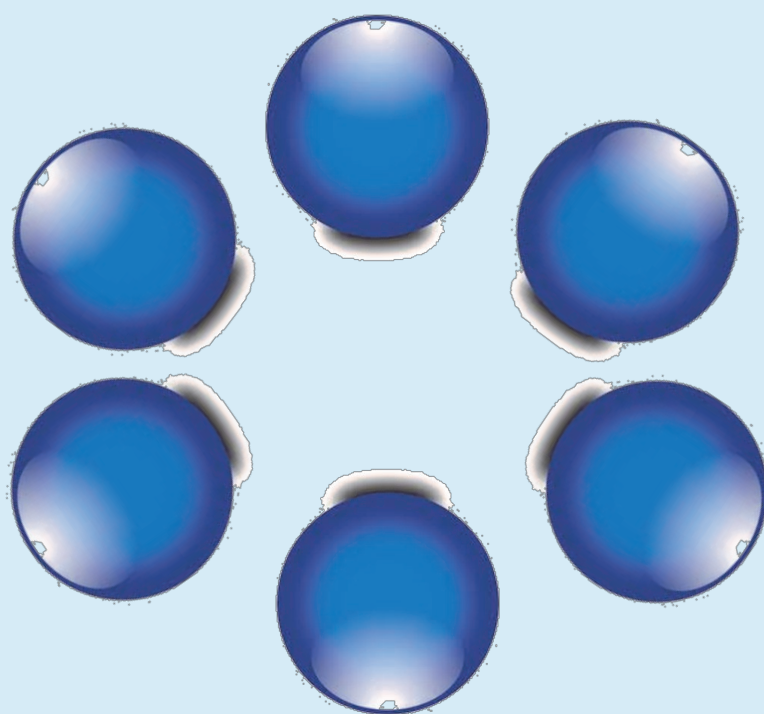# Health Impact Assessment (HIA):

A tool for public decision-making towards healthy, sustainable and equitable choices

An International Union for Health Promotion and Education (IUHPE) document

IUHPE – UIPES

INTERNATIONAL UNION FOR HEALTH PROMOTION AND EDUCATION
UNION INTERNATIONALE DE PROMOTION DE LA SANTÉ ET D'ÉDUCATION POUR LA SANTÉ
UNIÓN INTERNACIONAL DE PROMOCIÓN DE LA SALUD Y EDUCACIÓN PARA LA SALUD

HEALTH IMPACT ASSESSMENT (HIA):
A TOOL FOR PUBLIC DECISION-MAKING TOWARDS HEALTHY, SUSTAINABLE AND EQUITABLE CHOICES
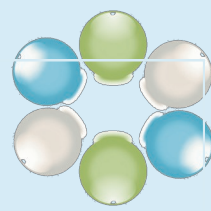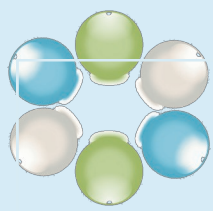
Guiding principles and recommendations for the implementation of Health Impact Assessments at the local level

Forward

There is a growing interest in Health Impact Assessment globally. Largely inspired by environmental impact assessment of development projects, this method has unfolded over the last ten years based on health promotion principles and values. It is now considered a promising method to promote the establishment of healthy and equitable public policies, as recommended by the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion (WHO, 1986).

With the multiplication of HIA experiences at all governmental levels (international, national and local), the International Union for Health Promotion and Education (IUHPE) wishes to contribute to efforts supporting the implementation of this practice at the local level, capitalizing on the knowledge of its global working group on HIA.

This document aims to promote the development of HIAs without being a methodological guide (as such tools exist and are available on the web, see "references" and "find out more" sections). It aims to inform stakeholders interested in local HIA, whether from the health sector, from non-governmental organizations or local and territorial authorities, on the conditions which promote HIA establishment, expected benefits from this method as well as the main challenges that impede its implementation.

