

GRANTS AWARDED TO HELP BUILD HEALTH INTO DECISIONS ON ENERGY, HOUSING, AGRICULTURE, AND OTHER AREAS

Health Impact Project Announces 16 New Health Impact Assessments

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WASHINGTON— The Health Impact Project, a collaboration of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and The Pew Charitable Trusts, announced the awardees of 15 new grants today. Selected following a nationwide call for proposals, the grantees will conduct health impact assessments (HIAs), a type of study that looks at potential health impacts of policies and projects in other sectors. HIAs help policy makers and communities take a broad look at the impacts of a decision, which can help avoid unintended consequences, maximize benefits, and balance trade-offs.

“The conditions in the places where we live and work affect our health even more than access to health care,” said **Aaron Wernham, M.D., director of the Health Impact Project**. “Decisions in housing, agriculture, transportation, or energy policy, for example, may raise or lower our risks for heart disease, asthma, diabetes, traumatic injuries, and some cancers. These new grantees will be using health impact assessments to inform important decisions for which the health implications might otherwise be missed. Capitalizing on investments in other sectors to prevent disease is one of the most important opportunities to improve Americans’ health.”

Three additional foundations—The Kresge Foundation, The California Endowment, and the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota Foundation—contributed funding toward these HIAs. The grant recipients and their respective projects are listed below:

- The **County of Alameda, California Public Health Department** will conduct [an HIA](#) to examine the impacts of changes to the Regional Transportation Plan, specifically changes to bus access. Availability of transportation may affect health through changing access to jobs, quality schools, medical care and social services, and grocery and retail stores. The HIA will focus on equity impacts, or how the new plan might affect different populations in different ways. (Supported by funding from The California Endowment.)
- **California Rural Legal Assistance** will conduct [two HIAs](#) to inform the development of state-mandated plans in Kern and Fresno Counties that will guide local land use, transportation, and other policies relevant to greenhouse gas emissions, as required by California’s Senate Bill 375. The HIAs will examine the ways in which these plans may influence factors important to health, such as access to sidewalks, bike lanes, open space, healthy foods, health care services, as well as exposure to air pollution. (Supported by funding from The California Endowment.)

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- The **City of Minneapolis Department of Health and Family Support** will conduct [an HIA](#) to inform revisions to the city's Above the Falls Master Plan, which will guide redevelopment of an industrial area near low-income neighborhoods along the upper Mississippi riverfront. This HIA is being conducted in collaboration with the City of Minneapolis Department of Community Planning and Economic Development and the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board. It will assess the ways in which proposed elements of the master plan could affect health through, for example, changing exposure to air and water pollution, developing parkland along the riverfront to provide opportunities for exercise, revitalizing substandard housing, and attracting businesses to the area. (Supported by the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota Foundation.)
- The **Georgia Health Policy Center and Department of Sociology at Georgia State University** will conduct [an HIA](#) to provide recommendations on the selection of sites for and the design of public housing in Galveston, Texas that is being rebuilt after Hurricane Ike destroyed much of the low-income housing in the region in 2008. (Supported by The Kresge Foundation.)
- **Hennepin County Department of Housing, Community Works and Transit (Minnesota)** will conduct [an HIA](#) to inform planning and funding decisions on the proposed Bottineau Transitway. The new system would create a bus or light rail line extending from downtown Minneapolis through North Minneapolis and into neighboring suburbs. (Supported by the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota Foundation.)
- The **Illinois Public Health Institute (IPHI)** will conduct [an HIA](#) on a legislative proposal under consideration in the Illinois General Assembly that would require the Illinois Department of Human Services to seek a waiver from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to ban the use of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits to purchase sugary drinks. IPHI will conduct a balanced, science-driven assessment. The HIA will consider both potential health benefits – such as a lower risk of obesity, tooth decay, and diabetes – and risks, including reduced participation in SNAP by eligible families, hunger, and the potential for such policies to add to the stigma associated with SNAP participation.
- **Kane County (Illinois)** will conduct [an HIA](#) of a proposed amendment to the county's farmland protection ordinance, which may affect the health of local residents through, for example, changes in availability and price of fresh fruits and vegetables, food safety, and economic changes resulting from increased food production in the region.
- The **Kansas Health Institute** will conduct [an HIA](#) of casino development in southeast Kansas that might result from changes proposed in three state Senate bills. Some studies suggest that casinos elevate the risk of alcohol abuse, violence, stress, mental illness, injury, and bankruptcy, which can lead to loss of housing and health insurance. However, casinos also can provide economic development, employment, and insurance, as well as county and state revenues to support services and infrastructure improvements that promote health. KHI will assess, and develop recommendations to address, the risks, benefits, and trade-offs of the legislation.
- The **National Center for Healthy Housing** will conduct [an HIA](#) to determine and compare the impacts of the proposed Baltimore-Washington Rail Intermodal Facility at several potential sites in the region. The facility would transfer freight cargo between trains and trucks. It poses potential health concerns that include, for example, air and noise pollution and substantial increases in local truck traffic leading to safety risks. Its construction and operation may create local jobs and generate community tax revenue that supports services that benefit health. (Supported by The Kresge Foundation.)

