Health Impact Assessment
The National Research Council (2011) defines HIA as:
...a systematic process that uses an array of data sources and analytic methods and considers input from stakeholders to determine the potential effects of a proposed policy, plan, program, or project on health of a population and the distribution of those effects within the population. HIA provides recommendations on monitoring and managing those effects.

Findings

State of HIA Practice
Use of HIA to inform decision-making is on the rise. Reviewed HIAs were implemented most frequently to inform decisions at the local level and less frequently at county, state, and federal levels.

Implementation of the six-step HIA process varied greatly among the HIAs, leading to large disparities in rigor and quality.

- **Screening** – Documentation of the screening process was often lacking, making it difficult to discern what factors went into making the decision to perform the HIA.
- **Scoping** – Documentation of the scoping process was inconsistent and often lacked details of the overall HIA plan (e.g., research questions, rationale for reductions in scope, etc).
- **Assessment** – The depth and defensibility of evidence is crucial to the effectiveness of impact assessment; however, considerable disparities existed in the depth of impact assessment, extent of data collection and analysis, and defensibility of evidence.

The extent of baseline profiles created in some HIAs was very limited and in others, missing completely (n=18). Most HIAs qualitatively characterized direction and distribution/equity of impacts, but rarely considered likelihood, magnitude, or permanence of the impacts. In addition, quantification of impacts was lacking throughout the HIAs.

- **Recommendations** – Recommendations most often proposed modifications to the decision and/or mitigations of the decision’s negative health impacts, but
Best practices identified in the HIA Review include:

- **Use of the Minimum Elements and Practice Standards for Health Impact Assessment**
- **HIA as a tool in Environmental Impact Assessment**
- **Equity promotion**
- **Documented Screening & Scoping**
- **Rules of Engagement Memo/Memorandum of Understanding**
- **Communication/Reporting Plan**
- **Stakeholder involvement**
- **Transparent literature search/review**
- **Quality of evidence evaluation**
- **Identification of data gaps**
- **Use and/or adaption of existing tools, methods, and metrics**
- **Detailed documentation of data and methodology**
- **Use of Geographic Information Systems**
- **Impact pathways/logic frameworks**
- **Clear summary of impact assessment**
- **Use of best available data (qualitative and quantitative)**
- **Impact prioritization/ranking**
- **Confidence estimates of projected impacts**
- **Feasible/actionable recommendations**

- **Implementation plan for recommendations**
- **Clear/transparent HIA Report**
- **Process evaluation**
- **Monitoring plan**

**Areas for Improvement**

The following areas for improvement, if addressed, would significantly advance the HIA community of practice:

**Adherence to Minimum Elements and Practice Standards** would ensure that the essential components of HIA are put in practice and would result in marked increases in rigor, quality, defensibility, and effectiveness. Essential components of HIA that are particularly lacking and should be targeted for improvement, include: establishment of baseline conditions, characterization of impact, stakeholder and community engagement, transparency in documentation, and monitoring and evaluation.

**Use of HIA to inform decision-making at all levels**, including county, state, and federal decisions.

**Identification of data gaps** would provide transparency in HIA reporting, but could also be useful in helping to refine methods and approaches used in HIA and identify areas for future research.

**Broader utilization of existing tools and resources** could contribute to a more robust impact assessment and help to close some of the data gaps found in HIA.

**Closing the data gaps** and maximizing the evidence available for use in HIA would result in more robust assessments and improved efficiency in predicting health impacts.

**Consistency in HIA terminology**, like transparency, would help to advance HIA reporting and rigor.

**Conclusions**

While HIAs have helped to raise awareness and bring health into decisions outside traditional health-related fields, the effectiveness of HIAs in bringing health-related changes to pending decisions in the U.S. varies greatly. The HIA Review found considerable disparities in the quality and rigor of HIAs being conducted. This, combined with the lack of monitoring, health impact management, and other follow-up could be limiting the overall utilization and effectiveness of HIA in the U.S.

Understanding the current state of practice and applicability of HIAs in the U.S., as well as best practices and areas for improvement, will help to advance the HIA community of practice, improve the quality of assessments upon which stakeholder and policy decisions are based, and promote healthy and sustainable communities.