

06-01

STATEMENT OF POLICY

Health Impact Assessment

Policy

Health impact assessment (HIA) is commonly defined as “a combination of procedures, methods, and tools by which a policy, program, or project may be judged as to its potential effects on the health of a population, and the distribution of those effects within the population.”¹ The five principles and values of HIA are democracy, equity, sustainable development, scientific and robust practice, and a holistic approach to health.²

The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) recommends distinct roles and responsibilities for different agencies to further the practice of HIA.

Federal, state, and local governments and agencies should conduct the following activities:

- Promote the standardization of HIA practice, including rapid HIAs, for local health departments and local/regional planning and transportation agencies across the United States.
- Support conducting HIAs on national and regional policies (e.g., Affordable Care Act or national food labeling laws).
- Support the institutionalization of HIA through the provision of funding, training, technical assistance, data development, and collaboration between traditional and non-traditional partners.
- Support HIA mentorship and peer learning among local health departments, planners, and local government agencies.
- Encourage hospitals, where appropriate, to dedicate funds set aside for community health needs assessments as mandated by the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act to also support HIAs.
- Support the promotion of social justice and health equity within communities through the use of HIAs.

Local health departments should conduct the following activities:

- Support close collaborations between federal, state, and local government agencies and communities around HIAs on various community planning, regulations, and design of new development and redevelopment, including brownfields redevelopment.
- Encourage local and regional planning and transportation agencies to incorporate HIAs into community design processes to promote and protect the health of communities.
- Build capacity to conduct HIAs among their partners to bring health considerations to the fore in multiple sectors such as transportation, planning, housing, agriculture, and labor.
- Use HIA tools and resources to facilitate the HIA process to promote a Health in All Policies approach to public decision-making.



- Use the strategies within HIA to support public health accreditation documentation where appropriate.

Justification

After years of practice and evaluation, HIA continues to be one of the most important processes in public health, given its aim to influence decision-making processes in an open, multi-disciplinary, and structured way.³ One of the first HIAs conducted in the United States was completed by a local health department in 1999. The San Francisco Department of Public Health analyzed a proposed policy to increase the minimum wage for city contractors and leaseholders. The HIA contributed to the passage of San Francisco's living wage ordinance and the passage of a subsequent city-wide minimum wage increase. As local health department interest in HIA increases, so do the topics on which HIAs are based. Examples of the expansion of HIA can be seen in the burgeoning interest in applying HIA to land use/community design projects and policies, which are primarily made at the local level.⁴ Another example is HIAs applied to policies implemented at the state and local levels that have a national impact, including water conservation or climate change adaptation plans.^{5,6}

HIA offers considerable benefits that may advance the work of local health departments in meeting the Essential Services and improving the quality of life and health outcomes attributed to Health in All Policies,⁵ land-use planning, and community design decisions. While many local health departments have been involved in community design decisions through the development review process, until approximately 2004, the involvement was only at a very rudimentary level (e.g., inspections and permitting).⁷ HIA provides the opportunity for local health departments to expand their purview to address a broader range of public health considerations, such as eliminating health inequities and addressing other non-health sector issues that may impact the public's health. Additionally, HIAs may bring attention to the psychological, social, cultural, and spiritual health concerns that may result from a development project, zoning policies, etc. Rapid, intermediate, or more comprehensive HIAs can be undertaken, with varying levels of input and rigor, using both qualitative and quantitative data. The decision to do a rapid versus full HIA is also dependent on time, resources (both people and money), and available literature in the respective health outcomes being examined. Full or comprehensive HIAs will require local health departments to use existing community networks and public education skills to address issues.

With the passage of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, non-profit hospitals are being called to increase their accountability to the communities they serve. Provision of funding is needed to provide HIA training, technical assistance, and data development in communities. Non-profit hospitals should be encouraged to work with local health departments where appropriate in supporting and conducting HIAs in their communities as part of their effort to fulfill community benefit requirements. Additionally, the six phases of an HIA lend themselves to community engagement and data collection standards needed to establish readiness for public health accreditation. HIAs can be used to substantiate the following measures in Domains 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, and 12 of the Public Health Accreditation Board Standards.⁸

HIA has the potential to assist the public health sector move toward the World Health Organization's definition of health whereby "...the effects on health of the broad physical and

social environment, which includes housing, urban development, land-use and transportation, industry, and agriculture” are fully considered in all aspects of community design decisions.⁷ As the number of local health departments using HIA in their communities expands, it is critical to provide the necessary funding, guidance, and resources to advance HIA practice as a strategy for building healthier communities.

References

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Record of Action

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