

How to use health impact assessment: A short guide

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Introduction

Health impact assessment is a tool that can contribute to decision-making and the development of a more integrated approach to policies and programmes. Many organisations have identified the potential of assessments to identify the wider implications of their decision-making, but are uncertain how to set about applying it.

This shortened version of a more comprehensive guide is intended to help organisations respond to guidance offered in the Health Social Care and Well Being strategy documents. It should be read in conjunction with Annex B of the Policy Guidance on Health, Social Care and Well being Strategies, which summarises the health impact assessment approach and its use. The guidance also states that '*Local authorities and Local Health Boards will wish to utilise health impact assessment as a tool that can assist the development of an integrated approach*' and this short guide is designed to inform future action as part of further work to develop the use and usefulness of health impact assessment in Wales.

What are health and wellbeing?

Health is often perceived as simply the absence of disease. However the World Health Organisation (WHO) defines health as 'a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity'. People's well-being can be poor even where there is no identifiable disease. It follows that, as the WHO points out: 'The policies that are the most successful in sustaining and improving the health of the population are those which deal with economic growth, human development and health in an integrated way'. The environment, income, employment, the organisation of transport, the design and condition of houses, crime, and the social and physical condition of local neighbourhoods all contribute to good and poor health. These factors are often called *the determinants of health* (see table A). Health impact assessment identifies how a proposal or policy will alter these determinants and assesses the likely impact on the health of different groups in a population.

What is health impact assessment?

Health impact assessment has been defined as 'a combination of procedures, methods and tools by which a policy, program or project may be judged as to its potential effects on the health of a population, and the distribution of those effects within the population'. In other words it is a process that considers the wider effects of local and national policies or initiatives and how they, in turn, may affect people's health. Some of these may be positive, and others could be more harmful. The idea is to ensure that any proposed initiative can be adjusted to 'add value' and ensure maximum benefits in terms of its effects on health.

The definition above is also useful in that it suggests that there is no standard way of conducting an assessment. The combination of procedures, methods and tools used may depend on both the decision-making organization and the proposal in question. Flexibility is necessary to ensure the best approach is taken in the given circumstances (Breeze and Hall 2002).

The definition also highlights the inequalities dimension since a policy or project can affect groups within a given population in different ways. Health impact assessment is a way of ensuring that those people who are most vulnerable to the causes of ill health stand to gain as much as possible.

The benefits of using health impact assessment include:

- Greater awareness amongst policy and decision-makers of how the decisions may affect health
- Identifying the links between people's health and other policies, programmes and services
- Assessing how and, if possible, the extent to which health will be affected by a decision or development.
- Informing planning and decision-making processes
- Allowing health benefits to be maximised and health hazards to be minimised
- Making the decision making process more transparent
- Involving the people who will be affected by, or have an interest in, the decision.

Throughout the document we refer to 'the proposal' by which we mean the project, programme, policy or other development for which the impact are to be assessed.

How to do a health impact assessment

Health impact assessment offers a systematic means of gathering information to inform decision-making, based on the available evidence. By being flexible and realistic, it is an approach that can improve decision-making without imposing excessive demands on resources or creating unnecessary bureaucracy.

A brief introduction to the process of health impact assessment follows. For more detailed information and support, see the resources section at the end. Although the process can sound rather technical, it is a simple series of stages of which many will already be familiar.

Screening

In its simplest form, screening means someone stepping back as early as possible in the planning and development process to ask the question '*Could this proposal have an impact on or implications for people's health?*' If the answer is 'No', then no further action is needed. However, if the answer is 'Yes' or '*Don't know*', then it triggers the subsequent stages of the health impact assessment process to consider what the impacts might be. Despite its grand sounding name screening may consist simply of a decision around a table that a proposal warrants a health impact assessment on whatever grounds.

The true potential of health impact assessment will be realised when the screening stage is embedded in an organisation's planning, development and decision-making processes. Usually organisations will want to make this a routine process, perhaps using a checklist or "screening tool", there is an example of this at the end and more information can be found via the resource list.

