

# CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL STATISTICS IN PALAU

Palau is an island country located in the western Pacific Ocean. The country contains approximately 340 islands, forming the western chain of the Caroline Islands in Micronesia, and has an area of 466 km<sup>2</sup> (180 mi<sup>2</sup>).



Land area  
(km<sup>2</sup>)  
**444**

2020 mid-year  
population estimate  
**17,900**

Population growth  
rate (%)  
**0.2**



Pacific  
Community  
Communauté  
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Pacific CRVS  
supported by Brisbane Accord Group

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## OVERVIEW

This civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) country profile for Palau is part of a series of country profiles for the Pacific Island region. The CRVS profiles consolidate knowledge shared by countries on the status of their CRVS systems in the recent past, including through government websites, published reports, media releases and presentations, and direct engagement between the authors of these profiles and in-country civil registration offices and health information offices. The objective of these CRVS country profiles is to provide a living resource (updated every 2-3 years) and quick reference point on the status and developments in CRVS systems in the Pacific Island region. The profiles provide an overview of the legislative, organisational and management frameworks of CRVS systems, registration processes, levels of completeness of birth and death registration, and the most recent developments towards improving CRVS systems. Whilst civil registration covers many vital events, these profiles focus on the registration of births and deaths, and collation of cause of death information. It is envisaged that these country profiles will serve as a fundamental tool in advocating for further investment in strengthening the coverage and completeness of CRVS systems across the Pacific Island region.

## SOURCE OF BIRTH AND DEATH DATA

The source of figures in Table 1 (births) and Table 2 (deaths) is outlined below each table, with the full citation given in the Reference section at the end of the document. All figures were obtained from published sources or through direct contact with in-country civil registration offices and health information offices. The date figures were obtained through direct in-country contact is stated below the tables, and indicates when those figures were extracted from in-country databases.

## SUGGESTED CITATION

Pacific Community and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) 2021. Civil registration and vital statistics in Palau. Noumea, New Caledonia: Pacific Community.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

For further information please contact the Statistics for Development Division (SDD) – Pacific Community at: [contact-sdd@spc.int](mailto:contact-sdd@spc.int); <https://sdd.spc.int/>

## CRVS LEGISLATION, ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT

### *Current legal framework governing birth and death registration*

The recording and registration of births and deaths in Palau is governed by the Palau National Code (PNC), Title 34 (Public Health, Safety and Welfare), Division 5 (Vital Statistics – Population and Residence Reports), Chapters 40–41 (1966, amended 1979); and the Court Order – In the Matter of Birth Certificates (22 Sept 2011).

### *Agencies responsible for birth and death recording and registration*

The Medical Records Department, under the Ministry of Health's Bureau of Health Administration and Support Services (BHASS), is responsible for overseeing the issuance and collation of birth and death records. The Medical Records Office is located at the Belau National Hospital in Koror. The Office of the Clerk of Courts, also located in Koror, is responsible for birth and death registration. It has a satellite office in Melekeok State, which can issue birth and death certificates, but registration is done only in its main office in Koror.

### *National CRVS committee and CRVS action plan*

Palau has a CRVS Committee but it has not been active since 2016. The committee is comprised of representatives from the Medical Records Department and Bureau of Public Health at the Ministry of Health, the Office of the Clerk of Courts, and the Office of Planning and Statistics at the Ministry of Finance, among others. Palau does not have a CRVS action plan.

### *National ID systems*

Palau has no current plans to implement a national ID system.

