

# Health Impact Assessment & Land Use

*Health Impact Assessment (HIA) is a combination of procedures, methods and tools by which a policy 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.*

HIA aims to make social decisions accountable for their effects on health, where health is defined broadly as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. HIA brings together evidence for decision-makers to understand how public decisions on programs, projects, plans, or policies effect health, positively or negatively. HIA also offers recommendations to enhance the positive health impacts of policy-making and development projects and to eliminate, reduce, or mitigate negative impacts.

**Benefits of HIA to the decision making process**

- *Making more informed decisions*
- *Making trade-offs explicit*
- *Increasing transparency*
- *Supporting community engagement and voice*
- *Promoting health and preventing disease in the population*
- *Advancing equity and justice*
- *Broadening public understanding of what is required for health*

### **Potential Health Impacts of Land Use Development**

- ❖ *Planning and public health disciplines are increasingly recognizing that land use and transportation planning decisions have had significant and wide-ranging impacts on the environment as well as on health.*
- ❖ *Historically, zoning regulations and land use plans have created long distances between where people live, work, shop, and play resulting air and water pollution, stressful commutes, physical inactivity, and global warming.*
- ❖ *Location-efficient, transit-oriented and mixed-use forms of development can benefit health by increasing walking and bicycling, reducing emissions of pollutants into air and water, improving traffic safety, and building social capital. These factors are associated with many health issues including cardiovascular disease, asthma, diabetes, obesity, depression, and some cancers.*
- ❖ *Land use development has the potential to cause or exacerbate avoidable health disparities, for example, when people or businesses are displaced or when areas become more segregated.*

**What does the HIA Process Look Like?**

1. **Screening:** determining whether or not a HIA is warranted.
2. **Scoping:** determining which health impacts to evaluate and the methods for analysis.
3. **Assessment:** analyzing impacts using existing research as well as qualitative and quantitative data collection research methods to determine the magnitude and direction of potential health impacts.
4. **Synthesis and Communication:** reporting the findings of the HIA. This can take many forms, including written reports and public testimony.
5. **Evaluation:** learning from the HIA process and assessing its impact on decision-making.
6. **Monitoring:** tracking the effects of the decision and its implementation on health determinants and health status

Given that the purpose of HIA is to inform decision-makers before they make decisions, HIA is typically carried out prospectively, before a decision is made or a policy is implemented.

Approaches to HIA vary greatly with regard to the breadth and depth of issues analyzed, the research methods employed, their relationship to regulatory impact assessment requirements, the role of policy-makers, the community and other stakeholders in the analysis, and the ways the assessment is used to influence policy. Regardless of scope, scale, and approach the typical steps in HIA are outlined in the box to the left.