

Part II

SECTION 4

Preparing to introduce health impact assessment

Overview

Health impact assessment is a tool designed to support policy- and decision-making.

This section explores the ways in which health impact assessment can be used as a powerful catalyst for culture change within an organisation/partnership wishing to engage with the broader public health agenda.

Working through this section will help you to identify:

- *the benefits of conducting HIA*
- *how HIA can be built into the planning cycle and work programme of your organisation/partnership.*

4.1 The role of health impact assessment in decision-making

Health impact assessment (HIA) is a tool that can be used to integrate a concern to improve the public health into the development of policies, programmes and projects. It provides a mechanism by which it is possible for policy- and decision-makers to take account of the impacts on health of non-health policies.

For years, there has been a growing awareness and understanding of the many determinants of health; a corollary of this is the recognition that:

- the provision of health services alone is not sufficient to improve the health of a population;
- health gain can be achieved from the implementation of non-health policies, programmes and projects.

However, it is only within the last 10-15 years that the need to determine the health impacts of non-health policies has been highlighted as an important component of policy appraisal. Health impact assessment is a tool suited to, and developed for, this role.

Thus, the function of HIA is to act as a support to policy- and decision-making; it does not obviate the need to make decisions - judgement must still be brought to bear on the proposal and the implications of its implementation.

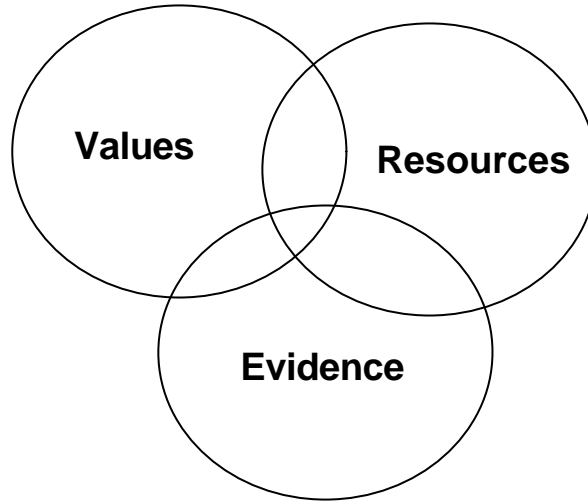
In general, there are three factors that can influence policy- or decision-making (*see Inset 4.A*):

- resources
- values
- evidence.

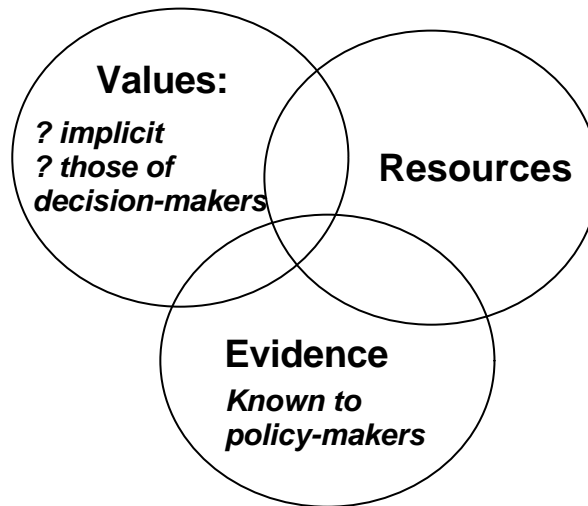
Inset 4.A:

Factors influencing policy

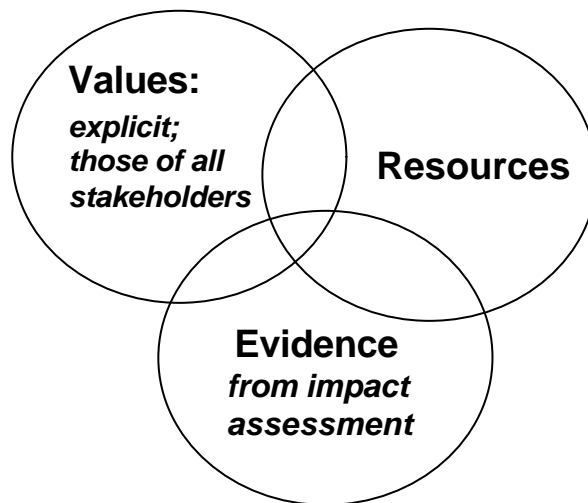
*Inset 4.A/1:
Three factors
influencing policy*



