

## Queensland Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages Data

The following presents information about the quality of the Queensland Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages (RBDM) birth registration administrative data collection.

Quality is a multidimensional concept which does not just include the accuracy of data, but also stretches to include other aspects such as relevance and interpretability. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Data Quality Framework has therefore been used to provide a broader assessment of the RBDM births data holdings.

### INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Queensland births data is sourced from birth registration systems administered by RBDM. Information about the birth is supplied to RBDM based on information provided on a birth notification form provided by the hospital where a child is born, and a birth registration form completed by the parent(s) of the child.

Civil registration of births is compulsory in Australia and registration services in Queensland are delivered by RBDM under the legislative framework provided by the *Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 2003* (BDMR Act) and the *Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Regulation 2015* (BDMR Regulation).

The legislative framework provided by the BDMR Act and BDMR Regulation, regulates the life events that can, or must, be registered, the information that must be provided for registration purposes, the requirements to access information and the types of life event certificates that can be issued. The BDMR Act also provides for the appointment of a Registrar, to support the proper administration of the BDMR Act.

The Registrar has a number of express functions and powers relating to the maintenance of the register. In particular, the Registrar:

- must maintain a register, for each type of registrable event, together with indexes necessary to make the information in the register reasonably accessible;
- must register a registrable event;
- may conduct an inquiry to find out whether a registrable event has happened;
- may make corrections to a register.

While RBDM is not a statistical agency additional information as part of the civil registration process is collected for national statistical, research and planning purposes under the objects of the BDMR Act. The critical act of recording important events in people's lives such as birth, deaths, and marriages, provide individuals with the official recognition and documentation necessary to establish identity, family relationships and civil status. However, the vital statistics and information that can be generated from civil registration also significantly contribute to the formulation of effective and efficient evidence-based policy across multiple sectors for Australia.

The use and disclosure of personal information is closely controlled under the BDMR Act to protect the privacy of individuals and protect against the risk that information will be misused. When releasing information under agreements with other agencies the Registrar is also required to comply

with the *Information Privacy Act 2009 (Qld)* (IP Act) and the Information Privacy Principles (IPPs), which set out how personal information must be collected, stored, used and disclosed.

## RELEVANCE

Registration of a birth is the responsibility of each state and territory Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages and is based on data provided on an information form completed by the parent(s) of the child.

### *Core purpose of data collection*

The BDMR Regulation sets out the information that must be collected by RBDM to register a birth and the information that must be included in certificates. The primary objectives of birth registration are to:

- create a person's official identity, through the registration of their birth;
- provide evidence of the event (birth) registered and proof of age, identity and parentage;
- preserve life-event records for future generations.

However, RBDM collects additional information for administrative purposes and to ensure the reliability of the registration. Supplementary information is also collected as part of the registration process to be used for statistical, research and planning purposes. Although these activities are not expressed explicitly as a power of the Registrar, they align with the objects of the BDMR Act.

Vital statistics derived from Australia's civil registration system provide annual flow demographic statistics for population estimates and projections, studies of mortality, fertility and health, and the construction of life tables. The United Nation's Statistical Division's 'Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System', Revision 3 (2014), pg5 recommend that:

*'Vital statistics are obtained preferably through a civil registration system, as this is the ideal source from which to derive accurate, complete, timely and continuous information on vital events. In addition, vital statistics derived from the civil registration system (and the population registers) can include annual flow statistics from the smallest civil divisions, which no other data-collection system can provide.'*

The *Australian Bureau of Statistics Act 1975* (Cth) outlines the functions of the bureau to ensure the coordination of official bodies (including Departments and authorities of the States) in the collection compilation and dissemination of statistics for the country. The *Statistical Returns Act 1896* (Qld) empowers the Statistician to collect and publish statistics in relation to (among other things) population and vital statistics (Section 4 (1)(a)) and social statistics (Section 4(1)(c)), collecting this, and other incidental information (Section 4(6)) in the manner that he or she decides (Section 4(2) & 4(5)).

The BDMR Act also allows the Registrar to enter into an arrangement for provision of information to an entity that is in the public interest. This power recognises the significant community value of the information RBDM holds for statistical, research and planning purposes relating to population, fertility, health, mortality and other matters. For example, information collected as part of the birth registration process makes up essential information for key health and demographic statistics in the National Minimum Dataset. The National Minimum Dataset is used for:

- determining fertility rates, and national population projections;
- community planning and determining requirements for key services such as education; and
- informing government health policies (including maternal health).

