



## Message From The Chairperson

In 1997, the Advisory Committee on Population Health (ACPH) expressed concern about the quality of vital statistics data in Canada. Although it was established that the data quality issues were isolated it was nonetheless decided that the ACPH would establish a Working Group to examine the quality of national vital event data. As a consequence of this initiative a report with recommendations on the quality of national vital event data was prepared.

Although the Working Group determined that the quality of the national vital event data is good, there are always opportunities to improve on the methods for collecting, analysing, and disseminating data. To this end there have been several significant initiatives introduced by the Vital Statistics Council to improve the business processes involving the various programs overseen by Vital Statistics. In October of last year I provided the ACPH with a presentation on the initiatives by the Council with respect to the recommendations made in the Working Group Report. Several of these initiatives are discussed below:

- Technical assistance from Statistics Canada will be supplied to jurisdictions—for example, Prince Edward Island—so that they may upgrade their systems in order to improve data quality and consistency, and to facilitate data transfer;
- Statistics Canada is working with a physician and a former medical examiner to develop a program to instruct physicians on how to properly report the cause of death on the Medical Certificate of Death;
- A Data Quality Capture/Recapture project is underway to assess the quality of the data capture systems in the provinces/territories and at Statistics Canada; results will be determined by recapturing data from original birth and death records from each province/territory;
- Statistics Canada provided resources for a Data Quality Workshop in Ontario for approximately 150 people; participants included federal, provincial and local data users and individuals at the local and provincial levels who are responsible for the data;
- The Vital Statistics Council Web Site ([www.vscouncil.ca](http://www.vscouncil.ca)) was developed and is now online;

- A National Vital Event Data Capture and Routing System project has been initiated that will ultimately create an information-routing system to improve both the timeliness and quality of data and increase the protection of confidential data already being transmitted (paper or electronic) between provinces/territories and to Statistics Canada. (For more information, please refer to the article by Phil Marsh located elsewhere in this newsletter.); and
- The implementation of ICD-10 for mortality coding began in the provinces/territories and Statistics Canada in January 2000.

The Council is committed to strengthening the national vital statistics system by working collaboratively with users of our data to identify opportunities and overcome challenges in maintaining and enhancing the quality of national vital event data. ♦

*Thelma Johnston, Chairperson  
Vital Statistics Council for Canada*

## The Council Launches a New Web Site

*Brian McKee, Senior Project Officer  
British Columbia Vital Statistics Agency*

The Vital Statistics Council for Canada is moving further into the electronic age with the introduction of its brand new Internet site (which is located at: <http://www.vscouncil.ca>). Development of the web site took place early last year under the auspices of a Council sub-committee hosted by Ron Danderfer of the British Columbia Vital Statistics Agency. Participating members included co-chair Alexandra Schmidt of the Department of Consumer and

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Commercial Relations of Ontario, and Michel Séguin of the Health Statistics Division of Statistics Canada. Ron Danderfer kindly supplied the assistance of Phil Marsh to facilitate a three-day workshop on site design; Bruce Stuart and Brian McKee then interpreted the design concept and created the site.

The design crew needed to accommodate the needs of several quite different client groups who could be expected to access this web site. Members of the public seeking registry services or certificates of registration would need help directing their inquiries to a specific provincial/territorial registry, combined with access to that registry's services. Council members will require information on current or past Council activities, or ongoing sub-committee processes. And researchers seeking statistical information would need access to the information services of the members. With this in mind, the site is composed of three major categories: Registry Services, Members, and Vital Statistics Council.

The Registry Services section is subdivided into seven categories: birth, death, marriage, genealogy, change of name, adoption, and divorce. Under each category the user is given province- and territory-specific information on the most frequently asked questions on each subject.

The Members section comprises 14 subsections, one for each provincial/territorial registry and one for the Health Statistics Division of Statistics Canada. These subsections publish the Vital Statistics Council Orientation Kit information on each of the members. Information contained in these subsections includes the historical evolution of each member's vital statistics agency or department, the services available from each member, the relationship of the member in its own government structure, the relationship of the member to Statistics Canada, information on the member's operations, and contact information on the member.