- The **Ohio Housing Finance Agency** will conduct [an HIA](#) that will inform decisions on proposed modifications to housing inspection programs in the state that would reduce the number of inspections on affordable housing units by improving inter-agency coordination and streamlining the current system. Housing inspections help identify and remedy substandard physical conditions, like water leaks and mold, pests, peeling paint, and structural hazards, which can contribute to a wide range of health problems including asthma, injury, burns, and mental illness. The Ohio State University College of Public Health is a partner for this project.
- The **Oregon Public Health Institute** will conduct [an HIA](#) to inform the Portland City Council's June 2012 decision on whether to fund the Bureau of Development Services' Rental Housing Inspections Program at a level sufficient to continue the city's Enhanced Inspections pilot program, and potentially expand it to other parts of the city. Inspections programs can influence housing conditions, and poor housing contributes to a range of health problems, such as asthma and other respiratory illness, injury, burns, and lead exposure.
- The **Sequoia Foundation** will conduct [an HIA](#) to identify impacts and inform decisions regarding a proposed biomass energy facility in Placer County, California. The proposed facility would be fueled by forest materials (wood chips, slash, bark, and pine needles) that are currently being generated as a result of ongoing programs enacted to reduce forest-fire hazards in the area. The HIA will ensure that these decisions factor in health considerations, such as how changes in air quality and truck traffic on local roads could affect things like asthma, injury rates, and access to services important to health.
- The **University of Rochester** will conduct [an HIA](#) to help inform a waterfront revitalization plan in low-income neighborhoods in Rochester, New York. Health-related issues that the HIA will address include, for example, how the plan will affect opportunities for physical activity, air and water pollution, and seafood contamination.
- The **University of Washington School of Public Health** will conduct [an HIA](#) to inform decisions by the Environmental Protection Agency and responsible parties related to the proposed cleanup of the Lower Duwamish Waterway Superfund site. The responsible parties include the Port of Seattle, the City of Seattle, King County, and the Boeing Company. Key health issues that the HIA will address include consuming contaminated seafood, air and soil pollution, as well as concerns such as construction noise, traffic safety, and access to goods and services in the neighborhoods surrounding the site during and after the cleanup.
- **Virginia Commonwealth University** (VCU) will conduct [an HIA](#) to inform the zoning and permitting decisions associated with a proposal to build a poultry litter-fired power plant as part of Virginia's federally-mandated plan to reduce water pollution in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. The proposed facility poses potential health risks through increasing harmful air emissions, truck traffic, odor, and noise in nearby communities. Economic impacts, however, may benefit health by increasing employment opportunities, access to health insurance, and generating revenues that support local services important to health. The project, which will involve the VCU Center on Human Needs and the VCU Center on Environmental Studies, will conduct a balanced assessment with the goal of providing useful information for the public and decision makers looking to weigh trade-offs.

The Health Impact Project, a collaboration of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and The Pew Charitable Trusts, is a leading national initiative dedicated to promoting the use of health impact assessments in the United States. More information about the projects and HIA in general, including a searchable map of HIA activity in the U.S., is available at www.healthimpactproject.org.