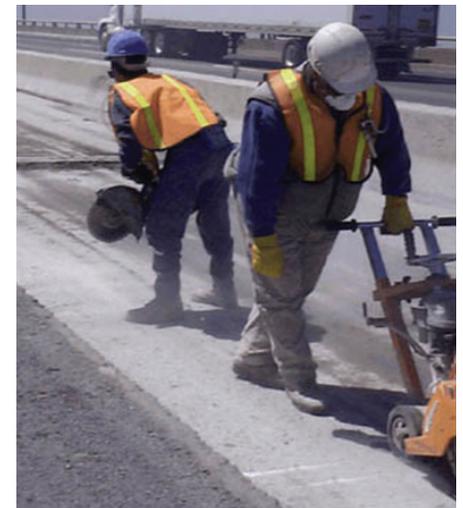
Analyzing the Public Health Impacts of Highway Reconstruction in Massachusetts

Massachusetts' heavily traveled McGrath Highway, which runs through densely populated communities in Cambridge and Somerville, is slated to undergo significant restoration. The design options being evaluated by the state's Department of Transportation would bring the currently elevated highway down to ground level. A health impact assessment (HIA), required by the state's transportation reform law, was conducted to identify the potential effects on residents' health in the largely low-income, minority neighborhoods through which the elevated highway runs. The HIA reported that obesity rates among children in the study area are significantly higher than the state average, an indication that public planning to promote healthy behaviors is paramount.

Recommendations

The "Grounding McGrath HIA," which was undertaken by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, in partnership with the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) and with support from the Health Impact Project, includes the following recommendations:

- Conduct more research on the potential for increased ground-level exposure to traffic-related air pollutants among community members, and identify the most effective mitigation measures.
- Perform a more comprehensive analysis of the potential for increased noise levels associated with a de-elevated highway, and identify areas where noise mitigation is needed.
- Incorporate strategies to reduce pedestrian injuries and fatalities in the highway design options, and develop and promote safety plans for sidewalks, bike paths, and open spaces, in conjunction with local law enforcement.
- Project design alternatives should minimize the displacement of residents and ensure that they have access to affordable goods and services, housing, and job opportunities.



Next Steps

Results and recommendations from the HIA have been summarized in MassDOT's final report on plans to restore the highway. Transportation officials have publicly recognized the utility of the HIA in comprehensive decision-making, and the HIA will be discussed at the next Healthy Transportation Compact meeting.

For more on this HIA, contact:

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[www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/
departments/dph/](http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/departments/dph/)

New Opportunities to Improve Health

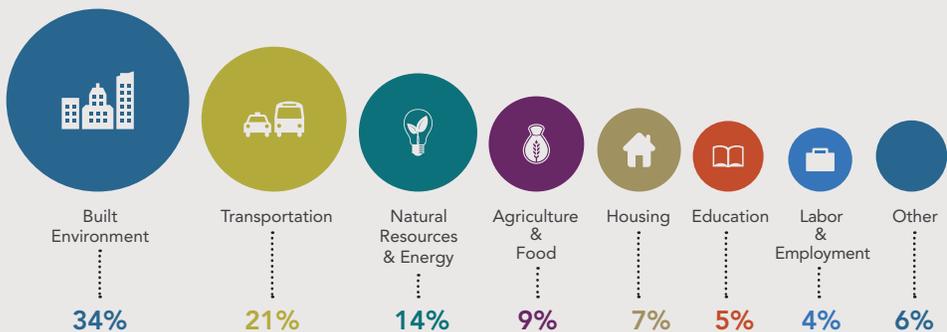
Preventable health problems are crippling the U.S. economy and its workers and their families. Heart disease and diabetes alone now account for more than 700,000 deaths in the U.S. annually and cost the nation more than \$650 billion in medical expenses, disability, missed work, and financial losses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

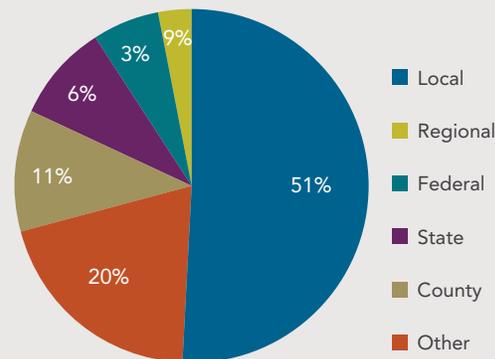
Considering health can help decision-makers leverage opportunities to improve wellness and avoid unintended consequences and associated costs. Health impact assessments, or HIAs, have proved to be an effective way to do that. HIAs bring together scientific data, public health expertise, and community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