*Inset 4.A/2:
Policy-making
in the absence
of impact
assessment*



*Inset 4.A/3:
Policy-making
influenced by
impact
assessment*



In general, most decisions are based principally on values, which may not be made explicit and, in the main, tend to reflect those of the policy- or decision-makers, and the availability of resources (see *Inset 4.A/2*). However, the nature of the support provided by undertaking the process of HIA for policy- and decision-making is threefold (see *Inset 4.A/3*); it enables:

- the integration of the best available evidence on the factors that impact on health;
- the incorporation of the perceptions, experience and expectations of those affected by a policy or decisions taken about programmes and projects;
- the introduction of transparency and openness, such that values are made explicit and reflect those of the people affected by or involved in the implementation of a proposal as well as those of the policy- and decision-makers.

However, it is important to be aware that although HIA can be used to bring the implications for the public health directly into the consideration of policy- and decision-makers in both the public and private sectors, health gain for the local population may not be their only priority, and other priorities, such as wider economic benefits, may take precedence over health.

Despite this, HIA can be used as a powerful catalyst for increasing the awareness of broader health issues within an organisation or partnership, and thus for bringing about culture change. The use of HIA brings health into the mainstream of priorities facing policy- and decision-makers, and draws the focus to the broader public health agenda.

A list of the general benefits arising from conducting HIA is shown in *Inset 4.B*.

Signpost

- For the benefits of conducting HIA that were identified by participants during a process evaluation of the HIA of Houldsworth Mill re-development, see *Case-study 8.4.7*.

Inset 4.B:

The benefits of conducting health impact assessment
<p><i>Global benefit</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improved health for the population, but particularly for those groups that are vulnerable, disadvantaged or marginalised
<p><i>For the community</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Greater involvement in policy- and decision-making• Extension of the democratic process• Empowerment, and skills development• The elimination or amelioration of sources of disadvantage• The development and provision of local services and facilities that have a greater correspondence with local needs
<p><i>For organisations and partnerships</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ability to demonstrate a wider concern for the well-being of the population• Ability to demonstrate the wider benefits or added value of service provision• A shift in focus within service provision from one of remediation to one of the prevention of negative impacts• Organisational development and learning• Improved quality and outcomes of partnership working• Greater inter-agency understanding• Shared vision, values, and priorities

4.2 Building health impact assessment into an organisation's or partnership's work

4.2.1 Establishing a foundation for the use of health impact assessment

Of central importance when establishing a foundation for the use of HIA in any organisation or partnership is the development of an overarching policy to engage with the process as appropriate. The need to develop such a policy will reflect the current policy drivers outlined in *Section 3.1* and, in particular, the requirements:

- to improve the public health, i.e. maximise health gain within a particular context of service provision;
- to obtain value for money (VFM) during service provision.

During the development of a policy to engage with the process of HIA, it is important to explore and reach a consensus about:

- the meaning health holds for the organisation/partnership;
- the values underlying the organisation's/partnership's general approach to health and health gain;
- the values that will underpin the organisation's/partnership's general approach to undertaking HIA (*see Section 3.2*);
- the overall aims for the organisation or partnership in conducting HIA (*see Inset 4.C*).

During this process, it is vital to obtain:

- the commitment of senior managers and other senior figures in the organisation, for example, depending on the constitution, this will include non-executive directors, trustees, governors, or elected members;
- the co-operation of middle managers.

It is sometimes helpful to make use of external levers when introducing a new concept. One such lever is the Annual Report of the Director of Public Health. An excellent example in this context is the Report for East London and City Health Authority of 1998/99 in which the health effects of urban regeneration are investigated, and the need to evaluate investment in regeneration is underlined. HIA is highlighted as a tool that can be used to achieve these aims.

