

# Perspectives of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Practitioners on considering Population Health



Authors: Ms Ciara Logue MPH and Dr Margaret Douglas MSc, FFPH

## WHAT WE LEARNED

1

Health in SEA is perceived by practitioners to be confined to biophysical parameters resulting in SEA not fully reflecting current population health issues.

2

Practitioners are eager to consider health more comprehensively in SEA and want more support from Public Health professionals to do this.

3

The current public health reform in Scotland provides an opportune time to introduce policy changes to unite health and planning sectors to improve population health.

## BACKGROUND

- Scotland's public health priority 1 is "A Scotland where we live in vibrant, healthy and safe places and communities." Local Development Plans are key in achieving this.
- These are subject to SEA, which is a systematic process to assess, consult on and monitor likely impacts of plans, programmes and strategies on the environment, including human health.
- Fuller consideration of health determinants in SEA could allow improved plans with greater positive impacts on health. However, consideration of health tends to focus on bio-physical impacts.

## OBJECTIVES

1. To understand the perspectives of SEA practitioners on considering health.
2. To ascertain what the current practice is on considering health and why.
3. To gain insight into how SEA practitioners think health should be reviewed.

## RESULTS

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with SEA practitioners and consultation authorities. There were four themes identified through thematic analysis. These can be found below, along with examples of supporting quotes.

*"In my time here I have seen a (...) change in mindset, that planning's not just the physical environment, it actually affects people's physical and mental health as well. I see it all as quite integrated really, that's how it should be looked at."*  
Practitioner 4

*"So, the system that we operate is very very high level so it's very difficult to assess specific health impacts of a development, and also it's very difficult to ascertain those impacts as they can be intangible."*  
Practitioner 3

*"Things like wellbeing and mental health, there's no consultation authority that would give views on that really (...) none of the consultation authorities would feel comfortable stepping in and saying well this is how we think it should happen."*  
Consultation Authority 1

*"The person missing (...) is a healthcare professional who can comment on (...) how can we really tackle obesity. If there was a national body, or (...) at a regional level so we can tap into that resource, that would be fantastic."*  
Practitioner 1

Concept of health & 'place-making'

SEA is objective, health is subjective

Challenge to health inclusion

Appetite for change