

Towards institutionalizing Policy HIA in Québec




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Overview of the development of HIA in Québec

- **Public Health Advocacy disrupting public hearings on pesticide use for forest management in 1982**
- **Memorandum of understanding between the Ministry of health and the Ministry of the environment in 1987**
- **Systematic and efficient integration of public health concerns into the EIA process since the beginning of the 1990s**
- **Public Health Law of 2002 introducing HIA of all public policies with significant health impacts**

Article 54 of the Quebec Public Health Act

« The Minister is by virtue of his or her office the advisor of the Government on any public health issue. The Minister shall give the other ministers any advice he or she considers advisable for health promotion and the adoption of policies capable of fostering the enhancement of the health and welfare of the population.

In the Minister's capacity as government advisor, the Minister shall be consulted in relation to the development of the measures provided for in an Act or regulation that could have significant impact on the health of the population.”

http://publicationsduquebec.gouv.qc.ca/dynamicSearch/telecharge.php?type=2&file=/S_2_2/S2_2_A.html

Implementation strategy for Article 54

The assessment process should disturb as little as possible the current policy development process.



- The process is under the responsibility of the policy proponent
- Support by the Ministry of Health



- HIA as a research process
- HIA as an administrative process

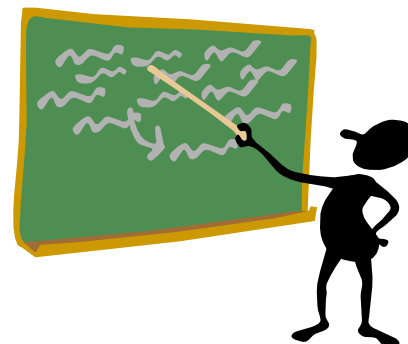
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HIA as a research process

Research program

- HIA methods and processes
- Knowledge synthesis and briefs
- Research for priority themes in HIA



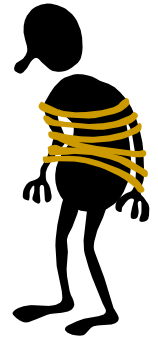
HIA as an administrative process

- Development and testing of a policy screening tool (based on health determinants)
- Development of an assessment process
- Development of consultation procedures
- Development of a network of collaborators in all government departments
- Survey of perceptions of HIA by government departments

Description of current experience with the administrative process

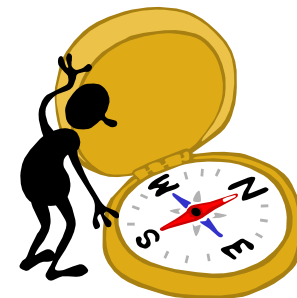
- About 12 assessments over a period of 12 months
- Half of the requests originating from the *Conseil exécutif* (« Department of the Prime Minister») and half from other departments
- Mean response times of a few days
- Slow uptake of information on the assessment process by the other departments
- Public health professionals in the department of health as experts
- Use of health determinants from the area of health protection (environment, infectious diseases) and safety (fire arms)

Weaknesses of the current administrative process



- Very limited assessment by the policy proponent
- Nearly all requests at the end of the policy process
- Difficulty to obtain expert knowledge
- No use of social determinants of health
- No integration of different health determinants
- Limited response time

Challenges for an efficient Policy HIA process in Québec



- **Leadership of the Department of Health in creating open communication channels with the other government departments**
- **A pragmatic use of the legal powers of the new Public Health Act**
- **Strong links between the HIA research component and the administrative HIA process**
- **Development of the knowledge concerning the links between policies, health determinants and health status, particularly social health determinants**
- **Diffusion of this knowledge among government departments, politicians and the general public**

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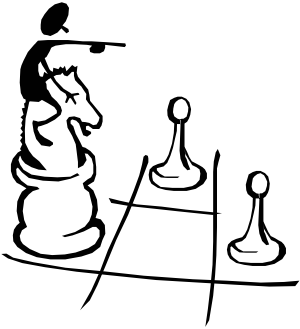
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The greatest challenge for HIA

« There is nothing a government hates more than to be well-informed; for it makes the process of arriving at decisions much more complicated and difficult. »

John Maynard Keynes

Conclusion



- The Quebec HIA process is demand driven (obligation of Public Health Law)
- The institutionalization process is well under way
- Vigilance is needed to prevent the process from becoming a bureaucratic tool without real world effectiveness
- The confidentiality of the HIA governmental process has to be creatively linked to a process of external accountability and scientific quality.

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