By prominently displaying the members' names on the header of each page the design team felt that people looking for registry services could access the province/territory of their choice through hyperlinks from each member to its own web site, if available. The address and telephone information included in each member's section will facilitate contact, particularly to those members who have not yet implemented their own web site.

The third major section of the site is dedicated to the Vital Statistics Council for Canada. This section has subsections for the orientation kit material on

the Council itself, the five-year strategic business plan, the current year business plan, links to download the *Vital News* newsletter, and contact information for Council members.

Navigation on the fully bilingual web site is facilitated by the use of a common header and footer on each page. The graphics on the header and footer contain easily recognizable file tabs that contain hyperlinks to other parts of the site. A site map is included as well as a search engine and a feedback form to aid users in seeking information.

Future plans for the site include setting up an area restricted to members only, which can be used to circulate committee minutes or other Council business correspondence. Ron Danderfer and Alexandra Schmidt, co-chairs of the Internet committee, welcome ideas and suggestions to enhance the usefulness of the Council web site. ♦

## **Privatization of Registries Service Delivery**

*Barry Haugrud, Director General Registry  
Alberta Vital Statistics, Corporate/Registries on Line*

Alberta Registries was formed in February 1993 by consolidating and centralizing six departments under a common umbrella. These departments include Motor Vehicles, Land Titles, Corporate Registry, Personal Property Registry, Land Information Alberta, and Vital Statistics. The goal for consolidation was efficient and timely service delivery to taxpayers.

Prior to the creation of Alberta Registries, the service delivery system was complex and often inaccessible to the outlying areas of Alberta. Motor Vehicles offered service from 11 government offices, 149 private sector and 16 Alberta Motor Association offices, and a mail-in option for vehicle registration renewals. Land Titles, Corporate Registry, Personal Property, and Vital Statistics offered counter and mail-in services in Edmonton and Calgary. Land Information Alberta operated in Edmonton only.

Under Alberta Registries, the service delivery model changed dramatically and privatization became the key to success. Motor Vehicles, Vital Statistics, Personal Property, and Corporate registration services are now offered at 229 Registry Agent outlets throughout the province. Only a selected number of Land Titles and Corporate Registry transactions can be conducted over the counter at government offices. Knowledgeable government

personnel are available six days a week to assist the agents in completing complex issues.

Lawyers, financial institutions, search houses, and others may apply for access to the Registries Online network to perform searches directly from their offices. In the case of financial institutions, this direct access to a search eliminates costly delays in loan and mortgage transactions. Depending on their contractual agreement with Alberta Registries, Registries Online subscribers may also process certain Land Title, Corporate Registry and Personal Property transactions.

Alberta and Albertans are continually reaping the benefits of this privatization initiative. Some of these benefits are:

- one-stop shopping for a full range of registry services;
- improved access due to more outlets;
- same service availability in small towns as in major cities;
- extended day hours and weekend service;
- improved turnaround time for transactions (for example, from three weeks to one day for Corporate annual returns, and from six weeks to one day for Vital Statistics certificates);

- agents can respond more readily to community needs by extending operating hours, hiring more staff and adding work stations; and
- reduction in the government's overall budget for delivery of registry services of over \$19 million.

With respect to Vital Statistics, the benefits experienced since privatization are as follows:

- The marriage licence and registration process is streamlined, thereby greatly enhancing error-free registrations. The data is entered online, captured, and the licence and registration are printed on-site. This process eliminates a turnaround waiting period and allows the client to immediately verify that the information is correctly entered. The registration part of the form is returned to Vital Statistics for processing after the wedding is solemnized; the licence part is kept on file by the wedding officiant.
- When ordering a certificate at a service outlet, the client can verify that the recorded information is correct prior to its issuance. If a discrepancy exists, the amendment process can be initiated immediately. Only Vital Statistics personnel can follow-up on an amendment request and make any correction.

