

HEALTH **IMPACT** PROJECT

ADVANCING SMARTER POLICIES FOR HEALTHIER COMMUNITIES
■ www.healthimpactproject.org

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Health Impact Assessment: *Bringing Public Health Data to Decision Making*

Preventable health problems, including many cases of heart disease, diabetes, asthma and injuries, are taking a huge toll on American families. For the first time in U.S. history, data suggest that today's children may live shorter lives than their parents. These problems also threaten our nation's economic vitality. Heart disease and diabetes alone now account for more than 700,000 deaths in the United States annually and cost the nation over \$650 billion in medical expenses, disability, missed work and financial losses associated with premature death.¹⁻⁵ These costs are rising every year.

To improve Americans' health, the root causes of these illnesses must be addressed. By factoring health consequences into the process when drafting new laws and regulations, building a major roadway, planning for a city's growth or developing a school curriculum, policy makers can capitalize on hidden opportunities to improve health, save on health-related costs and use limited resources more wisely. Health Impact Assessment (HIA) is a practical, evidence-driven tool to accomplish these goals. Many nations, large lending banks and major industries such as oil, gas and mining are adopting HIA to improve health, control costs and build trust with communities.



A collaboration of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and The Pew Charitable Trusts



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The Steps of HIA

1. SCREENING

↓ Determine whether an HIA is needed and likely to be useful.

2. SCOPING

↓ In consultation with stakeholders, develop a plan for the HIA, including the identification of potential health risks and benefits.

3. ASSESSMENT

↓ Describe the baseline health of affected communities and assess the potential impacts of the decision.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

↓ Develop practical solutions that can be implemented within the political, economic or technical limitations of the project or policy being assessed.

5. REPORTING

↓ Disseminate the findings to decision makers, affected communities and other stakeholders.

6. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Monitor the changes in health or health risk factors and evaluate the efficacy of the measures that are implemented and the HIA process as a whole.

The HIA process encourages public input at each step.

HIA in Decision Making: A Flexible Approach

HIA brings together scientific data, health expertise and public input to identify the potential health effects of a new proposal and to help craft policy recommendations that minimize risks and capitalize on opportunities to improve health. HIA gives federal, tribal, state and local leaders the information they need to make better decisions today to prevent health problems in their communities tomorrow.

The basic HIA process can be readily adapted to fit the scope, resources and timeline of a given decision. In a recent survey by the Health Impact Project, HIA practitioners reported that most HIAs take from six weeks to a year to complete and cost \$10,000 to \$200,000—a fraction of the time and resources that often go into environmental studies and permitting procedures.

HIA also shows promise as a way to help policy makers who are facing difficult budgetary decisions. For example, the New Hampshire Center for Public Policy Studies is conducting an HIA to shed light on the health implications of proposed budget changes for 2011 in order to help legislators make the difficult choices necessary to balance the state budget.

Can a new light rail line make you healthier?

Eating right and getting enough exercise can be a challenge. But for the many people who live in neighborhoods without nearby grocery stores or safe areas to walk, the challenge is even greater: higher risks of health problems ranging from pedestrian injuries to diabetes. In Georgia, an HIA of the proposed Atlanta Beltline pointed to many potential health benefits from a well-planned project.

The HIA has helped spur private and government investments to update pedestrian infrastructure, clean up industrial sites and build new trails, which together will give many Atlanta citizens safe places to exercise and allow easier access to healthy foods. Many of the health opportunities created by the Beltline would not have been recognized or realized without this HIA.

International and Business Perspectives on HIA

In the United States and abroad, policy makers, health officials and industry are turning to HIA as a practical and structured way to collaborate with other sectors—such as transportation, energy, education, urban planning or agriculture—and provide the information needed to discern hidden health risks and capitalize on opportunities to improve health.

Over the last 20 years, more and more countries—among them Canada, members of the European Union, Australia, New Zealand and Thailand—are using this tool. Multinational corporations are beginning to use HIA as a best practice for planning new projects.

