

HEALTH IMPACT ASSESSMENT FACT SHEET

February 2013

What is a Health Impact Assessment?

Health Impact Assessment (HIA) is a practical approach that uses data, research and stakeholder input to determine a policy or project's impact on the health of a population.

In practice, HIA is a useful way to

- Ensure that health and health disparities are considered in decision-making.
- Engage stakeholders in the process.

How is it Done?

A typical HIA includes six steps:

1. Screening - Determines the need and value of an HIA
2. Scoping - Determines which health impacts to evaluate, the methods for analysis, and the work plan for completing the assessment
3. Assessment - Provides: a) profile of existing health conditions; b) evaluation of health impacts
4. Recommendations - Provides strategies to manage identified adverse health impacts
5. Reporting - Includes development of the HIA report and communication of findings and recommendations
6. Monitoring - Tracks impacts of the HIA on decision-making processes and the decision, as well as impacts of the decision on health determinants

Within this general framework, approaches to HIA vary as they are tailored to work with the specific needs, timeline, and resources of each particular project.

When is it Done?

HIA is a flexible process. Generally an HIA should be carried out before a decision is made or policy is implemented, to allow the HIA to inform the decision or policy.

How Much Does it Cost?

Because HIA can be described as a spectrum of practice, there is no standard cost for conducting one. Health Impact Assessments are highly tailored to work with individual budgets. Scale and approaches of HIA vary based on:

- The depth and breadth of issues analyzed
- The types of research methods employed
- The extent to which stakeholders are involved in developing the HIA
- The way that HIA findings are used
- The relationship to regulatory requirements

Health-focused foundations and public agencies are increasingly interested in funding HIAs as a way to proactively reduce costly negative health outcomes that may be associated with a proposed decision or policy.

HOW DOES HIA START?

An HIA can be initiated by public health practitioners, community groups, advocacy organizations, affected stakeholders, responsible public agencies, or policy-makers who are interested in the consideration of health in a decision-making process. HIA can also be required by project-specific legislation or to comply with environmental regulations.

Is HIA Time Consuming?

Like cost, the length of an HIA can vary, but even a long and complicated HIA is likely to reduce the time associated with project approval. When recommendations from a well-executed HIA (e.g., one that involves community stakeholders) are implemented, the project is less likely to get held up in the approval process or by litigation.

What Does an HIA Produce?

Generally, a completed HIA results in a report that documents the HIA process and findings. This report can then be used to inform policy-makers and engage communities in advocating for decisions in the best interest of community health.

How Do I Know if an HIA is Appropriate?

In order to assess whether an HIA is appropriate, one should consider the potential for the HIA to influence the proposal, the timing of the proposal, and the capacity of stakeholders and community members to participate. Screening, the first step in conducting an HIA, will help you determine if the HIA is appropriate by addressing these considerations.

Is an HIA Ever Required?

Currently, there are few state and no federal regulations that require HIA. However, because many laws and regulations do require the consideration and analysis of health effects on proposed project and plans, an HIA can be a great way to comply with these types of requirements. HIA can also add value to Environmental Impact Assessment.

What Is the Result of an HIA?

There are two desired outcomes of an HIA. One is to influence policies and projects in a way that improves health and diminishes health disparities. The other is to engage community members and stakeholders so they understand what impacts health and how to advocate for improving health.

The Benefits of HIA

At Human Impact Partners, we are dedicated to helping organizations and public agencies who work with low-income communities and communities of color to understand the effects of projects and policies on community health. And we help them use this information to take action.

Our HIAs have looked at many topics, including land use, transportation and housing plans and projects, as well as employment, incarceration and education policy.

Here's what our work has led to:

- *Changes in proposed developments that improve neighborhood housing and employment conditions.*
- *The inclusion of comprehensive health analyses in decision-making processes that would have otherwise not included such analyses.*
- *Changes in how policies are framed and debated to improve public health.*
- *An increase in coverage of health impacts of decisions in the news.*
- *New collaborations between community organizations, public agencies, and other stakeholders to make sure health is considered in decisions.*
- *Increased participation in decision-making processes by community residents and empowerment of community organizations.*
- *New capacity among our partners to conduct HIA successfully.*