

Health Impact Assessments: A Tool to Ensure Healthy Communities

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What is a Health Impact Assessment?

A Health Impact Assessment (HIA) is an evaluation tool that looks at the positive and negative impacts on individual and population health for development projects, plans, and policies. HIAs can be applied to a variety of locations and sectors, including decisions that impact the built environment and land use. A variety of methods, tools, and data sets are used within the process to provide a meaningful set of data and evidence-based recommendations to mitigate potential negative health impacts, promote positive health impacts, and inform decision making processes.

Health Impact Assessments can be conducted at any stage of the project, planning, or policy creation process, but are typically most beneficial when conducted very early in the process—during the decision making phase—when recommended changes and revisions can still be implemented. HIA is a very flexible tool—meaning it can be customized depending on the type and size of project, from a rapid to an in-depth HIA—but typically all HIAs follow the below steps:

1. *Screening* - determining if an HIA is warranted
2. *Scoping* - determining which health impacts will be considered, which type of HIA to conduct, and the plan for the HIA
3. *Identification and assessment of impacts* - determining the magnitude, nature, extent and likelihood of potential health impacts, using a variety of different methods and types of information
4. *Decision-making and recommendations* - making explicit the trade-offs to be made in decision-making and formulating evidence-informed recommendations
5. *Evaluation, monitoring and follow-up* - process and impact evaluation of the HIA and the monitoring and management of health impacts

Questions for Discussion:

As important players in shaping the built environment, does the development community have a role to play within the Health Impact Assessment process?

What would that role look like? Initiator of HIA, partner, consultant, financier, other?

What do you see as benefits and challenges to the development community becoming involved in this process?