

# VITAL NEWS IN THE SUNSHINE STATE

## DEVELOPING PROFESSIONAL PARTNERSHIPS IN PUBLIC HEALTH

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## Partners in Business

On August 13, 2019 Michelle Vega, Fraud Prevention Manager with the Miami Passport Agency, United States Department of State met with staff at the Bureau of Vital Statistics.

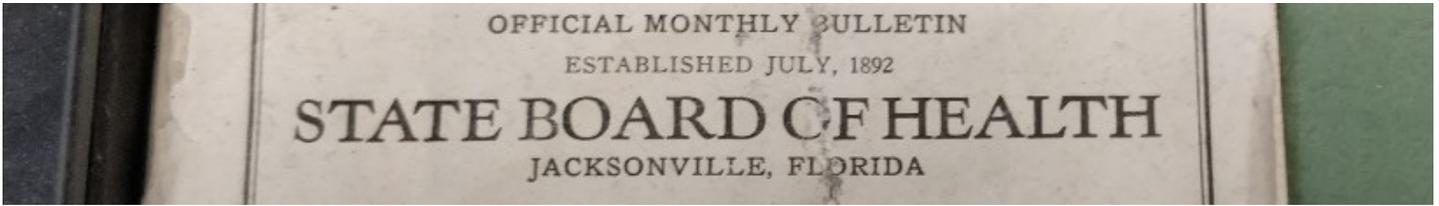
Managers and supervisors met for a round table discussion with Ms. Vega regarding fraud issues as it relates to passports and birth records. Ms. Vega was able to provide staff with the application process for issuing passports and their challenges.

The group then split up for discussion on issuance of birth records and amended birth records. Amendment management staff discussed with Ms. Vega the sensitivity and potential fraud of the Delayed Birth Records. Staff also discussed with Ms. Vega how passports are processed for children/adults who are adopted and records amended by paternity actions. Staff agreed we deal with the same common challenges and how important this partnership is. The common threads are:

- Shared goals and values
- Development of mutual respect
- Timely communication
- Dealing with the same clients
- Excellence in customer service

In the next newsletter, we will report on our meeting with our business partner, Florida Department of Revenue, Child Support Enforcement Program.

## Vital Statistics - Past, Present, Future



The Florida Department of Health, Bureau of Vital Statistics, located in Jacksonville, Florida is the central repository of all Florida vital records - births, deaths, fetal deaths, marriages and dissolution of marriages.

In the late 1880's, the State Board of Health was established and subsequently appointed a State Health Officer to head the then Office of Vital Statistics. To encourage reporting of births and deaths, the Bureau of Vital Statistics supplied physicians and midwives with postage paid penny postcards, but the need to collect more information than what was provided on a 4x6 postcard became apparent. In 1913, Warder Voorhees, the Office of Vital Statistics first statistician, implemented a very successful plan that incentivized local counties to become more involved in the collection of vital records. Although the incentives ceased, local county offices remain an integral part of the Vital Statistics program today.

Technological advances throughout the years have helped improve the collection process, timeliness and quality of the vital records. Computers have greatly increased data processing and the internet has made filing vital records faster, more secure and convenient through our centralized database.

Aggregate statistical data that had taken months for the National Center for Health Statistics to receive is now uploaded within days of an event. Social Security Administration receives earlier notification of both births and deaths. Certified copies of records are available through a central database within all 67 County Vital Statistics offices and over 120 tax collector offices throughout the state. Death records that once needed to be couriered or mailed from funeral home to physician to medical examiner to county health department to state office can now navigate to all sources through the centralized database and key participants in that process are kept informed by automated emails.

The Office of Vital Statistics, now referred to as the Bureau of Vital Statistics, is continually seeking ways to improve. A new database platform using HTML web-based technology is currently being developed to replace the current registration system, with a vision towards interoperability between different operating systems. The Bureau of Vital Statistics has come a long way since those first few records, and with the help of our business partnerships, every day will invite new challenges and opportunities.

## Newborn Screening Reconciliation Process

The Bureau of Vital Statistics and the Bureau of Laboratories-Newborn Screening Program have linked Newborn Screening Specimen Collection Card (DH 677) information with Florida birth record data to confirm reporting of live births statewide. The Bureau of Vital Statistics receives weekly notifications of newborn screening data that have not linked to a Florida birth record, and conversely the Bureau of Laboratories receives notification of birth records that have no indication that a newborn screening test was associated with it. There are several identification fields used to link the birth record with a newborn screening test, such as tracking number, mother's name, child's name, date of birth, gender and medical record numbers for the mother and infant, just to name a few.

This process provides the necessary data to allow the Bureau of Vital Statistics to discontinue the need for the county vital statistics staff to perform the hospital reconciliation process based on the faxed birth logs from all birthing facilities.

Thank you to all stakeholders for your continued cooperation in these very important programs.

