

# Rapid HIA to Support Multimodal Transportation in Spokane



The Lands Council Photo

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*Above, a beautiful day in Riverfront Park located in downtown Spokane.*

Land use and public policy decisions can contribute to health and social inequities; chronic conditions and disease, such as asthma, obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and cancer; increased sprawl and traffic; decreased air and water quality; loss of green space; and other unwanted consequences, such as increased crime. How can we minimize these adverse health impacts and promote more thoughtful and responsible decisions with respect to community health?

Health impact assessment (HIA) is a tool that can be used to improve communication between planners and public health officials and thereby encourage projects and policies that promote health. HIA places public health on the agenda and results in better-informed decisions with respect to health. Additionally, it promotes collaboration between diverse disciplines, helps prevent adverse health issues, and encourages positive health – promoting decisions. It also addresses environmental and social justice concerns, encourages sustainable development, and looks at the “true” cost rather than the short-term initial cost of a project. For health professionals, HIAs provide a comprehensive, data-

driven tool to advocate for public health benefits, rather than provide anecdotal information that may not be as useful.

Due to a shared interest in effects of public works on the public’s health, we – The Lands Council (a local non-profit organization), City of Spokane, and Spokane Regional Health District (SRHD) – decided to perform a health impact assessment on the pedestrian portion of the multi-modal transportation strategy in the *Fast Forward Spokane: Downtown Plan Update*. Created by the City of Spokane and the Downtown Spokane Partnership (DSP) to promote the livelihood of downtown for future generations, this strategic and coordinated community effort provides a short- and long-term structure for addressing issues and challenges facing the downtown. Highlights of the plan include streetscape improvements, east-west links, urban refuges, and increased public transportation. Although it focuses largely on economic development and downtown revitalization, *Fast Forward* includes numerous strategies for promoting active transportation, environmental stewardship, and a healthy “built environment.”

