

# Pacific Health Information Network

## Strengthening Health Information Systems and Digital Health

### INFORMATION DOCUMENT: 9.2 Pacific regional medical cause of death and ICD Mortality Coding

#### 1. BACKGROUND

The Brisbane Accord Group (BAG)<sup>1</sup> has coordinated capacity building and technical support for strengthening civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) systems, particularly the collection and reporting of births and deaths, in Pacific Island countries and territories (PICTs). Accurate data on vital events underpin effective decision-making and health and development programmes. The work of the BAG partners is coordinated and guided by several key regional action plans and strategic frameworks<sup>2</sup>. The Pacific Community (SPC) Statistics for Development Division (SDD) is the Secretariat for the BAG.

Strong political commitment from countries combined with support from partners and Bloomberg Philanthropies Data for Health Initiative (D4H)<sup>3</sup> has led to significant improvements in Pacific CRVS systems over recent years (See Appendix). Despite these developments, the availability and quality of mortality data and statistics in PICs remains suboptimal. Critical gaps exist in: (i) death registration (ii) medical certification of cause of death; (iii) coding of cause of death; and (iv) data analysis, interpretation and reporting. Strengthening local staff capacities and performance in these key areas constitute a core component of the BAG's activities. The high prevalence of major health risks in the Pacific (diabetes, obesity, heart disease, tobacco and alcohol use) make it imperative that national health authorities improve the availability, timeliness and quality of cause-of-death data.

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<sup>1</sup> See Brisbane Accord Group (BAG) webpage: <https://sdd.spc.int/brisbane-accord-group-bag>

<sup>2</sup> These include the Pacific Vital Statistics Action Plan (PVSAP) [See [https://sdd.spc.int/digital\\_library/pacific-vital-statistics-action-plan-pvsap](https://sdd.spc.int/digital_library/pacific-vital-statistics-action-plan-pvsap)] under the Ten-Year Pacific Statistic Strategy 2011–2020 (TYPSS) and succeeding Strategic Framework for the Development of Pacific Statistics 2022-2030 (TYPSS II) [See [https://sdd.spc.int/digital\\_library/strategic-framework-pacific-statistics-2022-30-pacific-regional-statistics-system](https://sdd.spc.int/digital_library/strategic-framework-pacific-statistics-2022-30-pacific-regional-statistics-system)]. Partners activities also align with national commitments to strengthen CRVS systems during 2015–2024 under the Regional Action Framework (RAF) on CRVS in Asia and the Pacific. [See <https://getinthepicture.org/crvs-decade/regional-action-framework> ]

<sup>3</sup> See Data for Health webpage <https://www.bloomberg.org/public-health/strengthening-health-data/data-for-health/>

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### 2. ACTION TAKEN

The BAG has continued to strengthen its support to countries in improving the completeness and coverage of civil registration. This ensures every person has a legal identity, can access entitlements, and that there is timely information for planning and monitoring the provision of essential services. Reporting, quality and analysis of mortality data, in particular through strengthening cause-of-death certification and coding practices, has been a key focus. The aim is to improve availability, quality, timeliness, reporting and use of vital statistics in policy decisions, and develop a pool of highly skilled Pacific Island professionals that can lead capacity-building efforts in the region. In particular, since 2020, SPC with D4H in consultation with relevant BAG partners has provided technical and financial assistance. Achievements include:

- An assessment of needs and capacities in medical certification of cause of death and ICD mortality coding among selected PICTs
- Report on regional technical support for mortality statistics programs in PICTs including an initial proposal for a regional centre for coding of causes of death
- Published a regional training curriculum for medical certification of causes of death and a regional training curriculum for ICD mortality coding of causes of death<sup>4</sup>
- Regional and in-country training on cause-of-death certification and coding practices provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), the Queensland University of Technology (QUT), WHO and SPC<sup>5</sup>
- Review of cause of death records in Fiji, Tuvalu, Nauru, and Republic of Marshall Islands with a report published on quality assessment of cause of death data for the Republic of Marshall Islands

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<sup>4</sup> See Curriculum on medical certification of cause of death for Pacific Island countries and territories <https://purl.org/spc/digilib/doc/vmfzk> and Curriculum for coding of causes of death for Pacific Island countries and territories <https://purl.org/spc/digilib/doc/qbrzh> . Published by the Brisbane Accord Group. 2021