## REPORTING AND REGISTRATION OF BIRTHS

### *Recording births at health facilities and registering births at the civil registry*

Birth registration in Palau benefits from a close collaborative arrangement between the Ministry of Health and the Office of the Clerk of Courts. Nearly all births in Palau occur at the Belau National Hospital (BNH). If a birth occurs outside the hospital, the mother and child are transported to BNH for a routine check-up soon after the birth. The Medical Records Department initiates the birth registration process by facilitating the completion of the Birth Certificate Application Form. Either the birth parent or a nominated representative must fill out and submit the form. The information on it is entered by the Medical Records Office staff into a database and a Certificate of Live Birth is produced. The certificate is reviewed and signed by one or both birth parents, the attending physician or midwife, and the Director of the Bureau of Hospital and Clinical Services (BHCS) at the Ministry of Health. The certificate is then transferred to the Office of the Clerk of Courts by the Medical Records Office (which keeps a copy), where it is entered into a web-based database system (the Judiciary Information System), assigned a unique number and registered. A paper-based system is also used as a back-up tracking system in case of technical issues with the electronic system. The parents then present to the Civil Registry to request and collect a certified copy of the official birth certificate.

### *Timeframes and costs*

The law requires that every birth in Palau be registered within 10 days of delivery (PACLI, Nd).

Standard, on-time birth registration	no charge
Late registration (> 10 working days)	25.00 (USD)*
Birth certificate printed	2.00 (USD)
Birth certificate printed (off-island)	15.00 (USD)
Change of name	50.00 (USD)

Addition of father's particulars (≤ 3 months)	4.00 (USD)**
Addition of father's particulars (> 3 months)	50.00 (USD)***

\*The late fee was introduced on 1 December 2016. The fee is payable to the Ministry of Health.

\*\*Within three months of birth, submission of affidavit acknowledging paternity USD 1.00 and notarisation USD 3.00.

\*\*\*After three months from birth, filing of paternity petition in court USD 50.00.

### *Tasks that require a birth certificate and incentives (financial or other) for completing the birth registration process*

A birth certificate is required for enrolment of a child in primary school, issuance of a passport, a driver's license and police clearance. Birth registration is particularly important in Palau, given that it can be used as proof of citizenship, which is essential for accessing many rights under Palauan law. Due to restrictions on persons of non-Palauan descent and/or citizenship to nationality, land ownership and other rights, parental information is of great importance. The information recorded on a person's birth certificate is the most common means for establishing a person's rights as a citizen and as a member of their clan(s) (UNICEF and Republic of Palau 2012). In recent years, birth registration has become a requirement for access to national health insurance coverage, which entitles a person to access health and hospital services free of charge or at a subsidised cost. Before the birth registration requirement for health insurance coverage, the birth of many children was registered late, only upon enrolling in school. However, with the health insurance incentive, most parents now register their children at birth.

### *Registration process for births occurring overseas*

The children of Palauan citizens who are born in a foreign country can have their birth registered in the Palau civil registry by sending the Office of the Clerk of Courts a certified copy of their birth certificate obtained abroad. The birth certificate is scanned and uploaded into the birth registration database, and the birth is registered in the civil registry. Because of restrictions on persons of non-Palauan descent and/or citizenship to nationality, land ownership and other rights, parental information is of great importance, and many Palauan citizens who have moved to a foreign country will register their child's birth in the Palau civil registry. Of the births registered in the civil registry for 2015, 33 births were in USA, 14 in Guam, three in Philippines and Japan, and one in Marshall Islands. Whilst some of these children who were born overseas return to Palau soon after their birth, many continue to live in the foreign country where they were born for a substantial proportion, or all, of their life. These overseas births are not included in Table 1 below.

## **REPORTING AND REGISTRATION OF DEATHS**

### *Recording deaths at health facilities and registering deaths at the civil registry*

Most deaths occur at the main hospital, BNH. When a death occurs in the community on Koror or Babeldaob, the body is transported to the morgue at BNH, where the medical certificate of cause of death (MCCD) is completed. If a death occurs in one of the more remote states, the death must be certified by two legally authorized persons and reported to BNH. In cases of missing bodies, the court must declare the person dead before the death is certified. The Medical Records Department at the Ministry of Health initiates the death registration process by creation of an MCCD. An informant, typically a close relative of the deceased, the attending physician, and the Director of the Bureau of Hospital and Clinical Services must sign the certificate, confirming the details of death, including the sequence of the cause of death. The original copy of the MCCD is transferred to the Office of the Clerk of Courts by the Medical Records Office, where each death is entered into a database, assigned a unique number and registered. Family members may then present to the Office of the Clerk of Courts to collect a certified copy of the death certificate.