Inset 4.C:

General aims for the use of health impact assessment in an organisation or partnership
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To improve the public health by encouraging an awareness and understanding of health at every level of policy- and decision-making • To establish a concern to improve the public health as routine during policy- and decision-making • To minimise the harmful effects and maximise the beneficial effects on health of the implementation of policies, programmes or projects.

Signpost

- For the values identified by members of the Healthy Hillingdon partnership underlying their approach to health and health gain, *see Inset 5.C*.

4.2.2 Integrating health impact assessment into an organisation's or partnership's planning cycle

Once a policy to conduct HIA as appropriate has been developed, it is important to integrate the process of HIA (described in Section 2) into the work cycle of the organisation or partnership. In the first instance, it is advisable to identify how HIA will fit into the cycle of strategic planning and policy development. A cycle of strategic planning and policy development that is probably applicable in most organisations is shown in *Inset 4.D*.

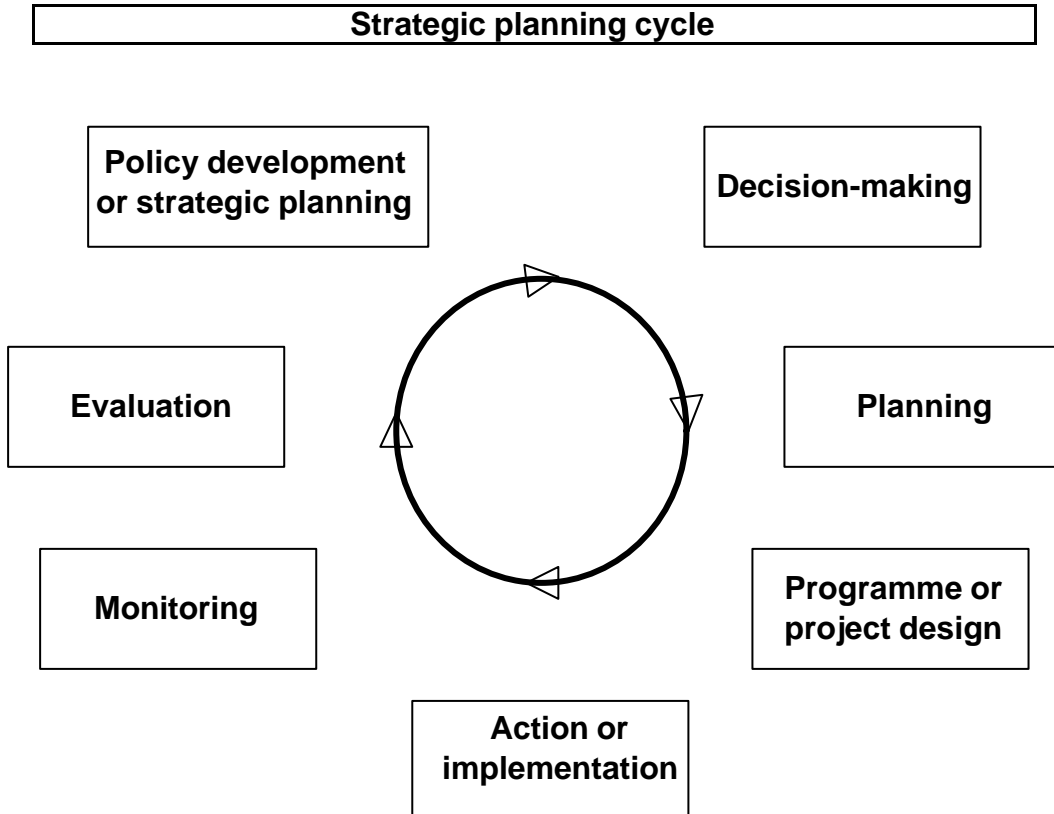
As already discussed in Section 2, there are five core steps in HIA – screening, scoping, appraisal, decision-making, and monitoring and evaluation - some of which are common to the strategic planning/policy development cycle presented in *Inset 4.D*. It is possible, therefore, to incorporate the process of HIA around these common steps. Thus, to show the inter-relationship of the two processes and how it is possible to integrate HIA into the strategic planning cycle, in *Inset 4.E*, the core steps for **prospective HIA** and, in *Inset 4.F*, the core steps in **retrospective HIA** have been combined with those for strategic planning or policy development. For *Insets 4.E and 4.F*, steps in the strategic planning framework are shown as lozenges; steps in the process of HIA are shown as oblong boxes; steps common to both processes are shown as lozenges within oblong boxes.

