

Through the Lens of Community Health: Using Health Impact Assessment to Inform and Strengthen the Planning Process

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Health Impact Assessment (HIA) is about the “upstream determinants of health” – the underlying physical and social conditions that affect health exposures and shape health choices. These issues cut across sectoral boundaries.

Upstream determinants of health



View NE of Bakersfield. From GoogleEarth, 2008

Upstream determinants of health



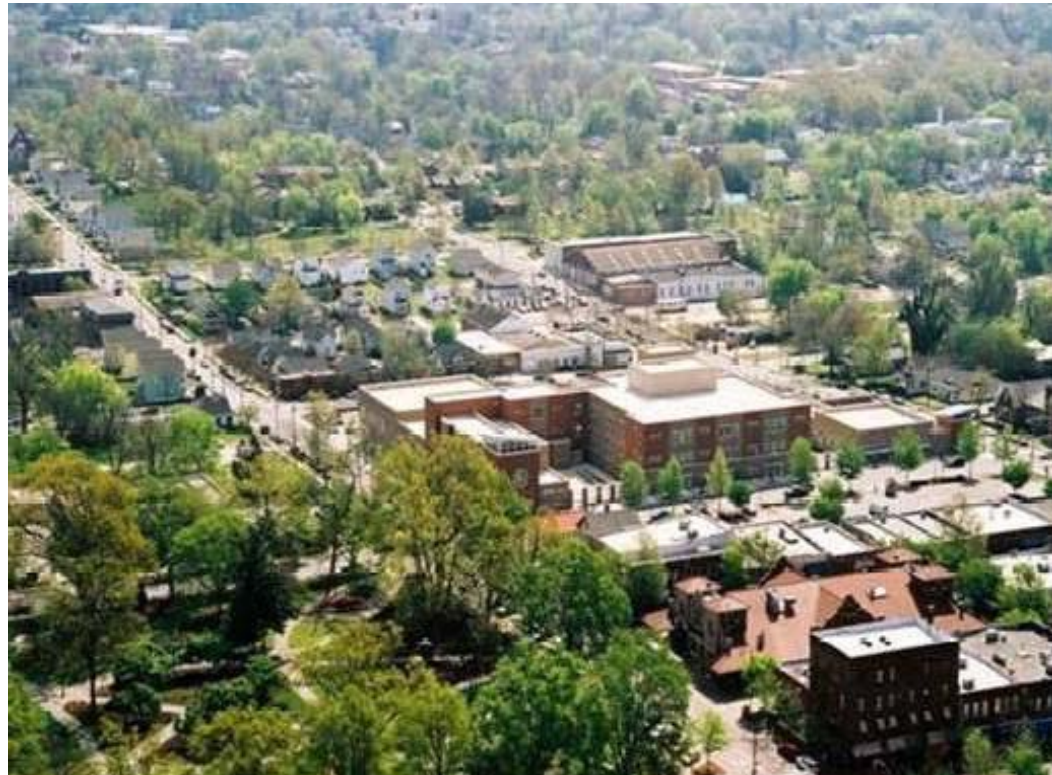
Photo by Tatianes via Flickr

Upstream determinants of health



Photo courtesy Michael Gamble, Georgia Tech School of Architecture

Upstream determinants of health



Photos from U.S. EPA Smart Growth Office website

The rationale for health impact assessment (HIA)

From the perspective of public health:

Many, if not most, of the opportunities for achieving the greatest gains in improving the public's health lie beyond the traditional purview of health care systems and public health agencies.

HIA can bring attention to these upstream determinants of health as they are affected by public policies and projects, and suggest alternatives to maximize the potential benefits and minimize potential harm, especially when public health considerations are not already a major consideration.

The rationale for health impact assessment (HIA)

From the perspective of planning and other (non-health) sectors:

Newspapers, blogs, community meetings and casual conversations show that community health issues resonate deeply with community members, especially when they involve perceived disparities in the distribution of environmental risks and benefits.

HIA can:

1. Provide a means of engaging community members around health issues they deem important;
2. Help both community members and decision-makers better understand the evidence pertaining these issues
3. Provide a foundation for shaping public policy decisions in a way that protects public well-being and helps the community move towards the vision it has for itself.

Health Impact Assessment is

... a tool for systematically evaluating, synthesizing, and communicating information about potential health impacts for more informed decision-making.