<sup>5</sup> See [Regional Training Workshops on ICD Mortality Coding | Statistics for Development Division \(spc.int\)](#); [Sub-regional training on medical certification of causes of death | Statistics for Development Division \(spc.int\)](#); <https://sdd.spc.int/events/2022/12/webinar-regional-cause-death-training-and-icd-11>

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Building on this progress, the *Pacific Regional Programme on Strengthening the Availability and Quality of Cause of Death Data* (Pacific CoD programme)<sup>6</sup> is focused on increasing institutional capacity for medical certification of cause of death and mortality coding as well as the actual implementation of regional training and capacity building support provided by the D4H and BAG partners.

Current and planned activities include:

- Expanded training and training-of-trainers on medical certification of cause of death
- Training and mentorship support on ICD mortality coding (including on ICD-11 and the transition to ICD-11)
- Support countries in the use of relevant resources for ICD mortality coding including automated tools and advocacy materials
- Implement standardised regional training curriculum on medical certification of cause of death and ICD coding (and online courses) at regional academic institutions
- Advance proposal and implementation at initial scale of regional coding centre
- Support countries on data quality assessments
- Training in data analysis and interpretation, and production of vital statistics reports

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

Data on births, deaths and cause-of-death are essential for planning, managing, and evaluating the performance of the health sector and needed for accurate monitoring of population health in PICs. The availability and quality of cause-of-death data remain fundamental challenges for most PICs. This mainly stems from weak death registration practices, inaccurate, delayed, or inadequate medical certification and ICD coding of causes of death, and limited data analysis and reporting.

The Pacific CoD Programme aims to institutionalise regional support provided by the D4H and BAG partners for medical certification and ICD coding of causes of death, through building

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<sup>6</sup> See webinar event providing overview of this project <https://sdd.spc.int/events/2022/12/webinar-regional-cause-death-training-and-icd-11>

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local capacity in accordance with mutually identified support requirements. The programme is working on a sustainable and systemic framework of support that enables training participants to become trainers themselves. The aim is to build a pool of highly skilled Pacific Island professionals who would lead capacity strengthening efforts in the region (training-of-trainers), particularly through south-south or peer-to-peer support. The project also includes work towards a long-term solution of centralised coding support at a regional centre for countries where needed. This includes testing the concept and implementing at initial scale as well as strengthening the partnership arrangements.

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### 4. APPENDIX

#### Recent developments on CRVS systems in Pacific Island countries

##### Death registration

- Kiribati has revised the death registration form to correspond to international standards for medical certification.

##### Institutional support for civil registration

- Business process mapping and improvement (BPI) work have been recently completed in Niue, Samoa, and Vanuatu using the CRVS System Improvement Framework
- Through the Pacific Civil Registrars Network, Niue and Cook Islands have established a data sharing arrangement with New Zealand which will enable them to update their records with information on deaths and name changes occurring off-island
- Civil registrars have participated in a workshop to establish effective disaster management strategies for civil registries. South-South support arrangements between countries have also been supported through which countries have reported adopted changes in practice through learning from each other.
- Assessment of inequalities in registration have been conducted in Fiji. Inequality assessment work plan to be conducted in Samoa and more countries.
- Countries are increasingly including civil registration performance assessment questions in their censuses; Tonga and Tuvalu were the first two to make this change, with Tonga proceeding to develop an analytical fact sheet from the findings of the census

##### Health sector linkage with civil registration

- A number of countries have revised their registration business process particularly facilitating improved coordination between the Ministries of Health and civil registration offices. In 2017 Kiribati set up a civil registrar's desk at the main hospital to facilitate birth registrations, while Tokelau has established a memorandum of understanding with the health office, to enable immediate notification of events occurring in the health premises

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### Vital Statistics

- Tuvalu, Kiribati, and Vanuatu have produced and published their first ever national vital statistics reports based on administrative data. While Niue, Nauru and Cook Islands are in the process or releasing the second series of reports.
- A number of countries are being supported to develop vital statistics reports, which include performance assessments of completeness in registration over time

### Cause of death

- Doctors from the region are being trained on medical certification practices in accordance with the International Classification of Diseases.
- Medical coders from the region are being trained on ICD mortality coding, including on ICD-11. Regional ICD mortality coding support approaches are being progressed.
- Tuvalu has been supported in review of the quality of their medical certification and coding practices.