Scoping

The next stage is to decide the 'scope' of the impact assessment. It involves asking a number of questions and making a number of decisions in relation to undertaking the assessment including:

- What kind of assessment is necessary and/or possible in the time available – rapid to in-depth?

- Who are the stakeholders?
- Should a steering group be set up and who should be involved?
- Should the assessment be an in-house exercise or should someone be commissioned to do the appraisal?
- Roles and responsibilities
- When should the health impact assessment be completed?

Involving a range of stakeholders will promote participation in, and ownership of the process. Again for more detailed questions to ask in this 'scoping' stage see links in the resources section.

Appraisal

Once a decision has been made on how to proceed, the next stage is to do the appraisal, from a rapid assessment to an in-depth assessment. Here, the method that was chosen in the scoping is put into practice. By consulting people most likely to have an insight into the potential effects of the proposal and looking for other relevant evidence, an understanding of the likely impacts and the people most likely to be affected can be developed. It will be useful to use a table (such as in Table A) to remind participants of the determinants of health and wellbeing. In addition locally relevant information on vulnerable or disadvantaged groups will ensure that a focus on inequality is maintained.

Reporting

The information found in the appraisal stage should be collated and presented in a form accessible to the intended audience. There are many possible formats ranging from a simple list or matrix of the findings, to a more comprehensive report. In some cases the report will be read by an audience with a variety of perspectives and skills, it is important that this is taken into account. The Welsh Health Impact Assessment Support Unit currently holds a register of completed assessments and this is one way to disseminate reports to a wider audience.

Monitoring and evaluation

It is important to be aware of the eventual impact and accuracy of the work. More detailed help on monitoring and evaluation is available in the full guide and other guidance can be located through the resource list. As the aim of a health impact assessment is to inform and influence decision-making, it is useful to evaluate how the information was used, its usefulness as seen by its target audience(s) and whether or not it influenced decision-making and developments. This will help to assess how effective the health impact assessment process is in influencing decisions within individual local authorities and throughout Wales. Given that health impact assessment is a relatively new approach, it is useful for the report to include information on the resources required to undertake the assessment and the experience of doing it as the basis for learning and future development.

Choosing a process

Each of these stages can be conducted in more or less depth. The decision about the level of detail should be based on the resources in skills and time available to those carrying out the health impact assessment. Although there are a number of 'models' of health impact assessment, from rapid appraisal to comprehensive assessment, in practice choices will be made about each part of the assessment process based on factors specific to the local context. The table below will help illustrate a range of options.

Details of the various models, from rapid to in-depth, can be found in the full version of the guide. Only rapid health impact assessment is covered here. Again, most assessments will use features from more than one 'model', depending on resources available.

Rapid appraisal

This is usually a desktop exercise. It is unlikely to involve a great deal of data gathering or literature review. The output may simply consist of a summary table and conclusion. The summary table will list the relevant determinants and their likely impacts with minimal quantification. The conclusion should state whether the net impact of the proposal is likely to be positive or negative for the relevant population groups. It should also attempt to suggest ways in which negative consequences could be mitigated, and benefits exploited, particularly for disadvantaged groups. Depending on the size of the proposal a rapid appraisal may take as little as a couple of hours or as much as one day. It is also possible to break the process up into a series of two or three short meetings. It is important, even with a rapid health impact assessment to make a note of the procedure and monitor the outcome.

Table demonstrating the range of options for health impact assessment, a ‘pick & Mix’ model

