HIA in Practice: NSW Developmental HIA Sites

Phase 2 of the NSW HIA Project has a focus on learning by doing. As part of this a five sites from across New South Wales have been selected to undertake health impact assessments. These HIA developmental sites will focus on health policies, plans, programs and services. The sites are also:

- All prospective HIAs;
- A mixture of desk based audits and intermediate-level health impact assessments;
- Assessing an assortment of rural, metropolitan/regional and statewide proposals; and
- Relevant to both the sites themselves and the NSW Department of Health more broadly.

Illawarra Area Health Service

Health Impact Assessment of the Management Plan for the Shellharbour Foreshore (Plan)

Shellharbour City Council recently released a Management Plan for the Shellharbour foreshore. The Plan aims to conserve and beautify the foreshore while encouraging and supporting appropriate public use. The consultation phase has been completed with no significant issues so far identified. The management plan is simply an environmental management tool with no current funding attached. Implementation will occur over a period of years as funding becomes available and IAHS is undertaking a HIA of the Plan so as to be able to influence the development and/or staging of implementation. The proposed HIA will assess the likely impact of the proposed infrastructural changes in Shellharbour on physical activity levels of residents in the Shellharbour local government area. It will determine the likely number of people that will be affected by the changes and the potential level of health impact as well as the likely level of investment.

Mid North Coast Area Health Service

Slow Stream Rehabilitation/ Transitional Care on the Mid North Coast (Health Service)

The MNCAHS is the fastest growing rural health service in New South Wales by Ben Harris-Roxas

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Wales and has a higher than state average proportion of adults aged over 65 years, attributable to both demographic ageing and high levels of migration to the area. In cooperation with a non-government residential aged care facility in the area the MNCAHS is proposing to establish a slow stream rehabilitation/transitional care service to provide programs to elderly patients that stimulate independence with the aim of returning the clients to their home with appropriate services (if necessary). The HIA will look at the health impacts of providing a slow stream rehabilitation/transitional care service and assess the impacts on all stakeholders including; patients, their carers, the community, hospitals and community health services.

Centre for Health Promotion, NSW Department of Health

Health Impact Assessment of the Proposed Chronic Disease Prevention Campaign (Program)

The Centre for Health Promotion is undertaking a HIA of the Chronic Disease Prevention Campaign. A key priority for action in the NSW Chronic Disease Prevention Strategy 2003-2007 is the development of a chronic disease prevention (social marketing) campaign that integrates all programs and activities dealing with tobacco, alcohol, nutrition, physical activity and mental health promotion. The findings of the HIA will be used to guide the implementation of the campaign at a statewide level.

Mid Western Area Health Service

Health Impact Assessment of Future Directions for MWAHS Health Promotion Team (Program)

Due to the small numbers of staff comprising the present MWAHS health promotion team and difficulties associated with providing a service in a geographically and demographically diverse area it has become necessary to restructure the team to work at a more strategic level rather than concentrating on specific areas of interest. This is to ensure that all MWAHS health services and Area programs work within a health promoting framework. In order to achieve this, the team has recently redefined their core business needs. MWAHS is undertaking a HIA to identify the potential health impacts arising from the proposed changes to the way in which the health promotion program is funded, structured and delivered.
HIA in Practice:
NSW Developmental HIA Sites Cont.

Primary Health and Community Partnerships Branch, NSW Department of Health

Health Impact Assessment of the draft Transport for Health Policy Framework (Policy)

NSW Health is developing a Transport for Health Policy Framework to provide a policy context for the Transport for Health Strategy, which was developed as part of the NSW Rural Health Plan (2002). It aims to improve access to health services for people who are transport disadvantaged and who have no other way of getting to and from a health facility. Primary Health and Community Partnerships Branch propose to undertake a HIA of the draft policy framework to identify the potential health impacts of the policy.

Progress

The developmental sites along with representatives of a number of key agencies have recently completed a second round of training, focused on undertaking their HIAs. The majority of sites have completed the screening stage and are currently scoping their assessments. For further information on the sites please contact the project team.

HIA Connect:
Building Capacity to Undertake Health Impact Assessment

CHETRE, in conjunction with the Centre for Health Promotion, has developed a website on HIA. The site has been developed to assist those undertaking or interested in health impact assessment.

The site contains information on:
- Frequently Asked Questions
- Undertaking HIA
- Past Issues of the E-News
- Information on the NSW HIA Project
- Reviews and Links

CHETRE has developed a website on health impact assessment
chetre.med.unsw.edu.au/hia
Recap: The Steps of HIA

In this issue Sarah Simpson writes on the **assessment of potential health impacts** as part of our ongoing series of articles on the steps involved in HIA. Articles in this series have included:

- **FAQ: The Key Steps in HIA** (Issue 4)
- **Step 1: Screening** (Issue 5)
- **Step 2: Scoping** (Issue 6)
- **Step 3a: Identification of Potential Impacts** (Issue 7)
- **Step 3b: Assessing Potential Health Impacts** (this issue)

Click on the links to access the articles. Future editions will cover the remaining steps of (i) negotiation and decision making and (ii) evaluation.
Identification and Assessment of Potential Health Impacts: The Third Step in a HIA

The purpose of this step in a HIA is the identification, assessment and/or appraisal of potential health impacts. Step 3 of a HIA includes two processes:

- the **identification** (sometimes known as profiling) of potential health impacts and
- **assessment** (also known as appraisal/mapping/risk assessment and quantification) of the identified potential health impacts.