Key elements of HIA

- ◆ Starts with a proposed policy or project;
- ◆ Considers a range of potential pathways and health effects, not just a single outcome; addressing both intended and unintended consequences, potential benefits and potential harm;
- ◆ Uses a mix of methods within a systematic, standardized framework;
- ◆ Produces actionable information communicated to policy-makers and stakeholders;
- ◆ Is balanced, addresses disparities and supports principles of participatory democracy.

HIAs vary in their analytic aims

- ◆ Identify health effects
What are the potential health effects of a proposal to change sales tax revenue?
- ◆ Assess magnitude of health effects and their significance
Will expansion of after-school programming yield significant health benefits?
- ◆ Evaluate the distribution costs/benefits in order to assess equity
Are the health benefits and risks of a proposed farmers' market distributed equitably?
Will the market minimize or exacerbate current disparities in health risks and conditions?
- ◆ Assess current policies to identify policy opportunities.
What are the health consequences of the current set of agricultural subsidies?
- ◆ Combine economic information with information on health effects
What elements of school site design are most cost-effective in encouraging physical activity?

These are probably not HIAs...

- ◆ A survey of gastrointestinal infections before and after implementation of a new restaurant inspection and grading system;
- ◆ A community health assessment describing current health conditions, needs and service priorities;
- ◆ A public health officer's testimony about the effectiveness of changes to pedestrian infrastructure to promote walkability;
- ◆ A “health element” that is integrated into a community's general or master plan.

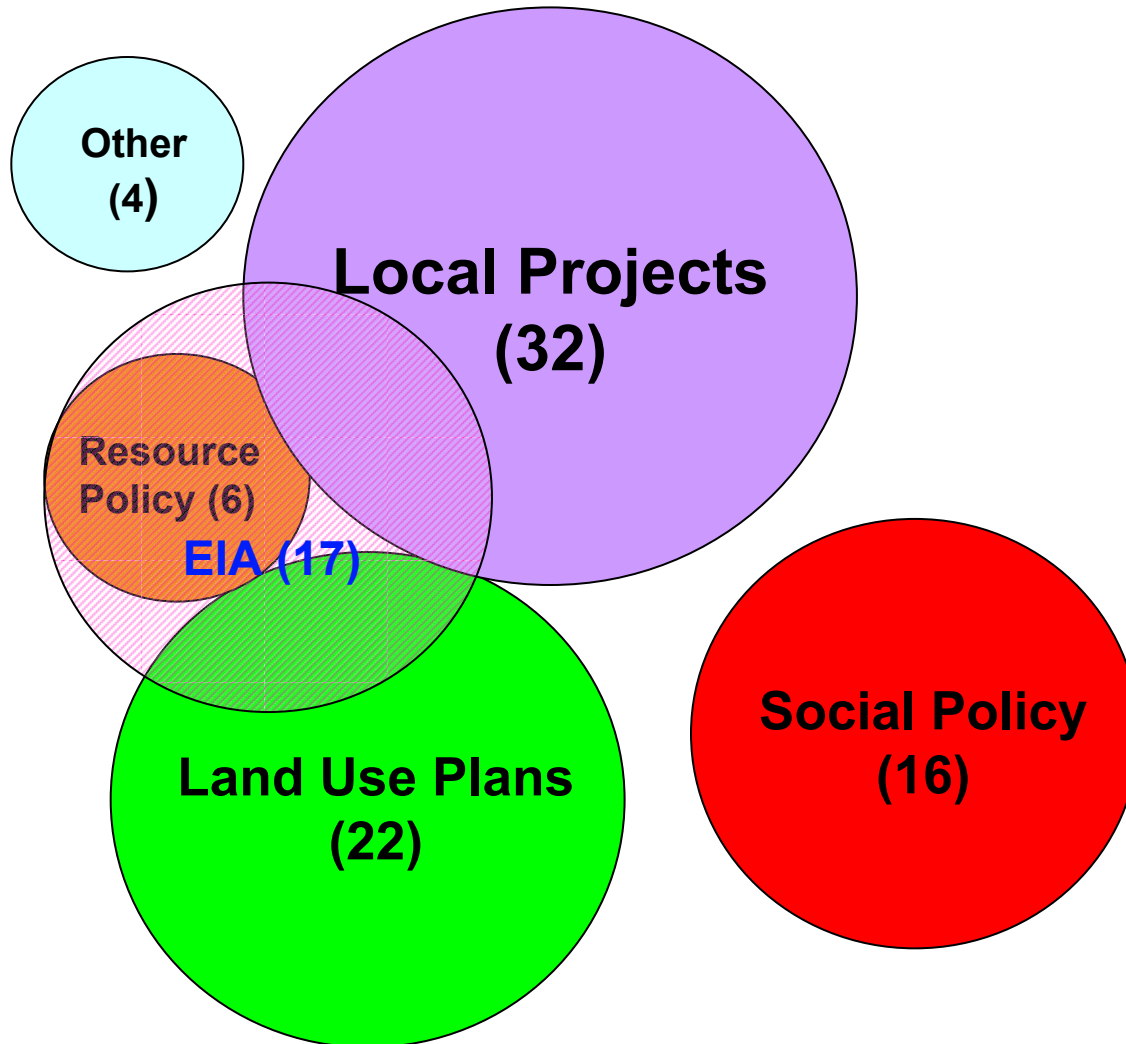
But any one of these could be part of an HIA