### *Timeframes and costs*

The law requires that every death in Palau be registered within 10 days (PACLI, Nd). There is no fee for late registration of deaths.

Standard, on-time death registration	no charge
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Death certificate printed	2.00 (USD)
Death certificate printed (off-island)	15.00 (USD)
Late registration (> 10 days)	no charge

### *Tasks that require a death certificate and incentives (financial or other) for completing the death registration process*

A death certificate is required for probating a person's estate (including social security benefits, land ownership issues, settling of bank accounts), life insurance claims, and claims for custody of children where death is alleged. There are no incentives, such as funeral assistance payments.

### *Registration process for deaths occurring overseas*

The Medical Referral Program sends Palauans to hospitals in other countries (e.g. Guam, Hawaii, Taiwan, Philippines) for treatment. When a death occurs overseas following medical referral, the body is almost always returned to Palau for burial, and registered with the Office of the Clerk of Courts using the death certificate from the country where the death occurred. Deaths of Palauan citizens who have been living abroad for some, or most, of their lives can also be registered in the civil registry if a family member sends the Office of the Clerk of Courts a certified copy of their death certificate obtained abroad. Each year there are around five to ten deaths of Palauan citizens overseas that are registered in the Palau civil registry. These overseas deaths are not included in Table 2 below.

## **COLLATION AND CLASSIFICATION OF CAUSE OF DEATH**

### *Process for coding death certificates*

Allocation of mortality codes to death certificates is done manually at the national level by trained coders with some external support. ICD-10 is used.

### *Training and resources for cause of death certification and coding*

A short course (two-weeks) on medical terminology and morbidity and mortality coding was held in 2019 with technical and funding support from the Western Pacific Regional Office (WPRO) of the World Health Organization. The training course was condensed to accommodate scheduling and to maximize the opportunity to train the majority of medical records technicians and billing/finance specialists. There are plans to conduct the training on a yearly basis and to send select staff off-island for formal training, especially for mortality coding.

## **COMPLETENESS OF CIVIL REGISTRATION DATA**

Registration practices in Palau are strong, with ongoing quality review and follow-up with families where required. There is generally a high level of awareness among the public of the importance of civil registration, and a strong demand for birth and death certificates (UNICEF and Republic of Palau 2012; UN 2017). The completeness of birth and death registration can be estimated by comparing the number of births and deaths in the civil registry with the number of births and deaths recorded by the health system, enumerated during national censuses, and estimated by international agencies. In some countries in the Pacific region, the births and deaths of citizens overseas can be registered in the civil registry. When estimating completeness, it is best that these are not included in the civil registry figures since the other sources to which they are compared, such as health records, do not include overseas events. In Palau, overseas births and deaths can be registered in the civil registry (see sections above on registration processes for births and deaths occurring overseas). However, in order to estimate completeness in Tables 1 and 2 below, these overseas events have been excluded from the figures for the civil registry.

Table 1 shows that, between 2012 and 2018, birth registration completeness when compared to health records has remained  $\geq 95\%$ . Comparison with figures of annual births for 2014 estimated by the 2015 Palau census indicates a completeness of around 93%; and comparison with the SPC projection of births for 2018 indicates

a completeness of around 99%. The completeness of birth registration in Palau has also been estimated by periodic population sample surveys. The Child Protection Baseline Survey conducted by UNICEF noted that close to 100% of births occur at the Belau National Hospital, and compliance with birth registration is close to 100% (UNICEF and Republic of Palau 2012; UN 2017).

