



# HEALTH IMPACT ASSESSMENTS HELP LINK POLICY DECISIONS WITH EFFECTS ON PUBLIC WELL-BEING

## Introduction

Chronic conditions like heart disease, stroke, cancer and diabetes are among the most common, costly and preventable of all health problems in the United States. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), chronic diseases cause more than seven out of 10 deaths among Americans each year. Like the rest of the United States, Kansas has seen an increase in the rate of chronic conditions among its residents that contribute to higher health care costs and poor quality of life. In 2010, about one-third of Kansas adults were obese and more than one in four adults in Kansas had arthritis.

To address the prevalence of chronic disease, policymakers can start to think about health in a new way. Helping Kansans achieve good health requires a multifaceted approach, such as improving access to affordable, quality health care services and creating an environment that helps them make healthy choices.

As discussed in this brief, health impact assessments (HIAs) can be a valuable tool for policymakers seeking to understand the health impacts of the policies they consider.

## The National HIA Landscape

Because various factors affect well-being — including behavior, education, genetics and environment — policymakers can try new strategies to address chronic disease. The Health in All Policies approach encourages policymakers to collaborate across sectors to create social and physical environments to promote health. HIAs are a practical way to implement Health in All Policies because they bring health into policy discussions and offer a reasonable projection of health effects. HIAs have been used in other countries for some time but are a rapidly emerging practice in the United States.

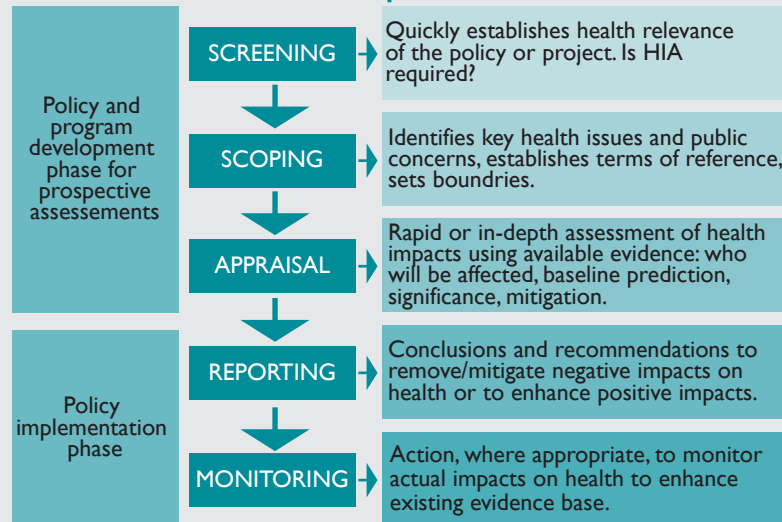
As seen in Figure 1 (page 2), HIAs involve steps that are similar to those used in other types of decision-making tools, including environmental

### KEY POINTS

- A health impact assessment (HIA) is an informational tool designed to help decision-makers consider the health implications of proposed policies, especially those that don't appear to have direct connections to health.
- HIAs encourage collaboration among sectors, allow policymakers to use resources effectively and help officials identify hidden factors that affect health.
- Since 1999, policymakers in more than 30 states have used HIAs to inform many decisions, including policies related to transportation, housing, agriculture, energy and environment.
- Kansas policymakers could use HIAs to bring health into the state and local decision-making process.
- The Kansas Health Institute and research partners conducted the first HIA in Kansas in 2012. The HIA examined the potential health effects associated with casino development in southeast Kansas — from benefits associated with more jobs and tourism to drawbacks associated with pathological gambling.

## Figure 1. Health Impact Assessment Steps

### HIA follows the same basic steps.



### The HIA process varies in scale and scope.

Mini, desktop	Maxi, comprehensive, inclusive
Rapid	Lengthy
Single health outcome	Multiple outcomes
One person	A range of stakeholders, including community
Simple model	A range of models and tools
Quick decision	In-depth, consensus-based decision
Inexpensive	Expensive

Source: Adapted from WHO, *Health Impact Assessment Tools and Methods*.

impact assessments. The HIA process can include different research methods, such as literature review, data analysis and community engagement. This process is flexible for each HIA and depends on the amount of time and resources available to effectively inform policymakers.

