

Colombia



The Challenge

While birth and death registration has increased in Colombia over the past decade, disparities in registration remain among ethnic groups in geographically remote areas. Registration of vital events is critical to addressing health disparities and ensuring legal protections for vulnerable groups. Further, there is a need to improve the quality of cause of death (COD) information, and for better coordination within the Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) system.

Impact

CRVS Governance and Coordination: The Data for Health Initiative has worked with government partners to streamline business processes, coordinate data governance, and ensure integration of reporting systems. The initiative has also supported a legal review, which informed recommendations to strengthen CRVS-related regulations, and the development of a user manual to guide operations and reporting in the CRVS system.

Counting Every Birth and Death: To address low registration, the initiative supported the Colombian government in developing the Colombia Rural Vital strategy. The strategy engages communities and leverages mobile technologies to increase the registration and certification of vital events. In 2018, an SMS platform for reporting vital events was implemented in 14 municipalities with low levels of birth and death registration. The SMS message activates a cascade of actions to verify events, provide referrals, and collect more information, including automated verbal autopsy—a method to determine the probable cause of death based on information obtained from a caregiver of the deceased.

As of 2020, over 628 community leaders, health officials, and clinicians have been trained to use the Colombia Rural Vital platform to report births and deaths. Overall, 422 births and 182 deaths were recovered in 2017 and 2018. The coverage of birth registration in the intervention municipalities increased by 8.9 percentage points in 2017 and 8.2 percentage points in 2018; while the coverage of death registration increased by 6.8 percentage points and 11.2 percentage points, respectively.

Understanding Community Mortality: A key component of the CRV strategy involves administering verbal autopsies. Since 2017, 361 interviewers and supervisors have been

trained to conduct verbal autopsy interviews. From 2018 to 2019, the number of verbal autopsies conducted increased by 18% in the intervention municipalities.

The Approach

Since 2017, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection (MSPS), the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE), and the National Civil Registry, in partnership with the Bloomberg Philanthropies Data for Health Initiative, have implemented several strategies to strengthen the CRVS system and reach vulnerable populations.

Better Cause of Death Data from Facilities: To improve the quality of cause of death information, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection (MSPS) and the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE) have implemented a multi-pronged approach to improve medical certification of cause of death (MCCD) and to introduce technologies for International Classification of Diseases (ICD) coding. The MSPS partnered with the National School of Public Administration to develop an eLearning course on CRVS, with a focus on MCCD. The course will be required as continuing medical education for physicians and is compulsory for medical students. Since the course was launched in October 2019, 150 physicians and health officials completed the 40-hour training.

In parallel, DANE has upgraded technologies for automated ICD coding. In November 2018, coders from DANE received training on Iris, a software program that automatically assigns an underlying cause of death. DANE began using the Iris application in March 2019, and since then more than 58,000 deaths have been coded using the Iris system.

Producing and Using Vital Statistics: Colombia's governmental institutions have extensive experience producing vital statistics reports. In collaboration with the Data Impact Program, small area completeness estimates were generated for birth and death registration at the national, departmental and municipal level. The effort produced more accurate national statistics than previously available that will inform program planning.

Ongoing Work

CRVS Governance and Coordination

The Data for Health Initiative is focused on carrying out recommendations that emerged from Colombia's CRVS legal review. A policies and procedures manual for the CRVS system was developed based on the original business process map and is pending validation by government partners. The manual will facilitate the adoption of improved workflows and inform changes to the CRVS regulatory framework. The CRVS eLearning course will also be updated to reflect the changes in the legal framework.

Counting Every Birth and Death and Understanding Community Mortality

Government partners will continue to extend certification and civil registration of births and deaths to vulnerable populations through the expansion of the Colombia Rural Vital strategy in two additional municipalities. Information from the platform will also be integrated into the CRVS data system. To ensure sustainability of community-based activities, the initiative is providing capacity-building support to transition leadership and coordination functions to local health officials.

Better Facility Cause-of-Death Data

In the coming year, the Data for Health Initiative will focus on data quality improvement. The MSPS will expand the CRVS eLearning course with the goal of training 2,000 physicians, medical students, and health officials by the end of 2020. With Iris automated coding fully underway, the program will largely focus on strengthening skills for a more comprehensive approach to assure and improve data quality, including implementation of the analysis of causes of national death for action (ANACONDA) electronic tool that assesses the accuracy and completeness of mortality data. DANE is also developing an electronic quality assurance module that will conduct routine data checks.

Producing and Using Vital Statistics

Finally, the initiative will support enhanced design and dissemination of vital statistics reporting, demonstrating Colombia's commitment to not only improve the quality and completeness of cause of death information, but also to utilize data for public health policy and planning.