# Health Impact Assessment

## HEALTHY COMMUNITY DESIGN

*Fact Sheet Series*

Health impact assessment (HIA) is commonly defined as "a combination of procedures, methods, and tools by which a policy, program, or project may be judged as to its potential effects on the health of a population, and the distribution of those effects within the population" (1999 Gothenburg consensus statement).

HIA can be used to evaluate objectively the potential health effects of a project or policy before it is built or implemented. It can provide recommendations to increase positive health outcomes and minimize adverse health outcomes. A major benefit of the HIA process is that it brings public health issues to the attention of persons who make decisions about areas that fall outside of traditional public health arenas, such as transportation or land use.

## Major Steps

The major steps in conducting an HIA include

- screening (identify projects or policies for which an HIA would be useful),
- scoping (identify which health effects to consider),
- assessing risks and benefits (identify which people may be affected and how they may be affected),
- developing recommendations (suggest changes to proposals to promote positive or mitigate adverse health effects),
- reporting (present the results to decision-makers), and
- evaluating (determine the affect of the HIA on the decision process).

HIAs are similar in some ways to environmental impact assessments (EIAs), which are mandated processes that focus on environmental outcomes such as air and water quality. However, unlike EIAs, HIAs can be voluntary or regulatory processes that focus on health outcomes such as obesity, physical inactivity, asthma, injuries, and social equity. An HIA encompasses a heterogeneous array of qualitative and quantitative methods and tools. Rapid HIAs can be completed in a few days or weeks; full HIAs may require months to complete. The decision to conduct a rapid or a full HIA is often determined by the available time and resources.

Numerous HIAs have been performed in Europe, Canada, and elsewhere. Some countries have mandated HIA as part of a regulatory process; others have used it in on a voluntary basis. In the United States, interest in the topic is growing, with HIA work being performed by the University of California, Los Angeles, the San Francisco Department of Public Health, and CDC. In October 2004, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and CDC hosted a workshop of domestic and international HIA experts in Princeton to identify the steps needed to move the field of HIA forward in the United States. A summary of the workshop is available at http://ajph.aphapublications.org/cgi/reprint/96/2/262.pdf.

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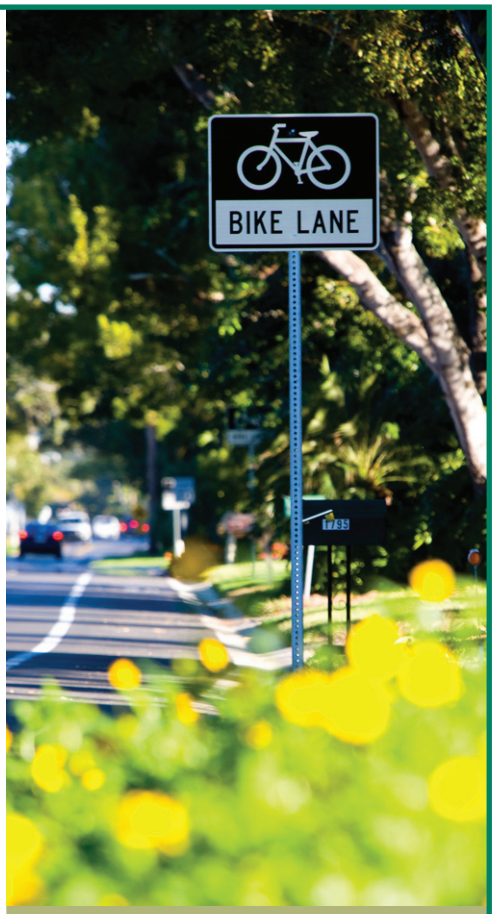
## Resources

For more information about HIA, refer to the following resources:

- CDC Healthy Places Web site (http://www.cdc.gov/healthyplaces)
- Dannenberg AL, Bhatia R, Cole BL, et al. Use of health impact assessment in the U.S.: 27 case studies, 1999–2007. *Am J Prev Med* 2008;34(3):241–256.
- Health Impact Project (www.healthimpact.org)
- UCLA Health Impact Assessment Clearinghouse Learning & Information Center (www.hiaguide.org)
- Health Impact Assessment Gateway (http://www.hiagateway.org.uk)
- World Health Organization Health Impact Assessment (http://www.who.int/hia/en/)
- International Health Impact Assessment Consortium (http://www.ihia.org.uk/)
- National Association of County and City Health Officials (http://www.naccho.org/topics/hpdp/land_use_planning/LUP_HealthImpactAssessment.cfm)

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