



Health Impact Assessment

A methodological balancing act

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Health Impact Assessment: a tool for policy development in Australia

Innovations Project Grant, Public Health
Education & Research Program,
Commonwealth Dept. of Health & Aged
Care

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Project Aims


To develop an understanding of HIA as a tool for policy development in the Australian context – the strengths/weaknesses, obstacles and limitations, opportunities, lessons learned from overseas and potential appropriate applications - and to identify the training and capacity building needs of the public health workforce.



Strategies

- To fill the research gap that currently exists in Australia in respect to HIA in the policy context,
- To contribute to the debate at state, national and international levels on this innovative new tool for linking policy formation in other sectors with health outcomes,
- To establish partnerships with appropriate Australian, New Zealand and international organisations and researchers engaged in HIA in a policy context,

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- To learn theoretical and practical lessons from overseas partners about the issues impacting on HIA in a policy context and identify gaps in knowledge in respect to process and methodology,
 - To establish working links between appropriate Australian partners including the enHEALTH initiative on HIA, relevant Commonwealth and State departments, and impact assessment and public health professionals,

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- To identify the key questions that need to be answered in the Australian context about applying HIA to the policy context,
 - To identify workforce development, training and capacity building needs, and
 - To identify ways forward including, if appropriate, an area of rural policy that would be suitable for a pilot health impact assessment to assess the costs, benefits and workforce needs.



Processes

 ***Stage 1:***

Develop partnerships and collect background information.

 ***Stage 2:***

Consultation across Australia particularly through a one day invited forum

 ***Stage 3:***

Propose future action & develop pilot projects



Definition of HIA

A combination of procedures, methods and tools by which policy, program or project may be assessed and judged for its potential, and often unanticipated, effects on the health of the population and the distribution of those effects within the population.

(modified Gothenburg definition, in Mahoney & Morgan, 2001)



What is policy-linked HIA?

A UK government briefing document states that the aim of HIA in a policy context is
'to improve public health by adding health awareness to policy making at every level and making concern for improved public health a norm in all policy making.'

(UK Cabinet Office, 1999)



EHIA versus policy-linked HIA?

Difference lies primarily in intention.

- ✦ EHIA focuses on health impacts arising out of a development with environmental consequences
- ✦ Policy-linked HIA focuses on the effects of all policies on human health from the perspective of health



Foci of policy linked HIA

Current thinking

- ✦ Broad focus : prospective, qualitative and inclusive
- ✦ Tight focus: retrospective, quantitative and technocratic



Components

1. Broad application issues

- ✦ Development of a framework for understanding how it fits political contexts (drivers, approaches that will work, contextual issues)
- ✦ Institutionalisation factors (locating it within existing policy frameworks)
- ✦ Resolving Australian specific issues



2. Methodological issues

- ✦ Lessons learned from overseas
- ✦ Local, State or National expertise
- ✦ Broader applicability
- ✦ Processes (when the tool would be applied, by whom, locus of responsibility, nature of the application)



3. Capacity building dimensions

- ✦ What is required for health professionals?
- ✦ What is required for non-health sector professionals?



Conceptualising HIA

There is no universal HIA

One of the best ways of viewing it is as a flexible tool that can be modified for the particular task and context for which it is being used e.g. a socket set – a tool which has a handle (i.e. core principles) to which one adds the most suitable device to complete the task

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Policy development versus HIA

Where once policymaking drew on *policy analysis and evaluation* to determine whether or not policies were meeting their defined objectives, HIA can supplement this process by applying tools to provide data on the unintended consequences, side-effects and spin-offs of the policy on health prior to, or after, its implementation



Commonwealth HIA projects

- ✦ Health Impact Assessment – Implementation Guidelines
- ✦ Health Impact Assessments – Incorporating Environmental Health into Environmental Protection Legislation
- ✦ Health Impact Assessment: a tool for the development of policy in Australia



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tensions

- ✦ Lack of certainty about what HIA is and how it links to EHIA
- ✦ Getting health on the agenda of non-health sectors
- ✦ Understanding how it would fit in terms of political processes
- ✦ Methodological issues – reinventing the wheel, participatory processes versus need for quantification
- ✦ Clarity about boundaries

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- ✦ Participatory processes yet confidentiality in policy development
 - ✦ Pressures for answers about efficacy before application issues are resolved (time, resources, funding, broader political and social tensions)
 - ✦ Definition and perspective of health being adopted