		Rapid ← → In-depth		
Time Taken	Hours	Days	Weeks / Months	
Who steers process	One person on behalf of an organisation or team	Limited multi-agency steering group involving the agencies directly involved	Steering Group with many stakeholders represented including the community. Involvement at all stages from scoping to evaluation	
Who consulted	Desk based – little consultation	A number of stakeholders and experts consulted through a workshop or stakeholder conference	A wide range of stakeholders and experts consulted individually and/or in groups.	
Who conducts the appraisal	Conducted in-house from the human resources available		Researcher/appraiser commissioned to collect and analyse data and write report.	
Evidence collected	Baseline demographic data. Existing knowledge available data Evidence from past projects	Existing community profiles Data collected from workshop sessions with key experts Review evidence from similar health impact assessments.	New community profile data collected through local survey or interviews Data collected from individual and/or group interviews with key experts (lay and professional and stakeholders from a range of Population groups). Selective literature review – using library and internet resources or Systematic review of the evidence	
Output	Checklist written up in standard format	Brief report with references to evidence and sources	Comprehensive report, agreed and possibly co-written with a number of stakeholders.	
Evaluation	Note made of effect of the assessment on decision making process, and subsequent likely health impacts at agreed time point		More extensive evaluation with a process for assessing the impact of the health impact assessment on subsequent decisions. Indicators agreed at scoping meeting monitored at specific time points.	

Evidence to use in health impact assessment

In anything other than a very rapid appraisal, many of the impacts identified will be the opinions of the various stakeholders involved. In addition to documenting these, it is likely that other information will need to be collected to shed more light on these impacts. There are many sources of further evidence and specialist training or experience may not be necessary. For more information see the resource list.

Values of health impact assessment

There is a danger that health impact assessment can be used to justify or add credibility to potentially controversial decisions that would have been made anyway. As such, it is important that assessments should be open and transparent, impartial and consider both sustainability and equity. Steps should be taken to ensure that assessments are open to public scrutiny.

Reducing health inequalities

Any health impact assessment should, as an integrated part of it, pay particular attention to how the proposal will affect health inequalities. With many proposals there will be gainers and losers or there will be different levels of impact on different groups within the population. The assessment should try to identify which, and how, different population groups are affected and in what ways. It will then be possible to assess whether the proposal increases or decreases inequality and if it could be modified in some way to reduce health inequalities further.

Sample tool

The tool on the following pages is but one example of the many that have been developed for screening purposes. It can be used as a template for both screening and rapid appraisal but is flexible and should be adapted for local use. Consideration of all relevant groups within the population is important. Table A is downloadable from the Welsh Health Impact Assessment Support Unit web-site. The format should be seen as flexible, allowing organisations to ensure the determinants and population groups listed are comprehensive and relevant to the proposal and the target population. Many other tools are available via links in the resource list.

For screening Table A should be completed writing *significant*, *moderate* or *nil* in cells relating to relevant impacts, for relevant groups. The likelihood of an impact should be indicated for each population group. Depending on how it is to be used, it may be possible to note briefly, where relevant, how the proposal impacts on the health of the groups.

On examining the completed table, a decision can be made as to whether this proposal warrants further investigation. Ask: are there significant impacts, missed opportunities or scope for improvements for all or some groups? If, on balance, the proposal would appear to benefit from a health impact assessment then an appraisal should be conducted.

A decision on the necessary scope for the appraisal will need to be made. For a rapid appraisal, table A can be used as a desk exercise, or as the basis for stakeholder discussion. The table can be filled in again, in more detail – describing the likely impacts in each category for each group. Table B can then be completed by suggesting potential solutions, or pointing to the need for further investigation and information gathering.

Template for a health impact assessment screening or appraisal tool

Project title and brief description of the proposal:						
Key aims and objectives:						
Table A	Target Groups	Those on low income	Older people	General population	Minority ethnic Groups	Children and young people*
Factors that determine health						
Individuals Lifestyle / capacities affecting health: Smoking, nutrition and health eating, physical activity, alcohol / drug misuse, sexual health, Propensity to use health and care services Skills and knowledge, training and education						
Social and Community Influences affecting health: Family: Structure and function, Parenting Community: Social support mechanisms, social networks, neighbourliness. Peer pressure. Community divisions, degree of isolation. Historical identity, Cultural and spiritual ethos.						
Living conditions: Built environment, civic design and planning, housing, noise, smell, air and water quality, physical view and outlook, public safety, waste disposal, road hazards, injury hazards, Safe play spaces.						
Working conditions: Employment, workplace conditions, occupation, income.						
Services: (access to and quality of) Medical services, caring services, careers advice and counselling, shops and commercial services, public amenities, transport, education and other services. Access to information technology.						
Socio-economic, cultural and environmental and sustainability factors: Biological diversity, efficient use of resources, pollution, diversity / local distinctiveness, climate. Macro-economic factors: Political climate, GDP, economic development., policy climate.						
Others**						

