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IUHPE Position Paper on Health Impact Assessment



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The **International Union for Health Promotion and Education** (IUHPE) is a global professional non-governmental organisation dedicated to health promotion around the world for more than 65 years. The IUHPE operates a unique worldwide, independent, global, professional network of people and institutions committed to improving the health and wellbeing of the people through the integration of health in all policies, advocacy for effective health promotion, translation of research and workforce development.

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PURPOSE

This position paper on health impact assessment (HIA) and health promotion provides information to guide the International Union for Health Promotion and Education (IUHPE) Board and membership as they take action to enhance the effectiveness of policies, plans, and projects intended to improve the health of populations and to advance health equity.

The paper defines HIA and describes its uses in promoting health and advancing health equity, including links with other forms of impact assessment.

HEALTH IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND ITS ROLE IN PROMOTING HEALTH AND HEALTH EQUITY

Promoting the health of populations and enhancing health equity requires health and other sectors to implement a range of strategies taken over time, including:

- enhancing the positive impact on health and health equity of public policy developed and implemented by the health and all other sectors
- increasing personal knowledge and skills
- supporting communities to participate in creating positive social change
- reorienting health services to strengthen their roles in promoting population health, preventing illness and injury, and in reducing inequities in health
- working in partnership with communities and other sectors to create physical and social environments that support health and increase health equity.

DEFINITION

Health impact assessment (HIA) is a combination of methods and research tools by which policies, programs or projects can be assessed to identify their potential effects on the health of populations, and the distribution of those effects within populations (adapted from ECHP 1999, Mahoney and Morgan 2001). HIA identifies appropriate action to manage those effects (Quigley et al. 2006). The purpose of HIA is to develop evidence-informed recommendations to inform decision makers about actions to increase the positive and reduce the negative impacts on health of their plans, projects, or policies (National Research Council 2011).

Health Promotion and HIA strengthen mutually. The current practice of health impact assessment makes reference to several principles of health promotion. Not only it aims at acting on the social determinants of health, but it carries equity as its central value through its concern for the groups which are more vulnerable to the changes proposed by new policies. Advocating for an intersectoral approach, it values the contribution of knowledge of all kinds, including those of citizens. The participation of stakeholders in the process of impact analysis and in that of decision-making is relevant to the objective of conferring a bigger control over the determinants of health (WHO 1986).

Besides, HIA is one of healthy public policy development strategies to improve the conditions in which the populations evolve.

IUHPE encourages and supports the use of HIA in recognition of the opportunity it offers to increase the positive impacts of plans, programmes, projects or policies developed by all sectors on health.

WHAT IS HIA?

HIA is a process to ensure that the potential health benefits of policies, programs and projects are maximised, and that the potential negative health consequences and health risks are minimised (WHO ROA 9009). HIAs also identify and address potential health inequities that may arise from policies, programs and projects proposed by the health and all other sectors (WHO 2008a, WHO 2008b, IFC 2009, IFC 2006). HIA is done *before* proposals or decisions are implemented.

HIA is an essential approach of health promotion to equip the decision-makers at every level (municipal, regional and national) so that an analysis of the potential effects on health would be integrated into the steps of planning a program, a project or a policy.

HIA is a structured process by which evidence is gathered and stakeholders are engaged. It uses a broad range of evidence from public health, social sciences, biophysical sciences, and political science to assessment plans, programmes, projects or policies with stakeholders and affected communities or populations. HIA assesses potential impacts on health, both positive and negative.

HIAs assess the distribution of health benefits and harms in terms of:

- socioeconomic status, in particular poverty
- age
- gender
- culture and language
- location, including both proximity and remoteness
- existing levels of disability and health.

In addition to assessing the distribution of impacts on the social, environmental determinants of health, health impact assessment should consider impacts on the determinants of health inequities. These are distinct and include changes to factors such as values, history, norms, power and context (political, cultural, colonial, economic and social, Mantoura and Morrison 2016, Harris and Harris-Roxas 2010).

PRINCIPLES UNDERPINNING HIA AND ITS USE

Equity

Equity in HIA relates to equitable opportunities for health for different communities and population groups in terms of socioeconomic status, gender, culture, ethnic, age, geographic area, disability and current health, and other dimensions of people's lives. In the context of HIA it refers to the distribution of impacts amongst communities and populations, including both positive and negative impacts.

Sustainability

Assessing the short-term, long-term, cumulative and intergenerational impacts of proposed plans, projects, programmes or policies.

Democracy

Democratic processes within governments, organisations and communities to enhance governance, accountability and transparency.

Inclusivity

Inclusion and involvement of people in the decisions that shape their lives and have an impact upon their health and wellbeing.

Using multiple sources of evidence

Ensuring that multiple forms of evidence inform the assessment, including scientific research, academic literature, and lay knowledge.

Ethical use of evidence

Using the most rigorous evidence within HIAs and refraining from selective use of research or findings.

Flexibility of the approach

Effective HIA responds and adapts to the decision-making, disciplinary, and political context within which proposals are being implemented.

Collaboration

Collaboration across multiple sectors and disciplines, drawing on expertise and knowledge beyond the health sector alone.