The role of stakeholder participation in HIA analysis

The best HIAs provide sound, evidence-based information that decision-makers and stakeholders can use. Analysis in HIA:

- Synthesizes available scientific evidence;
- Identifies and examines community concerns (*e.g. scoping meetings*);
- Weighs alternatives from the perspective of maximizing public health benefits and minimizing health disparities;
- Is reported in a way that allows community stakeholders to evaluate the quality, completeness and relevancy of the analysis and recommendations.

Policy and Project Focus of HIAs in the U.S. (2001-2010)



Health determinants and pathways frequently examined in HIAs in the U.S.

- ◆ Exposure to air pollutants
- ◆ Housing adequacy and affordability
- ◆ Traffic injuries
- ◆ Parks and greenspace
- ◆ Income adequacy; social equity
- ◆ Diet, nutrition, food safety, food insecurity
- ◆ Noise
- ◆ Mental health
- ◆ Social capital, community cohesion
- ◆ Access to jobs, stores, schools, recreation

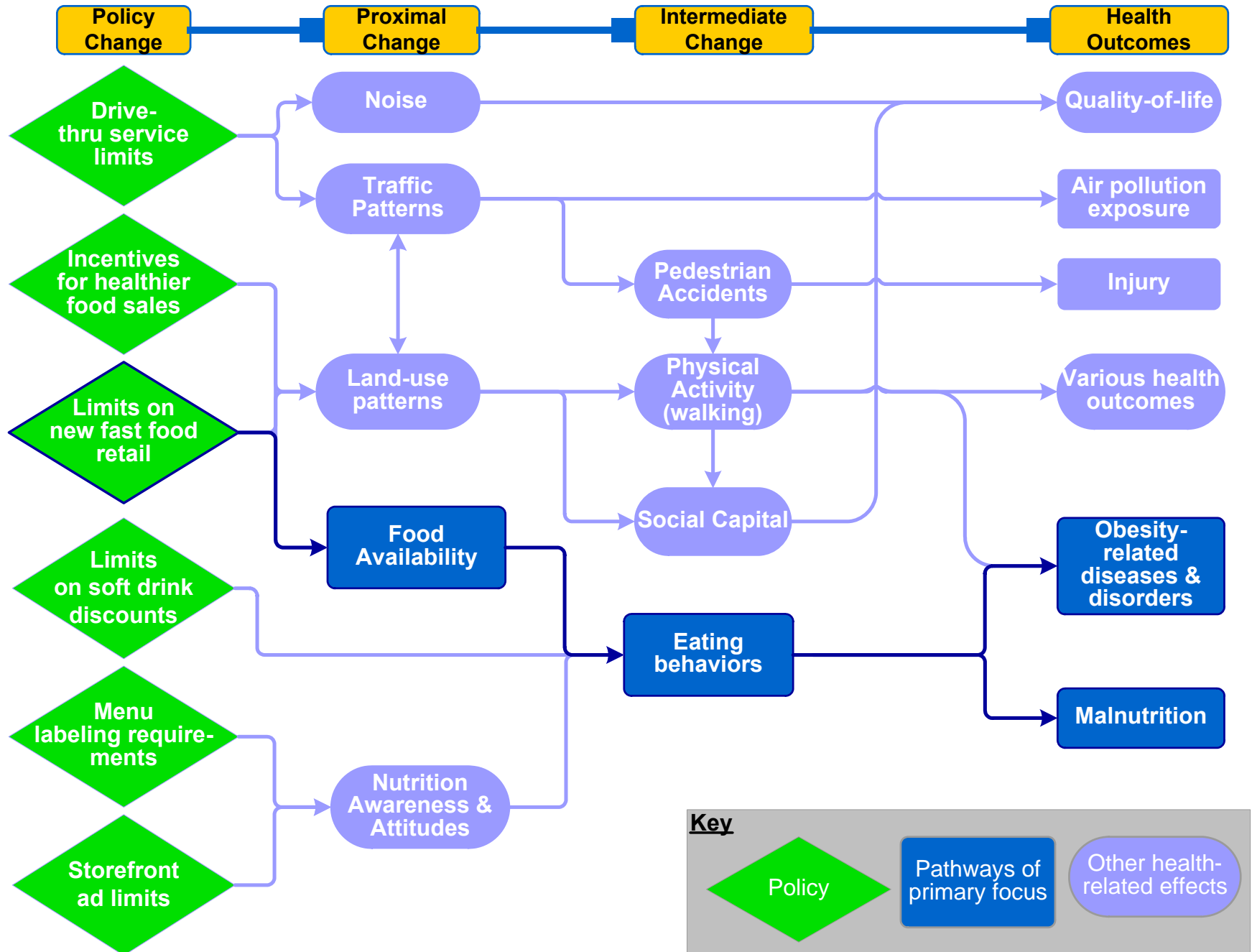
HIAs examine multiple impacts and pathways

