

Intro: Health Impact Assessment #3 its benefits as a policy tool

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Defining Health & Its Determinants

The World Health Organization (2001) defines health as, “A state of complete physical, social and mental wellbeing, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”. From this definition it is clear that the motivation to maintain a healthy lifestyle goes beyond a person’s genetic make-up and self-discipline. It includes the societal, environmental and economic conditions, in which she/he is born, lives and works. A few examples of such health determinants include access to fresh food and sanitized water, access to transport facilities and educational systems, employment opportunities and many more. All of these determinants are in turn shaped by policies drawn and implemented by various economic sectors, and departments, authorities, and private entities operating outside the health sector (Chesney et al, 2008).

Achieving Health In All Policies

Health in all policies is a concept through which policy and decision makers across various sectors of the economy aim to integrate health and health equity considerations in the development, implementation and evaluation of their policies and services. Through this process, decision makers strive to understand and take into account the linkages which exist between health determinants and the health outcomes which their decisions may ultimately impact. Applying the health in all policies

concept not only results in improving the health of populations being served but may also lead to the establishment and implementation of more effective policy-making processes (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health Finland, & European Observatory on Health systems and Policies, 2006; WHO & Government of South Australia, 2010).

HIA Can Help Achieve Health In All Policies

Health Impact Assessment is a tool which can assist in achieving health in all policies. Departments and agencies in various sectors may perceive or define health differently from the health sector. HIA can provide a way by which different entities can achieve a common understanding of the **health** concept. It introduces a broader definition of health, one which includes its biophysical, social, economic and environmental determinants (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health Finland, & European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies, 2006).

HIA Provides a Mechanism For More Informed Decision-Making

Health Impact Assessment provides a mechanism which can be employed for the routine screening of proposals at an early stage in their development to determine how these may impact the health of Iowa’s populations. HIA can thus set the platform for evidence-based policy making which takes into consideration and addresses existing health

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disparities and strives to provide and promote environments which are conducive to healthy living (CDPH & UCSF, 2010; WHO & Government of South Australia, 2010).

It Provides An Opportunity For More Democratic & Transparent Decision-Making

HIA provides an avenue for increased active participation by communities on decisions which may impact their health. HIA's consultative and participatory approach towards decision-making can help create cross-sector initiatives and partnerships which stimulate collaboration. It can assist in bringing about the pooling of intellectual resources, thus integrating research initiatives across different economic sectors in developing new models which help integrate social, economic and environmental goals and hence promote sustainable development (IPH Ireland, 2009; WHIASU, n.d.).

HIA Can Help Achieve Health Equity

Environmental justice posits that all people and communities have the right to live, work and recreate themselves in environments which are safe and conducive to health (Corburn, 2004; Dannenberg et al, 2003). Health equity entails providing equally fair opportunities for all individuals to be able to achieve their full potential. HIA can be used to address the social,

environmental and economic health determinants, such as social and economic inequality and social marginalization and exclusion, which tend to place individuals or communities at risk or disadvantage, making them unable to not only achieve but also express their abilities in a constructive manner. HIA can thus provide the opportunity to address health inequalities in a systematic manner whereby policy and decision makers can assess and determine how expected health effects might be distributed differentially across Iowa's various population groups (Mahony et al, 2004; WHIASU, 2004).

Ultimate Goal: Reduce the Burden of Ill Health

The HIA framework includes a step which focuses on building suitable recommendations which aim to reduce/eliminate negative health impacts or enhance positive health outcomes identified during policy development. In addition, HIA's participatory approach towards consensus building enables the direct involvement of communities which may be impacted by policies under study. Such participation can help provide the opening communities need to take responsibility and ownership of their cities, neighborhoods and social and work environments, thus conferring community empowerment, helping people and community members come together to act together to solve common problems and build healthy futures (Israel et al, 2001; WHIASU, 2004).



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