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Health impact assessment

# Health Impact Assessment

**AUTHORS**

Marco Martuzzi
Ben Cave
Julia Nowacki
Francesca Viliani
Salim Vohra

The "H" in HIA:  Health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.

Health Impact Assessment (HIA) is an established form of IA, applied in different countries worldwide for at least twenty years. HIA encompasses a broad range of applications and may be defined as

> […] a combination of procedures, methods and tools that systematically judges the potential, and sometimes unintended, effects of a policy, plan, programme or project on the health of a population and the distribution of those effects within the population. HIA identifies appropriate actions to manage those effects. [IAIA]

Health is influenced, for good and bad, by a variety of factors, referred to as health determinants. These operate at all levels from genetic predisposition to individual, family and community levels and to national and global trends. Most health determinants are not under the control of the health sector. Hence, like all IA practice, HIA advocates stronger inter-sectoral collaboration and focuses on strengthening links between health and other sectors of society (an approach known as "Health in All Policies").

## GOALS

HIA predicts and anticipates the health implications of proposed projects, programs, plans, or policies. It informs decision-makers about options to maximize the positive impacts and minimize the negative impacts and to manage these impacts appropriately.

HIA considers quantitative and qualitative impacts. For example, an HIA applied to transport would consider multiple pathways, including:

- Morbidity and mortality effects due to predicted changes in air quality, noise exposures and occurrence of road traffic injuries.
- Cardiovascular health gains obtained from increased physical activity through cycling and walking.
- Mental health and well-being effects from the stress induced by different transport modes.
- Indirect changes in health and wellbeing resulting from employment opportunities.
- Changes in the distribution of determinants that in turn affect health inequalities among the population.
- Access to health services and facilities.

## VALUES AND FOUNDATIONS

HIA practice is underpinned by the following values:  recognition of human rights, democracy, equity, sustainable development, and ethical use of evidence. HIA strives to be inclusive and uses comprehensive definitions of health such as:

> Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity [Constitution of the World Health Organization (1946)].

This holistic framework is central to HIA, which focuses on what is most important for human health. HIA practice shows that pragmatic courses of action can be effectively followed and deliver good results against challenging goals.

**IAIA**

**International Association for Impact Assessment**

## PRACTICE OF HIA

HIA is carried out routinely in different settings. Applications range from small scale and rapid assessments to extensive studies. Health input to integrated assessments is also increasingly a requirement of major lending institutions. Unlike Environmental Impact Assessment, HIA is not routinely prescribed by law.

Good HIAs ensure that relevant public health issues are considered and inform decisions. Successful, well-designed HIAs use a variety of methods and tools and, crucially, ensure the direct involvement of relevant institutional and community stakeholders.

Stakeholder involvement is demanding, but a participatory process can increase the legitimacy of an HIA and thus contribute to the social acceptability of a proposal. Also, stakeholder involvement, including vulnerable subgroups, can assist in identifying and formulating pertinent scoping questions and relevant mitigation or enhancement options.

### FURTHER READING

"Health Impact Assessment International Best Practice Principles." IAIA Special Publications Series No. 5. September 2006. http://bit.ly/X2iOxM

*Introduction to Health Impact Assessment*. Washington, DC: International Finance Corporation. 2009. http://bit.ly/wz8BkV

Harris-Roxas, Ben et al. "Health Impact Assessment: The State of the Art." *Impact Assessment and Project Appraisal* 30 (1):43-52, 2012. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14615517.2012.666035.

Winkler, Mirko S. et al. "Untapped potential of health impact assessment." *Bulletin of the World Health Organization* 91 (4):237-312, 2013.

### USEFUL WEBSITES

WHO: http://www.who.int/hia/en/

HIA Gateway: http://www.apho.org.uk/default.aspx?RID=40141

IAIA HIA Blog: http://healthimpactassessment.blogspot.ch/

HIA Discussion forum: http://www.linkedin.com/groups/HIA-Health-Impact-Assessment-Group-2144549/about

HIA Connect: http://hiaconnect.edu.au

Health Impact Project: http://www.healthimpactproject.org/

### OTHER

IAIA twitter: @hiablog

Want to know more?
www.iaia.org/publications-resources
Downloadable Publications > FasTips

Do you have a suggestion or a request for a FasTip on a different topic?
Contact Maria Partidário (mpartidario@gmail.com), FasTips Series Editor.

## FIVE IMPORTANT THINGS TO KNOW

1. The World Health Organization supports HIA as a resource for protecting and promoting human health. National governments support HIA as do multi-lateral lenders such as the World Bank. International industry associations also promote the use of HIA.

2. Consideration of the ways in which different population groups are affected is important. This is also known as consideration of health equity and health inequalities.

3. It is often said that HIA builds on EIA. This is true, but is only a part of the picture. HIA shares considerable common ground with health promotion.

4. HIA includes access to quality health services and facilities, but is not limited to these; determinants pertaining to the physical and social environment and lifestyle are also taken into consideration.

5. Health considerations are often included in other IAs and within integrated impact assessments. However, sometimes narrow models of health, focusing on the impact of a few physical risk factors, are used.

## FIVE IMPORTANT THINGS TO DO

1. When undertaking an HIA, clarify the terms of reference and spell out the scope of the assessment as far as possible. Specify the available realistic policy options being considered.

2. Ensure that all relevant disciplines are involved. In addition to health, social, environmental and other sciences experts are likely to be needed. Understanding the use of local traditional medicine is critical in settings where Indigenous Peoples are affected, or where health services are not available.

3. Once all stakeholders are sitting around the HIA table, ask "Who else should be here?" The missing stakeholder's voice may be the one that is always unheard.

4. Manage people's expectations of HIA. Sometimes some stakeholders expect that their views and preferences will be supported. HIA, like all IA, is often about developing consensus.

5. In virtually all HIAs, some statements have a solid evidence base, either quantitative or qualitative, while others are uncertain. Try to qualify each statement by specifying its degree of reliability and uncertainty.

IAIA
www.iaia.org