Beyond Health Impact Assessment: a government policy for health and well-being

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Health Impact Assessment (HIA): an important lever for intersectoral action

Section 54 represents an explicit recognition by Québec authorities of the principle of intersectoral action and the impact on health of decisions made in other sectors.

HIA acts on the determinants of health by raising awareness among decision makers in other ministries of the importance of:

- Taking into account the significant negative impacts of their bills or draft regulations
- Adopting the measures needed to mitigate these impacts
- Highlighting potential positive impacts

Adopting a section of an act is certainly a positive step but the challenge of applying it remains ...
Strategy for Application of Section 54: supporting efforts made in other sectors

1. Implementation of an intragovernmental health impact assessment mechanism
   - Ongoing involvement of MSSS in the process (network of representatives)
   - Production of decision-making tools adapted to the needs of users
   - Access to relevant expertise within a reasonable time frame

2. Development and transfer of knowledge on healthy public policy
   - Increase and consolidate interdisciplinary research capacities
   - Support research to assess the effects before and after implementation of public policies
   - Foster the transfer of knowledge to concerned decision makers and professionals
   - Develop tools to support the development of healthy public policy
Concerted Action on Health: future prospects

Findings with regard to HIA

- Greater awareness-building and participation by partners and increasing integration of the process within ministries and public agencies
- Requests for projects other than laws and regulations
- However, many requests are sent in at the end of the process
- Some bills and draft regulations still do not include HIA
- An innovation that demonstrates the government’s commitment to HIA

Going beyond HIA in intersectoral action on the determinants of health will require:

Creating horizontal and vertical synergies so as to remove certain obstacles and take advantage of all opportunities for concerted action to foster health and well-being
Going beyond HIA…

a government policy

Québec has institutionalized a mechanism to influence other sectors in order to lessen the negative impact of their actions on the health and well-being of the population

- Section 54 of the Public Health Act

A “health in all policies” strategy based on a whole-of-government approach would be an added value and:

- Better structure health-promoting actions by proposing a common framework for action
- Lead other sectors to develop policies, programs and action plans that enhance health and well-being
- Include other sectors in the prevention of health problems (the MSSS has had a prevention program – the NPHP – in place since 2003)

The MSSS could rely on its acquired knowledge and experience to carry this project

- Population-based responsibility
- Data on health
- Expertise of the MSSS and the INSPQ with regard to the determinants of health
- Partnerships with other sectors (developed, notably, through the application of Section 54 and the NPHP)
Other Sectors and Health: a complex reality to document

- Evidence-based data inform decision makers on the nature of a problem and the range of possible solutions.

- The most effective time to use evidence-based data is during the drafting stage of a policy (Fafard, 2008).

- A government policy for health and well-being would address the complex reality of the determinants of health.

- To develop such a policy, the MSSS intends to document:
  - The impact of other sectors on health
  - Healthy public policy measures

- The approach chosen by the MSSS to develop an evidence-based policy will involve:
  - Meetings to exchange information with researchers
  - Monographs on the determinants of health
Developing an intersectoral policy means working together from the start

To discuss the content for a strong and mobilizing policy framework:

- Theme-based discussion forums
  - bringing together chosen participants from the milieu concerned by the theme (managers, professionals, experts)

- Consultation with
  - stakeholders from other sectors
  - citizens
  - experts from various fields of study
  - actors from the MSSS and its network
Taking Advantage of All Opportunities: the context also counts

- Decision making involves more than evidence-based data. Public policies are also developed on the basis of:
  - the political agenda
  - public opinion
  - the decision maker’s past experiences
  - precedents
  - possible solutions and available resources
  - crisis management

This is why **strategic monitoring** is essential, as is taking advantage of all opportunities to foster **commitment on the part of the highest government authorities** with regard to a government policy for health and well-being.
Conditions for Success

A literature review and an analysis of national and international intersectoral initiatives have brought out the conditions that would foster the success of the MSSS plan to develop a government policy:

- Provide strong leadership
- Affirm common values
- Point out the added value of the policy to partners
- Show respect for different visions and practices
- Have a plan and mechanisms for implementation
- Recognize the importance for the regional and local levels to integrate the policy
- Provide for follow-up
- Report back to all levels through formal mechanisms
To sum up...

- Québec has adopted an HIA mechanism which represents an important lever for healthy public policies.

- The strategy for application of Section 54 of the Public Health Act makes it possible to assist and support actors in other sectors.

- A government policy for health and well-being would provide a broader framework that would strengthen government interventions to foster health.

- Such a policy must be based on rigorous documentation and take other sectors into account.

- Strategic monitoring is essential, as is taking advantage of all opportunities to move forward on a government draft policy for health and well-being.
For more information

http://www.mssss.gouv.qc.ca