III. Registration of Vital Events

The origin, flow, and disposition of North Carolina vital records are illustrated in the flow diagram on the following page. A brief history of vital records processing and current registration practice in North Carolina is presented.

The Bureau of Vital Statistics was created by an act of the General Assembly in 1913. The Vital Statistics office became a part of the Department of Human Resources in 1973. In 1989, the General Assembly combined the Department of Human Resources’ Division of Health Services and the environmental and natural resources divisions of the Department of Natural Resources and Community Development to create the new Department of Environment, Health, and Natural Resources. In 1997 the public health divisions, including the Vital Statistics office, were combined again with the human resources division to form a new Department of Health and Human Services. The public health authority of this department and the laws that it administers are contained in Chapter 130A, Article 4, of the General Statutes of North Carolina. Within the organizational structure of the Department of Health and Human Services, the State Registrar of Vital Statistics is appointed by the State Health Director. Duties of the State Registrar are accomplished by Vital Records, a unit of the State Center for Health Statistics (SCHS).

Birth and Death
The collection of birth and death records began on October 1, 1913. The Department of Health and Human Services is the custodian of these records. The hospital administrator or person attending a non-hospital delivery is required to file a birth certificate or fetal death report within 10 days after delivery. The funeral director or person burying or otherwise disposing of a body is responsible for filing a death certificate with the local registrar within five days after death.

The local registrar is the county health director. A clerk of the county health department, designated by the local registrar as deputy registrar, carries out registration procedures locally. The deputy registrar forwards the original birth and death certificates to the Department of Health and Human Services on the fifth day of the month following the birth or death, where they are processed and permanently preserved. Microfilmed copies and computerized data from birth and death certificates are sent to the National Center for Health Statistics.

North Carolina was admitted into the National Death Registration Area in 1916 and into the National Birth Registration Area in 1917.

Fetal Death
North Carolina law requires the filing of a fetal death report for fetal deaths (stillbirths) of 20 or more weeks gestation. Legislation enacted by the 1971 General Assembly and subsequent legislation requires that therapeutic abortions be reported separately, effective May 19, 1971. Thus, the induced abortion report form now replaces a fetal death report for the very few therapeutic abortions occurring at 20 or more weeks gestation. For this reason, counts of fetal deaths and perinatal deaths since 1971 are not strictly comparable to counts in previous years.

Marriage and Divorce
In 1957, the General Assembly enacted legislation requiring that the duties of the clerk of court include the registration of divorces and annulments of marriage effective January 1, 1958. Certificates of divorce and annulment are required to be sent to the Department of Health and Human Services on or before the 15th day of the month following the event. The filing of certificates of divorce rather than divorce listings was started January 1, 1984, following legislation in 1983.

By virtue of legislation enacted in 1961, the duties of the county register of deeds include the registration of marriages occurring on or after January 1, 1962. Copies of the certificates of marriage are required to be forwarded to the Department of Health and Human Services on or before the 15th day of the month following the marriage. The original certificates are filed with the county register of deeds.
The Origin, Flow, and Disposition of Vital Records North Carolina

**Hospital Administrator**
Statutory Citation G.S. 130A-101 & 114
Completes birth certificate or fetal death report for hospital deliveries. Obtains certifier’s signature. Sends birth certificate or fetal death report to county registrar. Responds to requests for information.

**Physician**
Statutory Citation G.S. 130A-101 & 114
Signs birth certificate or fetal death report. Completes birth certificate or fetal death report for non-hospital delivery; sends to county registrar. Completes cause of death and signs certificate for all non-medical-examiner deaths.

**Funeral Director**
Statutory Citation G.S. 130A-112 & 115
Sends notification of death to registrar and completes death certificate. Obtains cause of death and signature of physician. Obtains burial permit when necessary. Delivers death certificate to county registrar within five days.

**Medical Examiner**
Statutory Citation G.S. 130A-114, 115 & 383
Initiates certificate for a death resulting from injury, suicide, or homicide, and for certain unattended deaths and fetal deaths. Investigates circumstances surrounding aforementioned deaths and certifies cause and manner of death.

**Register of Deeds**
Statutory Citation G.S. 130A-110
Completes marriage certificates for all marriages. Sends copy of marriage certificate to Department of Health and Human Services. Prepares delayed certificates and sends to DHHS for approval. Initiates amendment applications.

**Clerk of Court**
Statutory Citation G.S. 130A-111
Completes divorce certificate and forwards to Department of Health and Human Services.

**County Registrar (County Health Department)**
Statutory Citation G.S. 130A-97

**Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)**

**Vital Records Unit – SCHS**
**Report Processing**
- Receives and processes current reports of births, deaths, marriages, and divorces and delayed birth certificates.
- Codes demographic data.
- Provides consultation and assistance to individuals involved with vital records registration.

**Corrections**
- Receives and processes all requests for change to prior records.

**Special Registration**
- Reviews and processes all requests for adoption, legitimation, and judicial determinations of paternity.

**Nosology**
- Codes all conditions at death using current revision of the ICD.
- Codes underlying cause on fetal death report.
- Codes congenital anomalies on birth certificates.

**Data Entry**
- Keys data from vital records — births, deaths, fetal deaths, marriages, and divorces.

**Microfilm and Preservation**
- Microfilms all vital records.
- Prepares certifications, verifications, and manuscripts from microfilm and photocopies.
- Stores and preserves all original records.

**Transmits Data to the National Center for Health Statistics**

**Statistical Services Unit – SCHS**
- Answers requests for vital statistics data.
- Publishes annual reports; conducts special studies.
- Performs selective edit of variables and maintains cumulative files.

**Medical Examiner**
Statutory Citation G.S. 130A-115
Initiates certificate for a death resulting from injury, suicide, or homicide, and for certain unattended deaths and fetal deaths. Investigates circumstances surrounding aforementioned deaths and certifies cause and manner of death.

**National Center for Health Statistics**

**Other States**
Exchange birth and death records.