In the United States, the CDC and other nationally recognized health agencies support the use of HIAs. In addition, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and The Pew Charitable Trusts collaborated to create the Health Impact Project, a national initiative designed to promote the use of HIAs as a decision-making tool for policymakers.

Since this national HIA initiative launched in 2009, several states — including Washington, Colorado, Oregon and Maryland — have used

HIAs as part of their policymaking process. For example, an HIA analyzed the redevelopment of the Derby District in Colorado's Commerce City commercial core. Policymakers used the HIA findings while planning the district to create an area that encouraged physical activity and increased access to healthy foods.

## HIA Development in Kansas

Three bills considered in the 2012 Kansas legislative session were in part designed to clear the way for construction of a casino in Crawford County or Cherokee County in southeast Kansas. The Kansas Health Institute, in partnership with the University of Kansas School of Medicine—Wichita, launched the state's first HIA in January 2012 to identify the potential health impacts of developing a southeast Kansas casino. The project, funded with a grant from the Health Impact Project, considered health issues within a framework of social, economic and physical factors. It also focused on building capacity to conduct future HIAs in Kansas and showing state and local policymakers the benefits of using HIAs.

Policymakers may find it challenging to recognize how some of their decisions might affect the health of Kansans, particularly when those decisions do not seem to have direct health consequences. As shown in Table 1, the HIA findings outline how a new casino could affect the health of southeast Kansans. The Kansas HIA uncovered potential health benefits — such as reduced likelihood of premature death, improved quality of life and increased life expectancy associated with job creation — and negative health consequences — including depression, chronic fatigue and obesity associated with pathological gambling — that were not part of previous discussions of casino development.

Concerns about the economy and health are not new for southeast Kansas residents. More than 27 percent of Crawford County and Cherokee

County children live in poverty, compared to 18 percent of all Kansas children. As the 2012 *County Health Rankings* show, Crawford and Cherokee counties lag behind many other Kansas counties. The result is that many residents are sicker during their lifetimes and die younger than their counterparts in other parts of the state.

## HIA Findings and Recommendations

The HIA used multiple information sources — including a review of relevant literature, interviews with key local and state leaders, stakeholder meetings with community members and secondary data analysis — to project potential health impacts of a southeast Kansas casino.

The HIA findings focus on three main casino impacts: casino employment, tourism and access to gambling. Based on these, the HIA research team developed recommendations with input from community members to maximize the potential benefits of a casino development. Selected recommendations follow.

### Casino Employment

The presence of a casino in Cherokee County or Crawford County could increase local employment levels. Tangible benefits (such as insurance and income) and intangible benefits (such as a sense of meaning) of employment may have positive impacts on health. But the extent of positive health effects depends largely on the physical, psychological and social job environment. Several negative effects have been associated with casino employment, including shift work and secondhand smoke exposure.

### Recommendations:

- Provide health insurance to employees.
- Eliminate smoking in and around the casino.

**Table 1. Summary Health Impacts of a Casino in the Southeast Kansas Gaming Zone (Crawford and Cherokee Counties)**

Health Factor or Outcome	Expected Health Impact	Quality of Evidence
<b>CASINO EMPLOYMENT</b>		
Casino employment	Mixed	****
Unemployment rate	No effect	***
Health insurance	Positive	****
Income	Positive	****
Shift work and sleep disturbance	Negative	**
Secondhand smoke exposure	Negative	****
Employee risk behaviors	Negative	***
Public assistance benefits	Negative	**
<b>TOURISM</b>		
Tourism activity	Mixed	****
Leisure and hospitality industry jobs	Positive	****
Health insurance	Positive	***
Income	Positive	***
Per capita income	Positive	**
Population growth	Mixed	***
Property crime, violent crime	Negative	***
Traffic volume	Negative	**
<b>ACCESS TO GAMBLING</b>		
Entertainment value	Positive	***
Problem and pathological gambling	Negative	****
Child abuse and neglect, domestic violence	Negative	****
Divorce	Negative	**
STDs	Negative	***
Alcohol (ab)use, alcohol-related motor vehicle injuries and fatalities	Negative	****
Suicide	Negative	***

Source: Kansas HIA Project, 2012.

