



## CASE STUDY – REGIONAL CAUSE OF DEATH REPORTING (TONGA, TUVALU, FIJI)

Reliability of mortality data generated from civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) systems has remained a fundamental challenge for most countries in the Pacific, despite considerable effort and investment from development partners over many years, including:

- training workshops in coding, data analysis, and statistics reporting,
- delivery of relevant resources including reference materials and operational manuals,
- email exchanges and online consultations,
- data quality assessments, and
- feasibility assessment and implementation of automated coding tools, including in Fiji.

Strengthening cause-of-death certification and coding is prioritized in the **Action Plan for Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (APPCRVS) 2023–2026** and **Pacific Health Information Network (PHIN) Activity Implementation Schedule 2023–2025**.

The 2023 meeting of Pacific Heads of Planning and Statistics agreed to promote the concept of a regional coding support approach, where coders drawn from across the Pacific share the coding workload and access to specialist automation tools. The team would comprise trained professional Pacific coders supported by experts from Pacific CRVS Partners Collaboration (previously known as BAG) partner agencies. The pool of coding specialists would remain in their home country and comprise mortality coders that have previously undertaken training. A regional coding support centre would provide administrative, secretariat, and coordination support. This pilot looked to test the concept that coders in one country (Fiji) were able to assist in the coding of deaths from other countries (Tuvalu and Tonga).

The following activities were undertaken:

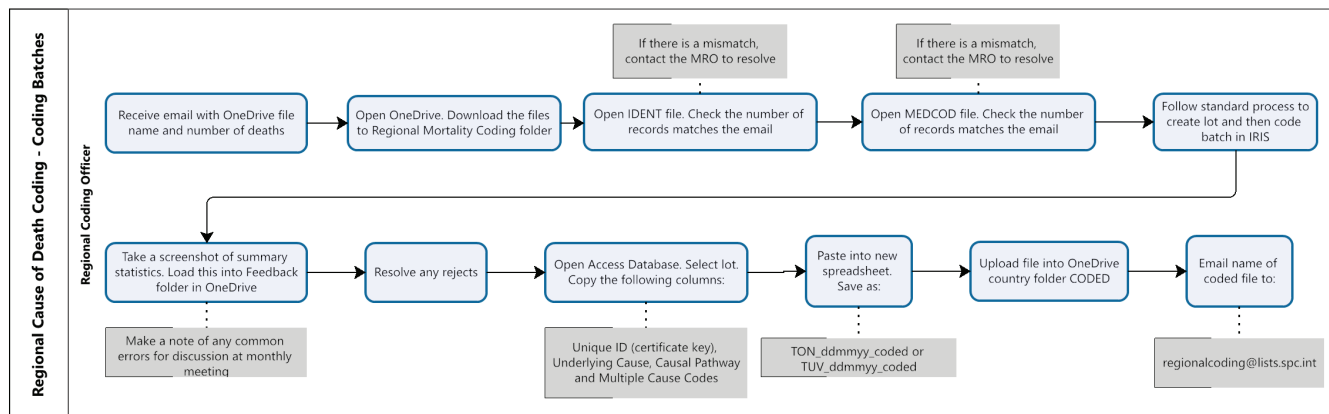
- Fiji, Tonga and Tuvalu were identified to participate in the pilot and developed Terms of Reference.
- Support and Funding was secured – Vital Strategies and SPC.
- A regional coding team (virtual) – mortality coders that have previously undertaken training drawn from across the Pacific, remain in their home country. Agreement was reached with their country

employer about how much time they could devote to the regional team and coding those countries unable to manage their own.

- A regional coding support team drawn from SPC and the Australian Bureau of Statistics has provided technical support on a needs-basis, training and mentoring for coders, quality review either in-country or remotely, support acquisition and use coding tools, and administrative and coordination support to the regional coding team.
- Strengthened cause of death medical certifications (Tonga and Tuvalu doctor training).
- Completed business process mapping, including the role of Health agencies in Fiji, Tonga and Tuvalu.

Example below of one of the Process Maps documented to lay out the steps to be followed:

### Process Map 2: Coding Batches



The key outcomes of this pilot were:

- Documentation which allowed the sharing of data between participating countries, and with the support centre, including data standards, templates and data sharing/access agreements.
- A tool or process which allowed individual cause of death records of the deceased from one country to be anonymously coded in another country.
- A digital workspace which allowed anonymised death records to be securely accessed by authorised staff in Tuvalu, Tonga, Fiji and the support centre.
- A governance and monitoring mechanism for the operation of the pilot which included quality review of the coding results.
- A regional coding approach is possible.

Upon evaluation of the pilot in March 2025 it was agreed to continue with the pilot and proceed wider implementation. Funding is available from Bloomberg Philanthropies and Kiribati and Palau have also shown interest in joining the project. The review also developed ideas to improve the value to be gained from the new approach, such as reviewing coding results and providing feedback to doctors to improve the quality of their certification.

### Impact statement – Ronnie Samuel (Ministry of Health Tuvalu)

“The regional cause of death coding pilot which started last year. We partner with Tonga, and we thank SPC as the pilot really helps in Tuvalu, a small island state. One of the biggest problems we have are skilled people on the ground and we don’t have a specialist coder. It’s really helpful for us”.

### Impact statement – Walter Hurrell (Ministry of Health Tonga)

“Through multiple assessments and carrying out research, we realised that the data quality for mortality data was a challenge which required significant improvement. So, to address those data quality challenges, we have engaged with SPC to establish a pilot which provides a platform which leverages the capacity of ICT coders, which Fiji has”.