Over the last several years, Tonga has formalised an active multi-sectoral Civil Registration and Vital Statistics committee, and undertaken a significant amount of work to improve CRVS.

One example of this work has been the reconciliation of registered births and deaths with those reported through health. This work involved both the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) and Ministry of Health (MOH), and was overseen by the National Statistics Office (NSO).

Improved CRVS data has facilitated core government functions and improved development outcomes.

Registration of births and deaths is compulsory by law in Tonga, with all deaths required to have a medical certification of death. Official registration is done through the Civil Registry Office under the MOJ, with a sub-registry in each of the major island groups. There is also a system of town and district officers who are required to record events in their community and share this information with the registry.

Health data is collected through the health clinics and hospitals, with reports collated and coded (for deaths) at the national hospital. Reporting processes have been revised over the last several years to improve data completion and quality.

There is no requirement for registration of a death before burial. Although reporting in each source is less than fully complete, nearly all events are captured somewhere in the government system.

A 2011 exercise to reconcile data (through MOH, MOJ and the University of Queensland) revealed higher than anticipated early adult mortality from non-communicable diseases (NCDs). *

As a result, existing NCD responses were reviewed and Tonga was able to attract additional support for health programs.

Tonga has developed a strong process for linking data to national planning.

A medical record review was also completed in 2011, and highlighted a range of certification and coding issues for review. This exercise is currently being repeated by the Ministry of Health.

The MOH, MOJ, and the NSO, have jointly held both community workshops to highlight the importance of CRVS, and training for staff in the outer islands.

CRVS in Tonga

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Next steps for Tonga include formalising key priorities into a multi-sectoral national plan.

Prioritising CRVS against other competing needs is a key challenge for governments.