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Health Impact Assessment at the Georgia Health Policy Center

The mission of the Georgia Health Policy Center (GHPC) is to integrate research, policy, and programs to advance health and well-being. It is widely recognized that many of the strongest predictors of health and well-being fall outside of the health care setting. 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 seize opportunities to improve health. HIA typically follows a six step process outlined below.

Table 1: Steps in the Health Impact Assessment (HIA) Process¹

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 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

GHPC has been a leader in HIAs for nearly a decade.

- Conducting HIAs around diverse topics, including large-scale redevelopments, transportation plans and policies, housing policy, and urban food systems.
- Providing training and technical assistance through partners at the National Network of Public Health Institutes, Health Impact Project, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and various clients.

- Contributing to the advancement of the HIA knowledge base through dissemination of papers and participation in professional associations and conferences.

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

- HIA Training Participant

Services

Conducting HIAs

GHPC can partner with interested organizations to plan and conduct HIAs, including the following:

- Identifying appropriate HIA topics
- Assisting in submitting applications for external funding
- Identifying stakeholders to include in the process
- Supporting each step of the HIA process

Trainings

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

- Customized training, including an overview of HIAs, how they are conducted, and their value, as well as strategies for stakeholder engagement and communication
- Identification of case studies specific to the situation
- Detailed meeting facilitation including meeting materials, handouts, and agendas

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 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 to assist in preparation, implementation, and documentation
- Material development and review – assistance in developing materials specifically for the HIA
- Problem-solving – assistance in problem-solving any challenges that may arise during the process

Project Examples

HIA to Inform Low-Income Housing Tax Credit Policy

Georgia allocates \$22 million in support of affordable housing development each year through low-income housing tax credits (LIHTC), distributed through the Qualified Allocation Plan. A grant from the Health Impact Project, a collaboration of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and The Pew Charitable Trusts, enabled GHPC, in partnership with the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, to evaluate how public health perspectives could be more strongly incorporated into affordable housing policy.

The Health Impact Assessment of the 2015 Qualified Allocation Plan for Low-Income Housing Tax Credits in Georgia identifies how the state's allocation of LIHTC can be strengthened to support health-promoting affordable housing development. These proposed policy changes, resulting from an HIA, centered on strengthening connections between LIHTC properties and their surrounding communities, encouraging access to educational opportunity, and promoting healthy design and operation.



Mid-South Regional Greenprint Health Impact Assessment

Shelby County, Tenn. was awarded a \$2.6 million grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to prepare the Mid-South Regional Greenprint and Sustainability Plan. The 25-year plan is designed to enhance regional sustainability by establishing a unified vision for a region-wide network of green space areas to address long-term housing and land use, environmental protection, accessibility, community health and wellness, transportation alternatives, economic development, and social equity in the Greater Memphis Area.

GHPC, in collaboration with local stakeholders in Memphis, conducted an HIA to inform stakeholders about the public health implications of green infrastructure planning in the region. HIA recommendations addressed location, design, and programming of green infrastructure covered in the final plan. The HIA found the Greenprint is most likely to positively impact health by building healthy communities, framing parks and trails as resources for health, and promoting healthy travel behaviors.

