

Tools to Assess Health Impacts of Land-Use Policies and Programs: An Introduction to Health Impact Assessment and Evaluation for Land-Use Agencies



HEALTHY COMMUNITY DESIGN

Fact Sheet Series

Land-use agencies such as local, state, and national parks and natural resource departments play a key role in determining how public lands are designed and utilized. The decisions these organizations make can affect the mental, physical, and social well-being of the communities they serve. By predicting or monitoring the health outcomes related to individual land-use decisions, agencies help to improve the health of their communities. The analyses conducted can provide decision-makers with valuable information regarding the interaction between a specific program, project, or policy and its effect on public health.

Land-use agencies can examine the health outcomes of their actions using two public health tools: health impact assessment (HIA) and evaluation. This fact sheet provides information about HIA and evaluation, as well as background material that will help guide land-use agencies to consider health when making decisions about effective ways to use public lands.

Health Impact Assessment

HIA is a combination of procedures, methods, and tools that brings public health issues to the attention of persons who make decisions about areas outside the traditional public health arena, including decisions made by land-use agencies. HIA can be used to predict and communicate the potential health effects of a program, project, or policy before it is built or implemented. For example, HIA could be used to predict the health outcomes of a program designed to get children and families outdoors, informing decision-makers of potential health benefits and risks before they make a final decision.

An HIA can be completed in six steps:

- screening: identify projects or policies for which an HIA would be useful,
- scoping: identify which health effects to consider,
- assessing risks and benefits: identify who may be affected and how they may be affected,
- developing recommendations: identify alternatives and/or ways to improve the project or policy,
- reporting: present results and recommendations to decision-makers, and
- evaluating and monitoring: determine how HIA affected the decision process and observing if the predicted health impacts occur.

The results of HIA provide an ideal starting point for land-use agencies to maximize health outcomes of proposed actions.

Evaluation

The purpose of evaluation is to make judgments about the effectiveness of a program, project, or policy; to identify unintended consequences; and to inform decision-makers about ways a specific program, project, or policy could be improved. Evaluation critically examines a program, project, or policy to determine whether the expected outcomes have been realized. Unlike HIA, which is performed before a project begins, evaluation is performed during or after a program, project, or policy is implemented. Evaluation involves collecting and analyzing information about the program, project, or policy's activities, characteristics, and outcomes.

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Although there are many ways to perform evaluation, most follow a similar methodology. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Evaluation Center recommends the following steps when conducting program evaluation:

- engage stakeholders,
- describe program purpose,
- focus the evaluation design,
- gather evidence,
- justify conclusions,
- ensure use, and
- disseminate lessons learned.

Why Assess Land-Use Decision Outcomes?

Land-use and public health agencies share many goals. By working together to conduct health impact assessment or evaluation, these different kinds of agencies can improve the value of their programs and the health of the populations they serve.

Common Health Outcomes of Land-Use Decisions

- **Increased physical activity:** Evidence suggests that land-use decisions that provide greater opportunity for recreation are associated with increased levels of physical activity. Increased physical activity is associated with several health benefits, including lowered risk for developing cardiovascular disease, stroke, diabetes, and osteoporosis.
- **Improved mental health:** Land-use decisions can provide greater opportunity for recreation and social interaction. Physical activity, contact with nature, and social interaction have all been associated with improved mental health, including lowered rates of depression and anxiety and improved ability to deal with stress.
- **Child development:** A recent report by the American Academy of Pediatrics indicates that free-play during childhood is essential to the successful development of a child. Land-use decisions that provide the opportunity for free-play in a safe environment can greatly influence the overall health of a child.
- **Environmental health:** Evidence suggests that, by predicting, monitoring, and evaluating land-use decisions, agencies can influence the overall health of a community, addressing numerous environmental health factors, including issues of accessibility, improved air quality, lower risk of injury, and increases in social equity and capital.

Additional Resources

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

- CDC Healthy Places Web site (www.cdc.gov/healthyplaces)
- Health Impact Assessment Gateway (www.hiagateway.org.uk)
- World Health Organization Health Impact Assessment (www.who.int/hia/en/)
- Health Impact Project (www.healthimpact.org)
- UCLA Health Impact Assessment Clearinghouse Learning & Information Center (www.hiaguide.org)

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

- CDC Framework for Program Evaluation (<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr4811a1.htm>)
- The Community Guide Effectiveness Evaluation (www.thecommunityguide.org/methods/)
- My Environmental Education Evaluation Resource Assistant (www.meera.snre.umich.edu)

E-mail: healthyplaces@cdc.gov

Web: <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyplaces/>

