

# Health impact assessment (HIA): an overview

Erica Ison

Specialist Practitioner in HIA

# HIA: what can the term be used to mean?

- **Concept**
- **Process**
- **Methodology**
- **Model**
- **Tool**
- **Approach**

# HIA: what is it?

**“a combination of procedures, methods and tools by which a policy, a program or project may be *judged* as to its potential effects on the health of a population and the distribution of effects within the population”**

*WHO Gothenburg Consensus Paper, 1999*

# HIA: how and why did the methodology develop?

## How?

- Developed by the Canadian Institute of Advanced Research for the assessment of non-health proposals

## Why?

- To offset the inadequate appraisal of impacts on human health in environmental impact assessment (EIA) and social impact assessment (SIA)

# HIA: how and why did the methodology develop?

## Problems with EIA

- EIA is conducted *only* on projects
- EIA is conducted on projects *only* of a certain size
- In the UK, up to 75% of EIAs either do not address human health or they do not deal with it effectively

**HIA: unique selling point in relation to other impact assessments**

- **EIA is concerned with mitigation of negative impacts**
- **HIA addresses negative impacts BUT also identifies positive impacts and seeks to enhance them – added value**

# HIA: what is its status?

- HIA is not a statutory requirement
- Mentioned in UK Government policy documents but mainly documents about health policy
- In the UK, HIA tends to be undertaken at a regional or local government level, or by the health sector
- Health is a consideration in Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

# HIA: a methodology of two parts

- 1. Health impact analysis – identifying the potential impacts on health of a proposal**
- 2. Health impact assessment – identifying ways to address those potential health impacts by modifying the proposal**



**HIA: judging the potential effects  
on health and well-being**

**Any proposal has two main types  
of effect on health and well-  
being:**

**1. direct**

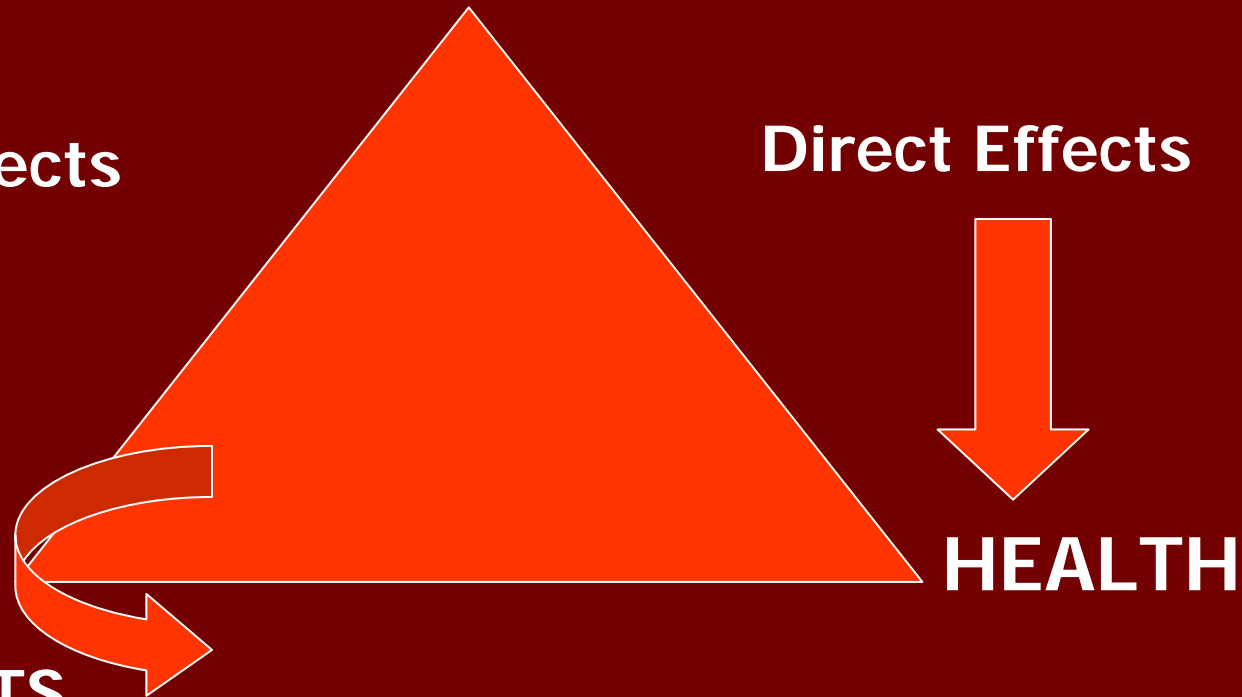
**2. Indirect, through the  
determinants of health**

# HIA: investigating impacts on health and well-being

*Proposal*

Indirect Effects

Direct Effects



**HEALTH**

**DETERMINANTS  
OF HEALTH**

HIA: a way of generating added value for health?

