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# Preface

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## **PREFACE**

“What’s past is prologue...”

Sometimes the best way to determine what direction to take is to look at where we are and back at where we have been. This is as true in matters of public health as it is in navigation. And in today’s complex society, careful planning is becoming more important than ever before.

Each year, the Oregon Health Division (OHD) publishes the Oregon Vital Statistics Annual Report, an analytical look at the health of Oregon as measured by the health of its citizens. By this means, policy makers and health care professionals have a source of important knowledge that can be used to form bases for action and benchmarks for assessing progress.

## **STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT**

Starting with the 1992 data, the Vital Statistics Annual Report is issued in two volumes in an effort to make it easier to use.

Volume 1 presents data on births, abortions, and teen pregnancy.

Volume 2 presents data on deaths (all ages) and adolescent suicide attempts. This volume’s chapter on fetal and infant deaths now includes analysis on birth characteristics.

The section on marriage and divorce has been eliminated, but simple, unpublished cross-tabulations are available by calling the Center for Health Statistics.

The section on communicable diseases has also been eliminated from the report. Comprehensive information on such diseases can be obtained by contacting the OHD Center for Disease Prevention and Epidemiology.

The more significant demographic and public health issues are discussed in the narrative sections that open each chapter. These narratives are accompanied by charts, graphs, and sidebar tables. Readers can research their own areas of interest by using the data in the many tables at the end of each section. You can also refer to other OHD reports for more detail on the specific issues summarized in this report. Recent publications are listed on the back inside cover of this report.

## **A COOPERATIVE EFFORT**

The presentation of data in this report is the final stage of a long, ongoing process that begins with the prompt, accurate recording of vital events. This registration system ensures that the information is collected, kept secure, and made available to individuals and their families when needed for documentation. Tabulation and analysis of the data by the Oregon Center for Health Statistics provide useful information about the health and social changes occurring in Oregon.

Vital Statistics has been called “the eyes and ears of public health,” and is, in fact, the only organized system of health records covering the entire population. The collection of data is a highly cooperative effort that depends on the participation of a great many people throughout the state.

## **THE PROVIDERS OF SERVICES**

Those who provide the services associated with vital events are the first participants in the collection system.

The birth attendant completes both the legal document and the confidential statistical section of the birth certificate. For deaths, the funeral director or person who first assumes responsibility for the body files the death or fetal death certificate. A physician completes the medical portion of these death certificates, except in cases of found bodies and unnatural deaths, which are certified by the medical examiner. Hospital medical records personnel help to ensure that all certificates are complete and accurate.

These service providers then file the completed certificates with the county registrars in the county where the event occurred.

Abortions and adolescent suicide attempts are treated differently. The providers of induced abortions file the completed statistical reports (which contain no identifying information) directly with the state registrar. Adolescent suicide attempts are reported by the hospitals treating the attempters.

## **COUNTY OFFICIALS**

County registrars play an important role by further assuring the completeness and accuracy of birth, death, and fetal death registration. They check the certificates against other sources of information to make certain no events are missed. County registrars also follow up any incomplete items before sending the certificates to the state registrar at the Center for Health Statistics.

## **CENTER FOR HEALTH STATISTICS**

At the state level, the staff of the Center for Health Statistics perform additional checks for completeness and accuracy. A field representative makes contact with providers and county registrars. Clerical staff send correspondence seeking additional information on such matters as causes of death, birthweight, and tobacco use. Microfilmmers store certificates so that certified copies can be made. Coders and data entry personnel turn the collected information into computerized data, which are then retrieved by programmers, analyzed by researchers, and made available for demographic and public health needs.

**OTHER STATES**

This report does not overlook events relating to Oregon residents that occurred in another state. The Centers for Health Statistics in each U.S. state and Canadian province have agreed to forward copies of birth, death, and fetal death certificates to the state where the person usually resided. A cooperative agreement also exists for reports on induced termination of pregnancy; however, some states collect no resident information on these reports and, therefore, cannot participate in the exchange.

Among all these participants, it is clear there is no single recorder. The many hundreds of people throughout Oregon who record the major life events of our citizens have all played important roles in preparing this report. It could not have been achieved without them.