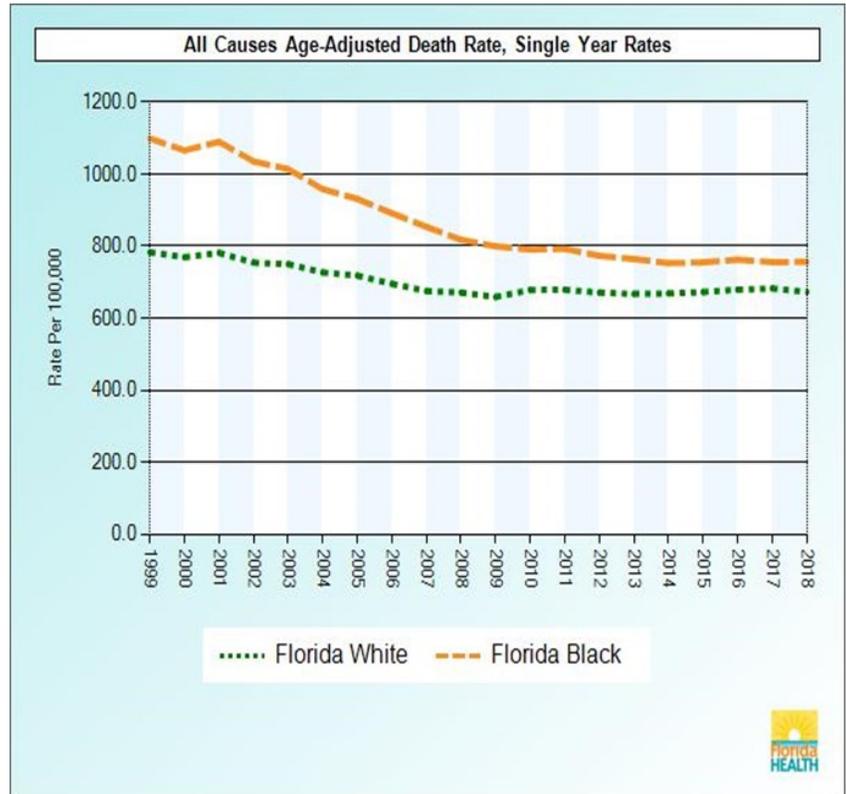
If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the Bureau of Vital Statistics Quality Assurance unit at 904-359-6900 ext. 9020.

# Trending Now on FLHealthCHARTS

## Florida's Death Rates Improved Between 1999 and 2018

Florida's age-adjusted death rate decreased by 16 percent between 1999 and 2018 from 810.2 per 100,000 persons to 679.4 per 100,000 persons. Looking at this by race shows the black rate declined 31 percent while the white rate declined by 14 percent. These declines have narrowed the gap between whites and blacks as shown in the graph below.

The gap is measured as the black/white ratio. In 1999, this ratio showed the black rate was 40 percent higher than the white rate. This ratio for 2018 shows the black rate is 12 percent higher than the white rate.



## Veteran's Affairs Service-Connected Disability

The Department of Health, Bureau of Vital Statistics partnered with the U.S. Department of Veteran's Affairs (VA) to assist families of deceased veterans with a service-connected disability in receiving benefits when their disability was a contributing factor in their death. Funeral directors using the Bureau's Electronic Death Registration System (EDRS) are able to send a letter or email reminding the certifier to include the veteran's service-connected disability in the cause of death section. The letter further explains that a service-connected condition is a disability incurred in or aggravated during active military service. The VA provides a rating letter that is used to identify service-connected disabilities or possible contributing factors to a veteran's death. The family of the decedent should provide a VA Rating letter to their physician, which can be obtained by the family by contacting the regional VA Center at 1-800-827-1000.

Funeral directors may contact the Bureau of Vital Statistics (BOVS) Helpdesk at 1-866-295-5902, Monday – Friday from 8:00 AM to 6:00 PM, ET and Saturdays from 9:00 AM to 2:00 PM, ET for clarification on how to send this letter to certifiers or if additional information is needed.

A brochure developed by the VA and the BOVS is available on the BOVS website: <http://www.floridahealth.gov/certificates> that provides information on veterans' service-connected disabilities and encourages families to provide the attending physicians and funeral director with the necessary information to properly certify the cause of death.

## What Happens When a Complaint is Filed with Medical Quality Assurance?

The Department of Health's (DOH) Division of Medical Quality Assurance (MQA) is responsible for regulatory activities of various health care practitioners, facilities and businesses. MQA's enforcement activities include receiving, analyzing, and investigating complaints and reports; tracking licensees' compliance with disciplinary sanctions; inspecting health care facilities; issuing citations and emergency suspension and restriction orders; prosecuting during disciplinary proceedings, and combating unlicensed activity.

