

NSW Health Impact Assessment Project

eNews

Ways Forward for HIA in Local Government

Considering health and wellbeing at the local level

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In our last issue we reviewed the experience of using HIA at the local government level in New South Wales, including interviews with local government participants in six HIAs. In this issue we look at possible ways forward for HIA in local government contexts.

Healthy Planning Guidelines

Some of those interviewed for this review felt that some form of guidance that sets out standards, healthy planning principles or guidelines for planners would be valuable. They suggested it would be helpful if there were guidelines that were tailored for use in the development of planning instruments such as Local

Environment Plans and Development Control Plans. Although it is important to consider afresh the full range of potential health impacts for each project to ensure that unique aspects of proposals or plans are thoroughly examined there may be enough areas of commonality that would be amenable to checklists, or guidelines. Ultimately, such principles could be accepted as elements of "good design", in the same way that "safety by design" elements are now accepted by planners and integrated into many local government planning instruments.

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Download our last issue on HIA in Local Government from <http://www.hiaconnect.edu.au>

Submit Your Abstracts: Deadline extended until 2 July!

Abstract submission is now open for the HIA2007 South East Asia and Oceania Health Impact Assessment Conference being held in Sydney from 7-9 November 2007.

Abstracts are invited under the following themes:

- HIA in Practice
- Health, Community Wellbeing and Sustainability

- Creating Environments for Health
- Liveable Urban Communities
- Working with Other Sectors

For further details or to submit you abstract please go to

<http://www.hia2007.com>

HIA2007



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At a Glance

The sites reviewed were:

- Palerang Council, HIA on an urban development strategy for Bungendore
- Shellharbour City Council, HIA on the Shellharbour Foreshore Management Plan
- Wollongong City Council, HIA on the Wollongong Foreshore Precinct Project
- Parramatta City Council, HIA on the Regeneration Strategy for Greater Granville
- Kempsey Shire Council, HIA on an Indigenous Environmental Health Worker Proposal
- Western Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils

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Disclaimer

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Ways Forward for HIA in Local Government

Evidence summaries

Similarly, it may be helpful for local government staff if summaries of evidence found in literature reviews that have been undertaken in HIAs to date were available. For example, evidence on the health benefits of walkability in communities, social cohesion and access to healthy food is new, persuasive information that would be relatively easy to present in summary form.

Publication of articles on these topics on the HIA Connect website, in local government newspapers, distribution via email and other newsletters could also promote interest and acceptance of HIA and further usage of the HIA website.

Valuable Training opportunities

The training that has been provided by CHETRE staff has been greatly appreciated by those interviewed. There are many who could be described as HIA enthusiasts who are keen to see the Councils that they work in use HIA in future projects. Continuing to provide opportunities for training a range of local government staff in HIA will be very important to embedding the use of HIA by local government. The staff who are most likely to attend and benefit from HIA training are strategic and urban planners, environmental health officers and community development staff.

Training for senior managers and Councillors

It would also be valuable to raise awareness of the value of HIA with General Managers and Mayors, and other senior managers. This may be possible by holding seminars or providing information sessions at conferences held by the Local Government and Shires Association (LGSA), or through the professional development and training sessions they provide for Councillors and staff throughout the year. There are also Conferences and training for various types of staff, provided by their own professional associations such as the Local Government Managers Association (LGMA), and the Local Government Community Services Association (LGCSA).

Regular training opportunities

Once the importance of HIA is accepted and embraced by local government, it may be possible to set up regular training programs that Local Government staff can attend, similar to that provided by NSW Police for Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED). Currently NSW Police provide four day CPTED training for local government staff (mainly planners and community safety officers) throughout NSW on a



NSW Development HIA Sites Training

Photo: Ben Harris-Roxas

HIA in Local Government

regular cycle throughout the year. Although some Council's senior staff may need a prompt from local police from time to time to ensure that their planning staff attend the training, the importance of designing for safety is now reasonably well accepted by local government. Councils pay approximately \$500 for each staff member to attend CPTED training.