HIA can

- supply useful data for decision-makers who wish to develop evidence-informed policies

- promote inter-sectoral collaboration

- improve transparency of decision-making processes

- support citizen participation in the development of public policies

- help to improve the health of populations and reduce heath inequities

- contribute to decision-makers' efforts towards sustainable development. (PHAC, 2004)
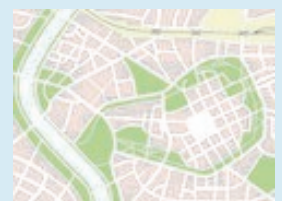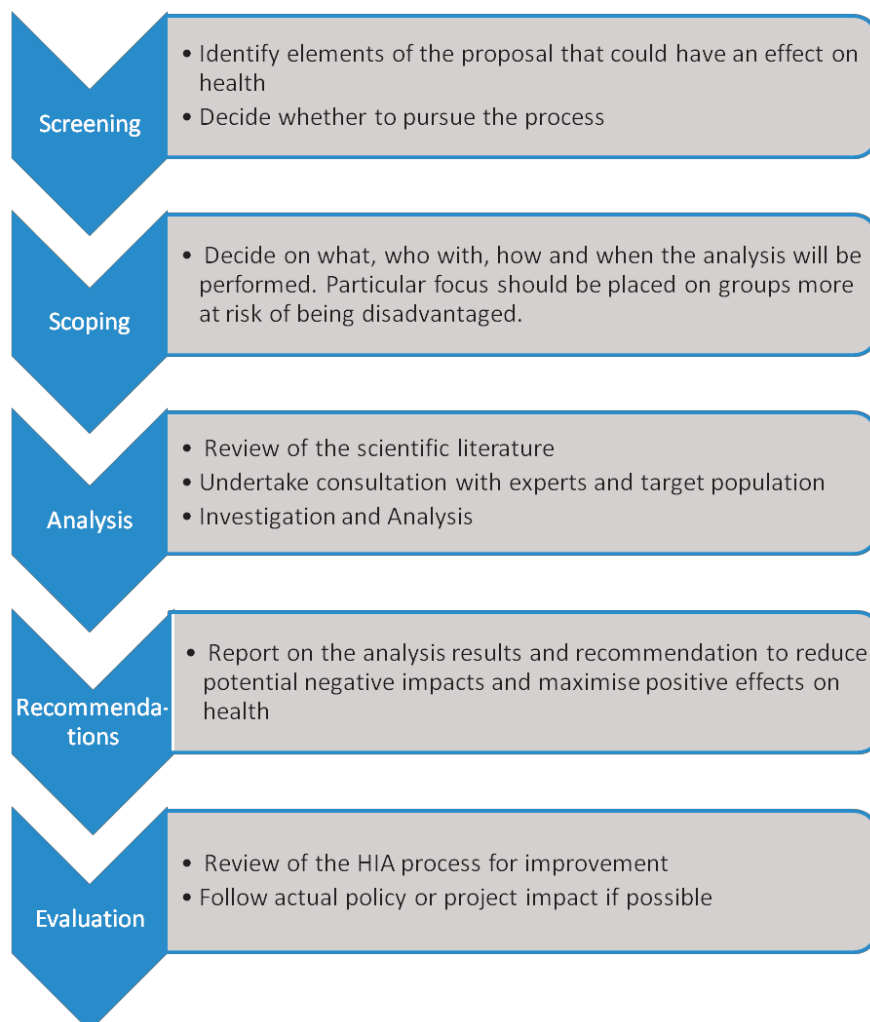
What is a HIA?

