



Center for Health Impact Evaluation Strategic Plan 2019 – 2021

Introduction

The Center for Health Impact Evaluation (CHIE) at the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (DPH) is one of the few centers in the US conducting policy-focused Health Impact Assessments (HIAs) within a public health agency. In recent years, with the rise in awareness of the social determinants of health and the health impacts of multi-sector policy decisions, HIAs have become more recognized for their value in informing decision- and policy-makers and particularly in promoting health and equity in public policy.

HIA is a systematic process for assessing the potential impacts of pending policy, program or project decisions outside of the health sector on the health of populations and the distribution of those effects within populations. HIAs inform decision-makers by providing recommendations on ways to address potential health benefits, either to augment and/or mitigate potential harms of proposed programs, projects or policies.

The HIA process:

- ◆ Examines potential health effects of a proposed policy, program or project;
- ◆ Uses best available data sources and analytical methods, taking a broad conception of health that includes both health outcomes (e.g., diseases, disabilities, conditions) and the social determinants of health (e.g., housing, income, social connections).
- ◆ Engages impacted stakeholders in the process; and
- ◆ Provides recommendations to monitor and manage potential health effects of policies, programs or projects that may or may not be directly related to health per se, including the built environment, socio-economic factors, etc.

LACDPH began conducting HIAs in the mid-2000s, but they were done infrequently and on an ad hoc basis under the auspices of different divisions within the Department. In 2013 the Department was awarded grants from the Health Impact Project (a collaborative project of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the PEW Charitable Trusts) and The California Endowment to complete several new HIAs and to build capacity at DPH to conduct HIAs. During the first two years of the grant period, DPH completed two rapid HIAs and a full HIA. Those HIAs were completed with the help of grant funded contract staff in collaboration with staff of different divisions within the department.

In October 2015, as part of the effort to build HIA capacity in the department, DPH hired a permanent staff person to manage the HIA efforts of the two grant programs. That new hire was housed within the Policy Analysis Unit of the Office of Health Assessment and Epidemiology.

By early 2017, the new HIA manager had completed two HIAs on local ballot measures related to affordable housing and homelessness, including one requested by a Board office. When the director of the Policy Analysis Unit took a promotional opportunity with the County Chief Executive Office, the Policy Analysis Unit was renamed the Center for Health Impact Evaluation (CHIE) and the HIA manager was promoted to be the director of the CHIE. Including the new director, the CHIE now has four permanent county staff items dedicated to conducting HIAs and other policy-oriented analysis projects within DPH.

Recognition of the importance of CHIE's work is reflected in the two most recent departmental strategic plans – the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health Strategic Plan (2018-2023) and the Center for Health Equity Action Plan (2018-2023). In both plans, CHIE is included as a lead partner in:

- ◆ Using HIA to support the policy change work of DPH and its partners.
- ◆ Leveraging community engagement in the identification of HIA topics.
- ◆ Effective, accessible dissemination of HIAs and other data driven policy research.

This expanding role in the Department, as well as the increasing interest in and opportunities to expand the work on conducting HIAs and other policy analyses, inspired the development of a CHIE strategic plan focused on:

- ◆ Building on CHIE's role and accomplishments to date.
- ◆ Clarifying products, services and project selection criteria.
- ◆ Leveraging CHIE's assets through inventorying data sets, models and other resources.
- ◆ Strengthening capacity.
- ◆ Envisioning future potential and defining aspirations.

Developing the Plan

The planning process involved a series of working sessions with the CHIE team, informed by confidential interviews with 35 people, including all six current CHIE staff members; 21 colleagues from within the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (DPH), including Dr. Barbara Ferrer, Director and Dr. Paul Simon, Chief Science Officer; and eight external informants, including CHIE partners/colleagues and experts in the Health Impact Assessment field.

Themes from the interviews included the following:

- ◆ A great deal of admiration and respect for the CHIE team's capabilities and accomplishments.
- ◆ Understanding of the current and potential value and importance of the work for policy making in a number of contexts.
- ◆ Great interest in increased collaboration and partnership.
- ◆ The need to create greater awareness of the value add, and to improve visibility and communication of value internally at DPH and externally to County departments, agencies, CBOs, municipal and other community leaders.
- ◆ Encouragement to increase the accessibility of the HIA reports and the capacity to produce reports for a range of audiences.

The core elements and considerations for the plan were developed through a full day retreat, during which the CHIE team reviewed the interview themes, further explored the themes through discussion and identified a number of key issues and factors influencing their work in the present and future, as follows:

Clarification of CHIE services and products, methodology for project selection

The group identified the need for greater clarification about HIA (and evaluation) topic selection, generating a strong consensus for designing an intentional approach that would help to:

- ◆ Clarify and support CHIE's role in DPH and beyond.
- ◆ Define the focus of CHIE's work in analysis on policy.
- ◆ Define levels of services that CHIE can provide (i.e. Rapid HIA, full HIA, etc.).
- ◆ Allow for more transparency in the process of topic selection.
- ◆ Help CHIE keep focused on its mission within DPH.
- ◆ Inform messaging about what CHIE does (CHIE identity).
- ◆ Explore and develop criteria for other kinds of policy analyses in CHIE's portfolio.

Working with others

The group also identified the importance of building relationships within the department and with external partners, as well as engaging communities in our work from the design and selection of projects to the sharing of reports and recommendations. Key points included:

- ◆ Enhance processes for how we work with other people/units in the department
- ◆ Develop strategies to promote/market our skills to other departments, projects, and agencies.
- ◆ Follow HIA practice guidelines for project selection.
- ◆ Define the role of community voice in our work. Consider best practices to help define the optimal balance between research rigor and strong community engagement.
- ◆ Determine what engagement strategies are working well and what we would like to improve or change.