Benefits and Best Uses of HIA

- *HIA can build community support and reduce opposition to a proposed project.* By ensuring that decisions are made with full attention to community concerns, HIA helps reduce conflicts that can delay projects. For example, an Alaska Native community considered litigation over plans to allow oil and gas lease sales in their traditional hunting areas. Instead, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) worked with the local government to complete an HIA, which resulted in new protections that addressed community concerns while still allowing development to go forward. Owing in part to the success of this HIA, an environmental impact statement associated with the lease sales was never challenged in court. Since then, the BLM has begun using HIA more commonly in similar planning and permitting decisions.⁶
- *HIA facilitates collaboration across sectors.* HIA provides a structured, pragmatic way for those in public health to collaborate with officials in other agencies and sectors, ensuring that these officials have the health data they need to make better decisions.
- *HIA is not always necessary.* If health is already a focus of a proposed policy or project, or if the potential health effects are too hypothetical, HIA may not offer any new information to decision makers. To avoid unnecessary time and expense, an effective approach to screening can determine whether HIA will add value.

The Business Case for HIA

Companies and lenders are turning to HIA as a small and prudent investment in the long-term success of major new initiatives and projects. The International Finance Corporation and many large banks now include HIA in their requirements for approving large development loans. Trade organizations, such as the International Committee on Mining and Metals and the International Association of Oil and Gas Producers, have produced handbooks on HIA, and many individual companies are adopting their own standards for using HIA. Reasons for this increased reliance on HIA include:

- building local and government support for new projects
- protecting community health and ensuring a productive local workforce
- speeding project planning and approval and managing risk by identifying and addressing concerns that could turn into more serious roadblocks or litigation in the long run.

Opportunities for HIA

Momentum is building in the HIA field as more and more cities, states, tribal and federal agencies seek better ways to factor health into their decisions. The Health Impact Project and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have identified nearly 120 HIAs that have been completed or are in progress in 24 states. Local planning departments, state environmental regulators and federal agencies carrying out environmental impact statements are beginning to request health impact assessments as well.

As initiatives progress at all levels of government, many opportunities exist to incorporate HIA and build healthier policies. Examples include:

- Government officials at all levels should use HIA for important new decisions outside the health sector—including, for example, transportation, housing and urban planning, educational programming, agricultural policy, and energy and natural resource projects—to minimize unnecessary risks and unanticipated costs and to help create healthier communities.
- Executive branch agencies involved in major infrastructure projects, such as Housing and Urban Development and the Department of Transportation, should consider ways to use HIA as a means to integrate health considerations in current and future initiatives.
- The newly established, cabinet-level and multi-agency National Prevention, Health Promotion, and Public Health Council should recommend that any federal agency that is making decisions with potentially significant health effects should use HIA.
- In spring 2011, the National Academy of Sciences plans to release a report on HIA, which is intended to provide guidance to federal, tribal, state and local agency officials and others. Once this report becomes available, agencies should consult it to determine where there are opportunities to apply HIA in decisions that have a potential for significant health effects.

HIA gives federal, tribal, state and local leaders the information they need to make better decisions today to prevent health problems in their communities tomorrow.

Examples of HIA Topics

Transportation and Land Use	Family and Employment	Energy and Natural Resources	Other
City planning, housing development and urban renewal ◆◆◆	Paid sick leave policies ◆◆◆	Planning and permitting oil, gas and mining projects ◆◆◆	State budget decisions ◆◆◆
Transportation corridor planning, highway projects and light rail systems	Minimum wage ordinance ◆◆◆	Carbon cap-and-trade regulations ◆◆◆	Food and agriculture policy
	After-school programs ◆◆◆	Permitting and siting new power plants	
	School siting decisions		

See www.healthimpactproject.org for project descriptions and key findings.

A Selection of HIAs Currently Supported by the Health Impact Project

Transportation Projects—*Minneapolis/St. Paul*

A community coalition is looking for ways to ensure that a new light rail transit line, which will run through low-income and immigrant communities, will have wide-reaching, positive impacts on health.

Fiscal Policy—*New Hampshire*

A nonpartisan policy institute is helping legislators weigh the relative impacts of several options to trim the state budget.