## **Vital Statistics Council for Canada Annual Meeting**

**What: The Vital Statistics Council for Canada 2001 Meeting with Representatives from Provincial/Territorial Vital Statistics Agencies, Statistics Canada, NAPHSIS and NCHS**

**When: June 4-7, 2001**

**Where: Winnipeg, Manitoba**

Organizations who wish to make a presentation to the Council at this meeting should address their requests no later than March 31, 2001 to:

Secretariat  
Vital Statistics Council for Canada  
c/o Health Statistics Division  
Statistics Canada  
18th Floor, R.H. Coats Building  
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0T6  
Telephone: (613) 951-1765

- The legal name change process is streamlined with the application being entered online at an agent's office. The application and the necessary documentation must be submitted to Vital Statistics for review and processing.
- The client's answers to questions (for example, marital status, children involved in the change of name) are input into VISTAS, the vital events database, to build the necessary screens for completion of the name change.
- When all information is added and updated, a summary is displayed online advising the agent and the client what documents have to be sent to Vital Statistics (birth certificate, immigration documents, marriage certificate, etc.).
- Certificates can be issued to clients within hours of their submission.
- Registry Agents offer personable and on-the-spot handling of questions, issues or misunderstandings. Major concerns can be directed to a knowledgeable government employee and dealt with while the client is still at the agent's counter.

How VISTAS allows an agent to assist a client in applying for a certificate is as follows:

- The agent keys in the pertinent information about the client. For example, a birth certificate application requires the client's name, sex, birth place, date of birth, the parents' names and their birth places.
- The agent then clicks on the "Search for Birth Registration" button.
- The system returns a list of possible matches based on the surname, sex and date of birth. Usually the list contains only one name listed.
- When there is a multiple birth or if the client does not know the date of the event, the pick list will show more than one name. If the date of event is not exact, the system will search 18 months on either side of the date indicated. With a name such as "Smith," the pick list could be substantial. VISTAS will return all the Smiths in the sex indicated within that three-year period.
- Forgotten dates are most common in marriage certificate applications.
- The pick list outlines the person's name, sex, and mother's maiden name.

Alberta Registries has monitored client satisfaction through a quarterly survey conducted by an impartial agency since 1995. Since the survey process began, the lowest result was 92 percent of Registry Agent clients satisfied with the service they received. The results of this year's first quarter survey returned with an impressive 96 percent rating of client satisfaction. ♦

## Change to the Stillbirth Definition in Saskatchewan

*Shelley Ann Gibson, Director  
Saskatchewan Vital Statistics*

Effective January 1, 2001 the definition of "stillbirth" as defined under *The Vital Statistics Act, 1995* for the purpose of registering stillbirths in the Province of Saskatchewan was changed to the following:

"Stillbirth" means the complete expulsion or extraction from its mother after at least 20 weeks pregnancy, or after attaining a weight of at least 500 grams, of a product of conception in which, after the expulsion or extraction, there is no breathing, beating of the heart, pulsation of the umbilical cord or unmistakable movement of voluntary muscle.

The previous definition of stillbirth was based on the criterion of birth weight alone. The change allows for two criteria to be used in defining a stillbirth: a gestation age equal to or greater than 20 weeks, or a weight equal to or greater than 500 grams. The ability to define stillbirth using both gestation age and birth weight will help ensure that a common definition of stillbirth is used across Canada. It will also allow Saskatchewan stillbirth data to be effectively compared and analyzed on a national and an international basis. In addition, the new stillbirth definition will permit the effective analysis of stillbirth data by provincial and federal health agencies across the country as they provide surveillance and interpret perinatal health data for Saskatchewan. This in turn will assist in program development to combat perinatal mortality.

If you need any further information with respect to this change, please contact the Saskatchewan Vital Statistics office in Regina. ♦

## National Vital Event Data Capture and Routing System

*Phil Marsh,  
B.C. Vital Statistics Agency*

The Vital Statistics Council for Canada is an advisory body composed of representatives from Statistics Canada and from each of the 13 provincial and territorial Vital Statistics Registries. The Vital Statistics Registries are responsible for the collection and processing of vital event data including births, deaths, marriages and stillbirths, and for supplying this data to Statistics Canada for national statistical reporting. Statistics Canada receives this data from the jurisdictions in different formats, on different media and at different times throughout the year. Due to a combination of financial, business, and technical reasons, not all jurisdictions have sufficient resources to standardize the collection and delivery of this data.