Dissemination, Sharing the Work

A strong theme from the interviews – recognizing the value of the HIAs – centered on increased awareness about the work as well as dissemination – getting the work out to a range of audiences beyond DPH and County leadership. Points raised during the retreat discussion included:

- ◆ Clearer process and policy about dissemination, increased accessibility of information.
- ◆ Getting the information to the appropriate audiences: identify audiences and best methods/means of reaching, presenting to them.
- ◆ Value add/importance of evaluating the impact of our work; leverage the role of qualitative data in communicating our value through stories.
- ◆ Potential for (more) unified marketing/communications under DPH communications resources and strategy.

The group then engaged in a review of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats/Challenges (SWOT). This SWOT analysis identified priorities to serve as guiding concepts for development of the plan. The priorities were then organized into two sets: Externally Focused (Programs/Services, Communications, Relationships and Community Engagement) and Internally Focused (Capacity and Fund Development).

Programs/Services, Communications, Relationships and Community Engagement

- *Clarify services so that they are aligned with our mission.*
- *Create clear criteria for project selection.*
- *Leverage relationships and community engagement opportunities.*
- *Compile bibliography from previous HIA projects; also create an index/list of previous products, data sets, etc. to leverage for future projects and requests.*
- *Diversify our communications and marketing techniques to broaden our reach.*

Capacity and Finances

- *Define capacity*
- *Salaries, project related costs – incentives, report production, etc.*
- *Supplemental funding opportunities and cultivating relationships*
- *Current fiscal environment*

Defining the Mission, Expressing the Mission

During the planning discussions, the CHIE team also spent time discussing the development of a mission statement. The group developed the following summary statements during the first planning session to answer the question: What does the CHIE do?

- ◆ We inform policy decision making with evidence about how policies may impact health, both positively and negatively.
- ◆ We use data to paint a more complete picture for the public and policymakers on how a policy could impact lives of all members of our community.
- ◆ We look at how policy affects health to recommend changes.
- ◆ We inform how new policies and programs impact the health of LA County residents.

At a second session, they reviewed the above statements and developed the following synthesized statements to consider in developing a mission statement:

- ◆ Using a community inclusive and data driven approach, we give policy-makers the information they need to make decisions with health impacts in mind.
- ◆ Informing policy makers to make decisions in the interest of community health.
- ◆ We bring health into the policy conversation.

The staff then developed the following finalized mission statement to provide the guiding context and purpose for the strategic plan.

The mission of the Center for Health Impact Evaluation at the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health is:

Through rigorous analysis and authentic community engagement, advance the consideration of health impacts in public policy development and implementation to promote health equity in Los Angeles County.

STRATEGIC PLAN OVERVIEW

Plan Framework

The following framework for the strategic plan was developed from review of the planning session discussions. The framework is comprised of four areas of focus: Core Work, Partnerships, Capacity and Presence/Visibility.

GOAL I: Core Work

Increase the impact of CHIE products and services by clearly defining their purposes, standardizing project selection criteria, improving community engagement strategies, and monitoring project outputs and outcomes.

- ◆ Clearly define the types of products and services provided and their intended purposes.
- ◆ Clearly articulate criteria and methodology for selecting Health Impact Assessments (HIAs).
- ◆ Clearly define community engagement strategies:
 - for each type of project
 - at specific time points in the process
 - identify and track measures of community engagement.
- ◆ Apply selection criteria to identify three priority HIA topics annually in collaboration with Center for Health Equity (CHE) Data Advisory Board (DAB).
- ◆ Develop and implement Results-Based-Accountability framework for HIAs conducted by CHIE. Framework will include metrics for tracking HIA process, community engagement, and outcomes.
- ◆ Conduct at least one HIA annually.
- ◆ Conduct at least one additional non-HIA project annually.
- ◆ Write-up and submit results of all HIAs and other projects to peer-reviewed journals for publication.

GOAL II: Partnerships

Develop effective relationships with other programs within DPH and external to DPH, including other LA County departments and relevant community-based organizations, in order to increase the reach and relevance of our work.

- ◆ Explore mutual benefits of internal and external relationships in terms of how they can improve CHIE's work and how that work can benefit internal and external partners.
- ◆ Conduct outreach meetings with Service Planning Area (SPA)-based staff to share what CHIE does, how it could benefit work in the SPAs, and how SPA staff and their community partners can be engaged in CHIE work.
- ◆ Conduct outreach meetings with County Departments relevant to prioritized HIA topics.
- ◆ Track engagement and satisfaction of internal and external partners with CHIE work.

GOAL III: Capacity

Identify resources and staffing needs required to enhance CHIE's long-term impact and seek internal and external support to meet needs.

- ◆ Track/identify numbers and types of projects CHIE currently must turn down due to lack of staffing and other resources.
- ◆ Determine resources and staffing needed to be responsive to all potential projects.
- ◆ Justify additional staffing needs to DPH leadership for inclusion in next annual Department budget.
- ◆ Identify additional non-staff resource needs (e.g., data, software, gift card incentives, food and logistical support from CBOs) and develop strategy for seeking foundation support for these resources.
- ◆ Develop criteria for the types of external project-specific funding that would align with CHIE strategic goals.
- ◆ Identify professional development needs and establish professional development goals for CHIE staff in order to enhance the quality of CHIE products and services.

GOAL IV: Presence/Visibility

Increase CHIE's visibility both internally and externally by making products more accessible and website more user-friendly.

- ◆ Regularly update CHIE web site to make it more user friendly and engaging to internal and external audiences.
- ◆ Actively promote updated web site within the department and health agency.
- ◆ Train CHIE staff in use of InDesign to make products look more visually appealing.
- ◆ Develop templates for brief versions of HIA reports that are more accessible to the public.