

PUBLIC HEALTH PROGRAM SURVEY- Other PH Prevention

Contact Information

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Short Title: Health Impact Assessment of the proposed Humboldt County General Plan Update

Program Location: Humboldt County, California, USA

Objectives and Goals:

Health Impact Assessment (HIA) is a set of tools, methods and procedures that examines a development project, a general plan, or a policy on the basis of its potential health impacts. The goal of our HIA was to determine potential positive or negative health impacts of the General Plan Update alternatives, which varied in the projected population and extent of infill vs. growth in previously undeveloped areas of our rural Northern California county. The intent was to make the link between land use planning and public health outcomes explicit to policy makers and community members and offer recommendations to enhance the positive health impacts of policy-making and to eliminate reduce or mitigate negative impacts.

Methods:

Our PH branch partnered with the Humboldt Community Development Services Planning Division, Humboldt Partnership for Active Living, Human Impact Partners and representatives of community based organizations to; select indicators for evaluation; collect and analyze local data using research, expertise and experience to judge potential health impacts; report results to stakeholders and decision-makers; and evaluate and monitor the effects of the HIA.

Program Length:

8/2007 – 3/2008 to produce the document. Reporting results and evaluation of impact is ongoing.

Number of target population reached by effort:

The health officer presented the findings to 22 other community meetings and meetings of elected officials. At least a dozen thorough stories were reported on TV and newspapers.

Demographic Info:

Humboldt County is the size of the state of Connecticut and has a population of 139,000. Approximately 60% of the population lives in “urban” centers with density is above 1,000 people per square mile. The poverty level is significantly above the state average; local timber and fishing industries are shrinking. Eighty-five percent of the population is Caucasian, 7% Native American and 4% Latino. The senior population is projected to grow 25% in 20 years, while other age groups will remain stable. The culture is automobile-based.

Overall Cost:

\$75,000 (included development of an extensive “healthy development measurement tool” with indicators which can be used for other HIA’s)

Funding Sources:

___10___% Local

___90___% Other, please explain: The California Endowment percentages ARE estimates

Outcomes: (all statistically significant, $p < 0.0001$):

Twenty three of 35 indicators would be positively impacted by focused growth as compared to 30 of 35 indicators deemed to be negatively impacted by permitting an expanded development pattern with more housing overall. The health officer submitted a draft of the Transportation Element to the Planning Division and many of the health promoting ideas suggested were used by staff. General awareness of the health implications of development has grown amongst elected officials across the county, policy makers and the public. Community involvement in public hearings about the general plan update has increased, spearheaded by the community-based organization Healthy Humboldt. The final update has yet to be adopted. The Harbor District is soliciting a contractor to specifically include human health impact in developing the EIR (Environmental Impact Report) for the proposed port development.

Did you make any estimates regarding costs deferred, outbreaks averted or deaths prevented?

It would not be possible to quantify such an impact.

Additional Information:

The full report is available at the website: humpal.org, including the complete set of indicators in the healthy development measurement tool.

Planners are often aware of the health implications of their work and welcome the fresh attention of public health to help articulate the community benefit.

Community participation was vital to this effort, both in guiding priorities for evaluation but also in building buy-in to the outcomes.

Development and community planning efforts can have a major impact on the community’s health. For example, encouraging people to exercise and eat right

may be unsuccessful if it is difficult for them to buy healthy food and get physical activity easily in the course of daily living.

Future Plans:

Funds have been depleted. The Public Health Branch will continue to communicate results throughout the community, and encourage performance of HIA or a health component of the Environment Impact Report for major development projects, providing local data when asked. We are continuing to partner on community forums on such topics as; safe routes to schools, and attractive higher density multi-income housing. We will continue mutual trainings with the planning departments and build capacity in our staff to undertake analysis of proposed development.