### **Key data items**

The prescribed information collected for inclusion on the birth register is set out in Schedule 1, Part 1 of the BDMR Regulation and includes:

- the full name and sex of the child
- the child's date and place of birth
- the order of birth if there was more than one child born
- for both the birth mother and another parent (if applicable), their full name, place of birth, age at the date of the birth, and occupation
- each applicant's name, residential address and relationship to the child
- names and age of any other children of the parents' relationship (including any predeceased)
- if relevant, details about the date and place of marriage or civil partnership of the parents.

RBDM also gathers some information in the birth registration process that is not prescribed in Schedule 1, Part 1 of the BDMR Regulation including:

- the birth weight of child, stillbirth indicator and gestation period if not born alive
- the date of birth, usual residential address of the child's mother and father
- the Indigenous status of the child's mother and father
- the date of birth of any other children of the parents' relationship
- name and residential address of persons present at birth (e.g. midwife/doctor)

The application form makes it clear, in the Privacy Statement, that "All items marked with an asterisk (\*) are for statistical, administrative and community planning purposes and will not appear in the Registers".

### **Scope of data collection**

Births registration is required by law and requires both parents of the child to sign the registration form and lodge it within 60 days of the birth. In the event of multiple births, a separate form must be completed for each child. Births data includes:

- all live born births registered in Queensland, and still born of at least 20 weeks gestation or 400g birth weight.
- births in Queensland to temporary visitors to Queensland births that have taken place outside of Australia, if the parents intend to live in Queensland, the child is less than 18 months of age and a resident in Queensland, and the birth is not already registered in another state or country
- births occurring in transit (i.e. on ships or planes) if 'next port of call' was Queensland
- and, adoptions, surrogacy arrangements, sex changes, legitimations and corrections.

Births data excludes:

- births that have been registered in another state or territory, or another country

### *Geographic Classifications*

The usual residential address of the child's mother and father/parent are collected as part of the birth registration process. This can be used to define geographical areas for data output. Currently, this raw data is not geo-coded.

The child's mother and father/parent country of birth information are also captured on the birth registration statement. However, note this data is not classified to a classification of countries.

### **TIMELINESS**

The process of registering a birth involves the collection and matching of two sets of data:

1. The birth notification data from the responsible person present at the baby's birth (usually a doctor or midwife)
2. The birth registration application from the parents.

If both sets of data are not received, and are therefore not able to be matched, a birth cannot be registered.

For home births if the baby is taken to a hospital within 24 hours after birth then the hospital will notify the registry of the birth. If a doctor or midwife attends the home birth, they remain responsible and may elect to utilise the hospital system of notification or notify the registry directly.

A child's parents are jointly responsible for having their child's birth registered, although the Registrar may accept an application from only one parent if the other parent's identity or whereabouts are unknown, one parent is unwilling or unable to sign the application or they are deceased.

Under the BDMR Act, a 'responsible person' (generally the chief Executive of the hospital) is required to provide a birth notification to the Register-General within two working days of the birth. The BDMR Act requires a child's parents to apply to register their child's birth within 60 days of the birth, however the Registrar may accept applications made after this period if satisfied that the birth happened.

It is therefore usual to have an interval between the occurrence and registration of a birth (referred to as a registration 'lag') and as a result, some births occurring in one year are not registered until the following year or later. This can be caused by either a delay by the parent(s) in submitting a completed form to the registry, or a delay by the registry in processing the birth. For example, births which occur in November and December are also likely to be registered in the following year.

As a result, there are two dates attributable to each birth registration:

- the date of occurrence (of the birth), and
- the date of registration or inclusion on the Queensland register. The registration date is the date at which all data on the birth record is finalised.

There is evidence to suggest that births to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents may have a lower registration rate than non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander births. Lags in registration may affect reliability of measures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander births. Caution should be



exercised when interpreting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data, especially with regard to annual change.

## ACCURACY

The presence of certain errors (whether systematic or random) may influence accuracy in the Birth registration dataset arising from inaccuracies in collecting, recording and processing the data. Every effort is made to minimise these errors by working with customers to ensure accurate information is provided, undertaking quality checks throughout the data collection process, training of processing staff, and efficient data processing procedures.