*e.g. Others may need to be added eg. People with disabilities, Asylum seekers. ** e.g. Bullying

Table B	Describe
What positive effect(s) is the proposal likely to have for people's health and well being, and for which groups within the population?	
What negative effect(s) is the proposal likely to have for people's health and well being, and for which groups within the population?	
If negative impacts were identified for one or more group within the population, are there ways in which these can be removed or mitigated?	
Is further investigation, information and evidence collection needed to find potential solutions?	
Are there opportunities to build in more actions to improve people's health as a part of the proposal. Are there sources of information or experience else where that may help explore this question more fully?	

Resources:

Welsh Health Impact Assessment Support Unit

The Unit has been established by the Welsh Assembly Government to help organisations in Wales to develop their use of health impact assessment. A more comprehensive version of this guide, together with links to other resources can be found on the Welsh Health Impact Assessment Support Unit website at www.whiasu.cardiff.ac.uk

If you do not have internet access, or you wish to contact the Unit directly:

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Other UK resources for health impact assessment

Other tools and resources relating to health impact assessment can be found on the Health Development Agency Health Impact Assessment Gateway website at: www.hiagateway.org.uk

Welsh Assembly Government Documents

The following are a selection of relevant documents that have been produced by the Welsh Assembly Government:

- Developing health impact assessment in Wales
http://www.wales.gov.uk/subihealth/content/keypubs/healthimpact/pdf/healthimp_e.pdf
- The health potential of the Objective 1 Programme for West Wales and the Valleys: A preliminary health impact assessment
http://www.wales.gov.uk/subihealth/content/keypubs/pdf/healthimpact_e.pdf
- Building a healthier future by taking health into account as part of Objective 1 projects <http://www.wales.gov.uk/subihealth/content/keypubs/pdf/object1-e.pdf>

References:

Breeze C and Hall R (2002) *Health impact assessment in government policy making: Developments in Wales*. Copenhagen, European Centre for Health Policy, WHO regional office for Europe.

Policy Guidance on Health, Social Care and Well being Strategies.

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This document is based largely on an abridged version of a more comprehensive guide available on the Web (see resources). A multi-disciplinary group produced the original document, including the Welsh Collaboration for Health and Environment and the Welsh Health Impact Assessment Support Unit. The tool in this document develops upon a number of existing tools including those produced by Luton Borough Council and the GLA. It has been developed further around the publication of policy guidance on the development of Health Social Care and Well Being Strategies.

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Introducing health impact assessment (HIA):
Informing the decision-making process





Health Development Agency

Introducing health impact assessment (HIA): Informing the decision-making process

edited by

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The Health Development Agency (HDA) was created to support and enhance efforts to improve health and reduce inequalities of people living in England. Working with a range of national and regional partners, it plays an important role in assessing – and then disseminating – information to improve the public's health. It offers expert advice and guidance, support for the development of standards, and resources and training for those involved in improving public health.

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Overview

About this booklet

This booklet provides a simple, straightforward overview of the developing health impact assessment (HIA) approach, aiming to highlight its potential value and encourage people to use it to inform and enhance equitable, health-aware decision-making at all levels.

It highlights that HIA is a flexible and adaptable approach, and acknowledges that, while people are currently undertaking it in a range of different ways, there is a growing consensus about its core elements and purpose.

In developing and pre-testing this resource, it became clear that people want a wide range of information and support for undertaking an HIA. It is not possible to cover all aspects of planning and undertaking HIA in this brief publication. It is, however, possible to provide a broad framework for understanding the developing approach, highlight key questions, and introduce basic concepts and stages associated with HIA. The booklet also provides some practical advice and tips, and useful sources of further information and support (page 18) as a starting point for those planning to undertake, commission or promote HIA.

