

## Communicating about Health Impacts

Health impact assessment (HIA) tools produce a large amount of useful information about various health topics, the location of health impacts, and who is affected by a project, plan, or policy. However, worksheets, maps, tables, and lengthy reports prepared as part of HIA processes may be difficult for the public and other stakeholders to understand and use. This fact sheet presents practical ideas for presenting information about the HIA process and the findings of HIA studies to a variety of audiences.

### What should I communicate?

There are numerous aspects of the HIA process and outcomes that the public, elected officials and government agencies may be interested in:

- **Purpose of the HIA.** Why was the HIA completed? How does it relate to other planning processes (e.g. comprehensive plan update)?
- **HIA Process.** What were the key steps in completing the HIA? What was the study area or scope for the HIA? What health issues were addressed in the HIA?
- **Participation in the HIA.** Who was involved in the HIA process? How were participants selected?
- **HIA Outcomes.** What were the key findings of the HIA? How will these findings be used in making decisions about the project, plan, or policy? Are there impacts of concern to specific population groups or geographic areas?

### What format?

As noted above there are several audiences for an HIA and they may need different formats.

- **The general public** may appreciate a short summary in non-technical language. This could be as short as a two page handout or could be the executive summary of a longer HIA report.

*Example:* The London Health Commission produced a **colorful poster** '[London and Londoners: Making the Links for Health](#).' While the layout is a little confusing it shows how a poster format can be used to convey health information.

*Example:* The same commission has a variety of publications including [an attractive 13 page document](#) summarizing an HIA of transport in London. The [full HIA report](#) is 140 pages long.

- **Participants in the HIA** will have more of an interest in how their voices were heard and may need some additional information such as a meeting summary.  
*Example:* The London Health Commission created a [colorful summary](#) of a health conference with a very informative "key learning points" section on the second page, lots of pictures, and informative summaries of sessions.

- **Government agencies, commissions, councils, and technically minded activist groups** will need more detail about specific analyses (so that they can be updated), key positive and negative impacts, enhancement and mitigation strategies, implementation timelines, funding sources, and responsible parties. This may be a separate report or integrated into a comprehensive planning document.

*Example:* The [Atlanta Beltline HIA](#) report is long—over 200 pages—but contains a **very helpful summary of recommendations** in section 10 (pages 151-174) that lays out in chart form key findings, affected populations, recommendations, and relationships to health issues (access, physical activity, safety, social capital, and environment).

*Example:* [Housing for health?](#) A screening Health Impact Assessment of the consultation draft of the Regional Housing Strategy. April 2007. This 81 page report provides a very clear and concise executive summary (p.3-4) that briefly describes purpose of the HIA, the key recommendations by topic and conclusions.

### What methods are available for communication?

Traditional, as well as non-traditional, means of communication should be considered to ensure that HIA information reaches the broadest audience and has the greatest influence on the project, plan, or policy. The following strategies can provide opportunities to reach audiences that might not otherwise engage in discussions about health and planning issues.

- Written reports, flyers, brochures, and newsletter articles to convey information. City council meetings, open houses, and meetings with neighborhoods or interest groups can be useful to not only present findings, but also get feedback.

*Example:* The New Zealand Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment created an [informative one-page fact sheet](#) for this HIA on electricity scenarios for the nation. It also created a [web page](#) with a short summary of recommendations and links to both the fact sheet and full report: [http://www.pce.govt.nz/reports/allreports/1\\_877274\\_28\\_3.shtml](http://www.pce.govt.nz/reports/allreports/1_877274_28_3.shtml)

- Creative communication techniques such as kiosks at local malls, cable access or radio discussions, focus groups, bill inserts, can also provide opportunities to reach audiences that might not otherwise engage in discussions about health and planning issues.
- Web pages can be a useful strategy for raising awareness.

*Example:* the San Francisco Department of Public Health created a dedicated web page for its [Eastern Neighborhoods Community Health Impact Assessment](#).

### Are there examples of HIA reports and summary documents?

- The Design for Health team has identified a number of examples of HIA summary documents that highlight various approaches to format and content.

*Example:* [Alconbury HIA – Final Report - From Bombs to Boom! Health Impact Assessment on a Former Air Base](#). This summary report provides an example of a well illustrated final HIA Rapid Assessment Report. The proposed Alconbury airfield development was for a road and rail freight distribution centre. Initial screening for potential health impacts identified both positive and negative consequences for human health and well-being, within the population of interest. Click [here](#) to view the full Alconbury HIA report.

*Example:* [Health Impact Assessment: Greater Christchurch Urban Development Strategy Options 2006](#). This on a health impact assessment undertaken on the Greater Christchurch Urban Development Strategy by the Canterbury District Health Board formally documents the rationale behind performing a health impact assessment on the strategy, the process involved and the conclusion reached.

- For more examples see:  
<http://www.designforhealth.net/techassistance/hiaexamples.html>