HIA refers to an approach structured around successive stages (see below diagram) that aim to identify policy elements that could have positive or negative effects on population health and on the health of various social groups. The approach informs decision-makers on the extent of potential negative effects and the possible ways to avoid them, ideally before the final decision is made. Usually, this process is undertaken for policies or projects that do not have health as their primary objective, and for which the effects on health are not necessarily considered. It therefore aims to enlighten public policy or program decisions in order to avoid negative impacts on health and maximise potential positive effects.
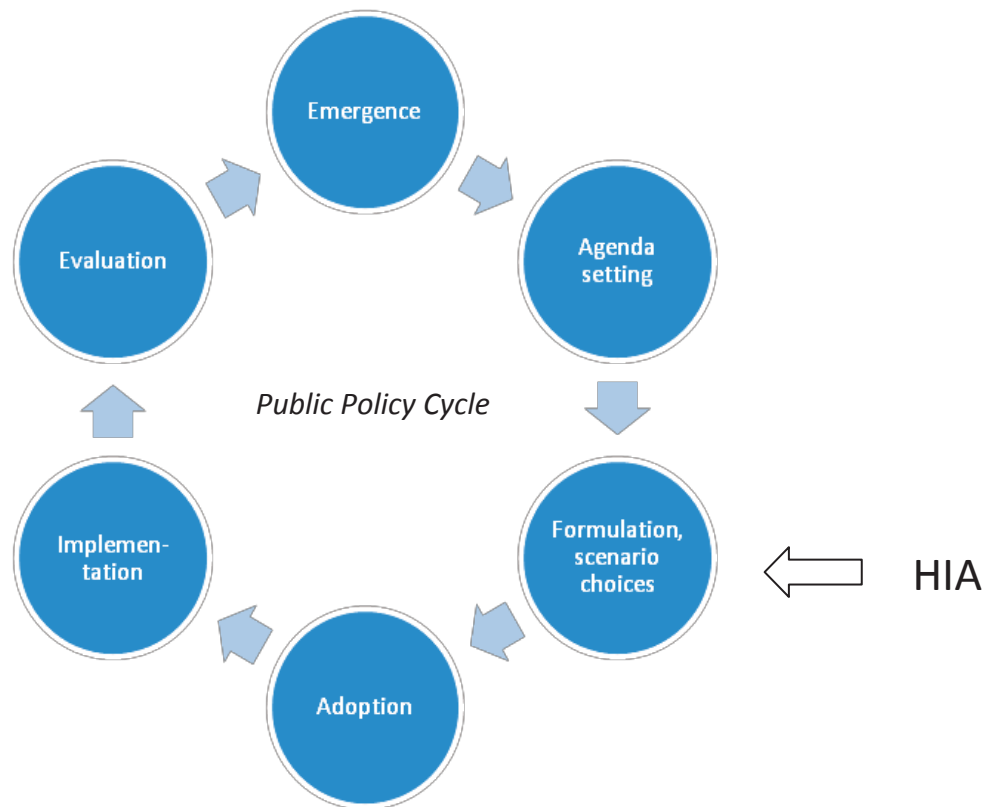
HIA is not only a set of impact analysis methods but also an approach that, when possible, **brings together stakeholders concerned with the proposed policy.** The assessment of the potential impacts takes into accounts both the **scientific data and** views from the affected citizens and decision makers.

Knowledge arising from the field not only allows HIA practitioners to **contextualise information** resulting from research, but can also **facilitate the implementation of policies**.

The five stages of HIA

Screening
- Identify elements of the proposal that could have an effect on health
- Decide whether to pursue the process

Scoping
- Decide on what, who with, how and when the analysis will be performed. Particular focus should be placed on groups more at risk of being disadvantaged.

Analysis
- Review of the scientific literature
- Undertake consultation with experts and target population
- Investigation and Analysis

Recommenda-tions
- Report on the analysis results and recommendation to reduce potential negative impacts and maximise positive effects on health

Evaluation
- Review of the HIA process for improvement
- Follow actual policy or project impact if possible

HIA in the public policy development process

Public Policy Cycle

Emergence → Agenda setting → Formulation, scenario choices → Adoption → Implementation → Evaluation → Emergence

HIA ⟵ (pointing to Formulation, scenario choices)

HIA Benefits

The growing interest for HIA can be explained by the potential benefits for all concerned stakeholders engaged in the process.

→ **For decision-makers**

- HIA supports the decision-making process by providing additional information, founded on evidence of health risks and benefits of a policy or program proposal;

- It links to other concerns or potential impact such as sustainable development, social impact (including equity considerations) or impact on territorial development;

- HIA allows for the prevention of negative consequences on health and well-being, and of developments which are difficult to reverse (e.g. certain infrastructure projects);

- It enables awareness raising and inclusion of citizen concerns with regards to health in a rigorous and impartial manner;

- Inclusion of concerned stakeholders and citizens in the decision-making process facilitates the implementation of final decisions whilst increasing their legitimacy;

- HIA is a great opportunity to promote collaboration between municipal authorities and health authorities as well as with other sectors that could be concerned by the policy, thus promoting its establishment.

→ **For the health sector**

- HIA enables the adoption of healthy public policies;

- HIA improves understanding amongst the concerned sectors and raises awareness of the social determinants of health;

- It promotes inter-sectoral exchanges and mutual trust;

- It enables action to reduce social inequalities in health;

→ **For other stakeholders and the broader community**

- HIA can contribute to an economic benefit (drop in prices, resource optimization);
- It brings a social benefit (choices that promote a better quality of life and reduce inequities);
- It contributes to a health benefit (reducing negative impact on health and encouraging healthy behaviours and environments;
- It contributes to the development of local democracy by allying stakeholders in the process;
- Through participation, it contributes to increased knowledge and health competencies of target populations.