Sources of error may include:

- incompleteness of an individual record at a given point in time;
- incompleteness of the dataset (e.g. impact of registration lags, processing lags and duplicate records and births that are never registered); and
- inconsistency in the application of questions and/or changes to birth registration forms over time.
- extent of coverage of the population (while all births are legally required to be registered some cases may not be registered for an extended time).
- transcription errors by parents using the online registration process.
- transcription and processing errors by staff. The RBDM attempts to mitigate this risk through rigorous staff training, detailed documentation and instructions for processing more complex or difficult cases, and data quality checks.

## Method of data collection

Online registration of births became available in 2015 providing parents the option of electronic lodgement of registration information.

In order to lodge an application to register a birth online, a person must be the parent of the child and eligible to sign the registration form electronically with two forms of personal identification.

In addition, to sign electronically both parents of the child must be married, in a civil partnership or cohabitating at the time of conception. If they do not meet this criterion, they must print the registration form, sign before a qualified witness and submit to RBDM in person or by post. An application remains incomplete until signed forms are received by RBDM.

The Registrar may however accept an application from only one parent if the other parent's identity or whereabouts are unknown, one parent is unwilling or unable to sign the application or they are deceased. One parent can also apply to register a birth in cases where the requirement for the other parent to apply would cause the applicant unnecessary distress, for example, where there may be a history of domestic violence.

Hard copy birth registration forms can be downloaded via RBDM's website and submitted by post or in person. Registrations can also be completed in person at the Brisbane registry customer service centre, or through one of RBDM agents at a Queensland Magistrates Court or Queensland Government Agent Program (QGAP) office.

For births that have taken place at home the registration form must be accompanied by written advice from the attending midwife (if present), or the health professional consulted after the birth. Any other persons present at the birth are also required to sign a declaration stating their presence at the birth.

In more recent years, a central point of contact has also been established to help address barriers to registration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Regular outreach visits have been made to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across the State. These visits assist community members to make birth registration applications.

### ***Corrections and Amendments***

Information about the identity of a parent may be added later, following the same criteria applied to the initial registration, including where the other parent does not dispute the parentage, or where a legal presumption can be made about the child's parentage.

Parentage disputes can be resolved judicially through the Supreme Court of Queensland, and the District Court may make orders regarding changes to all other registrable birth information.

Corrections to the register may be made under a court or tribunal order, following a formal inquiry conducted by the Registrar, on the application of a person who can provide correct information, or if the Registrar determines that the correction would ensure that the registration included the most reliable information about the event. Following a correction, the Registrar may decide also to retain the prior information and reflect both on a certificate.

### ***Under-registration***

Birth registration forms ask parents to state whether they are an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Australian. Propensity to register their child's birth and identify as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Australian can be influenced by a range of factors, including:

- who completes the form;
- the perception of why the information is required, and how it will be used;
- the fees and penalties associated with late birth registration;
- cultural aspects and how the information is collected (e.g. online birth registration).

## **COHERENCE**

Compulsory registration of births began in 1856, while Queensland was still part of the colony of New South Wales. RBDM hold historical registration records for baptisms between 1829 and 1856, and marine birth records until 1920.

Each state or territory Registrar has its own birth registration form. Most data items are collected in all states and territories and therefore data at a national level is available for most characteristics. In some cases, different wording of questions asked on the registration form may result in different answers which may influence outcomes regarding the topic of interest.

Changing processes over time and/or across state or territory registries can affect consistency and hence interpretability of statistical output. Changes to methods of data collection and form design across years may also affect reliability of measures and may impact on comparison over time.

Birth registrations data are not the only source of birth information in Australia. The National Perinatal Data Collection (NPDC) is a national collection on pregnancy and childbirth, based on births reported to the Perinatal Data Collection in each state and territory in Australia. This information is compiled and published annually by the National Perinatal Statistics Unit (NPSU) of The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) in **Australia's Mothers and Babies**. As information from these two collections are from different sources, the number of births may vary. The number of births in the Perinatal Data Collection is generally greater, which may reflect that the parent(s) delay or fail to register the birth of a child.

### INTERPRETABILITY

Births data is generally straightforward and easy to interpret. Changes in the numbers of births over time can be due to the changes in the number of women in child-bearing ages and changes in fertility. Considering births information in relation to the size of the relevant population(s) at a given time period should therefore be considered.

Another aspect of note is that each birth of a multiple birth is registered separately and should be considered if analysing characteristics of the parents.

