

# A short description of the HIA approach

## 1. Introduction

Health impact assessment (HIA) has been defined as “a practical approach that determines how a proposal will affect people’s health and wellbeing”. The proposal under assessment may range from a project (for instance, a housing development or a leisure centre) to programmes (such as an urban regeneration or a public safety programme) to policies (like an integrated transport strategy, or the introduction of water metering).

HIA builds on the now generally accepted understanding that a community’s health and wellbeing is not only determined by its health services, but also by a wide range of economic, social, psychological, and environmental influences. This draws on accepted definitions of health and wellbeing from the World Health Organization and from Maori models of health. Once acknowledged, it is clearly important to attempt to estimate the effects of non-health sector projects and policies on health and wellbeing to inform any decisions taken; this is the aim of health impact assessment.

Ideally, health impact assessment should happen before the start of the project, programme or policy concerned, so that any potential negative health effects can be avoided or reduced, and any positive ones enhanced. The principles of this approach have much in common with those behind the established practice of environmental impact assessment (Assessment of Environmental Effects in NZ).

HIA systematically works through relevant questions and issues, providing a rigorous base for any recommendations provided to decision makers. It is particularly good at seeing how policies affect people with disabilities, ethnic groups and low-socioeconomic groups.

The NZ Government is committed to the principle of HIA. The New Zealand Health Strategy refers to the requirement for the health effects of national and local policies and projects to be assessed, and the Public Health Advisory Committee are training people in this approach and encouraging its uptake. This is further supported by the introduction of a new duty on local authorities to promote the economic, social and environmental well-being of their areas, in partnership with all relevant local interests, and the Land Transport Management Act requiring strategies to ‘promote and protect public health’. HIA gives transport and local government agencies a ready-made tool to ensure these aspects are considered.

## 2. Typical aims of HIA

- to assess the potential health impacts, both positive and negative, of projects, programmes and policies
- to improve the quality of public policy decision-making through recommendations to improve predicted positive health impacts and minimise negative ones.

## 3. HIA on the GWRC Regional Land Transport Strategy

The GWRC RLTS health impact assessment has been undertaken because:

- the Greater Wellington Regional Council wants to strengthen their work across sectors to promote health and wellbeing. GWRC and Regional Public Health are the key funders for this HIA
- Regional Public Health also want to strengthen their work across sectors.
- Greater Wellington Regional Council has a willingness to try innovative approaches to meet the requirements of the Land Transport Management Act
- Greater Wellington Regional Council understand that transport is a key determinant of the health and wellbeing of the region
- The timing was right for informing the pre-public consultation strategy
- The RLTS affects a large number of people, and impacts on many determinants of health and wellbeing.

The aims, objectives and boundaries for the HIA were set by a steering group on 23 November 2005. At that meeting were representatives from Greater Wellington Regional Council, Regional Public Health, Transit, Hutt City Council, Wellington City Council, Kapiti Coast District Council, Land Transport NZ, and South Wairarapa District Council. Other organisations sent apologies.

### **3.1 Aim**

The brief for the HIA is to “check that it contributes to the draft RLTS objective 4 (promote and protect public health). If found deficient, appropriate changes are to be recommended, taking account of the other RLTS objectives.”

### **3.2 Packages of the plan to be assessed**

The HIA will focus on packages derived from Section 11 – the Regional Transport Programme. Broadly these are:

- Public transport – new infrastructure
- Public transport – improvements in ease of use
- Travel demand management, walking and cycling
- Roding

A brief assessment of the objectives of the strategy will also be undertaken.

### **3.3 Population groups of focus**

The following populations were identified as important to the stakeholders:

**Those with access issues:**

Households without cars  
School children  
People with disabilities

**Those with affordability issues:**

Low socio-economic groups (NZ Dept)

**Those affected due to geographical location:**

Rural people

Communities close to existing routes  
Communities close to proposed routes

**Those with cultural issues:**

Maori

### **3.4 Determinants of health**

The stakeholders acknowledged the budget and timeframe constraints on this process and were able to recommend a priority list of determinants:

- physical activity
- accessibility to services and the community
- accident rates and changes in injuries and fatalities
- community effects and severance as a result of traffic
- stress and anxiety

This list does not exclude the possibility of looking at other determinants in the future should they be considered important to include.

### **3.5 Information & Evidence**

A great deal of background work has already been done to pull together the:

- Community Profile – *a description of the place and the people affected by the strategy including both statistics and qualitative information from a range of sources including Statistics NZ, GWRC, DHBs and MSD*
- Evidence review – *a summary of the academic literature on the determinants of health being focused on, and how they affect health and wellbeing.*

Stakeholders and communities often know best what the likely outcomes of the strategy will be, and how the positives can be enhanced and the negatives mitigated. Bringing together of academic, organisational and regional knowledge will enable the HIA process to deliver recommendations that are both evidence based and acceptable to the local community and decision makers.

### **3.6 Recommendations**

Recommendations are likely to relate to the work of a number of agencies, primarily:

- Regional Public Health
- Greater Wellington Regional Council
- City Councils
- Transit

Please note that the HIA makes recommendations only, it does not take decisions, and so final decisions still rest with each organisation.

### **3.7 Completion date**

The HIA must be complete by 24<sup>th</sup> August 2006 to inform the pre-public consultation draft of the strategy.