Examples of projects and policies that have benefited from HIAs

Today, several policies and regional or local projects have benefited from HIAs. Policies around urban development, transportation, housing, leisure, elderly populations, as well as cultural policies or policies on economic development have been evaluated from the perspective of their impact on health. Large projects, such as the holding of the Olympics or the building of a London airport, as well as smaller projects such as the establishment of a new food market in a rural setting have also been subject to HIAs.

Principles and values

Generally accepted values (WHO, 1999) that underpin the practice of HIA include:
- *Democracy*, that recalls the right for citizens to participate in the development, adoption and implementation of policies that influence the course of their lives;
- *Equity* that leads us to consider not only the effects on population health, but also the differential effects on various groups of society;
- *Sustainable development* highlighting the need to consider short-term as well as long-term effects of policies;
- *Ethical use of knowledge* that not only reminds us of the importance of rigour for information / data collection and analysis, but also of the importance of addressing all of the socio-economic determinants of health.

Essential elements for the implementation and sustainability of a HIA approach

- Identify and support key enthusiastic individuals with regard to HIA who can support the experiences of new comers in HIA;
- Create favourable climate for HIA, in particular by sensitizing authorities and the population on the extent and importance of the determinants of health. It is crucial to reach a common understanding on a broad concept of health (beyond health care and individual behaviours) . It may also be necessary to reach a consensus on terminology that suits all (e.g. sustainable development, quality of life, wellbeing, etc.);
- To ensure the timeliness of engaging at the right stage of policy development, be familiar with current local policy processes. The HIA process should be able to follow the rhythm of the policy formulation process; this rhythm can be fast or slow, depending on the decision-making calendar/ timeline;
- Make realistic, practical and evidence-based recommendations to decision-makers;
- Promote collective learning and invest in stakeholders' (health, municipality, partners, etc.) ownership of the HIA process by organizing seminars and workshops prior to launching the HIA process;

- Assess to what extent the HIA process can strengthen or complement existing practices associated with the analysis of policies or other responsibilities of local authorities, such as community development, sustainable development, etc.;
- Ensure support from managers of the organisation leading the HIA process;
- Ensure adequate preparation of people that will be responsible for implementing the process;
- Rely on a HIA steering committee that is sufficiently representative of engaged stakeholders.

How and when to start?

- Begin with a small project or an "easy" policy that is most likely to produce a successful experience
- Chose a situation in which you could have support from other organisations or stakeholders of the concerned field;
- It is better to start on a small scale and to build on success;
- The best way to learn is to get involved in a HIA project and to gain skills from collective learning. Several health agents and other stakeholders engaged can then come to the realisation that they already possess many of the required competencies;
- Several successful experiences in HIA have started with pilot projects that have enabled the development of capacities, the gauging of necessary resources and concrete illustration of the approach and its legitimacy for decision-makers, their partners and the health sector.
- Having a person familiar with the HIA approach within a HIA steering committee during the initial experiences greatly facilitates the required learning.

Necessary resources

The amount of resources necessary to undertake a HIA depends on the nature of the policy/program, the organisational context and the type of HIA favoured (see box below). The resources can include:
- Scientific expertise that uses evidence to assess the health impacts of a policy or project.
- Competencies for evaluating public policies;
- Skills in project management, public participation and communication;
- Necessary logistics for community participation and / or inter-sectoral activities.

Types of HIA

It is common practice to distinguish between three types of HIAs depending on time available to conduct these. Therefore, depending on the scope of the evaluation, available resources and data, potential study of alternative scenarios, and the importance assigned to public consultations, an organization may select one of three types of HIA to conduct: **rapid HIA, intermediate HIA <u>and</u> in-depth/comprehensive HIA**. The latter is usually conducted by a multi-disciplinary team of experts that will use sophisticated analysis tools. Such a HIA can require considerable human, technical and financial resources. However, it is possible to conduct a HIA with limited resources. For example collaboration between a public health unit, a municipal team and community organisations can generate new information that is useful for decision-making by pooling knowledge. A rapid HIA can also provide sufficient information through the simple holding of a meeting between experts and citizens.