Showcasing successful HIAs

Managers in local government are generally keen on taking up new ideas from projects that have been shown to be successful in other Councils. Pressure on performance is high and innovation is encouraged. Replication of good projects in other Councils is common as staff are asked to do "new" things that will also be successful and not waste rate payers' money. Replicating successful projects in other areas satisfies these demands, by lowering risk and saving developmental time for staff in busy work environments. Therefore, showcasing successful projects to local government staff and Councillors is an important part

of a strategy to encourage use of HIAs in local government.

Promotional strategies

Opportunities for showcasing HIA projects exist through using existing local government media. The challenge is to gain the attention of staff in an environment where there are many competing demands for their attention and a great deal of information on a wide range of issues flooding their in-trays and emails on a daily basis. Providing information about HIA on a regular basis is most likely to steadily build awareness and interest.

Targeting information

It is sometimes difficult to ensure that information is directed to the correct person in a Council unless their position title is used, because of the vast amounts of paper-based information that are processed every day, with all incoming mail being sorted by the Records sections of Councils. For example, all mail sent to the "General Manager" is sorted by the Records staff and allocated to the most likely recipient. Information referring to general health matters could be sent either to Community Services staff or those with Public Health compliance responsibilities such as Food Premises Inspectors. Directing information about HIA to planners would best be achieved by addressing mail to the Director of Planning or the Strategic Planner.

There may be a place for "Healthy Planning" guidelines that could be incorporated into planning instruments.

Summaries of evidence of health impacts found in literature reviews on issues such as walkability in communities would be valuable information for local government staff and Councillors

Local government staff may take up opportunities for training in HIA or "healthy design" as they do with training in "safety by design" or "CPTED" provided by NSW Police



This article is based on a report that is available from HIA Connect > Publications » <http://www.hiacconnect.edu.au>

Developing a Memorandum of Understanding between a Council and an Area Health Service is a great way to ensure that the relationships developed between Local Government and Health during an HIA are enduring

MOUs can ensure that the organisations work together on issues of mutual interest and concern long after an HIA is completed

NSW Police use MOUs with local government to ensure that Councils consider Police advice on safety aspects of plans for new developments

HIA in Local Government

Newsletters, Email news and Newspapers

Many senior managers routinely receive the weekly email news from the LGSA Local Government Weekly. It can also be viewed on the LGSA Website. LGSA also produces a quarterly magazine called Local Agenda. The Local Government Manager is a bi-monthly publication for Senior Managers, and there are other newspapers such as Local Government Focus and Government News that also go to Councils for distribution to Councillors.

Awards

Awards also offer opportunities to showcase successful projects, and a culture of friendly competition is well established in the local government sector. There are many existing awards schemes such as the National Awards for Innovation in Local Government run by the National Office of Local Government, and various annual Awards for Environment, Culture, Communication and Heritage etc, run by the LGSA. Currently NSW Health partners the LGSA in an award for Multicultural Health Communication.

Memoranda of Understanding

One Local Area Health Service has developed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with a Council that agrees to action on a variety of issues of mutual concern, including an objective "To identify ways to enhance planning instruments to improve social and health outcomes through the use of learning from Social Impact Assessments and Health Impact Assessments". The deliverables for this project are to "produce a protocol for Population Health to

review and advise Council on health issues in major Planning Instruments and Master Plans".

This model consolidates and formalises an ongoing relationship between Health and local government staff. It may also overcome the potential problems of the two organisations ceasing to relate to each other when key staff who have formed working relationships during an HIA process leave their current positions.

The MOU model has been successfully used by NSW Police working with local Councils on Community Safety strategies. MOUs are negotiated with Councils so that any development over a certain size must be referred to the Crime Prevention Officer in the Local Area Command for comment on safety aspects of the design.



HIA in Local Government

In Conclusion

Maintain Area Health support for HIA

The active involvement of Area Health staff will continue to be crucial for the success of Health Impact Assessments in Local Government, because of their research skills and the support they can provide to throughout the HIA process. When approaching Councils to participate in an HIA, NSW Health staff should seek the endorsement of the General Manager and aim to include senior managers and planning staff on the Steering Committee, where possible. Involving senior staff in the HIA will generally lead to better understanding and communication of learning about health impacts across Council staff and to Councillors.