WHAT HIA IS NOT

HIAs are done *before* proposals or decisions are implemented. HIAs are not a replacement for planning activities. They are not evaluation, which is typically done during or after implementation. HIAs are also not solely monitoring frameworks or predictive models. HIAs complement these activities but they are not replacements for them. HIA is not a descriptive research for its own sake; it seeks to inform decision-making and implementation

HIAs should not be done on *all* proposed plans, programmes, projects or policies. HIAs should be conducted when:

- there is scope to influence the decisions of policy makers, planners or project engineers
- there are likely to be significant impacts on health and/or equity
- there is limited information already available on the likely impacts
- there is a high level of concern about the proposed plan, programme, project or policy's potential impacts on health.

THE STEPS OF HIA

HIA follows a stepwise, sequential process (Table 1).

Table 1: Overview of the steps of HIA

| Step | Purpose and components |
|----------------------------|---|
| Screening | Determine whether an HIA is appropriate or required; describe the rationale for proceeding with the HIA and desired outcomes |
| Scoping | Set the parameters for the HIA (may also be known as developing terms of reference); outline the process to be followed; agree on the potential impact pathways to be considered |
| Assessment | Assess potential impacts on human health; develop a community and/or population profile; collect information and evidence to identify potential impacts on health and health equity; predict potential health impacts; describe potential positive and negative impacts |
| Developing recommendations | Develop recommendations for acting on the HIA's findings to enhance health and minimise harms; develop a health management plan |
| Follow-up and Evaluation | Follow up monitoring and use of health management plan; evaluate changes to decision-making and implementation as a result of the HIA |

Adapted from Harris et al. (2007) and National Research Council (2011).

This process is a comprehensive, systematic approach but can be adapted to the specific decision-making contexts (Bourcier et al. 2014).

THE USE OF HIA TO PROMOTE HEALTH

There is evidence that HIAs have resulted in changes to plans, projects, programmes and policies (Wismar et al. 2007, Haigh et al. 2015). These changes have led to increasing positive impacts on health, preventing negative impacts, and increasing access to essential services. The factors that have been identified as enhancing the success of HIAs include:

- a stepwise but flexible process
- an evidence-based approach
- timing and timeliness of HIAs
- involvement of decision-makers and communities
- relationships and partnerships
- political support
- HIA capacity, experience, training and technical resources
- academic involvement and partnerships
- culture of intersectoral work
- supportive policy context (Bourcier et al. 2014, Haigh et al. 2015, Ross et al. 2014, Ison 2012, Simos et al. 2015).

USE OF HIA

There is a large range of policies, plans, programmes and projects from different sectors to which HIAs have added value, including:

- land use and spatial planning
- airport development and expansion
- transport
- housing
- energy
- extractive industries
- waste management
- climate change adaptation and mitigation
- employment
- income (Kemmm 2013).

There are also various forms of HIA institutionalisation and various configurations of implementation of HIA (compulsory, voluntary) at national and local levels.

HIA AND OTHER FORMS OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT

The process of HIA is similar to that of other forms of impact assessment. Where possible it is desirable to integrate and align HIA with other forms of assessment (Quigley et al. 2006). There is significant potential, particularly in relation to environmental and social impact assessments, for integration and alignment.

IUHPE's focus is on improving the health of populations and on advancing health equity. IUHPE will work towards the following goals:

- better consideration and analysis of health within the range of existing impact assessments
- supporting, and further developing, the use and implementation of HIA
- promoting the use of, and developing better, integrated assessments, and
- promoting the use of HIA as part of a Health in All Policies approach.

ALIGNMENT OF HIA WITH IUHPE'S PRIORITY AREAS

IUHPE has identified four strategies as part of its Strategic Directions (2015-2020, see Figure 2):

- i. promoting a health in all policies approach
- ii. advocacy for health promoting policies and programs
- iii. translating research and evidence into useable knowledge and know-how
- iv. supporting capacity building of the health promotion workforce.

HIA has been identified as an important mechanism for all advancing all four strategies.

Figure 2: IUHPE Strategic Directions 2015-2020



IUHPE'S ROLES IN EXPANDING THE USE OF HIA TO PROMOTE HEALTH

IUHPE recognises HIA plays a critical role in promoting health, and will seek to facilitate the inclusion of HIA in all comprehensive strategies to promote health. IUHPE takes the position that health impact assessment:

- plays a meaningful role in promoting health and advancing health equity
- is an important part of health promotion practice. It is explicitly identified as such in international declarations (WHO 2005, WHO and SA Government 2010)
- is distinct from planning, evaluation and monitoring
- should be integrated and aligned with other forms of impact assessment
- constitutes a key component of IUHPE's strategic directions, including Health in All Policies, advocacy, translation of research, and workforce development
- constitutes a relevant tool to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations 2012).

IUHPE facilitates the exchange of HIA ideas and developments, and supports HIA in many countries. IUHPE achieves this through its:

- global and regional conferences
- regional committees
- peer-reviewed journal
- projects carried out in multiple countries
- research and practice networks, including support of Global Working Groups
- strategic partnerships with international organisations including the World Health Organization, the International Association for Impact Assessment, and other professional associations and civil society groups.

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