

## HEALTH IMPACT ASSESSMENT (HIA): FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- [1. What is a Health Impact Assessment \(HIA\)?](#)
- [2. What are the wider determinants of health and wellbeing?](#)
- [3. What is the purpose of a HIA?](#)
- [4. What are the benefits of a HIA?](#)
- [5. How does HIA fit with other types of public sector duties and impact assessments in Wales?](#)
- [6. What does a HIA involve?](#)
- [7. How do I carry out a HIA?](#)
- [8. When can a HIA be carried out?](#)
- [9. How long does it take to carry out a HIA?](#)
- [10. Do I need any specialist knowledge and skills to undertake a HIA?](#)
- [11. How do I know if my HIA is fit for purpose?](#)
- [12. Is there training available to help me carry out a HIA?](#)
- [13. Is HIA a statutory requirement?](#)

### 1. What is a Health Impact Assessment (HIA)?

HIA is a **systematic, objective and practical** assessment process that can help identify links across the **wider determinants of health and wellbeing** and any impacts of a policy, programme or project on the health and wellbeing of the population or specific group affected.

**This is the commonly agreed definition of HIA:** Health Impact Assessment (HIA) is 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."<sup>1</sup>

### 2. What are the wider determinants of health and wellbeing?

Many factors combine together to affect the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities. To a large extent, **factors such as where we live, the state of our environment, genetics, our income and education level, and our relationships with friends and family all have considerable impacts on our health and wellbeing**, whereas the more commonly considered factors such as access and use of health care services often have less of an impact ([World Health Organization, 2017](#)).

<sup>1</sup> <https://phwwhocc.co.uk/whiasu/our-work/>

### **3. What is the purpose of a HIA?**

It can help identify actions to enhance positive impacts and reduce any negative impacts and explicitly demonstrate how the proposal for change or improvement can contribute to reducing inequalities, promoting good health, wellbeing and supportive environments and social relationships.

### **4. What are the benefits of a HIA?**

The findings and recommendations of a HIA can contribute to improved outcomes and increased value for money for investors. Stakeholder engagement is core to HIA. Engaging with a broad range of stakeholders including local communities can help decision-makers understand and identify potential risks, reduce or mitigate negative impacts and maximise positive impacts. This process can ultimately lead to more informed decision making and better longer term outcomes.

### **5. How does HIA fit with other types of public sector duties and impact assessments in Wales?**

A HIA is a single framework that can be used to consider and incorporate the requirements of many existing statutory duties. The main focus of a HIA is to address the impact on the health and wellbeing of population groups through the lens of the wider determinants of health.

The Socio-economic Duty (SED) and the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) also have a common purpose to address inequalities experienced by population groups. These are specifically on those groups who have shared characteristics (such as protected characteristics) or circumstances (such as socio-economic disadvantage). Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs) are routinely used as the main process or tool to understand the impacts of decisions with regard to the SED and PSED and meet these duties.

Alongside the SED and PSED, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 is a law that aims to improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales for present and future generations. The HIA process includes consideration of the impact of these factors as they are key determinants of health and wellbeing and the Act requires public bodies in Wales to think about the long-term impact of their decisions, to work better with people, communities and each other.

Therefore, the HIA process can allow for the identification of specific population groups in relation to a decision or proposal and assess the potential positive or negative impacts on those groups across the wider determinants. This process can meet the requirements of all of the duties identified above, and can lead to further investigation into the potential impacts on any population group identified.

### **6. What does a HIA involve?**

A HIA is an assessment that uses a range of evidence. It is proportionate in its approach based on the proposal under assessment. It uses qualitative and quantitative evidence from existing data sources as well as primary evidence collected

directly from stakeholders (including the target population) to identify potential positive and negative health impacts. It also involves making recommendations to prevent and mitigate actions to deliver the greatest possible health and wellbeing gain for a specific community or population.

## **7. How do I carry out a HIA?**

The Wales Health Impact Assessment Support Unit (WHIASU) has a range of guides, tools and resources available on its [website](#) to guide you through the process of undertaking a HIA.

## **8. When can a HIA be carried out?**

A HIA can be carried out at the start of the development of a policy, programme or project to anticipate its potential impact maximising any positive impacts and minimise any negative ones; alongside the implementation of the policy, programme or project to collect evidence as it emerges; or retrospectively to assess the effect of an existing policy, programme or project.

## **9. How long does it take to carry out a HIA?**

The time taken to undertake a HIA will depend on the stage of the development of the programme or proposal; its nature and complexity; the availability of resources; the type of data that is needed; and the decision-making timescales. Most HIAs are a few hours or days in terms of resources and arranging in total.

## **10. Do I need any specialist skills and knowledge to carry out a HIA?**

Teamworking is a key part of the process. Carrying out a HIA is a multisectoral, multi-skilled and multidisciplinary process which can be led by one person or one agency or several agencies. Teamworking shares the workload and improves communication and understanding between decision-makers.

A HIA uses a range of skills, knowledge and experience, much of which is transferable from other fields of practice. Not all of the roles require extensive expertise in HIA and many use transferable knowledge and skills such as research, policy, regulatory and legal, communication and data collection.

## **11. How do I know my HIA is fit for purpose?**

The effectiveness of HIAs could be evaluated in a number of ways such as, against the health outcomes identified within the organisation and/or local health and wellbeing partnership plans; measuring the number of HIAs undertaken; the way in which HIAs are undertaken; the impact on decision-making processes as well as progress towards improving public health outcomes.

HIAs can be quality assured using the WHIASU guidance [Quality Assurance Review Framework for Health Impact Assessment \(HIA\)](#).

## **12. Is there training available to help me carry out a HIA?**

WHIASU runs a number of free awareness and training courses both online and in person. Details can be accessed [here](#).

### **13. Is HIA a statutory requirement?**

All public bodies referred to in the HIA Regulations in S.4 of the [Public Health \(Wales\) Act 2017](#) must carry out a HIA in the circumstances specified in the Regulations such as when taking strategic decisions.

However, HIA has successfully been used voluntarily by a range of organisations across Wales for a number of years and will continue to be encouraged to demonstrate the effectiveness of projects and programmes on population groups, in topic areas ranging from Brexit, Covid 19, planning, health and the environment. Examples of previous HIAs can be found [here](#).

Note: The regulations relating to HIAs in Wales have not yet been enacted. The Welsh Government is currently consulting on the regulations. The [consultation](#) closes on 29 March 2024.

### **Further resources**

The WHIASU [website](#) contains a range of resources including previous HIAs, case studies, practice guides, checklists and training.