

NSW Health Impact Assessment Project

E-News

HIA Workshop Report

New South Wales Health Promotion Symposium

Patrick Harris and Jenny Hughes

UNSW Research Centre for Primary Health Care and Equity and
NSW Department of Health, Australia » www.cphce.unsw.edu.au

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The NSW HIA project recently teamed up with NSW Health to conduct a workshop on HIA at the NSW Health Promotion 'Getting Evidence into Practice' Symposium. The workshop looked at HIA as a professional tool for translating evidence into practice and the wider resource and infrastructural support required to undertake HIAs.

One of the learnings from the support CHETRE has provided to the NSW HIA developmental sites has been the importance of considering resource and infrastructure requirements early on in planning for a HIA (usually done during screening and scoping). As many of those attending the workshop had not come across HIA previously, this was an opportunity to encourage some detailed thinking about these issues.

We took an interactive approach to the delivery of the workshop. After a short overview of the NSW HIA project and a description of the steps in HIA participants worked in groups to consider opportunities for HIA within their current practice, focussing on constraints and facilitators. Participants also looked at a case study of an urban regeneration proposal and discussed the practical resources and infrastructure required to conduct a HIA. .



Participants at the NSW Health Promotion Symposium

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We are evaluating the HIA eNews and we'd love to get your input. Please take a few minutes to fill out our online survey »

tinyurl.com/y2zrpn

Feedback from each of the small groups looked at three key themes:

1. Initial Planning;
2. Establishing and supporting the steering committee; and
3. Other support.

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Planning for a HIA also involves mobilising organisational support for conducting it

HIA steering committees involve balancing the need for broad stakeholder involvement with the ability to manage potential conflicts and trade-offs

Opportunities for mentoring on HIA are required, as are opportunities to reflect on practice

NSW HIA eNews

Disclaimer

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Contact Us

Phone +61 2 9828 6230

www.cphce.unsw.edu.au

NSW HIA Project
CHETRE
LMB 7103
Liverpool BC NSW 1871
AUSTRALIA

Funded by
NSW HEALTH

HIA Workshop Report

New South Wales Health Promotion Symposium

Initial Planning

Participants felt that in the initial planning for a HIA, consideration should be given to mobilising support for conducting the HIA. Early on in planning for a HIA organisations need to *'be ready to take the HIA on'*, clarifying roles and responsibilities, tasks, timeframes and time allocations, and potential capacity requirements in terms of cost and human resources.

Defining and containing the impacts to be assessed early on in the HIA was also proposed as setting useful resource and infrastructure parameters. The need to *'manage views on evidence'* early on in planning was a surprisingly prescient comment from one group, concerning the often held debates over what constitutes evidence in a HIA.

Establishing and Supporting the Steering Committee

The steering committee was identified as important throughout the life of a HIA. Issues identified included:

- retaining a diverse membership on the committee;
- Encouraging both community representation and involvement of the proponents of the proposal;
- strong managerial support, but
- flexibility to both encourage diverse ideas while also successfully manage trade-offs and conflicting opinions.

Other Support

Participants also identified two other innovative areas where support could assist people and organisations as they undertake

HIAs. First was the need to establish a mentoring program whereby practitioners more experienced in HIA could support those less experienced. Second was the use of web-based resources, such as blogs, to encourage greater reflection on practice and opportunities for comment.



Andrew Gow presenting on the Bungendore HIA

More » tinyurl.com/se2co

Overall

Overall, during the workshop participants demonstrated considerable depth of knowledge concerning the support required to undertake a HIA. The workshop also proved a very useful arena to share ideas, indicating that planning well for a HIA covers much the same detail as planning well for other projects.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank those who attended, and the convenors of the symposium - the NSW Health Promotion Workforce Development Implementation Group Network and the NSW Health Promotion Research and Evaluation Network. Hopefully the interest shown at the workshop, and the robust discussions that participants engaged in, are indicative of the growing number of health practitioners in NSW who recognise the usefulness of HIA to their work.

Is HIA a Science?

