Health Lens Analysis of the Fourth Environmental Program (2020) in the Basque Country

- **Departament of Health**
- **Departament of Environmental**
- **General Secretariat for Coordination of the Presidency of the Basque Government**

Executive Summary

Health and equity in health are essential requirements to reach the remaining social benefits and in turn, many of their determinants are social, environmental and economic at source. Consequently, sectoral public policies at any level of governance have a significant impact on population health.

The Health in All Policies (HiAP) strategy provides a means to identify not only the direct impacts of public policies, but also the unintended ones, and ensures that health and equity in health are part of decision making.

The Basque Government's environmental policy is committed to achieving a society with low carbon emissions, a green, circular economy and resilient ecosystems that lay the foundations of citizen well-being. Therefore, in addition to focusing on preserving the environment, consistent with HiAP's strategy, it focuses on the well-being of the population

The work presented here describes the analysis process of the potential impact on population health and health equity of the Fourth Environmental Framework Program 2020, using the Health Lens Analysis (HLA) methodology, adapted from South Australia. In addition, the recommendations developed to maximize the positive effect on population health and mitigate or eliminate negative impacts are presented.

As its main governance tool, the HLA process boasts an HiAP Technical Committee made up of senior executives from the departments responsible for sectoral policies and the General Secretariat for Coordination of the Presidency of the Basque Government. The technical development was carried out by a team comprising members of this Secretariat, the Departments of Health and Environment and the University of the Basque Country.

The HLA was developed over 5 stages: 1) engage, 2) gather evidence, 3) production of recommendations and final report, 4) navigation and 5) evaluation. To identify the impact on the social determinants of health, an instrument based on the model of the WHO Commission on Social Determinants of Health, previously validated in the Basque context was used.

It was established that the impact of the Fourth Environmental Framework Program on most of the health social determinants, both structural and intermediary, would be positive. Among the former, which determine health inequalities, it is expected that social values of sustainability and health are strengthened, and welfare and governance improved. Likewise, it is expected that there will be a decrease in inequalities due to age and functional diversity.

With respect to the intermediate level ones, the impact would be positive for employment opportunities, environmental quality, natural environments, public transport and structures that promote active mobility. It is expected that the retention of wealth in the local area will be greatly strengthened and that access to goods and services such as employment, education, training and health services, diet, commerce in general and leisure and recreation facilities will be improved. It can also contribute to improving the quality of housing and the health system.

Among psychosocial factors, the positive effect of this sectoral policy would result in a decrease in psychosocial stress and an increase in social cohesion as well as individual and collective self-esteem.

In the end, the outcome of this set of positive effects would have an impact at an individual level by increasing people's control over their lives, making it easier for them to adopt healthy behaviour. The latter includes the practice of physical exercise, healthy eating, activities that increase interpersonal relationships and decrease alcohol, tobacco and illegal drug consumption.

The full strength of the positive health impact of the Fourth Environmental Framework Program, which includes health-generating elements, could be maximized if the actions to eliminate the uncertainty of the effect on some determinants were incorporated into it. In order to achieve equitable economic development, different social groups should be taken into consideration (gender, social class, country or geographic location of origin) in the definition and implementation of the actions developed by the policy.

Likewise, it is essential to avoid reducing the quality of employment and worsening working conditions, and it is advisable to incorporate positive discrimination measures. It

would also be desirable that improvements in connectivity and public transport reach rural areas as well. Regarding a healthy diet, it is intended to take action to prevent greater access to food leading to consuming processed food, especially in the most disadvantaged groups, and working with the industry sector to improve food content and curb the generation of waste.

Other recommendations focus on adapting climate change strategies to the most vulnerable groups, both by age and geographic location, to include measures in traditional garden design making them a place to see and be seen and thus discourage dangerous activities. Likewise there are proposals to monitor environmental factors that impact on population health and health equity, participate in initiatives aimed at increasing awareness, and assess the impact of the HLA process and its follow-up over time.

With this in mind, it is expected that the Basque population will improve health-related quality of life, health self-assessment, decrease premature mortality and multiple diseases (cardiovascular, respiratory, inflammatory, osteoarticular, infectious and parasitic, lung and breast cancer, leukaemia, asthma, allergies, diabetes, cataracts and macular degeneration). In addition a decrease in traffic accidents, drownings, insomnia and headaches would take place as well as an improvement in mental health. With regard to children, presumably physical and social development would see improvements and learning disorders, hyperactivity and cognitive delay would decrease.