#### Legend

##### Expected Health Impact

Positive: Changes that may improve health.

Negative: Changes that may worsen health.

Mixed: Changes can be positive as well as negative.

No effect: No identified effect on health.

Uncertain: Unknown how health will be impacted.

##### Quality of Evidence

\*\*\*\* More than five strong studies. May also include data analysis and expert opinion.

\*\*\* Five or more moderate studies. May also include data analysis and expert opinion.

\*\* Five weak studies. May also include data analysis and expert opinion.

\* Fewer than five studies.

- Create workforce development programs and educational opportunities.
- Provide workplace wellness services, especially for late-shift employees.

## **Tourism**

Tourism can have a number of benefits for rural communities, especially related to revenue and job creation. The casino HIA found that Cherokee and Crawford counties may experience an 11 percent increase in overnight tourism and related transient guest tax receipts following the opening of a casino. However, tourism also can mean population growth that can have positive and negative effects. For example, population growth may attract new health care providers and improve access to health care services. On the other hand, population growth in Cherokee and Crawford counties may lead to increases in crime and traffic volume.

## **Recommendations:**

- Ensure that the casino functions as a destination by creating an array of complementary attractions.
- Monitor and respond to any potential increases in crime.
- Enhance DUI enforcement on major roads.
- Discourage crime through facility design, such as safe entrances, adequate lighting and video surveillance.

## **Access to Gambling**

Access to gambling can lead to problem or pathological gambling. Adverse health consequences of pathological gambling include nicotine dependence, substance use disorders, depression and insomnia. Pathological gambling also has been associated with higher rates of child abuse and neglect, domestic violence, unsafe sex and divorce.

## **Recommendations:**

- Implement a tracking and exclusion system for gambling addicts.
- Educate new students at schools in the region about problem/pathological gambling.
- Train primary care physicians to screen for problem gambling behaviors at medical homes.
- Strengthen local addiction services to treat and prevent gambling addictions and comorbidities.

## **Conclusion**

In recent decades, health practitioners and researchers have realized that health should be more broadly factored into the policymaking process, although the link between public policies and factors affecting health is not always clear. HIAs help by providing in-depth analysis of the policies' potential effects on health so policymakers can make decisions that more effectively promote well-being and address health problems.

Legislation related to a new casino in southeast Kansas may not seem to have direct connections to health, making the issue a good fit for the Kansas research team. The casino project introduced Kansas to HIAs, and the team will build on this experience during two upcoming HIAs in Kansas communities.

As more communities are involved with HIAs, more Kansas policymakers will be able to recognize their value and use them to inform their policy decisions. They also may consider asking state agencies to conduct HIAs on policies with possible health implications. When health is considered in all policies, it is more likely that policies put in place will result in safer and healthier communities.

### **About the Issue Brief**

This publication is based on work done by Tatiana Y. Lin, M.A., Catherine C. Shoults, M.P.H., and Sida Niu. It is available online at [www.khi.org](http://www.khi.org). The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Health Impact Project, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation or The Pew Charitable Trusts.

### **KANSAS HEALTH INSTITUTE**

*The Kansas Health Institute is an independent, nonprofit health policy and research organization based in Topeka, Kansas. Established in 1995 with a multiyear grant from the Kansas Health Foundation, the Kansas Health Institute conducts research and policy analysis on issues that affect the health of Kansans.*

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