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 Oct. 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 within five days after date of birth 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 staff person of the county health department, designated by the local registrar as deputy registrar, carries out registration procedures locally. The deputy registrar reviews electronic births records from his or her local facility(ies) and releases the records to N.C. Vital Records and local register of deeds. The deputy registrar forwards the original death certificates to the Department of Health and Human Services on the fifth and 20th days of the month following the 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 Jan. 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 Jan. 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 before Jan. 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 record or fetal death report for hospital deliveries. Obtains certifier’s signature.
- Releases birth record to county registrar.
- Sends the fetal death report to the county registrar.
- Responds to requests for information.

### Physician, Physician Assistant or Nurse Practitioner
**Statutory Citation**
G.S. 130A-101, 114 & 115
- Completes birth record or fetal death report for 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, physician assistant or nurse practitioner.
- Obtains burial transit permit when necessary.
- Delivers death certificate to county registrar within five days.

### Medical Examiner
**Statutory Citation**
G.S. 130A-114, 115 & 383
- Initiates death 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 birth certificates and sends to DHHS for approval.
- Initiates amendment and legitimation applications.
- Register of Deeds maintain copies of birth and death certificates for issuance and public access.

### 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
- Checks records for accuracy and completeness.
- Requests further information when necessary.
- Reviews electronic birth records before releasing to Vital Records and register of deeds.
- Prepares copy of death certificates for register of deeds.
- Sends original certificates to the Department of Health and Human Services. Issues burial transit permits and disinterment and reinterment.

### Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)
#### Vital Records Unit – SCHS
- **Records Processing**
  - Processes electronic submission of births.
  - Receives and processes current reports of deaths, marriages and divorces.
  - Codes demographic data.
  - Provides consultation and assistance to individuals involved with vital records registration.
- **Corrections**
  - Receives and processes all requests for change to records.
- **Special Registration**
  - Reviews and processes all requests for adoption, legitimation and judicial determinations of paternity.
- **Nosology**
  - Keys all conditions at death using NCHS SuperMicar software.
  - Codes underlying cause on fetal death report.
- **Data Entry**
  - Keys data from vital records — deaths, fetal deaths, marriages and divorces.
- **Microfilm and Preservation**
  - Microfilms all vital records.
  - Prepares certifications and verifications from microfilm and photocopies.
  - Stores and preserves all original records.
- **Transmits Data to the National Center for Health Statistics**

#### Statistical Services Unit – SCHS
- Submits electronic birth certificate data to the National Center for Health Statistics.
- Answers requests for vital statistics data.
- Publishes annual reports; conducts special studies.
- Performs selective edit of variables and maintains cumulative files.

### National Center for Health Statistics
- Receives data from state.
- Codes cause of death on all death records.
- Performs sample quality control and assures receipt of all records and corrections.
- Publishes United States reports.
- Provides technical assistance.
- Provides classes in registration (ASTI).

### Other States
- Exchange birth and death records.

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North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services
Division of Public Health ♦ State Center for Health Statistics