



Talking Points:

Community Design for Healthy Living



Why Should State Legislators Be Concerned?

- **Community design impacts health.** The way a community is designed (including homes, schools, workplaces, streets and transportation systems) can have major effects on the physical and mental health of its residents. For example, a lack of accessible sidewalks and bicycle or walking paths can contribute to sedentary habits.
- **Obesity among adults and children has increased sharply in the last 30 years.**
- **Urban sprawl affects mental health.** Evidence suggests modern sprawling community design may contribute to depression, anxiety, attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder and other mental disorders.
- **Community design impacts some people more.** Persons in low-income communities, the elderly and children often suffer disproportionately from the adverse health consequences of transportation and land-use policy decisions.



How Can Health Effects Be Considered in Community Design?

- **Health Impact Assessment (HIA) holds promise.** Like environmental impact studies, HIA judges design projects and policies in terms of their potential health effects on vulnerable subpopulations.
- **HIA can be initiated by and be useful to decision-makers in the public, nonprofit and private sectors.** Its uses include community development and planning, policy development and analysis, strategy development, resource allocation and preparing or assessing funding bids.
- **HIA can assess diverse projects.** They include proposed highways, shopping malls, transit projects, urban renewal plans, housing policies, agriculture policies, noise abatement strategies, airport expansions, safe routes to schools and the location of landfills.
- **It's generally accomplished in five phases.**
 - **Screening**—to identify which projects may impact health.
 - **Scoping**—to plan how to carry out the HIA in a timely fashion to provide information at key decision points.
 - **Appraisal**—to gather evidence of health impact and collect views of key stakeholders.
 - **Reporting**—to recommend changes to a project or policy to reduce hazards and/or improve public health.
 - **Monitoring**—to evaluate how HIA contributes to improved health outcomes.
- **HIA is already used extensively in Europe and Canada.** Interest in HIA is increasing in the United States, and many HIA methods and tools are being tested here.



What are the Benefits of Health Impact Assessment?

- **Public health impacts are considered.** Policymakers who may not have considered the large health impacts of decisions on transportation and land use policies are now provided relevant evidence of health effects.

- **Short- and long-term and direct and indirect effects of projects and policies are evaluated.** Examples of short-term, direct effects of a new development are the displacement of families or increased traffic accidents. Examples of indirect, long-term effects are decreases in social capital, increased anxiety and depression, or increases in air pollution and pedestrian injuries. Completing an HIA allows the complex relationships between immediate impacts and long-term health consequences to be understood.
- **Ethical, rigorous use of qualitative and quantitative evidence.** Experts from many scientific disciplines work together to complete a comprehensive HIA. The principles that underlie an HIA are democracy, equity, sustainable development, scientific and robust practice, and a holistic approach to health.
- **Opportunities exist to reduce health disparities in at-risk subpopulations.**
- **Public participation.** The process allows for an open, transparent decision-making process that includes public hearings and participation of multiple stakeholders.
- **Strengthened local partnerships.** The process increases communication between local health, transportation and planning departments and community decision-makers to consider improved designs.



How Can State Legislators Support Healthy Community Design?

- **Incorporate HIA into state policy.** Support legislation to:
 - Allow for HIA to be part of regulatory processes and be incorporated into state government programs or projects that may have health impacts;
 - Create a state interagency working group to establish environmental health goals, guidelines and procedures for conducting HIAs; and
 - Consider funding for environmental public health monitoring systems, health information technology and other tools to support HIA data collection and consolidation.
- **Encourage use of HIA at the local level and monitor its results.** Support legislation to:
 - Encourage local planning and transportation agencies to subject new proposals to HIA;
 - Establish programs to guide and support cities, counties, agencies, organizations and institutions conducting HIA. Provide funding, technical assistance and training for health, transportation and public works officials as well as planners, transportation professionals, developers and nonprofit partners;
 - Require local entities to submit completed HIA reports to the state. Allow for establishment of HIA databases to collect recommendations and evaluations from all HIAs conducted in the state; and
 - Authorize outcome evaluations of HIAs to study the cumulative health effects of the projects or policies on which HIAs are completed.
- **Act as a leader for local action.** Help agencies and organizations undertaking HIA gain support from other groups and form coalitions to promote more multi-sector assessments. Help to build acceptance of the process among local decision-makers.

To find resources on HIA and reports from communities that have undertaken them, go to:

- National Association of County & City Health Officials (NACCHO)
Community Design/Land Use Planning Links:
http://www.naccho.org/topics/hdp/land_use_planning/LUP_Tools_Links_to_HIA.cfm

If you would like more information or references:

- Send your inquiry to <http://www.healthystates.csg.org/> (keyword: questions/comments) or
- Call the CSG Health Policy Group at (859) 244–8000.