



# HEALTH IMPACT ASSESSMENT of the Massachusetts SMALL BUSINESS TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

May 2015

Research suggests that as the number of small businesses in a community declines, fewer people participate in elections and express diverse points of view.



## THE SOCIAL IMPACT OF LOCAL, SMALL BUSINESSES

In communities with many small locally-owned businesses, the interests of business owners and community often align as places of business and residences overlap. This can contribute to and result in greater community engagement, investment in the local economy and interest in community problem solving<sup>2</sup>. Conversely, studies have found civic participation is dampened in places where a single business or small number of businesses employ the majority of an area's residents<sup>3</sup>.

Communities with high levels of social cohesion have better health outcomes than those with low levels<sup>4</sup>. These communities are often characterized by high levels of trust, collaboration and participation in public affairs and community groups. Those with rich social environments—who hold a greater level of trust in their

neighbors and are part of more tightly knit communities—have access to a greater network of social and economic resources which helps improve health.

The **Small Business Technical Assistance program** targets small businesses owned and operated by women, people of color and immigrants as well as businesses located in economically disadvantaged urban and rural communities. Through lending and training, the program supports local economies and conditions that allow a diversity of local, small businesses to flourish.

Over the past three years, the program helped more than 3,000 businesses<sup>5</sup>. Annually, it has provided support to over 600 women-owned businesses, 300 immigrant-owned businesses, and 600 business owners from low- to moderate-income backgrounds<sup>6</sup>. These businesses are not only creating more diversity in business ownership, but are serving as building blocks for more socially-connected and healthy communities in our cities and towns.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

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1. Blanchard T., Tobler C., and Mencken C. *The Health and Wealth of U.S. Counties: How the Small Business Environment Impacts Alternative Measures of Development.*  
2. Blanchard T. *The configuration of local economic power and civic participation in the global economy.*  
3. Ibid.  
4. Kawachi I, Berkman LF. *Social cohesion, social capital, and health.*  
5. Massachusetts Growth Capital Corporation SBTA grant program reporting data.  
6. Categories are not mutually exclusive

*Interested in contributing to the HIA? Please contact us before June 2015.*



## Participate in the HIA

Participation is an essential element of an HIA. In this HIA, we are engaging those who provide technical assistance to small businesses, individuals and organizations with small business and public health expertise, and experts from state agencies, academic settings and non-profit organizations.

If you are interested in learning more about the HIA or providing feedback, please contact us.

## ASSESSING THE HEALTH BENEFITS OF SMALL BUSINESS ASSISTANCE

**Small businesses have a profound economic impact on Massachusetts – that is well known. But what of their health impact?** How does the Commonwealth's Small Business Technical Assistance program, which helps underserved and disadvantaged businesses with fewer than 20 employees, improve the physical and mental health of owners and employees? Can that benefit extend to customers, surrounding neighborhoods, nearby residents and other businesses?

These are questions that a team led by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council and the Harvard Center for Population and Development Studies is determined to answer.

The team is conducting a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) on Massachusetts' Small Business Technical Assistance program. Our goal is to better understand the links between the program and health outcomes and to use our findings to inform program funding and decision-making. The HIA is being performed in coordination with the Massachusetts Growth Capital Corporation and the Massachusetts Association of Community Development Corporations.

## WHAT IS A HEALTH IMPACT ASSESSMENT?

A **Health Impact Assessment (HIA)** is a process that uses data, health expertise, and public input to identify the possible health effects of a proposed change. HIAs are used to assess proposals such as new development projects or legislative policies to produce recommendations that minimize health risks and maximize health benefits.

**Websites:** <http://www.pewtrusts.org/hip/massachusetts-small-business-technical-assistance-program.html> and <http://www.mapc.org/sbtahia>

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[www.healthimpactproject.org](http://www.healthimpactproject.org)

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