Three types of HIA

Rapid HIA	A few days / weeks
Intermediate HIA	2 to 6 months
In-depth HIA	6 months and more

A Few Successful examples

In-depth HIA

The city of Glasgow, in collaboration with various health partners, carried out a health impact assessment of the holding of the 2014 Commonwealth Games. The HIA was conducted over a period of a little over a year and called upon engagement of eight organizations for the framework coordination, citizen consultations and analysis. A comprehensive literature review was conducted by a university team and almost 3000 people were consulted via questionnaires, electronic surveys and interactive workshops. Of the 13 identified themes, accompanied by concrete measures, five were prioritized by citizens: civil pride, the city's image, housing, public spaces and employment economy. Recommendations were made for each of the potential impacts. For example, it was proposed that public space be designed so that it promotes physical activity and social interaction (Glasgow City Council, 2009)

Intermediate HIA

In 2006, the town of Christchurch in New Zealand decided to lead a HIA on the urban development strategy designed to address the anticipated growth of its population. The HIA was carried out over a two-month period and led by city council and public health staff. The screening stage was conducted as part of a workshop gathering thirty people from the city council and from public health settings. The following six determinants were identified to be further investigated: air quality, water quality and access to clean water, housing, transport, and social connectivity. The analysis was supported by a literature review conducted by a specialist and by four workshops, each focusing on one of the identified determinants. The fact that the analysis was based both on scientific evidence and citizen participation has favored integration of HIA report into the strategy planning process. It helped decision-makers to go beyond traditional concerns related to physical aspects of urban development to focus more on the quality-of-life outcomes (Stevenson et al., 2006).

Rapid HIA

In 2005, the housing development plan of a small town of around 2000 inhabitants in New Zealand was subjected to a rapid HIA. The HIA was mainly led by a small team of two people, one from the city council and one from the health center, each working part-time on the project over a period of twelve weeks. The HIA team was overseen by a steering committee representing health and council authorities as well as the community. The analysis was based on existing literature review and feedback from key informants. The majority of recommendations (9 out of 16) focused on three areas of determinants: physical activity, quality and access to drinkable water and good neighborhoods were integrated in the various city council development plans (Dubois, 2007).

Challenges and suggestions for solutions

There are several different challenges associated with the practice of HIA. They can be methodological, political, linked to inter-sectoral work or to citizen participation. Years of HIA practice have produced suggestions to overcome or reduce the difficulties associated with these challenges.

Challenges	*Reflections and Solutions*
Methodological	
One of the challenges often mentioned is linked to the methodological difficulty of establishing clear links between project or policy elements and population health. This difficulty can come from the complexity of interrelations among multiple health factors, and / or the absence of or difficulty accessing local data. This difficulty is magnified (magnified) by the often short time allocated to conducting these analyses in order to meet decision-making process deadlines.	HIA is a flexible tool that can adapt to many situations. Sometimes, even small amounts of information can be sufficient to inform the decision-making process. It may also be useful to refer to similar case studies. However, it is important that information be relevant for the decision-maker; that it be collected/assembled in a rigorous manner and from reliable sources and that it be conveyed in a transparent manner.
Political	
Various reasons can lead a decision-maker to undertake HIA, all of which are valid (see box). HIA should not be used as an instrument of politics, but neither should it be assumed that "science" alone is the only value that drives political choices. Certain projects or policy proposals can be highly controversial and the subject of high-level political debates, with various interest groups. Caution must be taken to ensure these various groups do not bias the HIA and to ensure the credibility of the process is not jeopardised. The clear objective of a HIA is to influence decision-making. However, the decision-making process is based on a set of sometimes competing considerations including health. HIA aims to shed new light that often adds to the complexity of decision-making. This complexity also arises from the fact that, generally, a decision benefits one group more than another. However, the final decision belongs to decision-makers who must take into account other considerations.	Communicate clearly, from the start, the objectives and principles of HIA. Ensure a good understanding of all stakeholders' expectations For example, if the policy-maker is expecting that the results assist in the acceptance of his / her decisions by citizens or partners, it will be important to discuss different scenarios prior to the process in case the impact analysis does not meet this expectation. A good reading of the political environment is essential. It is possible that the HIA helps to transcend existing conflicts by focusing the debate on health implications. Alternatively, the HIA process may raise unrealistic expectations or provide arguments for opponents of the policy/program, especially if the extent of potential health impact is unclear. It will therefore be important to judiciously weigh short and long-term advantages and disadvantages of conducting a HIA. A purpose of HIA is to raise awareness around the determinants of health. It is therefore important to consider the knowledge exchanged during the course of the HIA as one of the positive outcomes of the method. Influence on policies can thus be indirect and long-term.