The main reason for identifying a proposal's impacts on health and well-being is to explore the *possibilities* of changing the proposal to optimise the health gain we could get from it

# HIA: optimising health gain

**In HIA, we try to optimise health gain from a proposal by framing suggestions that are aimed at:**

- **Protecting health**
- **Improving health**
- **Reducing health inequalities**

# HIA: optimising health gain

- Objective to achieve health gain from non-health-related proposals – giving added value
- Objective to maximise health gain from health-related proposals

# HIA: why do it?

The main intention when undertaking HIA is to provide information to politicians, and other decision-makers, so that:

- They are able to *take health into account* when making decisions about a particular proposal
- They can *consider ways of changing the proposal* to protect and improve health

# HIA: supporting decision-making with information

- **Analysis of a proposal's potential beneficial and potential harmful effects on health and well-being**
- **Suggestions about ways to modify the proposal to maximise the benefits and to minimise the harms to health and well-being**

# HIA: supporting decision-making

**Information relevant to decision-making about a particular proposal can be provided during:**

- **The design of the proposal**
- **The development of the proposal**
- **The implementation of the proposal**



# Characteristics of HIA

- **Multidisciplinary**
- **Intersectoral**
- **Range of different methods**
- **Use of quantitative and qualitative evidence**
- **Focus on health inequalities**
- **Participatory**

# Values for HIA

- **Sustainability** – work towards sustainable development, or sustainable communities
- **Democracy** – people's democratic right to participate in open and transparent decision-making processes
- **Equity**
- **Ethical use of evidence**

# HIA: evolution of main strands in the application of the concept

- **Applying the classic or traditional process of HIA – 5 or 6 stages**
- **Using an HIA approach – taking specific elements from the process, usually screening or appraisal, and using them during the design and development of a proposal, known as desk-top appraisal**

# The full process of HIA

<b>5 stages</b>	<b>6 stages</b>
<b>Screening</b>	<b>Screening</b>
<b>Scoping</b>	<b>Scoping</b>
<b>Appraisal, including reporting</b>	<b>Appraisal</b>
	<b>Reporting</b>
<b>Supporting decision-makers</b>	<b>Supporting decision-makers</b>
<b>Monitoring &amp; evaluation</b>	<b>Monitoring &amp; evaluation</b>

# HIA: levels or depths of appraisal

- ***Rapid* appraisal**  
– using best available information, i.e. no “new” information is collected

- ***Comprehensive* appraisal** – primary research is conducted, i.e. “new” information is generated

# HIA: when do you do it?

- Before a proposal is implemented – *prospective* HIA
- While a proposal is being implemented – *concurrent* HIA
- Some time after a proposal has been implemented – *retrospective* HIA

# HIA: main models

<b>Biomedical model of health</b>	<b>Social or socio-economic model of health</b>
<b>Biomedical or bio-physical model of HIA</b>	<b>Social or socio-economic model of HIA</b>
<b>Environmental determinants of health</b>	<b>Socio-economic determinants of health</b>
<b>Quantitative evidence</b>	<b>Qualitative evidence</b>
<b>Measurement of variables; modelling</b>	<b>Descriptive</b>

# HIA: which model do you use?

- It is important to try and achieve a balance between the two models of HIA
- This balance might be different for different types of proposals
- Both quantitative and qualitative information are important to HIA, but they have different roles



# HIA: key features of the methodology

## HIA is specific

**HIA is undertaken on:  
a specific proposal that will  
impact  
on a particular community  
living in a particular set of  
circumstances**

# HIA: key features of the methodology

## Flexibility/adaptability

HIA can be used on:

- ✓ national policies through to projects on a single estate
- ✓ any subject or topic

HIA can be adapted to suit:

- ✓ time available
- ✓ resources available (human, financial, material)
- ✓ prevailing organisational culture, procedures and practices

# HIA: what can it bring to the city administration?

**If HIA is undertaken, and the results used by politicians and other decision-makers, it can help to improve the public health by:**

- **Encouraging an awareness and understanding of health at the level of policy- and decision-making**
- **Establishing a desire to improve health as routine during policy- and decision-making**
- **Making policy- and decision-making "healthy"**

# Benefits of HIA for stakeholder organisations

- **Demonstrating a commitment to health and well-being of local people**
- **Health as an added value for organisations not in the health sector**
- **Potential for organisational development and learning**
- **Potential to improve partnership working among different agencies and different sectors**
- **Potential to shift from services that solve problems to services that prevent problems arising**

# Benefits of HIA for the community

- Greater involvement in policy- and decision-making
- Potential to extend the democratic process, especially for groups in society for feel excluded
- Skills development and capacity building
- Potential to contribute to increasing social capital
- Potential to reduce sources of inequality and disadvantage
- The planning and design of services that better meet the needs of the local community

# HIA: realistic expectations

- It is a systematic framework with which to explore health and health-related issues during decision-making
- Health may not be the only priority
- The information from HIA needs to be considered in relation to information about other priorities

# HIA: realistic expectations

Using HIA can enable you to answer the following questions:

- Whose health will benefit from the proposal and whose health will be harmed?
- Is there anything we can do to increase the benefit and decrease the harm?
- Will the proposal, or changes to it, enable us to address inequalities in health?
- Will the proposal have implications for service provision in the area (through changes to needs and demands)?
- What are the trade-offs between health gain (through protection, improvement and/or reducing inequality) and other priorities for the city?

# HIA: applying it in an urban setting

**In the UK, the types of proposals that it is common to investigate using HIA are:**

- **Regeneration and redevelopment**
- **Economic development**
- **Spatial planning/urban planning**
- **Housing**
- **Transport, and transport-related issues**



# HIA: applying it in an urban setting

**Proposals that are becoming important for investigation by HIA:**

- **Those relating to ageing or older people living in cities, and the problems they face**
- **Those relating to children and young people living in cities**
- **Those relating to lifestyle factors, such as physical activity, alcohol, and smoking**