PART II: GETTING FROM HERE TO THERE: STAGES OF HIA
Stage 2: Scoping

Aim: To identify the particular issues that should be addressed in the HIA.

Learning objectives:

1. To review the determinants of health.
2. To identify the potential health impacts for the particular proposal.
3. To assess which impacts are likely to be important and thus need to be addressed in the HIA.
4. To construct a logical framework for the health impacts.
5. To set boundaries for the HIA: temporal, geographical and population.
6. To identify stakeholders who should to be involved.
7. To reach a consensus regarding the details of the risk assessment among the stakeholders.

Screening is the first and most fundamental step of the assessment process. It should always be applied irrespective of the policy, program or project to be evaluated.

Three different conclusions can be reached from the screening process:

1) An HIA is feasible and likely to yield useful information.

2) It is not necessary to conduct an HIA but recommendations can be made on how negative health impacts can be ameliorated.

3) It is not yet possible to decide one way or the other, due to inadequate information. The screening process should be repeated after obtaining further information.

Aim: To determine if an in depth impact assessment is necessary and if HIA adds value to the decision-making process.

Analytical Procedures:

1. Define the policy, program or project to be analyzed.
2. Review criteria for selection (including general HIA screening criteria and additional criteria relevant to a particular program, locale, etc).
3. Complete and discuss screening tools (checklists, etc.)
4. Make a preliminary assessment on whether to proceed with HIA.
5. Review decision with stakeholders.

Product:

A brief preliminary assessment on the feasibility and value of an HIA.

(UCLA, 2003-2004)

Key criteria to assess during HIA screening

- Significance: Likelihood and magnitude of significant health impacts
- Value:
    - Added value of HIA to policy-making process
    - Valuation of added information
    - Impact of added information
- Evidence:
    - State of current knowledge
    - Data availability
- Feasibility: Available resources to conduct HIA (time, money, personnel)

Screening checklists that operationalize these criteria can help set priorities and determine which proposals require an HIA. Examples of such checklists can be found in Appendices 1 to 3.

Assessing Significance during HIA screening

Background questions:

1) What are the health conditions of different groups within the affected area? Are there groups who:
    - Are particularly vulnerable?
    - Are already exposed to numerous health risks?
    - Have a high prevalence or incidence of health conditions that might be affected?
2) Are there particular health goals (e.g. Healthy People 2010 objectives) that might be affected by the proposal?[1]

Secondary questions which may be linked to the matter at hand:

1) Could one expect particular health risks to decrease or increase as a result of the proposal? Will impacts become apparent in the short term (within 5 years) or in the long-term?
2) For the distribution of ill-health within a population, it is of decisive importance to determine which groups are presently subjected to decreased/increased health risks, and whether any new decision will affect the group's capacity either to deal with difficulties or by contrast increase their vulnerability.
3) In what way will the social environment in the local community be affected by the proposal?
4) Is there a risk that a proposal may have a 'double' impact on certain groups (i.e., both their health risks increase and their social environment deteriorates)?
5) Are there alternative policies that might result in better health for exposed groups and the population as a whole?

Adapted from Landstings Forbundet and Svenska Kommunförbundet. Focusing on Health Stockholm. 1998. Original Swedish language version: http://www.lf.se.hkb. English-language version: http://www.who.int/hia/about/en/HIA_sweden.pdf

[1] See Appendix 4 for Surgeon General's "Healthy People 2010" objectives most relevant to health impact assessment

Criteria for Assessing Impact Significance (adapted from Canter, 1986)

Nature of the Impact	Definition
Magnitude	The probable severity of each potential adverse impact, in the sense of degree, extensiveness or scale. How serious is the impact? Does it cause a large change over baseline conditions? Does it cause a rapid rate of change – large changes over a short time? Will these changes exceed local capacity to address or incorporate change? Does it create a change which is unacceptable? Does it exceed a recognized threshold value?
Geographical limits	The extent to which the potential impact may eventually extend (e.g., local, regional, national, global), as well as the geographical location (e.g., far North, reserve, etc.)
Duration & Frequency	Length of time (day, year, decade) for which an impact may be discernible, & the nature of the impact over time (is it intermittent and/or repetitive?) If repetitive, then how often?
Cumulative Impact	The potential impact that is achieved when the particular project's impact(s) are added to impacts of other projects or activities that have been or will be carried out. The purpose being to predict whether or not a threshold level is surpassed.
Risk	The probability of an impact occurring. For many socio-economic impacts, qualitative assessments would be appropriate (high, medium, low).
Socio-economic Importance	The degree to which the potential effects may (or may be perceived to) impact on local economies or social structure.
People affected	How pervasive will the impact be across the population? This criterion addresses the portion of the population affected and the extent which it will affect different demographic groups, particularly at-risk groups.
Local sensitivity	To what extent is the local population aware of the impact? Is it perceived to be significant? Has it been a source of previous concern in the community? Are there any organized interest groups likely to be mobilized by the impact?
Reversibility	How long will it take to mitigate the impact by natural or human means? Is it reversible, and, if so, can it be reversed in the short or long-term?
Economic costs	How much will it cost to mitigate this impact? Who will pay? How soon will finances be needed to address this impact?

Source: Health Canada. The Canadian Handbook on Health Impact Assessment (3 vols).2000, http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ewh-semt/pubs/eval/index_e.html

Screening algorithm to guide decisions on whether to conduct an HIA