To help address this situation, the Council has initiated the National Vital Event Data Capture and Routing System Project. The proposed system consists of two major components. The first component, which is the data capture and validation application, will allow vital events to be electronically recorded and validated “at the source” by authorized service providers. This method will be much more efficient since it will eliminate the paper-based data routing and the data entry task currently performed by the Vital Statistics registries. The second component of the system consists of developing an infrastructure (or routing system) that will enable the simultaneous electronic delivery of vital event information among provincial/territorial Vital Statistics organizations, Statistics Canada, and authorized third party organizations. The expected completion date for the project is 2004, at a cost of approximately \$9.6 million.

The routing system will enable users to deliver data to a variety of authorized destinations. Depending on the type of event and the specific data, the data will be delivered to anyone who is an authorized “subscriber” to that data. For example, if a death occurs in B.C. to someone who normally resides in Alberta and who was born in Saskatchewan, then the B.C. event would be transmitted simultaneously to Statistics Canada in Ottawa as well as to the Alberta and Saskatchewan Vital Statistics registries. The data can be sent as soon as the event is “registered,” which can be as quickly as 48 hours after the event occurred. This in itself will help reduce the risk of fraudulent birth certificates being

acquired. Additionally, the Vital Statistics Registrars will be able to almost immediately provide this data to other authorized third party organizations such as Health Care, Social Services or Pension organizations that are most interested in this data for their own program delivery.

The data capture and validation application can be implemented based on the specific technical and organizational requirements of each jurisdiction. Because this application will be generic, each jurisdiction that chooses to implement it will be able to customize it to suit their particular requirements and processes. A province or territory may choose not to use this proposed data capture/validation application if they already have an existing application of their own, unless of course the proposed application could provide enhancements to their existing system. And any province or territory that currently does not have such an application and is thinking of adopting such an application in the future will have access to this generic system, at significantly less cost than developing one of their own.

Another potential benefit of this application includes enhanced quality of data, insofar as this system allows for direct input from service providers such as hospital personnel, clergy, and funeral directors. These are the people who come into direct first contact with a vital event, and are the ones best able to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the data. Each province or territory can work with their service providers to make use of the application to supply the jurisdiction with vital event data and a point of entry into the system.

At present, the Council has struck a steering committee that includes representatives from Statistics Canada and five of the 13 provinces and territories. The British Columbia Vital Statistics Agency is acting as project manager for the current phases. A conceptual design was delivered to the Steering Committee and approved in September 2000. This is a logical and abstract definition of what the data capture/validation application and routing system will look like and what its capabilities will be. During January-July of 2001, the conceptual design will be presented to all 14 jurisdictions to determine and quantify the magnitude of the impact that implementing such a system will have on each jurisdiction. At that point, there will be a consolidated report that will identify the following points for each jurisdiction:

- What applications have to be modified to interface with the new system;
- What will be the specific data the jurisdiction can supply;
- What are the resources, schedules and costs to implement the system; and
- What are the specific benefits that each jurisdiction will derive from the system?

Then the project will progress through the development and implementation phases, between late 2001 and early 2004.

If you would like more information about the project, contact Phil Marsh at the British Columbia Vital Statistics Agency (250-952-2438). ♦

### A Farewell

It is with regret that members of the Vital Statistics Council for Canada bid farewell to Council secretary Beth Sander. Beth has decided to retire on January 18, 2001 and has taken on new responsibilities until this date. Beth has supported the members of the Vital Statistics Council for Canada for many years and has become a friend and colleague to all of us. In preparing this farewell I asked Registrars if they would share some of their thoughts about Beth. This is what they said: she is very proud to be Canadian, she is dedicated, determined, hard working, easy going, fair minded, very approachable, and friendly. Beth not only did an excellent job of looking after our needs during times of work but also made sure we had some fun. She will be missed. The Council would also like to take this opportunity to wish Beth health, happiness, and success in the future.

The Council also has the pleasure of welcoming Josée Ménard as the new secretary for the Council. Council members look forward to meeting and working with Josée and wish her all the best as she gets settled into her new position.

## VITAL STATISTICS COUNCIL FOR CANADA



Thelma Johnston, Prince Edward Island - Chairperson  
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