It is important to be aware that, during the introduction and initial integration of HIA into the planning cycle and subsequent work programme of an organisations/partnership, the screening step may be rudimentary. As HIA becomes an integral part of planning, the process of screening will evolve such that an appropriate and effective screening tool will be developed.

This general plan for the integration of HIA into the work cycle is applicable when considering work within:

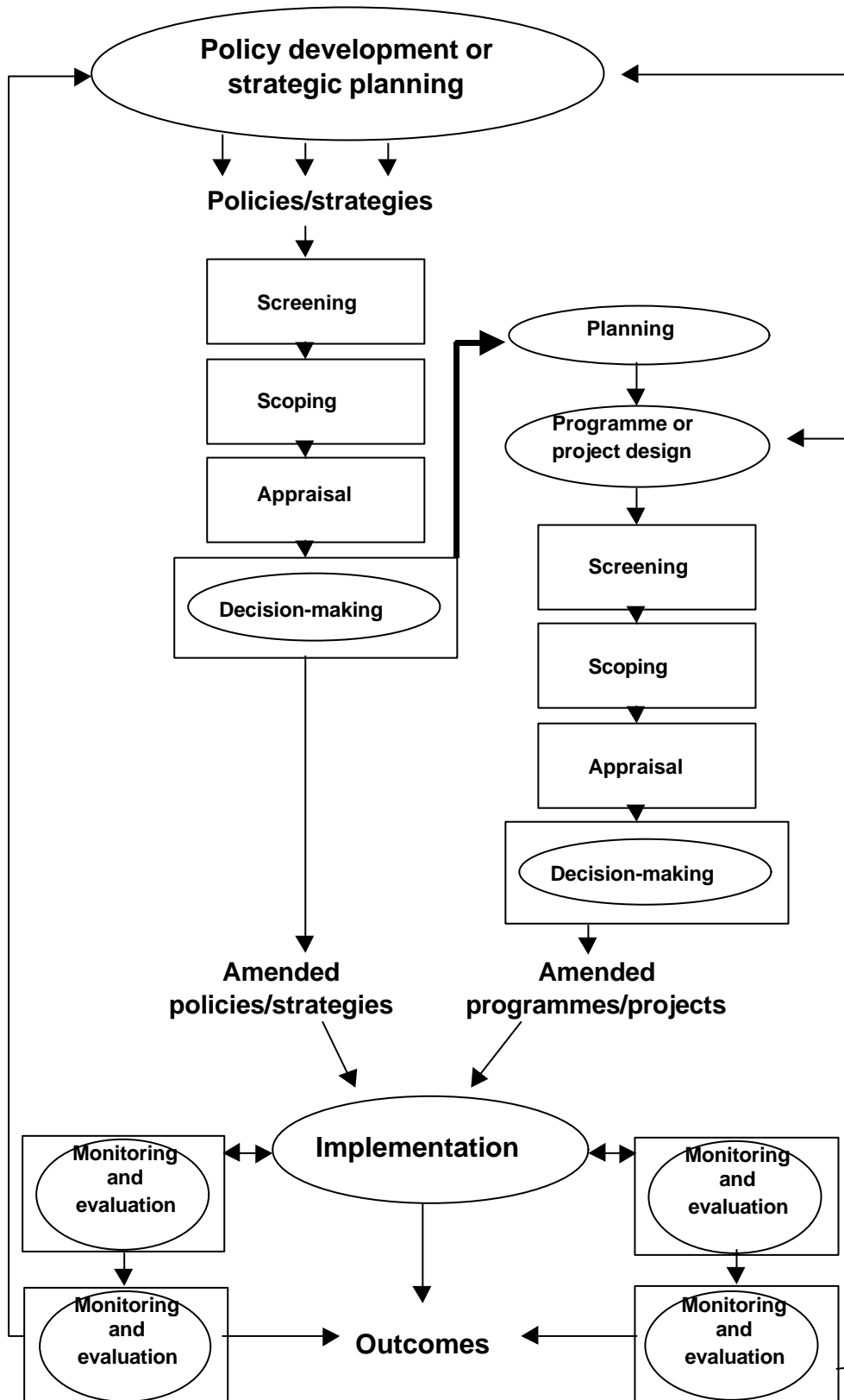
- individual departments of a large organisation;
- an organisation as a whole;
- a partnership among various organisations.