Health Impact Assessment Practitioner Series

Salim Vohra

Peter Brett Associates, United Kingdom » www.pba.co.uk

About six months ago, I re-read the Merseyside Guidelines, the leading guidance on HIA in the UK. It's the guidance that every practitioner in the UK, and I'm one of them, has read or says they've read. Okay, so



first time round I read them quite quickly and I liked what I read. What I hadn't done three years ago, when I was a novice HIA practitioner still learning the ropes, was to read them critically. That's what I did second time around. Imagine my shock, as a signed up champion of science, when on re-reading them I found, at the back, this definition of HIA:

"Is health impact assessment a science? It is important to emphasise that HIA is not strictly a science. Having said this, it most certainly draws on a scientific knowledge base. Scientific evidence on health impacts of specific determinants forms the backbone of this creative, interdisciplinary form of enquiry. But each HIA is uniquely

located in time, space and local conditions though its evidence base can be evaluated, and the rigour with which procedures and methods were implemented can (and should) be assessed. Uncertainties encountered during the undertaking of HIAs will frequently dictate the need to make assumptions, which may result in challenges to the HIA's validity: such assumptions are acceptable as long as they are stated explicitly, so that the reader is free to agree or disagree."

I agree with every part of this quote except the phrase "HIA is not strictly a science" because for me it describes perfectly what it means to apply scientific knowledge to the real world outside the lab.

For me, both HIA and science in all its myriad forms are "interdisciplinary forms of enquiry"; to misquote John Donne 'No science is an island entire unto itself every science is a piece of the continent, a part of the main'.

HIA for me is:

1. a systematic endeavour;
2. it uses knowledge and methods from other scientific disciplines e.g. epidemiology, sociology, toxicology and biology;
3. it aims for rigour,
4. it actively avoids bias and confounding;
5. the findings of one HIA have some applicability to communities of a similar social and cultural mix as that studied by the HIA; and
6. its results are subject to revision when new evidence or information comes to light that

This article first appeared on the HIA Connect Blog » www.hiaconnect.edu.au

Salim suggests that HIA:

1. is a systematic endeavour;
2. it uses knowledge and methods from other scientific disciplines;
3. it aims for rigour;
4. it actively avoids bias and confounding;
5. the findings of one HIA have some applicability to communities of a similar social and cultural mix as that studied by the HIA; and
6. its results are subject to revision when new evidence or information comes to light that contradicts and refutes previous knowledge.

Is HIA a Science?

Health Impact Assessment Practitioner Series

contradicts and refutes previous knowledge.

For me, this quote illustrates a misreading of science as about numbers and quantitative findings and about universal laws that transcend time and space. That works for the physical world (most of the time) but doesn't work so well for our social and cultural worlds where general laws and theories need to take account of local context. In fact even the universal laws of physics have to take account of local context. Science is about systematic enquiry where the resulting knowledge is always provisional and subject to revision.

What's even more interesting is that environmental impact assessment practitioners don't have any qualms about calling EIA a science. Neither do economists or

sociologists.

But public health professionals and HIA practitioners, in my experience, seem to have a problem with saying that HIA is a public health science? Or maybe I've got it wrong?

“environmental impact assessment practitioners don't have any qualms about calling EIA a science, but public health professionals and HIA practitioners seem to have a problem with saying that HIA is a public health science”

“as one of the authors of the Merseyside Guidelines. I have struggled with the question of whether prospective HIA is a science for many years”

“by ignoring the socially constructed nature of 'science' we risk HIA being forever doomed to produce only instrumentally justifiable knowledge”

HIA Connect Blog
This article first appeared on the HIA Connect Blog.



To participate in the debate go to tinyurl.com/y4omwt

Practitioners Respond

Martin Birley
Birley HIA » www.birleyhia.co.uk

I comment as one of the authors of the Merseyside Guidelines. I have struggled with the question of whether prospective HIA is a science for many years.

Good sciences are predictive. HIA makes assessments of the future consequences of present actions but I do not think those assessments can be predictive. They are also unverifiable because the assessment changes the outcome.

The objective is not the discovery of absolute truth but to make justifiable recommendations.

Debbie Fox
Liverpool University » liv.ac.uk

I agree with Salim on this and think epistemic differences (i.e. realist/ constructivist debates) are core to this discussion. By ignoring the socially constructed nature of 'science' we risk HIA being forever doomed to produce only instrumentally justifiable knowledge.

Ontological relativism suggests that multiple social realities are products of human intellect therefore knowledge can be categorised as an outcome of what we view as cause and effect, with truth an emergent property of that knowledge...

More » tinyurl.com/y4omwt

What's New?

