



# Health Impact Assessments

## What is a Health Impact Assessment (HIA)?

An HIA is an informational tool designed to help decision-makers consider the health implications of proposed policies, especially those that do not appear to have direct connections to health, and identifies appropriate actions to manage those effects.<sup>1</sup>

## Why consider health?

Almost all public decisions can affect health – either directly or indirectly through their effects on social, economic, or environmental conditions. Where we live, learn, work and play can have a great impact on how long and how well we live. HIAs help ensure that health consequences are considered in decision-making.<sup>2</sup>



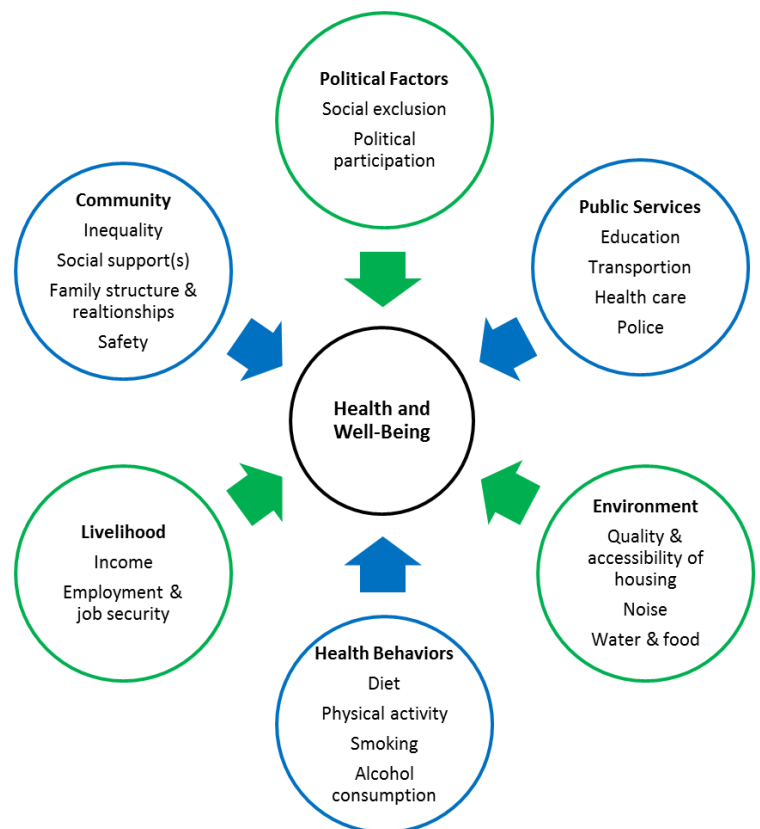
**The purpose of the HIA process is to<sup>2</sup>:**

- Inform decision-makers
- Engage and empower communities
- Build relationships and collaborations
- Build consensus around decisions

## What does an HIA assess?

An HIA assesses factors that most people don't think of as relating to health such as housing, employment, transportation, access to public and retail services, social cohesion, education, and incarceration. The adjacent diagram includes health factors often assessed in HIAs.<sup>2,3</sup>

### Where we live, work and play affects our health:



1) Kansas Health Institute. (2012). Health impact assessments help link policy decisions with effects on public well-being. Topeka, KS: Lin, T.Y. Shoults, C.C. Niu, S. 2) Human Impact Partners. (2011) A health impact assessment toolkit: A handbook to conducting HIA, 3rd Edition. *Human Impact Partners*. Oakland, CA. 3) Bhatia, R. (2011) Health impact assessment: A guide for practice. *Human Impact Partners*. Oakland, CA.



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## What is the value of an HIA?

The most salient value of an HIA is its usefulness as a tool for decision-makers seeking to understand the health impacts of the policies they consider. The process of an HIA is flexible depending on the amount of time and resources needed to effectively inform decision-makers in each situation. An HIA also involves steps that are similar to those used in other types of decision-making.<sup>1</sup>



## What are the outcomes of an HIA?

HIAs are used as tools for organizational learning, and may alter the way decision-makers think about health in policy-making. The following table shows the type of outcomes HIAs can produce.<sup>3</sup>

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### Changes to the design, adoption, or implementation of the project/policy

- Inclusion of design changes or mitigation to protect or promote health
- Adoption of an alternative decision option
- Reconsideration on a decision in light of unanticipated health concerns

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### Changes to societal understanding of the causes of good or poor health

- Greater understanding of relationships among the decisions, environmental conditions, and health
- Identification of new public health issues
- Greater support for healthy communities

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### Changes to the way health is considered in institutional decision-making practices

- Coordination and collaboration among public health and other sectors
  - New public or institutional support and/or resources for HIA
  - Adoption of health objectives and standards for policy and decision-making
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1) Kansas Health Institute. (2012). Health impact assessments help link policy decisions with effects on public well-being. Topeka, KS: Lin, T.Y. Shoults, C.C. Niu, S. 2) Human Impact Partners. (2011) A health Impact assessment toolkit: A handbook to conducting HIA, 3rd Edition. *Human Impact Partners*. Oakland, CA. 3) Bhatia, R. (2011) Health impact assessment: A guide for practice. *Human Impact Partners*. Oakland, CA.