

Spokane City Council Fact Sheet

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Health Impact Assessment



DEFINITION:

A Health Impact Assessment (HIA) is:

- A combination of procedures, methods, tools, and processes used to evaluate policies and projects for potential health effects on a population.
- A process that evaluates health in a broader and more holistic context.
- A tool used to emphasize not just disease prevention, but economic, social, environmental, and other relevant elements.
- A proactive, less expensive and less litigious document used to inform environmental impact reports, or stand alone.

For example, land use and public policy decisions can potentially contribute to health inequities, chronic disease, increased sprawl and traffic, decreased air and water quality, loss of green space, inappropriate siting of facilities, and other unwanted health consequences, such as asthma, obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and cancers. HIA seeks to minimize these adverse health impacts and promote more thoughtful and responsible decisions with respect to community health.

City of Spokane Downtown Plan Update Rapid Health Impact Assessment Results

Chapter 5 Multi-modal Transportation Pedestrian Strategies

A rapid HIA was conducted that looks at policy statements supporting multimodal transportation, specifically bike and pedestrian connections, which are found in Chapter 5 of the 2008 Spokane Downtown Plan Update. This was a collaborative effort between The City of Spokane Planning Department, Spokane Regional Health District and The Lands Council.

Findings and Recommendations

Impacts on Health Determinants:

Air Quality: Improving pedestrian facilities allows for more people to take trips without automobiles. A reduction in the number of vehicle trips decreases emissions, leading to improved air quality conditions.

Noise: Automobiles are strong contributors of noise. Improving pedestrian conditions allows for more people to utilize forms of active transportation, less automobiles should help reduce noise levels in downtown.

Safety: Increasing traffic calming techniques, lighting, and pedestrian crossings while maintaining the Centennial Trail should all help improve the physical safety of pedestrians in downtown Spokane, decrease bicycle and pedestrian collisions, and reduce the level of crime.

Mental Health: Improving pedestrian conditions will lead to a more pedestrian-friendly downtown. Walkable communities are thought to have enhanced community well-being, which can have positive impacts on mental health.

Parks and Natural Space: Improving pedestrian conditions will improve access to parks and natural spaces in and around downtown.

Private Goods and Services: Improving pedestrian conditions will lead to better access to public goods and services provided in downtown.

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Transportation: Improving the pedestrian environment of downtown allows for easier access to public transportation and increases opportunities for alternative/active transportation options. Lessening money spent on fuel and vehicle maintenance allows for more dollars to be spent elsewhere in the downtown community.

Social Equity: Individuals and families with low incomes, in addition to people under 18 and over 65, are more likely to use alternative modes of transportation if pedestrian conditions are improved. Since lower income people with vehicles spend a larger percentage of their income on fuel and maintenance costs, providing viable transportation alternatives allows their dollars to be spent elsewhere in the community. Improved conditions, however, could also lead to gentrification due to the attractive nature of a pedestrian friendly environment. It will be important to retain a diverse population in downtown Spokane.

Physical Activity: Improved pedestrian conditions should increase physical activity, thus resulting in fewer obese residents and a cost savings of....

Recommendations:

- Development of pedestrian zone. An example: a general pedestrian zone downtown between Lincoln and Stevens and Spokane Falls Boulevard and 1st Avenue, during the weekends, for designated hours, to create a pedestrian friendly environment.
- Use HIA to prioritize pedestrian improvements near public transit stops, areas with high pedestrian activity levels, and large places of employment to encourage physical activity, induce public transit demand, and improve, among other elements, air quality and social equity.
- Encourage City Council research using HIA in the future as a tool to aid policy and project development and to add health impact considerations to decision-making.

References

Dannenberg, A. L., Bhatia, R., Cole, B. L., Heaton, S. K., Feldman, J. D., & Rutt, C. D. (2008). Use of health impact assessment in the U.S: 27 case studies, 1999-2007. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 34(3), 241-256. doi:10.1016/j.amepre.2007.11.015

Benefits gained by communities conducting HIAs:

- Places public health on the agenda and results in better-informed decisions with respect to health
- Promotes collaboration between diverse disciplines
- Can help prevent adverse health issues from occurring
- Promotes positive health outcomes
- Aids in addressing environmental and social justice
- Encourages sustainable development
- Looks at "true" cost rather than short-term initial cost of a project

"The use of health impact assessment (HIA) has been increasing in the United States in recent years, fueled by a growing recognition among public health, planning, and transportation professionals that land use and transportation planning decisions can have a substantial impact on the public's health." (Dannenberg p.241) There are at least 27 completed HIAs that cover issues from living-wage to urban redevelopment and land use in the United States and many others recently finalized or currently active. There is wide use of HIA in Europe and Australia; outcomes in the U.S. and abroad have been both successful and influential. The use of health impact assessments in the Spokane area can enable planners, public health officials, decision makers, and relevant constituents to create healthy and viable communities.