News, Publications and Events

Ben Harris-Roxas

UNSW Research Centre for Primary Health Care and Equity »
www.cphce.unsw.edu.au

News

New Zealand Launches Government HIA Unit

The New Zealand government has announced that policy HIA will be included as part of a portfolio of initiatives aimed at childhood obesity prevention. A HIA unit will be set up in the Ministry of Health with a "whole of government focus".

More » tinyurl.com/yk8mhc

Comparison of HIAs done on US and EU Agricultural Policies

The European Public Health Network has compared the HIA of the EU Common Agricultural Policy, that was recently completed by the Swedish Institute of Public Health, with the US equivalent HIA that was undertaken by the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy.

More » tinyurl.com/yxv33a

HIA of Drought Relief Program in Victoria, Australia

Mary Mahoney from Deakin University was interviewed about a HIA she has conducted on a Victorian government drought relief program. The link contains information on the HIA as well as a MP3 file of the interview.

More » tinyurl.com/yyqbtc

Books and Reports

Health in All Policies

The European Union the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health has published *Health in All Policies: Prospects and potentials*. The book presents a number of examples of "health in all policies" in diverse sectors. It also has several chapters on HIA.

More » tinyurl.com/yxgvn9
[PDF 1.9 Mb]

The Role of Health Impact Assessment

The Nuffield Trust has published a compendium of four papers on HIA and trade, security and foreign policies.

More » tinyurl.com/y6kfjj
[PDF 648 Kb]

Events

HIA2007 South East Asian and Oceania Regional HIA Conference

The first SEAO HIA Conference will be held in Sydney, 7-9 November 2007

More » [Article on Next Page](#)

27th International Association for Impact Assessment Conference

The 2007 IAIA Conference will be held in Korea. Abstracts are due in by 31 January 2007.

More » iaia.org

8th International HIA Conference

The next International HIA Conference will be held in Ireland in Autumn 2007 (formerly the UK and Ireland HIA Conference). More details to follow in future issues.

Future Issues of the eNews

In our next issues we'll be looking at:

- The new Developmental HIA Sites
- HIA in South East Asia
- HIA in local government

If you have any HIA-related information you'd like to share please email »

b.harris-roxas@unsw.edu.au

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The New Zealand government has established a HIA Unit to undertake policy HIAs on intersectoral proposals

The European Public Health Network has made a comparison of the HIAs that have been completed on EU and US food policies

The Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health has released a book on *Health in All Policies*, which includes several chapters on HIA and is available on the web

The first South East Asian and Oceania Regional HIA Conference will be held in Sydney in November 2007

Abstracts for the IAIA Conference in Seoul are due in by 31 January 2007

HIA2007

South East Asia and Oceania HIA Conference Sydney, 7-9 November 2007

The first South East Asia and Oceania HIA Conference will be held in Sydney on the 8th and 9th of November 2007, with pre-conference workshops on the 7th of November. The conference is

still in the early planning stages but a call for abstracts will be circulated soon.

Save the dates in your diaries now!

[More » hia2007.com](http://hia2007.com)

The HIA2007 South East Asia and Oceania Regional Conference will be held in Sydney from 7-9 November 2007

[More » hia2007.com](http://hia2007.com)



Journal Watch

HIA-Related Articles

Veerman J et al. (2006) *Health Impact Assessment and Advocacy: A challenging combination*, Sozial- und Praventivmedizin, 51(3) p151-152.

[More » tinyurl.com/y7ho6p](http://tinyurl.com/y7ho6p)

Petticrew M et al. (2006) *Validating Health Impact Assessment: Prediction is difficult (especially about the future)*, Environmental Impact Assessment Review, In Press.

[More » tinyurl.com/y2ptnw](http://tinyurl.com/y2ptnw)

Kauppinen T et al. K (2006) *The Effectiveness of Human Impact Assessment in the Finnish Healthy Cities Network*, Public Health, 120 (11) p1033-1041.

[More » tinyurl.com/y5ucvy](http://tinyurl.com/y5ucvy)

The IAIA has released a document on International HIA Best Practice Principles

[More » tinyurl.com/yhsose](http://tinyurl.com/yhsose)

HIA Best Practice Principles

The International Association for Impact Assessment has released a publication on *Health Impact Assessment: International Best Practice Principles*. The document sets out:



- the definition and purpose of HIA;
- principles by which HIA should be conducted;
- who should do a HIA;
- some of the contexts in which HIA may be used.

[More » tinyurl.com/yhsose](http://tinyurl.com/yhsose)