### ACCESSIBILITY

The use and disclosure of personal information is closely controlled under the BDMR Act to protect the privacy of individuals and protect against the risk that information will be misused. The BDMR Act provides that the Registrar can release certain information held by RBDM in the following circumstances:

- in response to a request, made in writing, by a person or other entity, noting that for non-historical information, the Registrar may refuse the request if the person does not have an adequate reason for obtaining the information (see Certificate Access Policy);
- under written policies maintained by the Registrar;
- under an approved arrangement (such as an agreement or Memorandum of Understanding) entered with an entity for the provision of information in a register, that is deemed to be in the **public interest**, including information in bulk or historical or genealogical information;
- under a reciprocal administrative arrangement with another registering authority e.g. an RBDM of another state or territory; and
- under an agreement with the Principal Commissioner of the Queensland Family and Child Commission, the Chief Executive (Child Safety), the Chief Executive (Adoptions) and the Health Ombudsman in relation to specific functions undertaken by those agencies.

RBDM is committed to respecting, protecting and promoting human rights. Under the *Human Rights Act 2019*, RBDM has an obligation to act and make decisions in a way that is compatible with human rights and when making a decision, to give proper consideration to human rights. When deciding about the use and disclosure of information under the BDMR Act, decision-makers must comply with these obligations.

### Privacy and Security

When giving a person or entity information, or access to information contained in a register, the Registrar must consider the need to protect people to whom the information relates from

unjustified intrusion on their privacy. This may involve imposing conditions on the release of the information.

### **Certificate Access Policy**

RBDM's Certificate Access Policy sets out who may obtain information under the BDMR Act, including community members who apply for information or a life event certificate. This policy deals with access to both historical and non-historical information. The current Certificate Access Policy is focussed on factors for determining whether a person has an adequate reason for seeking the requested certificate or information and setting out the specific requirements to accompany a request by specific individuals and entities. It does not provide a framework for the release of information where the Registrar enters into an arrangement, which is in the public interest, with an entity.

### **Historical Information**

In recognition that the information held by RBDM is of interest to family members, historians, genealogists, and family history researchers, the BDMR Act provides open access to **historical information** after a certain period has passed. This means that anyone can access historical information after making an application and paying the applicable fee. Historical information means information in a register that relates to an event that was registered before the following prescribed periods of time:

- for a birth—100 years before the date of the application.

### **Non-Historical Information**

In the case of individual one-off requests for **non-historical information**\*, such as a request for a copy of a life event certificate or information about an event that is in a register or a copy of a source document, the guiding principle, under the BDMR Act, is that information generally should only be released if the applicant has an adequate reason for obtaining it.

(\*Note: Non-historical information means information in a register other than historical information).

In deciding whether an applicant has an adequate reason for obtaining the requested information, the Registrar must have regard to:

- the relationship, if any, between the applicant and the person to whom the information relates;
- the reason that the applicant wants the information;
- the use to be made of the information;
- the age of the entry;
- the contents of the entry or source document;
- the sensitivity of the information; and
- any other relevant factors.

The BDMR Act authorises the Registrar to enter into an arrangement (agreement or MOU) with an entity to provide information **in a register**, including information in bulk or historical or genealogical information, but only if this is **in the public interest**.



RBDM ensures these agreements contain provisions to:

- protect the identity of individuals for example by imposing restrictions on the information able to be included in any publication and limiting who can access the data;
- only release the minimal amount of data needed to meet the objective of the agreement;
- ensure clearly defined, adequate and auditable data security arrangements to address data transmission methods, data storage, and individual and organisational access controls;
- address compliance with information security standards and privacy legislation;
- address data disposal and retention arrangements; and
- either restrict the provision of the data to a third party or clearly set out any third party use of the data and the conditions and arrangements for this use.

### ***Retention and Disposal***

RBDM, as part of Department of Justice and Attorney-General, is subject to the *Public Records Act 2002* (Public Records Act) in relation to the management and preservation of its records (for example, RBDM is subject to requirements under the Public Records Act around the retention and disposal of its records). The Public Records Act also sets out an access regime for access to records after certain periods of time, which is administered by the State Archivist. However, it is important to note that the BDMR Act provides that despite the Public Records Act, the Registrar retains control over access to any information supplied or records maintained under the BDMR Act.

### ***Data Requests***

For further information and Queensland birth data requests contact:

[CRMDData@justice.qld.gov.au](mailto:CRMDData@justice.qld.gov.au)

Please describe the information you want as clearly and with as much detail as possible. We will acknowledge your inquiry as soon as possible.

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