The Bureau of Enforcement within the MQA regulatory structure consists of the Consumer Services Unit, Investigation Services Unit and Compliance Management Unit. These units are responsible for initially receiving and reviewing complaints, which can be received anonymously or by a confidential informant from multiple sources such as, but not limited to, consumers, law enforcement, state and federal agencies, hospitals, insurance companies, and attorneys. A complaint can go one of two paths after filing. If a complaint is determined to be insufficient, the complaint is either closed or more information is requested. When a complaint is determined to be legally sufficient, the Bureau of Enforcement investigates, collects pertinent information and an Investigative Report is completed and sent to the Prosecution Services Unit (PSU) for review by an attorney within the Department of Health's General Counsel. The case is presented to a probable cause panel of the respective licensee's board. If probable cause is not found, the case is closed, remains confidential, and all parties are noted. However, if probable cause is found, an Administrative Complaint is filed 10 days later and the case becomes public. The subject then has a limited amount of time to request a hearing in front of the board to determine the penalty or an administrative law judge to dispute the violation. Once the discipline has been settled upon by the board a final order is filed with the agency clerk's office and includes the official determination by the board, the administrative complaint and any approved settlement agreement. Provided the license is not surrendered or revoked, once the respondent completes all the terms of the final order and the board determines they are safe to practice, the license is set back to a status of clear/active and no further requirements are made of the licensee. However, once a licensee is disciplined, the discipline stays on the license for the public to see and remains public in perpetuity.

Complaints against licensees are taken very seriously and very stringent guidelines are in place to ensure confidentiality and a proper investigation. Each unit works very closely with the other units to move the case timely and efficiently.

To access the DOH complaint portal, please visit our website at: [www.flhealthcomplaint.gov/](http://www.flhealthcomplaint.gov/).

Thank you to Donna Howell, from the Department of Health Medical Quality Assurance, for providing insights into their process.



**If you suspect unlicensed medical or healthcare activity, take action!**

Contact the Unlicensed Activity Hotline at

**1-877-HALT-ULA**

or visit [www.FLHealthSource.gov/ula](http://www.FLHealthSource.gov/ula)

## What Happens When a Complaint is Filed with the Division of Funeral, Cemetery & Consumer Services?

The Division of Funeral, Cemetery, and Consumer Services (Division) is responsible for enforcing the provisions of Chapter 497, Florida Statutes, and Rule Chapter 69K, Florida Administrative Code. These laws govern the Florida death care industry. This article will focus on the complaint process involved in that enforcement.

When a complaint is made that a licensee has violated either the statutes or the rules, the Division opens an investigation into the alleged activities. A complaint can come from many sources, including a consumer or a licensee within the industry. The most effective way to make a complaint is to complete a complaint form, found on the Division's website under "Consumer Help," and mail that form to the Division's office in Tallahassee. The Division's website is (<https://www.myfloridacfo.com/Division/funeralcemetery/>).

Upon receipt of a completed complaint form, the Division assigns the complaint to an investigator, who will reach out to the complainant, contact the licensee, obtain any documentation or other available evidence in support of the complaint, and prepare a report on the results of the investigation.

If there is insufficient evidence available to support the allegations made in the complaint, the Division will close the investigation. If there is sufficient evidence, the Division will forward the investigation file to the Department of Financial Services' Office of the General Counsel (OGC) with a request that administrative action be taken against the licensee. In both situations, the Division informs the complainant about the results of the investigation. If the OGC determines that there is enough evidence to proceed with the case against the licensee, the file is prepared for a probable cause panel. If no probable cause is found, then the case is closed. If probable cause is found, however, then the OGC prepares and files an Administrative Complaint which sets forth the factual circumstances and violations that were a part of the investigated complaint.

The licensee is served with the filed Administrative Complaint and given two options: the licensee may choose for the matter to go before the Board of Funeral, Cemetery, and Consumer Services (Board) for an informal hearing or alternatively may choose for the matter to be presented to the Division of Administrative Hearings for a formal hearing. Regardless of how the licensee proceeds, the matter comes before the Board and the members vote on the appropriate disciplinary action. Once an agreement has been reached, the complaint is then closed.

Thank you to Ellen Simon (Division of Funeral, Cemetery & Consumer Services) for providing the detailed information on their respective complaint process.

The complaint processes from the Medical Quality Assurance and Division of Funeral, Cemetery & Consumer Services seem similar—when a complaint is filed, an investigation is opened and results of the investigation are reviewed by attorneys for violation of statutes and/or rules. The recommendations are presented in front of a probable cause panel. If the panel decides disciplinary action is warranted, recommendations are presented and the subject of the complaint is given the opportunity to agree or dispute. Once all parties reach a settlement agreement, then the case is closed. For additional information on Medical Quality Assurance, visit their website at: <http://www.flhealthsource.gov/>. For additional information on the Division of Funeral, Cemetery & Consumer Services, visit their website at: <https://www.myfloridacfo.com/Division/FuneralCemetery/>.



**TO ADD YOUR NAME TO THE BUREAU OF VITAL STATISTICS  
MAILING LIST, PLEASE CLICK [HERE](#).**

**QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS?  
EMAIL [LORRAINE.KRATZ@FLHEALTH.GOV](mailto:LORRAINE.KRATZ@FLHEALTH.GOV)  
OR CALL 904-359-6900 EXT. 1136**