Health impact assessment: What is it? Is it effective?

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Overview

• Health impact assessment
  • Working/operational definition
  • Historical roots/origins to other IA approaches
• Relationship to action on SDH and equity
  • Why it has currency
• Examples of its use in Australia including equity focused HIA
• Effectiveness of HIA
Health Impact Assessment: formal

A combination of procedures, methods and tools by which a policy, program or project may be assessed and judged for its potential and unintended effects on the health of the population and the distribution of these impacts within the population.
Health Impact Assessment: plain

• a process or approach for assessing the potential intended and unintended health impacts (positive and negative) of a new proposal – could be a major plan, policy, program etc
• uses a combination of methods
• an applied approach
• usually generating new knowledge from existing information rather than primary research
• intention to improve policy development
Interest in use for policy development

HIA provides one approach to:

• Maximise potential positive health impacts
• Minimise potential negative health impacts
• Identify unintended potential health impacts (positive and negative)
• (Strengthen the equity focus)
Why do HIA: value add

• **Improve proposal** BEFORE implementation
  – Social marketing & health education
• **Best intentions** – not widening the gap
  – Better Health Initiative
• **Indicators for monitoring & evaluation**
  – Northern Territory emergency intervention
When to do HIA?

- Before finalisation & implementation of the proposal
- Commitment to acting on results
- Nature of the proposal (size, potential population impacts etc)
- Resources including capacity
Levels of HIA

1. **Desk-based/audit** - a broad overview of possible health impacts
2. **Rapid** – more detailed overview of potential health impacts
3. **Intermediate** – more thorough assessment of potential health impacts & more detail on specific predicted impacts.
4. **Comprehensive** – comprehensive assessment of potential health impacts

The steps in HIA

1. Screening
2. Scoping
3. Impact identification
4. Assessment
5. Decision making & recommendations
6. Evaluation & follow-up
HIA: key features

- Broad definition of health
- Promotion & protection of health
- Value add – best realised if done before proposal implemented
- Uses wide range of evidence or knowledge
- Uses processes part of other research approaches or tools
The link between equity & HIA

- Equity seen as a principle of HIA
- Assumptions for this
  - focus of HIA was to look at impact of other sectors – the ‘social determinants of health’
  - the ‘social determinants of health’ lead to equity issues
  - HIA used community consultation & participation as a tool
Achieving equity in HIA

Gap identified for an approach that:
• moves from differential impacts to issues of avoidability & fairness
• systematic/stepwise consideration of equity throughout the HIA
• lack of clarity about concept of distribution
Intent of Equity-focused HIA

To:

strengthen the ways in which equity is addressed in each step of health impact assessment
Aims

1. Raise awareness of need to consider differential impacts & inequality in health impact assessments - distribution

2. Provide a systematic process for doing this by strengthening the equity focus in each step of health impact assessment
Expected outcomes of efHIA

• Improved knowledge of potential impacts
  – Positive & negative
  – Intended & unintended
  – Distribution & fairness

• Recommendations for improving the distribution of potential positive health impacts

• Improved knowledge on health equity impacts for future proposals and HIAs

• Improved awareness of health & health equity impacts
  – may lead to improved policy & planning – consider these issues sooner
Examples of EfHIA

• 5 examples to test EfHIA framework

• Good for Kids Good for Life, Equity-focused HIA of a 5 year program with a focus on Aboriginal children

• Rapid Equity-focused HIA of Australian Better Health Initiative, Priorities 1 & 3

• Emergency Intervention in the Northern Territory
Effectiveness of HIA: Harris et al

Direct
- Decision changed as result
- Proposal iteratively changed in line with HIA findings
- Scope of the HIAs impact broadened
- Report submitted into the decision making process
- Adopted in principle but may need to be amended to enable implementation
- Influences the ways in which decision will be made

Indirect
- Engagement of stakeholders
- Building productive relationships
- Leads to further HIAs and working relationships
- See mutual benefit to involvement in HIA
- Significant learning:
  - technical skills
  - Conceptual skills
  - Social skills
Effectiveness of HIA in a nutshell

- 89% of HIAs in this study were found to be directly or generally effective
- HIAs were generally undertaken by inexperienced practitioners in the context of some conflict
- Having community involvement and

- The right person
- In the right place
- at the right time

Seems strongly associated with success.

However who this is, their position and timing appears to be flexible
EfHIA questions

1. What is the initiative trying to achieve?
2. Is there evidence that it is likely to be effective?
3. Is there evidence of inequity?
4. Who are likely to be winners?
5. Who are likely to be losers?
6. Could there be unintended consequences?
7. How could the policy be improved & or which policy option would you choose?
   - Equity perspective – which objective?
   - Social determinants of health or social dets of health inequity