



Reconciling the tensions

**Health Impact Assessment as a useful
tool in addressing inequalities in
health?**

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Health Impact Assessment: a tool for policy development in Australia

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Overview of the presentation

- ✦ Introducing policy-linked HIA
- ✦ Establishing the connection to sustainable communities
- ✦ Explaining the link to inequalities and inequity
- ✦ Outlining the tensions



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)



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 HIA trying to achieve?

- ✦ Encourage /persuade those who make decisions to consider and take into account any effects that their decisions may have on health
- ✦ Enhance the *positive impacts* of any decisions
- ✦ Reduce (or eliminate) the *negative impacts* of any decision



Sustainable development

- ✦ Recognises the connection between social, economic and environmental elements
- ✦ Good health as a determinant of sustainable communities

“Society depends on the economy and the economy depends on the global ecosystem, the health of which represents the ultimate triple bottom line.”

(VicWater, 2002)



Values underpinning HIA

HIA is underpinned by a philosophy and set of values which not reflect and are assisting of sustainable development.



Value 1: Sustainable development

Emphasising that both short term and long term as well as more and less direct impacts can be taken into consideration.





for example


regeneration programs in disadvantaged areas – enhancing the quality of life through strategies such as equal opportunities, sustainable economic growth, protection of the environment & issues of social exclusion



Value 2: Equity

Emphasising that HIA is not only interested in the aggregate impact of the assessed policy on health of a population but also on the distribution of the impact within the population in terms of

-  Gender
-  Age
-  Ethnic background
-  Socio-economic status

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- ✦ Recognises social and material inequalities as generating health inequalities
 - ✦ Identifying the underlying determinants of these inequalities
 - ✦ Applying this knowledge to ameliorative policies
 - ✦ Explicit consideration of inequities through health inequalities impact assessment



Value 3: Democracy

Emphasises the right of people to participate in a transparent process for the formulation, implementation and evaluation of policies that affect life both directly and through the elected political decision-makers

- Trust
- Social cohesion
- Accountability
- Trade-offs



Value 4: Ethical use of evidence

- ✦ Emphasises the links to effective democratic processes. HIA strives to be both ethical in the collection of data through community participatory approaches and its use of this data.



Tensions arising

A consideration of **power** and its influence on the outcomes of HIA is integral to understanding how HIA can best contribute to addressing inequities in health and assist in processes of sustainable development



Key questions

- ✦ Who are the main beneficiaries of the decisions?
- ✦ Who are makes the decisions?
- ✦ What is the relationship between the public and private sphere?
- ✦ What types of knowledge are seen as privileged or legitimated?
- ✦ What sort of ideology underpins the health systems/health approach?



Power as process

- ✦ Elitism versus community ownership
- ✦ Whose knowledge is most valued?
- ✦ Assumptions and implications.
- ✦ Priorities



Recommendation

- ✦ that an analytical framework of power must be considered for HIA which takes account of
assumptions
constructions
impacts and
power relations of the process itself



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