Promising Practice #5: Equity-Focused Health Impact Assessment

Health impact assessment (HIA) is a structured method to assess the potential health impacts of proposed policies and practices. HIA enables decision makers to highlight and enhance the positive elements of a proposal, and minimize the aspects that may result in negative health outcomes. By evaluating a broad range of evidence, HIAs are a useful way to assess the impact of proposals (either policy or specific practice) at the general population level. However, they are also recognized as a promising method to address the underlying social and economic determinants of health and resulting health inequities.

Equity-focused health impact assessment (EfHIA) specifically includes questions such as “Is this proposal likely to affect those who are already disadvantaged? Is it likely to impose new health burdens on specific groups? Is it likely to change exposure to, and/or distribution of, risk factors or specific determinants of health (for example, living conditions, access to services)?” By applying an equity lens to HIAs, it becomes clear that virtually every policy has winners and losers—some groups benefiting more than others. With the goal of reducing social inequities in health, this knowledge can assist decision makers to minimize negative health outcomes, compensate those affected with other benefits, and ensure that those affected are not already disadvantaged. Furthermore, increasing awareness of the determinants of social inequities in health among decision makers and other stakeholders has the potential of influencing both immediate and long-term policy decisions. Finally, a truly participatory approach to conducting EfHIAs can build the capacity of individuals and communities and foster social networks among diverse community members.
Practice #5 example: Sudbury’s Community Door Working Group, shared space concept

Sudbury’s Community Door Working Group, including representatives from social services, mental health, business, and education, engaged the support of the Sudbury & District Health Unit to conduct an equity-focused health impact assessment of a proposed “shared space concept” within the City of Greater Sudbury. This model would bring together diverse non-profit service providers into one location to share services, reduce costs, and potentially serve clients better.

Over 50 diverse community stakeholders provided their perspectives on the potential impacts of the shared space model. This helped ensure that the needs of all members of our community were represented and explored. In addition, it guided further research and assessment conducted by Health Unit staff in collaboration with the Community Door Working Group.

The final report of this EfHIA included a summary of the most significant potential health impacts identified by community stakeholders, a brief review of the evidence related to those impacts and recommendations for the Community Door Working Group as they explore the implementation of the “shared space model”.

What helps me promote and conduct an equity-focused health impact assessment?

• public health skills and competencies in research and assessment
• expertise in the broad determinants of health including social and economic factors
• existing partnerships with diverse community partners and stakeholders

What makes equity-focused health impact assessments challenging?

• EfHIAs can require a significant investment of time and resources.
• Multiple and diverse skills are involved in the process of EfHIAs including community engagement, assessment, and data analysis.
• Action on the results of EFHIAs is dependent on many factors including timing, political climate, and other emerging issues outside of the public health sector.

Useful Links

Health Impact Assessment as a Tool to Reduce Health Inequalities, National Collaborating Centre – Healthy Public Policy (NCCHPP). 2008

Health Impact Assessment - Fact Sheet, NCCHPP. 2009

Health Impact Assessment - Inventory of Resources, NCCHPP. 2009

Community Health Impact Assessment: Fostering Community Learning and Healthy Public Policy at the Local Level, Maureen Coady, People Assessing Their Health (PATH). 2010

To learn more about health equity and ways we can all help reduce social inequities in health:

Contact:
Information Resource Centre
Resources, Research, Evaluation, and Development Division
Sudbury & District Health Unit
705.522.9200, ext. 350
Visit: www.sdhu.com
References
10 Promising Practices

Promising Practice #1: Targeting With Universalism

Promising Practice #2: Purposeful Reporting

Promising Practice #3: Social Marketing

Promising Practice #4: Health Equity Target Setting
3. Saskatoon Regional Intersectoral Committee. Follow-up to policy or initiative options in the Health Disparity in Saskatoon Report: Recommendations for action in our community – working document. Saskatoon Regional Intersectoral Committee; 2009.

Promising Practice #5: Equity-Focused Health Impact Assessment
Promising Practice #6: Competencies/Organizational Standards


Promising Practice #7: Contribution to the Evidence Base

• no references

Promising Practice #8: Early Childhood Development


Promising Practice #9: Community Engagement


Promising Practice #10: Intersectoral Action

• no references

For an accessible version of this document, please visit: https://www.sdhu.com/health-topics-programs/health-equity/10-promising-practices-health-equity

To learn more about health equity and ways we can all help reduce social inequities in health:

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Last updated: May 2012