Informing better decisions

The experience of practitioners who have led the way in developing and undertaking HIA has highlighted that it is crucial – whatever methods and approaches are used – to maintain a clear focus on the ultimate purpose of the HIA, namely to **inform** and **influence** subsequent **decision-making**.

Health impact assessment provides a useful, flexible approach to helping those developing and delivering proposals to

consider their potential (and actual) impact on people's health and wellbeing and on health inequalities, and to identify practical ways to improve and enhance the proposal. While HIA is still a relatively new, developing approach, it draws on experience and skills in existing areas, and is something everyone can potentially contribute to.

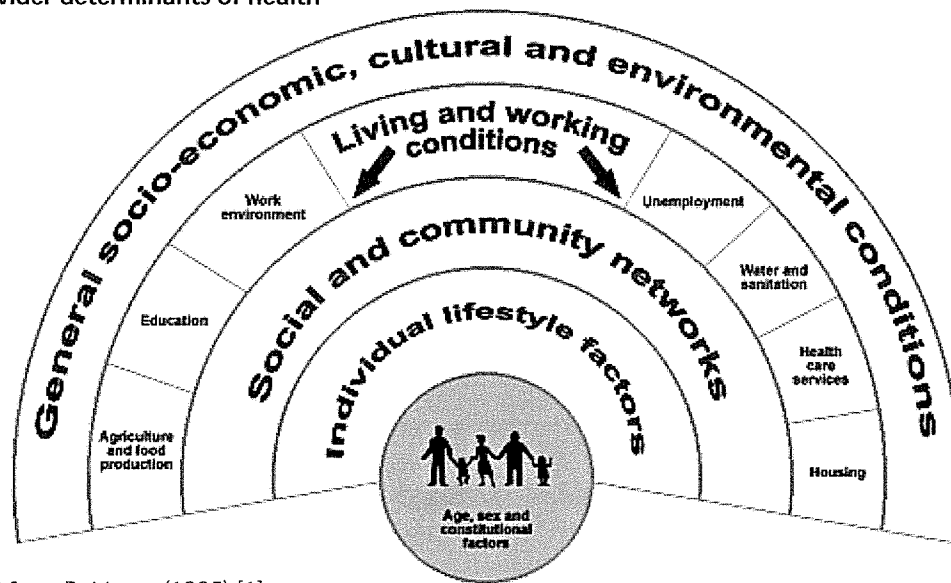
Looking at equity and health in the round

When thinking about health, many people focus on individual choices or lifestyles, and on particular health-related services. These can be important, but there are other issues influencing the health of individuals and communities. It is now widely recognised that many factors can influence health and health inequalities – including income/poverty, housing, employment, the environment, transport, education, and access to services (Figure 1, page 2; Box 2, page 6).

For example, encouraging people to eat a healthy diet with plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables is one thing, but helping them to achieve this is another. Someone living in a run-down or isolated area may not have easy access to cheap, good quality food outlets. If they are reliant on public transport, buying and carrying home bulky fresh supplies can present very real problems, particularly if they are having to care for a young child at the same time.

Similarly, while giving up alcohol can be difficult, it is less easy if a person is living in depressing and poor housing conditions, with few employment prospects, fear of crime, and little sense of control over their life. In this situation, messages to limit alcohol intake may have a limited effect, unless they are combined with efforts to improve living and working conditions.

Figure 1: The wider determinants of health



Source: adapted from Dahlgren (1995) [1].

Local government, community and business contributions to health

While the NHS plays an important role in health, this is only part of the picture. Many of the wider influences on health lie outside the NHS's remit or control, and it is increasingly recognised that local government, the voluntary sector and community groups, businesses and commercial firms all have

important contributions to make. Figure 1 is one way of viewing the interrelationship between the different factors that affect health and wellbeing. There are a wide variety of factors, and their effects are felt in different ways. This diagram helps demonstrate the breadth of potential influences. Health impact assessment provides a practical way to consider what these contributions are, and engages a range of people in identifying ways to improve proposals.