Pathways for an HIA on mass transit funding

1. Air and water pollution;
2. Household discretionary income;
3. Community economic conditions;
4. Physical activity;
5. Social capital and mental health;
6. Discretionary time;
7. Access to social and health services;
8. Land-use patterns.



A logic framework: Zoning regulation of fast-food retail



Elaborating causal pathways

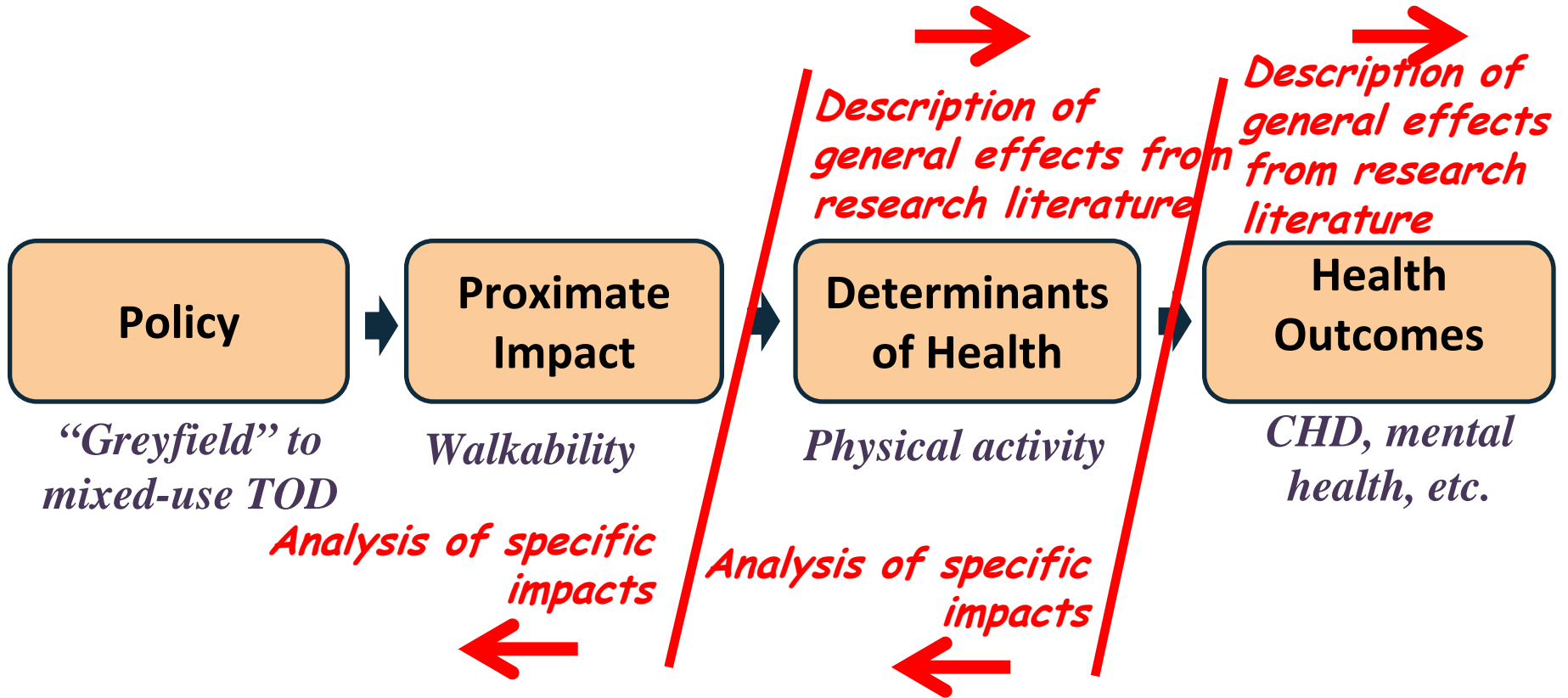


A good HIA should:

- 1.Explain these linkages;
