Health Impact Assessment (HIA): Linking Public Health to Community Decisions

Florence Fulk¹ and Justicia Rhodus²

¹U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Research and Development, National Exposure Research Laboratory, 26 W. Martin Luther King Dr., Cincinnati, OH 45268, USA
²CSS-Dynamac c/o U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 26 W. Martin Luther King Dr., Cincinnati, OH 45268, USA

Health in All Policies

Health impact assessment (HIA) is one of the key strategies for moving toward a health in all policies (HiAP) perspective.
- Offers a comprehensive approach to health
- Applicable in a broad range of decision-making contexts

Goal of Health in All Policies: Ensure decision-makers consider the intentional and unintentional health, equity, and sustainability impacts of policies during the policy development process.
- Adapted from California Health in All Policies Task Force, 2010

Environmental Justice & Equity

HIA considers distribution of health impacts across the population (paying specific attention to vulnerable groups) and recommends ways to improve proposed decisions for affected groups.

Equity is a core value of HIA.

Equity in health implies that ideally everyone should have a fair opportunity to attain their full health potential and, more pragmatically, that none should be disadvantaged from achieving this potential, if it can be avoided. — Margaret Whitehead, 1992

Around the Nation

Health Care Costs

Health care consumes a large percentage of state budgets.

HIA is a promising tool to improve people’s health and decrease health care costs because of its “broad applicability, its focus on adverse and beneficial health effects, its ability to incorporate various types of evidence, and its emphasis on stakeholder participation.” — National Research Council, 2011
HIA in Priority Research Areas

Water Pollution

Proctor Creek’s Boone Boulevard Green Street Project Health Impact Assessment (HIA)

Conducted by: U.S. EPA Office of Research and Development and Region 4

Location: Atlanta, GA

Status: Complete

Green infrastructure is being considered as a best management practice across the U.S. It
• Topography, prevalence of impervious surfaces, and a strained combined sewer system contribute to pervasive flooding in the Proctor Creek communities (Atlanta, GA) and have created environmental, public health, economic, and redevelopment issues.
• A green street project was proposed in the Proctor Creek Watershed to address some of the community’s needs.
• This EPA-led HIA examined the impacts to the low-income minority community within a half mile of the proposed project.
• HIA demonstrated the net public health benefits of green infrastructure reach beyond the environmental sector and include social and economic benefits, also.
• Recommendations of this HIA were used by the City of Atlanta to inform planning and implementation of the project.

California Drinking Water Project Funding HIA

Conducted by: The Sequoia Foundation, California Department of Public Health, and the Public Health Institute

Location: California

Status: In Progress

The State of California revises its drinking water project priorities annually.
• The Sequoia Foundation, in collaboration with the California Department of Public Health and the Public Health Institute, is conducting an HIA to inform the 2016 Drinking Water Intended Use Plan.
• Data-driven decisions about funding allocations can improve access to safe and reliable drinking water, especially in rural communities that lack advanced infrastructure.
• This HIA will provide recommendations to the California Water Board on criteria used to determine funding for drinking water projects and will work to standardize the use of HIAS among California agencies.
• Recommendations of this HIA will also help inform future California water resource policies.

Lincoln Park Small Area Plan Health Impact Assessment

Conducted by: Minnesota Department of Health and the City of Duluth

Location: Duluth, MN

Status: Complete

Minnesota Brownfields, the Minnesota Department of Health, and a University of Minnesota student partnered to develop an HIA Brownfields Tool.
• The tool helps illuminate the connection between public health and Brownfield redevelopment and provides a way to meaningfully engage the community in the redevelopment planning process.
• The tool was pilot tested in the Lincoln Park Small Area Plan (SAP) HIA.
• This HIA examined the Lincoln Park SAP and its objectives to re-empower, redevelop Brownfields, promote business and mixed-use development, expand recreation, lower crime, improve transportation and housing, and more.
• The HIA provided the City of Duluth with health information and evidence-based recommendations on how to improve the SAP could be improved to create a healthier, more vibrant neighborhood.

Health Impact Assessment of Proposed Code Changes for Onsite Sewage Disposal Systems in Suffolk County, NY

Conducted by: U.S. EPA Office of Research and Development and Region 4

Location: Suffolk County, NY

Status: In Progress

Suffolk County, NY is considering changes to its sanitary code that would require onsite sewage disposal systems (OSDS) for residential properties to be upgraded to a conventional or innovative/alternative (OIS) system.
• The proposed changes are being considered to address a growing issue of nutrient loading of Suffolk County soil, surface waters, and ground waters.
• Overloading of nutrients, particularly nitrogen, has been linked to the impairment of surface and ground waters, beach closures, shellfish population die-offs, harmful algal blooms, and damage of marine coastlines.
• This EPA-led HIA will inform the decision regarding changes to the sanitary code and provide recommendations to maximize potential benefits and mitigate potential adverse impacts to health that may result from the decision.

Climate Smart Strategy Health Impact Assessment

Conducted by: Oregon Health Authority

Location: Portland, OR Metropolitan Region

Status: Complete

The Portland Metropolitan Region (Metro) undertook a Climate Smart Communities Scenarios (CSCS) planning effort to meet the state’s legislative mandate to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from light duty cars and trucks to 20% below 2005 levels by 2035.
• Oregon Health Authority conducted an HIA on Phase 3 of the CSCS Project.
• This HIA quantified and monetized health impacts of the three proposed scenarios and drafted (preferred) approach to help decision-makers understand the impacts and weigh tradeoffs.
• The HIA provided Metro and its partners, health information and evidence-based recommendations to support the selection of a healthy final scenario that gives residents equal access to health-promoting resources.

Mojave Desert Solar Energy Projects and Tribal Communities: A Health Impact Assessment Project

Conducted by: National Indian Justice Center

Location: Ft. Irwin Army Base, CA

Status: Complete

Fl. Irwin began plans to build a photovoltaic (PV) array site in order to meet the renewable energy mandate of the military.
• There were concerns that the environmental assessment (EA) conducted as part of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process had not adequately addressed impacts to tribal communities in the region.
• The HIA examined eight areas assessed in the EA that were relevant to health and two tribal community health determinants to identify the potential physical, spiritual, and mental health impacts of the project on tribal communities.
• The HIA provided the U.S. Army health information, cultural considerations, mitigation measures, and recommendations to help inform the PV array facility development and maximize the health benefits of the proposed project.