

HIA Glossary¹

Assessment

In relation to HIA, assessment provides a profile of existing health conditions of people and groups affected by a proposed change and estimates the potential health effects if the change were to occur.

Best available evidence

Conclusive evidence of the links between, for example, socio-environmental factors and health or the effectiveness of interventions, is not always available. In such cases, the best available evidence, that which is judged to be most reliable and compelling, can be used but with caution.

Community participation

Involving the community in an activity such as the planning of projects or carrying out a HIA. There are a number of models of community participation, some of which are outlined in the Gothenburg consensus paper on HIA (WHO, 1999). Levels of participation vary (Arnstein, 1969).

Determinants of health

Determinants of health are factors which influence health status and determine health differentials or health inequalities. They include biological factors (e.g. age, gender and ethnicity), behavior and lifestyles (e.g. smoking, alcohol consumption, diet and physical activity), physical and social environment (e.g. housing quality, workplace stressors, and air pollution), and access to health care (Lalonde, 1974; Labonete, 1993).

Disadvantaged / vulnerable / marginalized groups

These terms are applied to groups of people who, due to factors usually considered outside their control, do not have the same opportunities as other, more fortunate groups in society. Examples might include unemployed people, households without access to a personal vehicle, and those who may be more susceptible to disease due to their age.

Evidence base

The evidence base refers to a body of information, drawn from routine statistical analyses, published studies, and "grey" literature, that tells us something about what is already known about factors affecting health. For example, in the field of housing and health, there are a number of studies that demonstrate the links between damp and cold housing and respiratory disease and, increasingly, the links between high quality housing and quality of life (Thomson et al., 2001).

Health impact

A health impact can be positive or negative. A positive health impact is an effect which contributes to good health or to improving health. For example, having a sense of control over one's life and having choices is known to have a beneficial effect on mental health and well-being, making people feel "healthier" (Wilkinson, 1996). A negative health impact has the opposite effect, causing or contributing to ill health. For example, working

¹ Modified from the UCLA Health Impact Assessment Clearinghouse: <http://www.ph.ucla.edu/hs/health-impact/>

in unhygienic or unsafe conditions or spending a lot of time in an area with poor air quality is likely to have an adverse effect on physical health status.

Health impact assessment

Health impact assessment (HIA) is often defined as "A systematic process that uses an array of data sources and analytic methods and considers input from stakeholders to determine the potential effects of a proposed policy, plan, program or project on the health of a population and the distribution of those effects within the population. HIA provides recommendations on monitoring and managing those effects." (National Research Council of the National Academies, 2011).

Indicator

A health indicator is a characteristic of an individual, population, or environment which is subject to measurement (directly or indirectly) and can be used to describe one or more aspects of the health of an individual or population (quality, quantity and time).

Outcomes

The effect the process has had on the people targeted by it. These might include, for example, changes in their self-perceived health status or changes in the distribution of health determinants, or factors which are known to affect their health, well-being and quality of life.

Population (Affected population)

Groups of individuals defined by locality, biological criteria (e.g. age, gender, health condition, or common exposure), or social criteria (e.g. socio-economic status or cultural affiliation). How a population is defined in an HIA will depend on the proposed project/policy being considered, health issues of most concern, the extent and classification of existing evidence on those health issues, and what information is of most value to the policy-making process.

Project

A project is usually a discrete piece of work addressing a single population group or health determinant, usually with a pre-set time limit. Usually (but not always), the term refers to "bricks and mortar" projects involving construction of a discrete structure or group of structures, such as a power plant, highway, or housing development.

Recommendations

Practical solutions and strategies to manage identified adverse health impacts and maximize benefits to health that can be implemented within the political, economic, or technical limitations of the proposed change.

Reporting

In reference to the HIA, preparing the HIA report and sharing the findings with decision makers, affected communities, and other stakeholders.

Qualitative and quantitative

HIA tries to balance qualitative and quantitative evidence. It involves an evaluation of the quantitative, "scientific" evidence when it exists but also recognizes the importance of more qualitative information. This may include the opinions, experience and expectations

of those people most directly affected by public policies. HIA tries to balance the various types of evidence (Barnes and Scott-Samuel, 1999). Generally speaking, quantitative evidence is based on what can be counted or measured objectively whilst qualitative evidence cannot be measured in the usual ways and may be more subjective. People's perceptions, opinions and views are considered examples of qualitative information.

Scoping

Creating objectives for the HIA, in consultation with stakeholders, and outlining the process to identify potential health risks and benefits.

Screening

In relation to HIA, screening usually refers to an initial step being taken in order to determine whether a policy, program or project should be subject to a HIA. It is a step to understand whether the HIA is likely to add value and influence decision-making.

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