Carbon Cap-and-Trade Regulations—*California*

The state health department is investigating the health risks and benefits associated with state carbon cap-and-trade regulations.

Agricultural Development—*Hawaii*

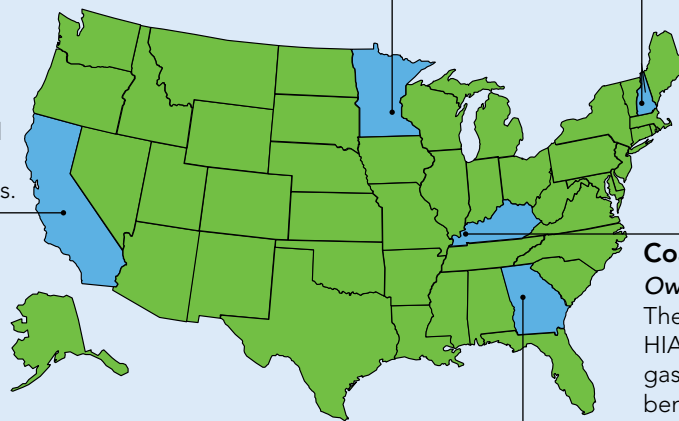
A nonprofit organization is collaborating with a county government to ensure that a new county plan for agricultural land use has maximum benefits for communities by creating jobs and improving the local diet.

Transportation Policy—*Atlanta, Georgia*

Health and planning experts are working with the metropolitan transportation planning agency to build health concerns into the region's long-term comprehensive plan.

Coal Gasification—*Owensboro, Kentucky*

The local health department is using HIA to help ensure that new coal gasification plants have a maximum benefit for health through jobs creation and revenue generation, while also helping to minimize potential harm from factors such as truck traffic and pollution.



Endnotes

- 1 Agency for Health Care Research and Quality. National Health Disparities Report 2009. AHRQ Publication No. 10-0004. Rockville, MD; March 2010.
- 2 American Heart Association. Heart Disease and Stroke Statistics – 2010 Update. Dallas, TX: American Heart Association; 2010.
- 3 Heron MP, Hoyert DL, Xu J, et al. Deaths: Preliminary data for 2006. National vital statistics reports; Vol. 56 No. 16. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics; 2008.
- 4 National Center for Health Statistics. Health, United States, 2009: With Special Feature on Medical Technology. Hyattsville, MD; 2010.
- 5 American Diabetes Association. Economic Costs of Diabetes in the U.S. in 2007. *Diabetes Care*. 2008;31(3):596–615.
- 6 U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, 2008. *Northeast National Petroleum Reserve Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (see subsections on Public Health)*. Anchorage, AK: Bureau of Land Management.

About the Health Impact Project

The Health Impact Project, a collaboration of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and The Pew Charitable Trusts, is a national initiative to promote the use of HIA across the United States. Its goals are to help policy makers, businesses and public health departments learn how to use HIA effectively to inform decisions that affect people's health, and to foster the use of HIA as a best practice for addressing today's pressing health problems. Launched in 2009, the Health Impact Project is working at the federal, tribal, state, county and city levels across the country to bring diverse organizations together to effectively implement and examine the benefits of HIA. The Health Impact Project is pursuing these goals by:

- funding a series of HIA demonstration projects by local and state agencies and nonprofits working in a range of societal sectors and throughout the country
- collaborating with HIA practitioners to provide training and technical assistance to those embarking on new initiatives around the country
- conducting HIAs on federal policy decisions
- researching and disseminating a series of policy briefs, including topics such as best practices for HIA legislation and a review of existing laws and regulations that might offer support for integrating health into various planning and decision-making activities.

Learn more about HIA at:

Health Impact Project: www.healthimpactproject.org

CDC Healthy Places: www.cdc.gov/healthyplaces/hia.htm

HIA Clearinghouse Learning and Information Center:
www.ph.ucla.edu/hs/hiaclhc

Human Impact Partners: www.humanimpact.org

World Health Organization HIA: www.who.int/hia/en

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