

WHAT IS HEALTH IMPACT ASSESSMENT?

Health Impact Assessment (HIA) is a combination of methods and analysis that examines the health impacts of proposed plans or policies and the distribution of those impacts across a community.

Depending on the focus of an HIA, different forms of analysis are employed, but the entire process consists of five phases: screening, scoping, assessment, reporting, and monitoring.

Find additional resources at:

- **Bay Area HIA Collaborative**
www.hiacollaborative.org
- **CDC Healthy Places Initiative**
www.cdc.gov/healthyplaces

CASE STUDY

EAST PALO ALTO REDEVELOPMENT AND RAVENSWOOD BUSINESS DISTRICT COALITION

East Palo Alto is a diverse community of 33,000 residents. It is the youngest city in San Mateo County, but its incorporation in 1983 was preceded by a long history of boom and bust development and annexations of residential areas by neighboring cities, which shaped its tax base, industrial land use pattern, and compact boundary.

A significant portion of East Palo Alto's remaining industrial land, referred to as the Ravenswood Business District (RBD), was adopted as a redevelopment project in 1990, yet little redevelopment occurred while industrial uses continued. Following several accidents, spills, and sustained community efforts, the California Department of Toxic Substance Control closed the remaining industrial plant, operated by Romic Environmental Technologies, and began environmental clean-up efforts in 2007. The closure and clean-up of the plant accelerated redevelopment activity. Although industrial contaminants may not be as prominent of a concern today, community conditions in and around the RBD continue to have the potential to impact human health. As a result, community groups involved in the closure effort built on their success by initiating efforts to promote community health through the city's redevelopment policies.

With grant support from The California Endowment, Youth United for Community Action (YUCA) initiated an 18-month process in which they collaborated with the RBD Coalition to lead a community visioning process. Simultaneously, a report on existing community health conditions will guide redevelopment in the RBD, and will include the first three phases of a health impact assessment (HIA), mirroring a traditional HIA process (see sidebar). YUCA contracted Human Impact Partners, a non-profit consultant team, to facilitate the HIA process and initiated the RBD Coalition to coordinate the efforts of several community groups, including the Community Development Institute, Environmental Justice Group, EPA Community and Neighborhood Development Organization, and Nuestra Casa. As an initial step, the partners created a separate timeline for completion of the report on existing community health conditions, which include jobs, access to goods and services, transportation, social cohesion, housing, and environmental quality. This effort was complemented by collecting data through interviews, surveys, and public data sets. HIP and the RBD Coalition are currently developing the final report. In anticipation of the eventual need to develop, disseminate and implement the recommendations of the report findings, the project partners have been conducting workshops to further bolster civic engagement in local redevelopment plans.

Throughout the scoping and assessment stages, the San Mateo County Health System, based on requests from the RBD Coalition, supported

the process by sharing multiple tools, including its Community Health Profile, to communicate general trends in access to services, mental health, drug and alcohol use, physical activity, and birth and health outcome data. The Health System also provided spatial analysis using the County's Geographical Information System (GIS), another tool that is increasingly valued in health and planning collaborations, to analyze patterns in demographic data and locate community features in East Palo Alto.

The expected outcomes of the YUCA / RBD Coalition HIA and community organizing efforts include:

- An increase in East Palo Alto's capacity to organize around health and environmental issues
- Policies and planning processes that take health and justice principles into account
- Policies that protect community health and the environment from being subject to future hazardous waste facility sites

Specific targets are still being established, but long-term outcomes of prioritizing community health in future redevelopment in East Palo Alto will likely include:

- Improved access to safe public transportation
- Expanded neighborhood resources, including access to fresh produce

- Increased opportunities for physical activity and active transportation
- Decreased pedestrian and bicyclist injuries
- Increased access to safe, high quality public spaces
- Increased social networks — potentially established through developing a downtown

Prior successes in community organization efforts, an uncommon redevelopment opportunity, and foundation funding made this collaboration possible. As demonstrated by their respective missions, all partners have a shared belief that health impact should be considered in decision-making processes. This common understanding allowed the partners to select issue areas that target the underlying causes and determinants of community health outcomes — issues that can be impacted by redevelopment policies.

“Now is the time to create and support policies around land use and development that are based on environmental justice and health principles that truly benefit our community's most vulnerable populations.”

— Youth United for Community Action



“There is such activism in East Palo Alto, and such hope for creating new development that will be good for the community's health in addition to being good for the city's economic health. We have seen this from community members as well as from city staff and planners. We hope that the consideration of data and information about existing health conditions in and around the RBD can help clarify the recommendations that have risen up from the community and encourage a RBD plan that will improve the health of all EPA residents.”

— Kim Gilhuly,
Human Impact Partners