- 2.Describe the strength and consistency of evidence, including a balanced discussion of limitations and disconfirmatory evidence;
- 3.Give a sense of the likelihood, direction, magnitude, distribution and significance of these impacts;
- 4.Compare alternatives (e.g. action/no action, with/without mitigation).

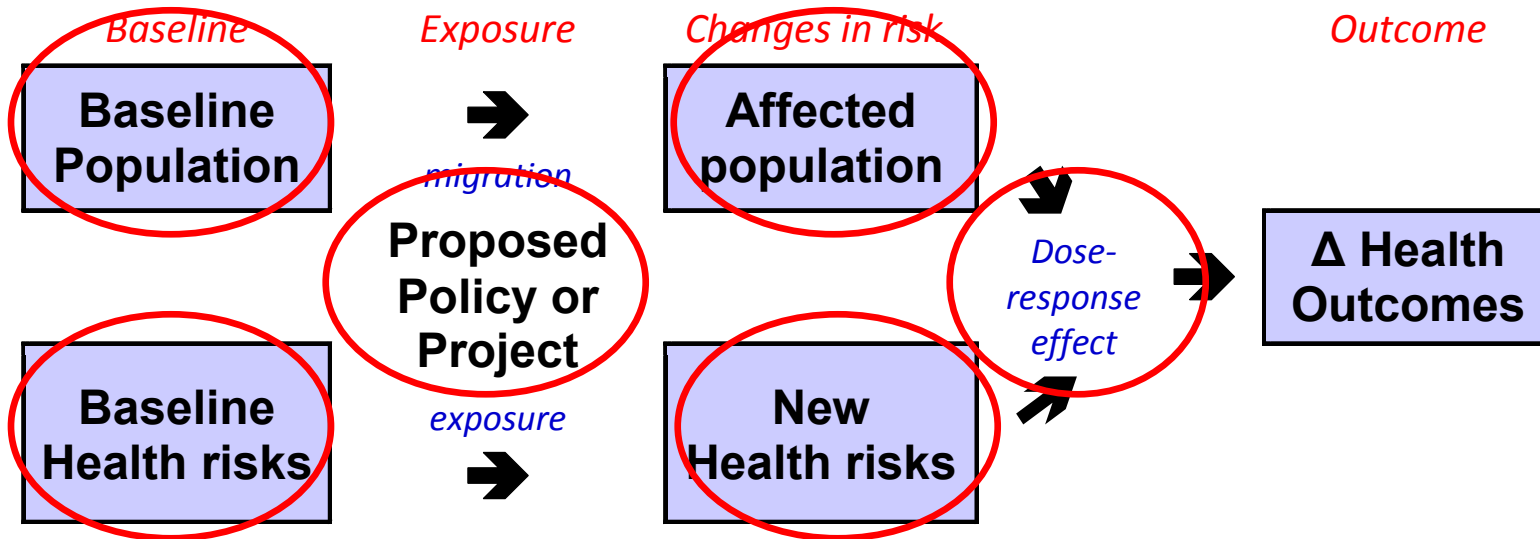
Quantitative prediction facilitates comparison and forces clear specification of linkages but is often not feasible, nor necessary