Inset 4.D:



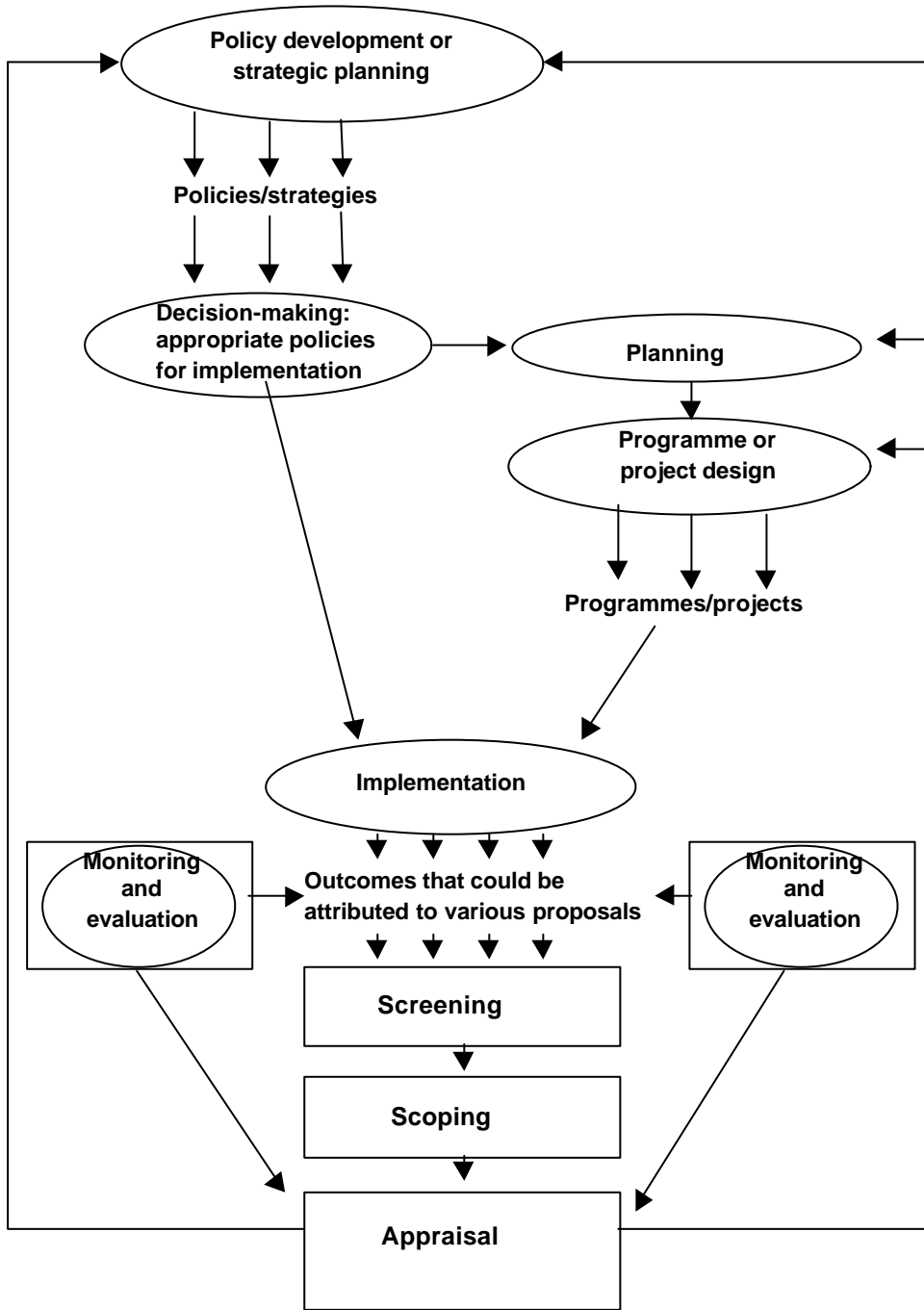
Inset 4.E:

Health impact assessment applied prospectively



Inset 4.F:

Health impact assessment applied retrospectively



A vital part of integrating HIA into an organisation's or partnership's planning cycle is the need to identify resource requirements both for conducting HIA and for the modification of proposals arising from HIA. For the Merseyside Health Action Zone, a budget of £300,000 over 3 years has been notionally allocated to these two activities: £60,000 has been allocated to conducting HIAs on priorities identified in the HAZ programme (see *Case-study 8.3.1*), and £240,000 to fund the implementation of recommendations arising from health impact appraisal.

The resources necessary for HIA are shown below in *Inset 4.G*.

Inset 4.G:

Resources for health impact assessment
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Personnel• Time• Money• Data• Access to data sources• Access to databases/library resources• Networks and contacts• Facilities, including meeting venues• IT equipment

Leverage that can be used to facilitate the integration of HIA into an organisation's or partnership's planning cycle include:

- incorporating health improvement into the strategic objectives;
- incorporating health improvement into the corporate plan.

Signpost

- For examples in which some of the resources needed to undertake the HIA are detailed, see *Case-study 8.3.1*, *Case-study 8.3.2*, *Case-study 8.4.2*, *Case-study 8.4.6*, and *Case-study 8.5.2*.

4.2.3 Integrating health impact assessment into the specific context of an organisation's or partnership's work programme

For the effective integration of HIA into an organisation's or partnership's work programme, it is advisable to conduct it within the context of one or more specific policy or strategic frameworks. This will ensure that:

- the approach to achieving health gain will be systematic across a spectrum of proposals in space and time;
- limited resources can be targeted effectively, such that HIA is applied to those proposals either with the potential to give rise to serious health impacts or of significance to the organisation or partnership in terms of priority or level of investment.

The dangers of conducting HIA ad hoc on individual proposals outside particular policy and/or strategic frameworks are several:

- a dissipation of effort and waste of resources on proposals that may not have the most significant health impacts or be of importance to the organisation/partnership;
- a lack of coherence in the approach to health gain;
- outputs that may bear little relation to the wider policy direction.

Examples of specific policy and strategic frameworks in which local HIA can be conducted are shown in *Inset 4.H*.

Inset 4.H:

Examples of specific policy and strategic frameworks In which local health impact assessment can be conducted		
PARTNERSHIP	LOCAL GOVERNMENT	HEALTH SERVICES
Health Action Zones, Education Action Zones & Employment Action Zones	Best Value	Our Healthier Nation priority areas
Health Improvement Programme (HimP)	Unitary Development Plan	Access to services
Local Agenda 21 (LA21)	Local Plan	Mode of provision of services
Single Regeneration Budget (SRB)	Sustainability Appraisal	Location of services
New Deal for Communities (NDC)	Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)	New Build
Neighbourhood Renewal Schemes	Social Impact Assessment (SIA)	Development of Primary Care Groups (PCGs), Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) and Care Trusts
Sure Start initiatives	Local Transport Plan	Health Promotion
Drug Reference Group-Drug Action Teams (DRG-DAT)	Housing Investment Plans (HIP)	
Joint Investment Plans (JIP)	Anti-Poverty Strategy	
Community Safety Plan		
Healthy Living Centre (HLC) initiatives		
Health for All (HfA) initiatives		
Healthy Cities initiatives		

Levers that can be used to facilitate the integration of HIA into an organisation's or partnership's work programme include:

- stipulating a requirement to include the implications for health in all reports, and policy documents;
- conducting HIA as a pilot exercise on a particular proposal;
- including health improvement as a criterion in performance management frameworks.