Challenges	Reflections and Solutions
Political	
	Making realistic recommendations and adopting a position to support the decision-making process provide greater opportunities for success in terms of impact.
Inter-sectorality	
Though including in the HIA process a broad range of stakeholders helps to broaden viewpoints, facilitate a common understanding and multiply accessible sources of information, it can also rapidly lead to a process that is difficult to manage. HIA can also lead to work with other professional groups (e.g. urban development professionals or community organizers) for whom inclusion of health in their field of responsibility is considered an intrusion or an additional constraint. Health stakeholders must also resist the habit of working in silos and be prepared to share the "ownership" of health.	Restricting the number of members on the HIA steering committee can be a solution. It is wiser to call upon various ad-hoc consultation groups to enlarge the knowledge base according to the various stages of the HIA process. However, in some cases, those in charge of HIA may want to call upon a large group to conduct the screening stage, considered as an important (and sometimes sufficient) step to promote the dialogue on the socio-economic determinants of health and the role of each stakeholder. It is important to be aware of other municipal or territorial obligations and see to what extent HIA can be adapted to these and complement them in a useful manner. It can also be strategic to integrate HIA within environmental and urban planning evaluation processes. Similarly, actions to raise awareness of such groups and decision-makers to the determinants of health interventions can allow for opening fruitful collaboration avenues.
Citizen participation	
Citizen participation in the different stages of HIA is strongly recommended, but can lead to multiple difficulties: • choosing people that are representative of the target groups; • representation of less visible and marginalised groups likely to be affected by the policy; • quality of the consultation process to avoid polarisation and / or the creation of unrealistic expectations with regards to a policy project.	Do not embark on a public consultation process without appropriate experience or skills. Call upon external resources or to join already planned public consultations in the context of policy development. Conduct a preliminary consultation process by meeting certain groups that are representative of the population or by interviewing some key informants.

Bibliography

- Blau, G. & Mahoney, M., (2002). *The Positioning of Health Impact Assessment in Local Government in Victoria*. Health Impact Assessment Unit, Deakin University. Australia.

- Douglas, M., et al., (2001). Developing Principles for Health Impact Assessment. *Journal of Public Health Medicine* 23 (2): 148-54.

- Dubois, L., (2007) *Bungendore Health Impact Assessment Progress Report on Outcomes.* Albury, NSW. Greater Southern Area Health Service.

- Egbutah, C. & Churchill, K., (2002). *An Easy Guide to Health Impact Assessments for Local Authorities*. Luton Borough Council. U.K.

- Finer, D. et al., (2005). Implementation of a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) tool in a regional health organization in Sweden—a feasibility study. *Health Promotion International,* Vol. 20 No. 3. 277-284.

- Glasgow City Council, (2009). 2014 *Commonwealth Games Health Impact Assessment Report: Planning for Legacy*. Glasgow City Council, Chief Executive's Office, Policy Health Team. www.glasgow.gov.uk.

- Kemm, J., (2007). *More than a statement of the crushingly obvious: A critical guide to HIA*. West Midlands Public Health Observatory. Version 1.

- S2D, Ville de Rennes, (2011). *Les Évaluation d'impact sur la santé (ÉIS) : Une méthode simple et des outils pratiques*. Rennes, France.

- Mahoney, M & Durham, G., (2002). *Health Impact Assessment ; a tool for policy development in Australia*. Public Health Education and Research Program Innovations Grants. Deakin University

- *Milner*, S., (*2004).* Using HIA in local government. In: J. Parry, J. Kemm and S. Palmer, Editors, *Health impact assessment concepts, theory, techniques and applications*. Oxford University Press

- PHAC, (2004*). A Guide to Health Impact Assessment : A Policy Tool for New Zealand*. Public Health

- Stevenson, A. Et al. (2006) *Assessing the impacts on health of an urban development strategy : a case study of the Greater Christchurch urban development strategy Social Policy Journal of New Zealand. 29 ; 146-164.*

- Thackway, S. et al., (2005). Health Impact Assessment Case Study: Working with local government to obtain health benefits. *NSW Public Health Bulletin*. 16 ;7-8, 127-128.

- WHO (1986). *The Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion.* Geneva; World Health Organization.

- WHO (1999). *Health Impact Assessment: main concepts and suggested approach. The Gothenburg Consensus paper.* Brussels; WHO Regional Office for Europe.

- Wismar et al., (2007). *The effectiveness of Health Impact Assessment. Scope and limitations of supporting decision-making in Europe*. European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies.

Find out More

HIA Gateway (U.K.): http://www.apho.org.uk/default.aspx?RID=44539

HIA Connect (Australia): http://www.hiaconnect.edu.au/

Health Impact project (USA) : http://www.healthimpactproject.org/

National Collaborating Centre for Healthy Public Policy (Canada): http://www.ncchpp.ca