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Health Impact Assessment at the Georgia Health Policy Center

The mission of the Georgia Health Policy Center (GHPC) is to improve health status at the community level. The National Prevention Strategy states "...many of the strongest predictors of health and well-being fall outside of the health care setting."¹ By assessing the potential health implications of decisions in sectors outside the traditional purview of public health – such as housing, transportation, education, and land use – we can help to identify intentional and unintentional health impacts to further improve health status at the community level.

Health Impact Assessment (HIA) is a structured process that brings together scientific data, public health expertise, and stakeholder input to identify the potential health effects of a proposed policy, plan, program, or project. Based on an objective and thorough analysis of these potential effects, an HIA offers practical recommendations for ways to minimize risks and capitalize on opportunities to improve health. HIA typically follows a six step process outlined below.

Table 1: Steps in the Health Impact Assessment (HIA) Process ²

| HIA STEP | PURPOSE |
|-------------------------|--|
| Screening | To determine whether an HIA is needed, feasible, and likely to be useful |
| Scoping | To determine the important health effects, affected populations, available evidence, and roles of stakeholders |
| Assessment | To analyze baseline conditions and likely health effects |
| Recommendations | To develop feasible, evidence-based recommendations and a plan for implementing them |
| Reporting | To disseminate findings to decision makers, affected communities, and other stakeholders |
| Monitoring & Evaluation | To monitor the results of the HIA and evaluate it in respect to process, impact, and outcomes |

Some important aspects of HIA practice include:

- Considering social, economic, and environmental influences on health;
- Bringing together community members, business interests, and other affected stakeholders;
- Acknowledging the trade-offs of choices under consideration and offering decision makers comprehensive information about those trade-offs;
- Framing health concerns in the context of other important factors when making a decision; and
- Considering if certain impacts may affect vulnerable groups of people in different ways.

1. National Prevention Council. *National Prevention Strategy: America's Plan for Better Health and Wellness*. June 2011.

2. Adapted from the Health Impact Project, a collaboration of The Pew Charitable Trusts and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. www.healthimpactproject.org



GHPC Expertise in HIAs

The HIA team at GHPC has more than a decade of combined experience in this emerging area.

- HIA practitioners who have conducted HIAs on a diverse set of topics, including large-scale redevelopments, transportation plans and policies, housing policy, and urban food systems.
- HIA trainers and technical assistance providers with funding provided by the National Network of Public Health Institutes (NNPHI), Health Impact Project, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and various clients.
- Contributors to the professional field and development of HIA including co-authors on Revised “Minimum Elements and Practice Standards for Health Impact Assessment” and provisional steering committee members of the Society of Practitioners of Health Impact Assessment (SOPHIA), the first professional association for HIA practitioners in North America.

Services

Conducting HIAs

The GHPC can partner with interested organizations to conduct Health Impact Assessments and offer the following:

- Identification of appropriate HIA topics
- Assistance in submitting applications for external funding
- Identification of stakeholders to include in the process
- Collaboration in conducting each step of the HIA process

Trainings

Trainings for potential HIA practitioner teams, stakeholders, partners, and decision-makers include:

- Tailored training for the HIA team and audience
- Identification of case studies specific to the situation
- Detailed meeting facilitation guide
- Meeting materials, including handouts and agendas
- Facilitation of the training, which includes:
 - Overview of HIA, perspective on HIAs in the U.S., importance and key values of HIAs
 - Detailed description of the six steps of the HIA process, including facilitated small group activities for participants to put their learnings into action
 - Discussion of stakeholder engagement strategies, communication strategies, lessons learned, etc.

Technical Assistance

Tailored ongoing technical assistance is offered via phone and email to guide the HIA team and partners in each step of the HIA process. This technical assistance package includes an average of approximately four GHPC staff hours per month dedicated to:

- Communication – regularly scheduled phone calls to prepare for each step of the HIA process
- Resource sharing – sample materials for each step of the HIA process and associated activities to assist in preparation, implementation, and documentation
- Material development and review – assistance in developing materials specifically for the HIA, and review of draft materials to provide feedback
- Problem-solving – assistance in problem-solving any challenges that may arise during the process

“I think I finally understand all of the main points of HIA. I found the training very helpful and interactive.”

- HIA Training Participant

Project Examples

Fort McPherson Interim Zoning Plan

Part of the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process

The HIA addressed the health effects of zoning provisions on the nearby residents’ nutrition, physical activity and social cohesion during the interim-use phase of a major redevelopment and new land use plan for Atlanta’s Fort McPherson BRAC process. The HIA recommended allowing provisions for community gardens; allowing use of selected buildings for community meetings; and limiting the development of fast food restaurants near areas where children congregate.



Replacing Public Housing Units Destroyed by Hurricane Ike

This HIA focuses on strategies for addressing replacement of nearly one-third of the 569 public housing units that were lost to Hurricane Ike in Galveston, Texas. Location of housing units can impact health through exposure to crime, access to amenities such as green space, and access to goods and services important to health, such as grocery stores and health care facilities. Recommendations will be offered to the Galveston Housing Authority Board of Commissioners.