Evidence is valuable to local government

Evidence arising from Literature Reviews is of great value to local government staff in several ways. HIAs extend staff's understanding of health impacts significantly. The evidence provides a tool for advocacy within their own Council, and in seeking funding for implementation of projects from the Grants Commission and other funding programs. It may be helpful



Photo: Andrei Z

to provide some of the evidence from health literature as “healthy design” principles that could be incorporated into planning instruments, such as LEPs, so that planners consider health impacts in a more rigorous and formalised way. However, healthy planning guidelines could not replace use of HIAs that fully review potential impacts to assess factors that are unique to a site or proposal.

Continue HIA training

Training in HIA and the support provided by CHETRE to Steering Committees and to health and local government staff doing HIAs for the first time, has also been very important to their success. Providing regular opportunities for training local government staff in HIA into the future will be important to professional understanding of health impacts, particularly for planning staff, and to embedding use of HIA in the sector.

Health staff must be proactive

Good relationships between Area Health Services and Councils have been established through working together on HIAs, but NSW Health staff will need to be proactive in monitoring local government activities for future opportunities for doing HIAs on proposals that are likely have significant public health effects. Negotiation of a Memorandum of Understanding between Councils and the Area Health Service provides a good model for formalising this relationship and facilitating consideration of health impacts in planning instruments and development plans.

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Showcasing HIAs to Councils will increase awareness of the value they can add to proposed projects.

More HIAs on Local Government projects will build sufficient “critical mass” to raise awareness amongst on Councillors and Senior Staff.

HIAs will add value to Local Government projects in terms of community health and well being.

HIA in Local Government

Realising that HIAs add value

At this stage, awareness of HIA in the local government sector is limited as there have been a relatively small number of developmental sites compared to the number of Councils and Shires in NSW. Ideally, additional HIA projects and increased showcasing of their

success to senior local government staff and Councillors through seminars, existing conferences and media, will convince those in local government of the added value that HIAs can bring to their projects, through better outcomes in health and wellbeing for their communities.



“Showcasing success... will convince those in local government of the added value that HIAs can bring to their projects, through better outcomes in health and wellbeing for their communities.”

Image: jazamarriuae

What’s the Future of the HIA Gateway?

As most of you will be aware the future of the HIA Gateway (hiagateway.org.uk) has been under a cloud for since the UK National Institute for Clinical Excellence decided that HIA was outside their core areas of work.

Gateway users were consulted last year and a report is now available.

From the report:

“The website was part of the NICE

website but is not now being actively maintained.”

“Importantly, the exercise has identified a clear willingness to participate in any developments to the site needs contributing material to the website consequently, to make such contributions easy and accessible.”

Access the report at:

<http://tinyurl.com/37qcv9>

New Thai National Health Act

Participatory HIA enshrined in law

Suphakij Nuntavorakarn

Healthy Public Policy Foundation, Thailand » <http://www.hpp-hia.or.th>

The Thai National Health Act B.E. 2550 (2007) was recently approved and entered into force on the 19th of March. The ambitious legislation includes several sections on HIA, which cover the right for Thai people to demand a HIA be conducted and to participate in HIA process, as well requiring the development of guidelines and procedures for HIA to be developed by the newly established National Health Committee.

According to the Act, HIA is designed to be a “social learning process”, which has been developed so that all stakeholders in society can be involved in examining the health impacts of policies, projects or activities that have already affected or may affect groups of people. This social learning process involves identifying and supporting the most



appropriate alternative in public decision-making processes with the goal of protecting and promoting the health of all people in Thai society.

For more information on the Act email suphakijn@yahoo.com. The development of HIA in Thailand will also be featured at the upcoming HIA2007 Conference being held in Sydney - see www.hia2007.com

Planning and Health

Findings from the UK Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution

Andrew Buroni

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The UK Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution (RCEP) is an independent body established to advise the Queen, the UK Government, Parliament and the public on environmental issues.

The Commission's advice is mainly in the form of reports, of which their most recent is on the Urban Environment. In this report the RCEP acknowledges current shortcomings in the planning system and recommends that the UK government and

devolved administrations develop a statutory framework for including Health Impact Assessments in the planning process.

This article provides a summary of the RCEP report, detailing the recommendations to Government and future HIA planning requirements.

Planning and Health

The planning system offers an important opportunity for a more coherent effort to develop cities and

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Planning and Health Cont.

