

# *Equity from the Start:* **Health Equity in all Policies - Health Lens Approach**

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*“The way in which health is considered is changing rapidly. Gone are the days when health meant only health care services, which were complicated and expensive to plan and manage. Health is now seen in a much more complex and nuanced way, with many determinants spread across the whole of society. It is also viewed as one of the key drivers, as well as one of the most important outcomes, of societal development”<sup>6</sup>*

## What is Health Equity in All Policies (HEiAP)?

HEiAP is a policy mechanism that can help organisations achieve their objectives in a way that also addresses inequalities. It allows organisations to use a health lens approach to systematically look at policies and assess them against the social determinants of health with a view to identifying gaps and integrating health equity issues.

All sectors contribute to health and wellbeing. The healthcare sector provides vital care and education, but a high quality built, natural and social environment can prevent ill health, thus reducing the need for healthcare and supporting considerable cost savings.

More effective intersectoral action to tackle the determinants of health and address inequalities is needed, but achieving this can be difficult. To ensure an integrated approach it is necessary to re-think mechanisms, processes, relationships and institutional arrangements across all sectors and at all levels.<sup>1</sup> HEiAP provides the potential to make this happen.

## Why do we need Health Equity in all Policies?

Income and status are key determinants of equity, or inequality. The level of income has a decisive influence on material living conditions. Social status affects both self esteem and mental wellbeing, and the ability to alter those conditions. People on low incomes and in lower social groups are more likely to die young and suffer ill health, primarily because their physical and social living conditions are poorer.

‘Considering equality and health equity in all local policies, across the whole of government, not just the health sector’ is one of the recommendations of the Marmot Review of Inequalities in Health post 2010 in England<sup>2</sup>, stimulated by the WHO Commission’s Report on the Social Determinants of Health.<sup>3</sup> HEiAP is a new approach aiming to systematically achieve this.



## Chief Executives Mandate

Chief Executives from public sector organisations in Belfast have endorsed Belfast's membership to Phase V (2009-2013) of the World Health Organization's (WHO) European Healthy Cities Network and to work towards implementing a 'Health Equity in All Policies' (HEiAP) approach, so that policies in Belfast will strive to embed and reduce inequalities and deliver outcomes in a more systematic way.

Belfast Healthy Cities Chief Executives HEiAP Mandate<sup>4</sup> expresses the clear and strong commitment of Chief Executives in Belfast to strengthen and champion action on health, health equity, sustainable development and social justice.



## What's required to achieve Health Equity in All Policies?

If health is to be created where people are born, grow, live, work and age, then the concept of HEiAP is best achieved working at a local level as is an intersectoral approach.

The Northern Ireland Public Health Agency's purpose is to build strong partnerships with individuals, communities and other key stakeholders to achieve tangible improvements in health and social wellbeing, enhanced by citizen engagement to ensure local environments are supportive of health.

Other public sector agencies and local government already play a significant role in the creation of a healthy society, ranging from economic development to housing and rubbish collection as well as being large employers, and the HEiAP process in Belfast has the potential to extend the level of influence they can have. Emerging approaches to inter-sectoral working, based on the principles of community planning within the city will create further opportunities for partnership action and capacity to promote equity and social inclusion, thereby addressing health equity.

Voluntary and community organisations deliver programmes at a neighbourhood level and have direct contact with those that are normally excluded or are 'hard to reach'. The HEiAP process will strengthen the policy opportunities to influence change, striving towards equity in neighbourhood areas.

## Foundations for HEiAP

With existing Northern Ireland interdepartmental policies and intersectoral initiatives, Belfast is well placed to become an innovator in the implementation of the HEiAP concept which, provides the opportunity to enhance the health of citizens and address health equity. Belfast has through Belfast Healthy Cities and other partnerships extensive experience and a track record of working in partnership as well as:

- a **strong policy foundation** for working on the **social determinants of health** through Belfast Healthy Cities, **Investing for Health** and the opportunity to introduce HEiAP as a **policy mechanism**
- extensive **intersectoral working experience**
- a recently established Belfast Strategic Partnership which has two primary aims; one to identify and reduce life inequalities and two to improve the health and wellbeing of the people of Belfast
- access to **excellent data sources** on the social determinants of health and **skills and experience in developing population profiles**
- **extensive capacity building programmes** and experience

- high level understanding of and experience in **applying health impact assessment/analysis (HIA)**,
- **access to leading edge practice internationally**, through WHO Healthy Cities and other links

There are therefore robust foundations in place in Northern Ireland and Belfast to undertake HEiAP. If we are to reverse the widening inequalities gap in Belfast, we need to **work in a more systematic way** across the public sector agencies and government departments. HEiAP provides a systematic policy approach incorporating elements of health impact analysis into the policy making process of all agencies.



## HEiAP Process for Delivery

Alongside the Chief Executives mandate Belfast Healthy Cities has developed a HEiAP Process for Delivery which can be systematically applied to pilot policy areas (Figure 1). There are 6 main steps outlined in this process, though the model may not necessarily be a linear process and various steps can be selected to meet the needs of the particular organisation and policy area.

The focus and guiding principles of this process are:

- ✓ **Health as a fundamental right**
- ✓ **Based on determinants of health**
- ✓ **Capacity, skills & knowledge**
- ✓ **Inequalities & Monitoring**
- ✓ **Civic Engagement and Leadership**
- ✓ **Leadership**
- ✓ **Collaboration & international learning**
- ✓ **Partnerships & intersectoral action**

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## HEiAP Pilots

Belfast Healthy Cities is currently piloting the HEiAP approach with a number of partner organisations.

- Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE)
- Belfast Health & Social Care Trust (BH&SCT)
- Public Health Agency (PHA)
- Belfast City Council (BCC)
- Health & Social Care Trusts: Travel Plan Framework



*“Health is created and maintained (and destroyed) primarily by activities outside of the health care sector”<sup>5</sup>*

*“The way in which health is considered is changing rapidly. Gone are the days when health meant only health care services, which were complicated and expensive to plan and manage. Health is now seen in a much more complex and nuanced way, with many determinants spread across the whole of society. It is also viewed as one of the key drivers, as well as one of the most important outcomes, of societal development”<sup>6</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> *Developing the new European policy for health – Health 2010*, First meeting of the European Health Policy Forum for High-Level Government Officials, Andorra la Vella, Andorra 9-11 March 2011

<sup>2</sup> Strategic Review of Health Inequalities in England post 2010: Fair Society, Healthy Lives, the Marmot Review, 2010., <http://www.marmotreview.org/AssetLibrary/pdfs/Reports/FairSocietyHealthyLives.pdf>

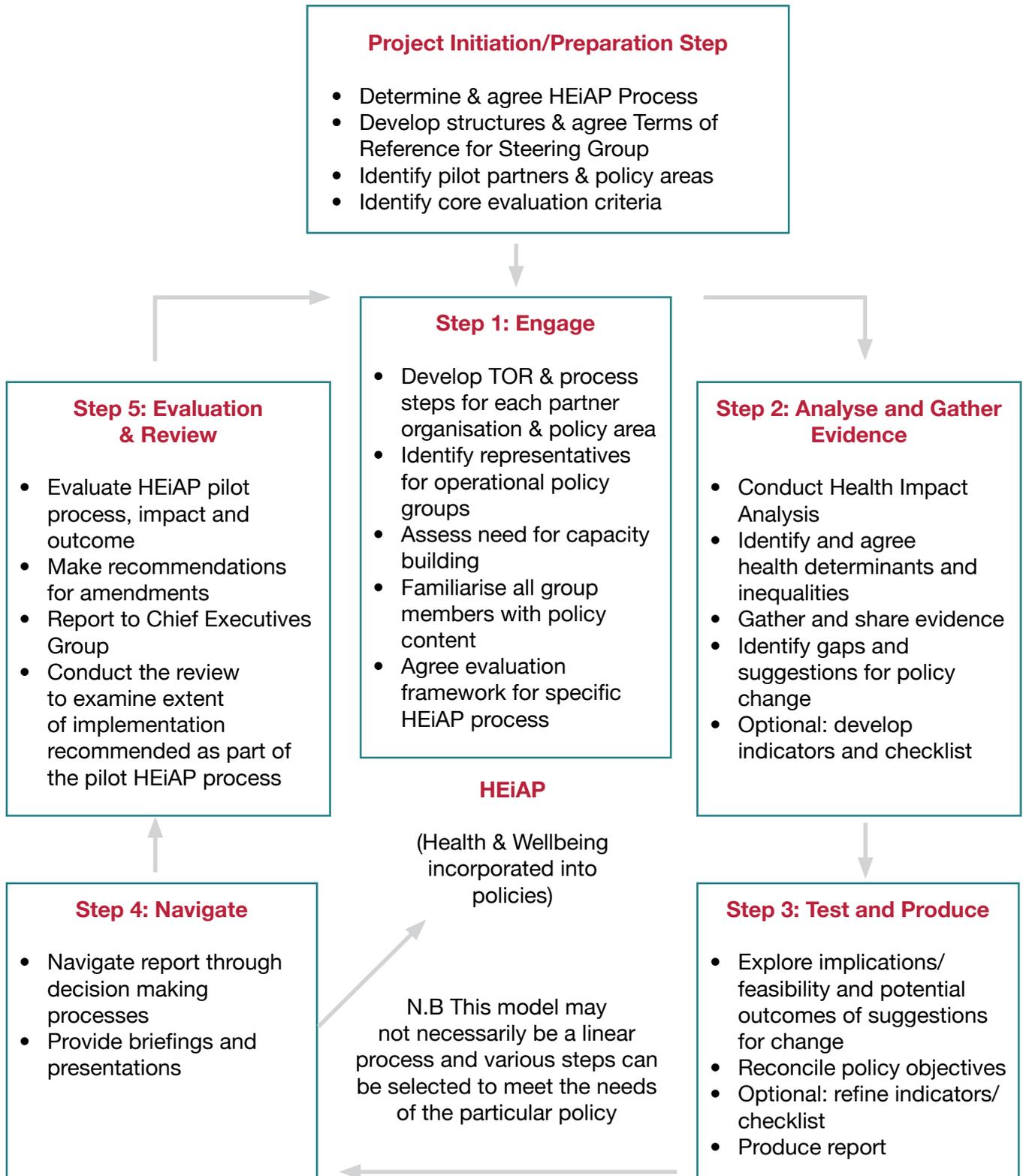
<sup>3</sup> Commission on the Social Determinants of Health. *Closing the gap in a generation: health equity through action on the social determinants of health*. WHO, Geneva 2008, [www.who.int/social\\_determinants/en/](http://www.who.int/social_determinants/en/)

<sup>4</sup> *Health Equity in All Policies: Getting Started*, Chief Executives Mandate, Belfast Healthy Cities Office, 2010

<sup>5</sup> Quote from Danny Broderick, Public Health and Clinical Coordination, South Australia, PowerPoint Presentation 2010

<sup>6</sup> *Developing the new European policy for health – Health 2010*, First meeting of the European Health Policy Forum for High-Level Government Officials, Andorra la Vella, Andorra 9-11 March 2011

**Figure 1: HEiAP Process of Delivery**



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