



Review of Health Impact Assessment (HIA) in Ireland December 2009

Executive Summary

In 2009 the Institute of Public Health in Ireland (IPH) commissioned Community Evaluation Northern Ireland (CENI) to undertake a review of HIA in Ireland. This was a follow up to a baseline study of HIA in Ireland conducted by the IPH in 2001 which indicated that HIA knowledge throughout Ireland was relatively limited and that there was 'little knowledge of HIA as a term or concept outside of a core group of organisations and workers engaged in high-level policy and service development.'

The terms of reference for the review included:

- Detail progress and achievements of HIA for the period 2001 to 2009
- Assess current levels of awareness and activity
- Provide suggestions for the direction of future work.

CENI conducted their review through a questionnaire administered to training programme participants and stakeholder interviews.

The responses to the training programme participant questionnaire, the review of support materials and activities carried out, and consultations with key stakeholders, have all indicated that IPH has had a substantial impact in relation to:

- Developing appropriate HIA tools and guidelines
- Promoting the use of these
- Providing appropriate training and capacity building
- Providing follow-up support
- Providing networking opportunities
- Raising the awareness of HIA and
- Conducting HIAs.

The consultations with key stakeholders indicated that IPH work in this area has established IPH as the primary provider of HIA support services and advocacy in the South as well as (with the possible exception of Belfast Healthy Cities in the greater Belfast area and Ards) in the North.

Difficulties with implementing HIA were identified at both the strategic as well as the operational/practical level.

The latter refers to issues such as the lack of resources (time, staff, capacity, finance) and the former includes issues such as the lack of a legislative requirement and responsibility for implementing HIA.

Commenting on other areas of work where IPH might be able to make a further contribution, respondents focused on lobbying for HIA to be given appropriate legislative/statutory authority; and providing more 'hands on support' (including actually carrying out more HIAs). The latter of these would, of course, have considerable resource implications if IPH was to take on the role of completing HIAs in every case where they were deemed to be needed. In the case of both the role of other agencies also needs to be considered.

In short, the main findings emanating from this review emphasise the need for a triadic approach to enhancing HIA throughout the island of Ireland in future. Firstly, the process needs to be streamlined; secondly, appropriate capacity-building needs to be provided; and thirdly, there needs to be the political will, at the highest level, to support the implementation of these developments.

The findings contained in this review provide; an assessment of the achievements of the IPH to date in relation to developing HIA on the island of Ireland; an assessment of the barriers and challenges (strategic and operational) to effectively implementing it and, a number of action points that need to be given urgent attention in order to address these.

The recommendations formulated by CENI which they saw as being useful to progress HIA are:

- The Department of Health, Social Services & Public Safety (DHSSPS) in Northern Ireland should review its responsibilities for HIA as outlined in 'Investing for Health'
- The DHSSPS should also ensure that the future of HIA is included on the agenda of the Ministerial Group on Public Health
- The Department of Health and Children (DoHC) in the Republic of Ireland should review its responsibilities for HIA as outlined in 'Quality and Fairness' and other key strategy documents
- IPH should explore ways of streamlining HIA, possibly through developing a tool that can be completed on line
- The HIA Network should approach the Office of the First Minister & Deputy First Minister in the North and the Department of the Taoiseach in the South, as well as the North/South Ministerial Council to discuss the drawing up of appropriate legislation to make HIA a legal obligation.
- Both Departments also need to consider the allocation of appropriate resources to enable HIA to be carried out as applicable
- IPH should consult with other relevant agencies and government departments with a view to securing resources for, and developing, an Integrated Assessment Tool in the Republic of Ireland.