This edition takes a closer look at the process of assessment of identified potential health impacts. Detailed information about the identification of health impacts was covered in the previous edition of HIA E-news.

Assessment includes collating the information collected from all sources (eg. literature, key informants) to list the potential health impacts and provide an assessment of the:

- potential severity of the health impact eg. very negative (--), neutral or slightly positive (+)
- likelihood/certainty that the potential health impact will occur – eg. definite, probable or speculative
- whether the potential health impacts are differentially distributed eg. children will be affected more significantly than adults
- whether potential differential health impacts are inequitable

One way of bringing this information together to assist in appraising the potential health impacts is to use a matrix (see Merseyside Guidelines or Douglas et al, 2001). This is useful not only for the HIA Steering Group (in developing their recommendations) but also for the decision makers – as a way of presenting the information in an easy to follow format. The Bro Taf Guidelines for Health Inequalities Impact Assessment Rapid Appraisal – Determinants of Health Brainstorm (2003) also provide a useful and alternative way of categorising/mapping the potential health risks.

Guidelines or standards can be used to assist in assessing the level of impact or risk, such as guidelines for water or air quality. However guidelines are not available for every possible potential risk or health impact and have limitation including:

- they reflect the knowledge about the particular health impact at the time of publication
- do not necessarily address the social, community or psychological aspects of health and well-being effectively
- may not identify potential positive health impacts
- don’t usually address differential impact that may arise due to age, gender etc eg. children absorb lead more easily than adults (enHealth, 2001, p.16)

The enHealth Guidelines for HIA (2001) include a set of criteria for assessing impact significance (see page 18 of the guidelines), including criteria such as socioeconomic importance and local sensitivity – perception about risk (see below). This issue highlights why it is important to ensure that you collect information about potential impacts from a range of different sources – the literature (peer reviewed and grey) and key informants (technical and community experts).

As with the identification of health impacts, how you have scoped will impact on the information available at the assessment step. For example if you have used a “tight” definition of health (ie. limited to physiological risk), you may not have identified as wide a range of

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By Sarah Simspoon
CHETRE

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Does the “expert” view conflict with the “lay” view about perceived potential health impacts? Where HIA is used for decision making such information is essential.
potential health impacts (positive and negative) as you could have:

The risk assessment process should identify the impacts that a proposed development is likely to have on health. These effects could be negative... or positive such as improved recreational opportunities or job opportunities. This is an aspect overlooked by the typical assessment that does not fully consider human health, and is one reason to include a broader view of health in the impact assessment process. (enHealth, 2001, p.15)

A proposed manufacturing plant for example has both potentially positive and negative health impacts - new job opportunities for people living in the area and potentially increased levels of noise and/or air pollution. The increased job opportunities would be particularly important in areas where there are high levels of unemployment. Increased job opportunities may potentially result in improved levels of health (physical and mental) in the community.

It's also important to identify the source of information for each potential health impact – whether this was something identified through the literature review, or key informants and/or both sources. This is important because it provides an indication about whether the “expert” view is in conflict with the “lay” view about perceived potential health impacts. Where HIA is used for decision making such information is essential. For example there may be no “expert” level evidence that the increased noise and/or air pollution levels as a result of a proposed manufacturing plant will impact adversely on human health. Local residents however may perceive the increased noise and/or air pollution levels as posing a risk and this needs to be taken into account as part of the decision making process. Perceived risk may result in a negative health impact in terms of mental and social health – ie. people are unhappy living there because there is a perception that the manufacturing plant is a negative outcome.

As part of this process it's useful to be able to explain how the potential health impact arises – the potential causal pathway. For example, one of the potential health impacts of a proposed freeway extension that enables drivers to bypass a regional centre and small towns is a decrease in physical injury rates due to decreased traffic through the town centre, including a decreased number of trucks. Another potential health impact may be a decrease in the number of asthma and/or other respiratory events among young children who live close to the existing road, due to decreased traffic which in turn decreases the amount of air and noise pollution. However another impact of the proposal is that due to less through traffic, fewer people stop and spend money in the town centre, meaning that businesses (eg. cafes and convenience stores) may close due to a decrease in income. A potential negative health impact could be that the people owning the businesses have increasing levels of physical and/or mental illness due to stress due to lack of income, a failing business, change health related behaviours (ie. increased smoking or drinking) and/or having to move away from their home and family networks.

Acknowledgments
I would particularly like to acknowledge the assistance of Mary Mahoney, HIA Unit, Deakin University and Caron Bowen, former Program Manager HIA, London Health Observatory in providing insights into this step of a HIA.
Queensland Health is undertaking a number of projects to progress health impact assessment (HIA) across the State. The projects aim to identify opportunities to influence the uptake of HIA methodologies within Queensland government. The projects specifically relate to local government planning processes, policy development and improving interdepartmental processes that relate to impact assessment.

To support the application of HIA and to provide guidance on assessing the determinants of health, Queensland Health has developed a draft HIA Framework and is also developing a HIA toolkit. The toolkit will provide guidance on how to conduct each stage of the Framework.

Queensland’s Health’s approach to HIA is to better enable the broader determinants of health to be considered during the assessment of initiatives that have potential to not only adversely affect health, but also provide opportunities to promote community health and wellbeing and to reduce health inequalities.


New Resources

HIA Connect
http://chetre.med.unsw.edu.au/hia

International Association for Impact Assessment
http://www.iaia.org

Articles
