

# 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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 15<sup>th</sup> 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 after 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 15<sup>th</sup> 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