**Table 1. Completeness of birth registration data**

Year	Source of births				Completeness of birth registration		
	Civil Registry <sup>a</sup>	Health <sup>b</sup>	SPC projection <sup>c</sup>	Census <sup>d</sup>	Compared with health	Compared with SPC	Compared with census
2018	242	256	245	-	95%	99%	-
2017	211	221	-	-	95%	-	-
2016	204	212	-	-	96%	-	-
2015	235	242	-	-	97%	-	-
2014	238	241	-	256	99%	-	93%
2013	223	229	-	-	97%	-	-
2012	265	268	-	-	99%	-	-
2011	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2010	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Sources: <sup>a</sup>Obtained directly from the Office of the Clerk of Courts on 09.10.2020. Births of Palauan citizens that occurred overseas have been excluded from the figures above. <sup>b</sup>2018 Statistical Yearbook (Ministry of Finance 2019). <sup>c</sup>Calculated from 2018 crude birth rate (Pacific Community 2018a) and 2018 population projection (Pacific Community 2018b). <sup>d</sup>The 2015 Census (Ministry of Finance 2016) asked all females aged ≥12 years the date of birth of their last child. Because the census was undertaken during 2015, the most recent complete year births were enumerated was 2014. Completeness was calculated by dividing 'Civil Registry' by 'Health', 'Civil Registry' by 'SPC projection', and 'Civil Registry' by 'Census'.

Table 2 shows that between 2012 and 2018, death registration completeness when compared to health records remained around 80–90%. Comparison with the 2015 census was not possible, as the census did not ask questions on annual all-age mortality (only child mortality). Comparison with the SPC projection of deaths for 2018 indicates a completeness of around 76%.

**Table 2. Completeness of death registration data**

Year	Source of deaths				Completeness of death registration		
	Civil Registry <sup>a</sup>	Health <sup>b</sup>	SPC projection <sup>c</sup>	Census <sup>d</sup>	Compared with health	Compared with SPC	Compared with census
2018	119	143	157	-	83%	76%	-
2017	155	183	-	-	85%	-	-
2016	143	175	-	-	82%	-	-
2015	120	136	-	-	88%	-	-
2014	148	167	-	-	89%	-	-
2013	173	192	-	-	90%	-	-
2012	151	164	-	-	92%	-	-
2011	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2010	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Sources: <sup>a</sup>Obtained directly from the Office of the Clerk of Courts on 09.10.2020. Deaths of Palauan citizens that occurred overseas have been excluded from the figures above. <sup>b</sup>2018 Statistical Yearbook (Ministry of Finance 2019). <sup>c</sup>Calculated from 2018 crude death rate (Pacific Community 2018a) and 2018 population projection (Pacific Community 2018b). <sup>d</sup>The 2015 Census did not ask questions on all-age mortality, only child mortality (Ministry of Finance 2016). Therefore, the 2015 Census could not be used to estimate the completeness of death registration. Completeness was calculated by dividing 'Civil Registry' by 'Health' and 'Civil Registry' by 'SPC projection'.

## PUBLICATION OF CRVS DATA AND REPORTS

Each year the Palau Judiciary publishes a summary of the number of birth and death certificates by the month and year in which they were issued (Palau Judiciary 2018). Because these tabulations are organized by the

month the event was registered, and not by the month the event occurred (e.g. the date of birth/death), their use in evaluation of CVRS completeness is limited in this context. The most recent Ministry of Health Annual Report was published in 2014 but an annual statistical yearbook containing tabulations of live births and deaths from the Ministry of Health is published by the Ministry of Finance (Ministry of Finance 2019).

## RECENT INITIATIVES AND PLANS TO STRENGTHEN CRVS

1. There are preliminary plans to establish an online birth reporting and registration system in Palau to enable real-time data entry and information-sharing between the Ministry of Health and the Office of the Clerk of Courts.
2. The annual reports published by the Palau Judiciary currently tabulate birth and death registrations by month of issue rather than month of occurrence (date of birth/death), which limits their use in evaluating CVRS completeness in this context. Discussions are being undertaken to also include tabulations by month of occurrence in future reports.
3. The Ministry of Health is in the process of reviewing and revising the outdated MCCD certificate currently in use, and implementing improvements to the death certification process to ensure timely and proper registration of all deaths.
4. Palau's CRVS Committee should be revived to re-engage stakeholders and finalize the national action plan to improve CRVS in Palau.

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