What is HIA?

The purpose of HIA – equity and health

There are a number of different formal definitions for what people consider HIA to be. For the purpose of this booklet, we have chosen to describe HIA as a **developing process that uses a range of methods and approaches to help identify and consider the potential – or actual – health and equity impacts of a proposal on a given population.**

Its primary output is a set of **evidence-based recommendations** geared to informing the decision-making process. These recommendations aim to highlight practical ways to enhance the positive impacts of a proposal, and to remove or minimise any negative impacts on health, wellbeing and health inequalities that might arise or exist.

Wherever decisions are being made that may have an impact on health and equity, HIA can provide a valuable tool to help inform the decision-making process at different levels and in a range of contexts, for example:

- policy development and analysis
- strategy development and planning
- programme and/or project development
- commissioning or providing services
- resource allocation and capital investment
- community development and planning, including community participation/service user involvement
- preparing or assessing funding bids
- developing sustainable approaches and initiatives.

An adaptable approach that can be integrated

Health impact assessment draws on a range of methods, techniques and skills that can be adapted and tailored to

individual circumstances. It draws on elements of project management and research and evaluation, as well as experience and expertise from other forms of impact assessment, such as environmental impact assessment, economic impact assessment, social impact assessment, and regulatory impact assessment.

Where other impact assessments are required, there is the option to consider whether a separate HIA would be useful, or whether it should be integrated with the other assessment area/s. For example, there is a health element in environmental impact assessments, and in some situations it may be worth considering enhancing the health and equity element of environmental assessment, rather than undertaking a separate HIA.

Concerned with evidence and judgement

A key consideration in HIA is identifying and assessing potential evidence. Evidence for actual or potential impacts on health can come from many sources, and a good HIA will strive to ensure different types of evidence are properly identified and considered. However, the evidence base available to support the HIA process, for example on various wider determinants of health and interventions to improve health, may in some areas be patchy or difficult to locate. For this reason, it is important to acknowledge that HIA can only make use of the **best available evidence** given the time and other resource constraints.

Health impact assessment also goes beyond examining the evidence – evidence can be mixed, contradictory or limited, so it is important to be able to judge its significance. Judgement ideally also involves a process of discussion and engagement with key stakeholders to ensure any recommendations developed are grounded in a clear understanding of their different perspectives.

International, national and local relevance

The importance and value of HIA have been recognised at many levels. While there is currently no direct statutory requirement in this country to use HIA, its role and value have been endorsed or highlighted in a range of policy and strategy contexts; Box 1 lists some examples of this.

What HIA is not!

It is not a 'magic bullet'. It does not replace decision-making. At best, it provides valuable information to inform and influence decision-making. But many factors will influence decision-making, and it is important to acknowledge that HIA is just one of these – there are also other ways to help ensure that health and equity issues are properly considered during

policy and practice development. In considering whether or not to undertake an HIA, it is important to look at viable alternative options or approaches that could be useful. With the current interest in HIA, it is important to be realistic about what it can achieve and to ensure it is used in situations where it can most effectively contribute to the decision-making process.

While an HIA can be undertaken without the active involvement of decision-makers, it is more likely to be effective if decision-makers can be involved at the earliest stages. Equally, because HIA is a relatively new, developing approach, there is currently limited evaluation information available. However, as more people undertake HIA and monitor and evaluate what it has achieved, the evidence base for what works will grow.