Example of a causal pathway in HIA



Impact assessment

General paradigm from risk assessment



Data needs

1. Clearly defined policy
2. Definition of the population of interest
3. Baseline distribution of risk factors (i.e. exposures) in the affected population
4. Change in the prevalence and distribution of risk factors resulting from policy
5. Change in the composition of the affected population resulting from policy
6. Dose-response relationship between risk factors and health outcomes

HIA-CLIC: An on-line resource for more information on HIA



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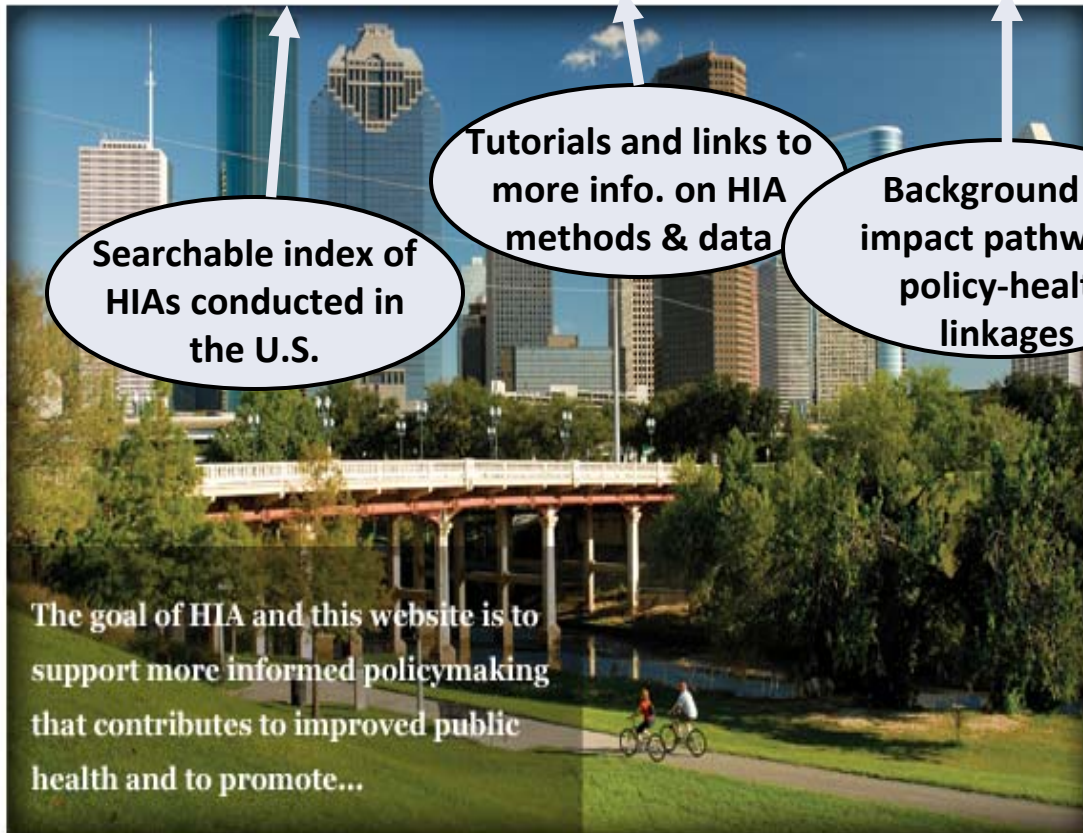
[Completed HIAs](#)

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Searchable index of HIAs conducted in the U.S.

Tutorials and links to more info. on HIA methods & data

Background on impact pathways, policy-health linkages



HIA Spotlight

• [Oak-to-Ninth Redevelopment in Oakland, CA \(UC Berkeley\)](#) »

• [Brenton, NJ Farmers Market](#) »

• [More HIAs](#) »

Training resources, HIA-related legislation



New to HIA CLIC?

Find out how to use the site with our [Quick Start Guide](#) »

at hiaguide.org

Wilshire Subway Extension

Authors: [UCLA School of Public Health](#)

Location: Los Angeles, California, United States



Photo Credit: <http://www.metro.net/projects/westside/>

Completion Date:

The proposed Metro Westside Subway Extension project would provide transit service to nearly 300,000 commuters and potentially transform the urban landscape along the proposed route.

Summary of the HIA

Related

Pathways:

- [Access to Parks](#) »
- [Access to Public Transit](#) »
- [Air Quality \(indoor\)](#) »
- [Air Quality \(outdoor\)](#) »
- [Healthcare Access, Insurance](#) »
- [Land-Use](#) »
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