

HEALTH IN ALL POLICIES PROJECT: HEALTH OUTCOMES DATA RESEARCH SAN DIEGO, CA

Healthy Public Policy and Data Availability

Interdisciplinary research shows that social, economic, and environmental factors – such as land use patterns, transportation systems, and housing – play a role in health outcomes and disparities. Recently, planners, public health practitioners and communities across the nation have combined efforts to address these factors and improve health, by advancing and adopting policies that shape our environments. A broad strategy called Health in All Policies (HiAP) offers a suite of activities, such as health impact assessment, to advance health through policy-making.

One aspect of HiAP, and a core component of partnerships that strive to integrate health in policy-making, is providing public access to high quality and locally-relevant health data. Local health data can be used to: make the case for policy interventions, develop appropriately targeted policies, weigh the benefits and tradeoffs of decisions, and track the effects of policies after implementation. Also, data can help communities understand the effects of an environment on their health and empower residents to act on the issues that matter to them.

The Project

In 2011, San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) partnered with the San Diego Health and Human Services Agency (HHS) to better understand the health data needs of constituents in San Diego County. Together, they hired Human Impact Partners (HIP) to determine the data and indicators individuals in the county currently use; how data may be used in the future; desired data that is currently unavailable; approaches that could be used to acquire needed data; and methods to make data available.

HIP conducted online data scans, key informant interviews, and a focus group with stakeholders from public health, planning and academia. Interviewees were in San Diego and other municipalities, and data collection spanned 3 months. Findings include that there are many sources of data in the County, but availability is not uniform or accessible at consistent geographic scales. Current methods of collecting and disseminating data are also limited. There are many different constituents with far ranging needs and a shared desire for data at the smallest possible scale. This diversity of needs is a barrier to reaching consensus on a single, best data development strategy. HIP developed a memo to summarize research findings and recommend future directions for collecting and publicizing health data.

Outcome

As a result of this project, our partners now have a better sense of the uses towards which data would be applied in San Diego County, a clearer picture of the next steps they need to take to meet the data needs of constituents, and more information to support a case for investing in data development. The project advanced a dialogue between public health and planning partners so policies that are informed by health evidence and that promote health are created, prioritized, and monitored.

Health in All Policies Context

- Health data are being used to shape policies to promote health, before they are up for debate.
- Decision-makers are already talking about the health implications of policies.
- Partnerships for health exist between public health and other agencies.
- Community representatives are being asked to weigh in on their needs and priorities.