Signposts

- For HIAs linked to the HIMP, *see Case-study 8.3.1 and Case-study 8.3.2.*
- For HIAs linked to a HAZ, *see Case-study 5.3.1 and Case-study 8.3.4.*
- For an HIA linked to NDC, *see Case-study 8.4.1.*
- For HIAs linked to SRB, *see Case-study 8.4.2, Case-study 8.4.5 and Case-study 8.4.6.*
- For HIAs linked to Local Transport Plans, *see Case-study 8.3.1, Case-study 8.3.2 and Case-study 8.3.4.*

4.2.4 Building the capacity to undertake health impact assessment in an organisation or partnership

It is likely that in order to introduce health impact assessment into any organisation or partnership education and training of various personnel will be required. At a general level, many different staff will need to be given information about the process of HIA and its applications. For those personnel who might be expected to conduct HIA, some specific training will be required, especially as the capacity to undertake HIA necessitates the application of a broad range of skills (see *Inset 4.1*). In the Merseyside Health Action Zone, £104,000 has been notionally allocated to capacity building for HIA over 3 years, £55,000 of which is earmarked to provide places on a variety of training courses and programmes.

Although, in the absence of certain skills within an organisation or partnership, it is possible to commission external assessors to undertake the work, the commissioning of HIA, and its management, do require the application of the general management skills (shown in *Inset 4.1*), and an awareness of the effective application of the other specialist skills.

Apart from training personnel, it is important to raise awareness and develop an understanding of HIA as a tool among the senior policy- and/or decision-makers in an organisation, such as the elected members of councils, non-executive directors of various organisations, and trustees in the voluntary sector. For example, Vale of the White Horse District Council initiated a series of informal evening forums for elected members, the first of which was on health and the role of HIA. Subsequent to this meeting, which two-thirds of the members attended, the council formally voted to incorporate HIA into the appraisal of proposals when appropriate.

Signposts

- For examples in which the skills needed to undertake the HIA are detailed, see *Case-study 8.4.2 and Case-study 8.5.2*.
- For an example in which the external expert advice is detailed, see *Case-study 8.3.1*.

Inset 4.1:

The skills required to undertake health impact assessment
<p><i>Specialist subject skills</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public health • Epidemiology • Social sciences • Environmental sciences • Toxicology <p><i>Research skills</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literature searching • Literature reviews • Statistics and data analysis • Design and conduct of various methods of stakeholder consultation/community participation <p><i>General management skills</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project management • Team-building • Facilitation • Negotiation • Networking • Communication and media • Political • Horizon-scanning

Review questions – Section 4

- Within your organisation/partnership, what value can you see in using HIA as a tool to judge the effects of a policy, programme or project? What on-going work might you be able to link it into?
- Can you think of ways in which HIA could act as a support to policy- and decision-making in your organisation/partnership? Can you think of specific situations in which HIA could act as a support?
- Within your organisation/partnership, how might you develop and share understanding about the benefits of conducting HIA, both to your organisation/partnership and the community?
- Has your organisation/partnership considered ways in which HIA can be fitted into the cycle of strategic planning and policy development? If not, might you consider the use of levers to facilitate the process, such as incorporating health improvement into the strategic objectives or the corporate plan?
- Within the sphere of work of your organisation/partnership, which policy framework offers most opportunity to apply and benefit from HIA? Do you currently take full advantage of this opportunity?
- Has your organisation/partnership considered ways to build capacity to undertake HIA? Have you explored the availability of specific training schemes, for instance?
- How might you develop the ability of your organisation/partnership to carry out strategic decisions in relation to HIA?
- What steps might you take to gain the commitment of senior managers within your organisation/partnership to conducting HIA on its policies, programmes and projects?
- How might you secure the co-operation of middle managers in conducting HIA on proposals being considered by your organisation/partnership?
- How might you raise the awareness of elected members/trustees/non-executive directors about the importance and usefulness of HIA to the work of your organisation/partnership?