Box 1. HIA – a focus for international, national and local interest

- At the European level, HIA is recognised as an important approach in a number of contexts, for example **Article 152 of the Amsterdam Treaty** calls for the European Union to examine the possible impact of major policies on health [2].
- At the national level, the role of HIA was specifically highlighted in the cross-government public health strategy: ***Saving Lives: Our Healthier Nation*** [3].
- The value and importance of HIA has been strongly endorsed or signalled by a range of other national policies, programmes and guidance, for example:
 - **New Deal for Transport** [4]
 - **New Deal for Communities** [5]
 - **National Service Frameworks such as CHD** [6]
 - **Modernising Government** [7].
- Recommendations from the government-commissioned '**Acheson Report**' on inequalities in health specifically highlight the importance of assessing the impacts of policy on health inequalities [8].
- At the local level, HIA has a potential contribution to make to many areas of activity and, in particular, can provide a valuable tool to support the work of **Local Strategic Partnerships**, and the development of related work, for example:
 - Neighbourhood Renewal
 - Community Strategies
 - Local and Regional Transport and Land Use Plans
 - Health Improvement and Modernisation Plans (HIMPs)
 - Best Value approach in Local Government
 - Integrated Pollution Prevention Control (IPPC) Regulations.
 - Equity audits
 - Regeneration initiatives
 - New power for councils to promote the wellbeing of communities.

Summary

In essence, HIA offers a practical and flexible framework for identifying health and equity impacts and ways of addressing them. It achieves this by providing a mechanism to:

- draw on a range of different experiences, skills and activities, and provide an opportunity to engage and involve different people
- provide a menu of different methods and approaches to gather evidence that can be used to help identify and consider the potential – and actual – impact of the proposal
- identify how the proposal affects health and inequalities in general, but also whether there may be a disproportionate effect on particular populations or areas
- consider specifically the potential – or actual – impacts on health and inequalities, the relative importance of these impacts, and the interaction between impacts

- identify recommendations to inform the decision-making process by highlighting practical ways to enhance the positive impacts of a proposal, and to remove or minimise any health inequalities and negative impacts that might arise or exist.

By using HIA, organisations and agencies can help themselves to achieve goals and targets related to any of their statutory obligations, and health considerations can be introduced into the planning and implementation process in a structured and focused way. This means they can be systematically reviewed alongside other priorities.

And in the long term? All public policy has the potential to improve the population's health and wellbeing. Much public policy could make a contribution to narrowing the gap between those experiencing the worst and the best health. HIA can help in making this potential explicit, by incorporating it as a routine element within decision-making processes.

Why get involved?

There are several specific drivers and benefits for introducing HIA into the work of organisations and partnerships.

Responding to national policies and priorities

A commitment has been made centrally to assess major new government policies for their impact on health. Clear messages have also been sent to decision-makers at the local level that:

- health impact assessment is a structured approach that can be used to inform proposal development and decision-making at the local level, not only within organisations but also within partnerships
- health sector organisations and local authorities are seen as important champions for health, and HIA can provide a valuable support tool when working or liaising with other organisations or sectors
- recent developments in primary care, signalled in *Shifting the Balance of Power* [9], highlight the role of primary care trusts in health improvement and their contribution, with others, to the development of the wider public health agenda.

Multiple factors affecting health and inequality

In order to look at the full range of impacts on health and consider equity issues, it is important to adopt a wider model of health – one that recognises that the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities are determined by a wide range of economic, social and environmental influences, as well as by factors such as family history and access to health services.

Health impact assessment can help ensure the wide range of different factors influencing health and equity are properly

Box 2. Factors affecting health and wellbeing

- **Socio-economic** – eg income and poverty, employment and social exclusion
- **Physical environment** – eg air and water quality, housing, regeneration, crime, noise, infectious and toxic hazards and transport
- **Social and community environment** – eg social and community networks, access to services such as education, health and leisure
- **Individual or family lifestyles** – eg diet, physical activity, smoking, alcohol, sexual behaviour, drugs and mental health
- **Fixed/constitutional** – eg age, sex and genes

considered and addressed. Box 2 summarises the main factors affecting health and wellbeing.

Considering and addressing inequalities in health

Health impact assessment can help organisations ensure that they make an active contribution to improving health and reducing inequalities – or, at the very least, that their proposals do not inadvertently damage health or reinforce inequalities. It helps to achieve this by using a wider model of health, and provides a systematic approach for assessing how the proposal affects a population – and more specifically, how these effects are distributed between the different sub-groups of the population concerned.

Demonstrating health gain as added value

Health impact assessment can be used to promote health gain for the local population. It can also highlight the added value of health-aware policies and initiatives. With a social