Findings from the UK Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution

improve the health and wellbeing of urban inhabitants.

Evidence suggests that planning can not only be applied to tackle and offset many of the adverse health effects of an urban environment, but can also be applied to address and prevent many of today's significant physical, mental and social health issues.

The mode of health effect is complex and represents a mixture of physical influences such as the removal of environmental risks, social influences brought about through improved connectivity and support through to behavioral responses from improved perceptions of the environment.

Potential outcomes from more health conscientious planning therefore reflect real opportunities to contribute in reducing cardiovascular and respiratory ailments, obesity, diabetes, road traffic accidents, antisocial behavior and crime and foster improved self-rated health, wellbeing and ultimately healthier communities.

The ethical and financial benefits of preventative health measures over treatment are key to Government policy represented through the White Paper, 'Saving Lives our

Healthier Nation' and supported by the Department of Health, the National Institute of Clinical Excellence and regional Health Authorities.

However, to date, consideration of health and wellbeing has had little influence in urban design and planning and the present planning

system is still unable to adequately deal with complex public health issues.

Planning applications for large-scale developments often require an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). These assessments can include data on environmental problems like air pollution that can cause health effects, but while they may predict environmental emissions from future developments to compare with relevant standards, they do not always look at health impacts in terms of a population's vulnerability and exposure to health risks.

EIAs and planning applications therefore tend to not consider health and wellbeing issues in a systematic manner and do not recognise the complex interrelations between social and environmental factors and rarely identify measures to enhance health benefits.

Recognition of the planning system's failure to adequately address health is not new. The RCEP's previous report on Environmental Planning, highlighted the general issues and recommended the Government integrate processes such as Health Impact Assessment (HIA) within EIA back in 2002.

In its response, the government recognised the benefits of HIA, but stated that it was "not persuaded that detailed Health Impact Assessments, which require different expertise and methodologies, should form an integral part of Environmental Impact Assessment at individual project level".

Planning and Health Cont.

Findings from the UK Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution

However, during the most recent RCEP study, the Department of Health supported the inclusion of HIA within the EIA process as the best means of considering health issues in the planning process, and the RCEP strongly concur.

The RCEP therefore reinforces its recommendation that Health Impact Assessments be incorporated explicitly in Sustainability Appraisals, Strategic Environmental Assessments and Environmental Impact Assessments.

In order to implement this, the RCEP further recommend that the UK government and devolved administrations develop a statutory framework for including Health Impact Assessments in the planning process.

Future HIA Requirement in the Planning Process

The RCEP's study reinforces the consensus view of UK health organisations and Local Government in that a formal requirement to assess the potential health effects of development is long overdue.

In the absence of leadership from Government and a lack of a formal requirement to conduct HIA, Local and Regional Government are developing their own initiatives to ensure that health is addressed in the planning process.

- In London, the Greater London Authority Act (1999) places a duty on the Greater London Authority (GLA) to promote the health of Londoners and to take into account the effect of its policies on health and inequality. Supporting the GLA Act, the Mayor appointed the London Health

Commission to drive health improvement in priority areas across London, to investigate specific health issues if it wishes and to drive the practice of HIA across London. Complementing the GLA Act, the Mayor of London has recently released Best Practice Guidance setting out how health inequalities can be tackled through more informed planning, policies and proposals subject to HIA.

- The Welsh Assembly have recently published a Draft Interim Planning Policy Statement on Planning, Health and Well-being, forming the first planning requirement for HIA in the UK.
- The Department of Health and the Health Protection Agency are developing guidance to advise health authorities on how to integrate health into Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA).
- Primary Care Trusts and Strategic Health Authorities are becoming more involved in the planning process and specifically requesting HIA.
- Developers are voluntarily commissioning HIA to identify potential health risks, to facilitate health improvements and avoid often-costly remediation.

In light of the growing demand and clear benefits of HIA, the RCEP recommendation is likely to be the precursor for the development of the first UK statutory requirement to conduct HIA.

Any further delay by Government may be perceived as a deliberate attempt to avoid tackling the often-emotive topic of health.

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Future Issues of the eNews

In our next issues we'll be looking at:

- The next NSW Developmental HIA Sites
- HIA in South East Asia

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

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