# Background

**Birth registration data**

NSW Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages

All babies born in NSW must be registered within 60 days of birth.

Under the [Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 1995](https://www.legislation.nsw.gov.au/#/view/act/1995/62), parents must provide the Registry with the full details of the child’s birth for a Birth Certificate to be produced. The NSW Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages (RBDM) keeps a permanent record of all registered births.

# Record linkage of RBDM birth data

Birth registrations held by the RBDM are used by the Centre for Health Record Linkage (CHeReL) to facilitate high-quality linkage to the Perinatal Data Collection (PDC) and create family linkages (see below).

RBDM Birth registrations are not frequently requested for research; however birth registration data contains information about the baby and mother that is not held in the PDC such as Aboriginality of the father.

## Record linkage of RBDM Births and Perinatal Data Collection data

Two datasets contain information on births: RBDM birth registration data and the Perinatal Data Collection (PDC). The PDC, formerly known as Midwives Data Collection (MDC), provides information about the mother’s and baby’s health, pregnancy care, and pregnancy outcomes. The PDC is a separate dataset requiring separate data custodian sign off through NSW Ministry of Health. For more detailed information on PDC see <https://www.cherel.org.au/data-dictionaries#section10>.

Birth registrations held by the RBDM contain full personal identifiers for the biological mother and other parent. RBDM births also include child’s name. The PDC contains full personal identifiers for the biological mother, but not for the baby. The CHeReL is able to link RBDM birth registration data with PDC using the biological mother’s personal identifiers.

The CHeReL website contains information on studies investigating the validity of data collections including the PDC and RBDM (see <https://www.cherel.org.au/validation-studies>).

## Family Linkage

Birth registrations held by the RBDM contain full personal identifiers for the biological mother and other parent, and the child’s name. The CHeReL links RBDM birth registration records to create a family ID number. Data for each individual (mother, other parent, child) can be linked to any external (with sufficient identifiers) or Master Linkage Key data collection, with the corresponding Family ID attached. It is also possible through the mother’s record to identify siblings. This gives researchers the opportunity to look at health-related outcomes (physical and mental health) in multiple members of the one family (as opposed to the traditional mother-baby linkage), and explore the relationships retrospectively and prospectively. Family linkage studies may be important in examining aetiology of risk factors or disease

# Tips / limitations for using birth registration data in linkage studies

The RBDM birth registration data are based on year of registration of the birth, rather than the year of the birth.

Stillbirths are required by law in NSW to be registered as a birth.

It is advisable to request an additional year of data if you require all births within a given year/time period. Births occurring late in a year but are registered the following year will be recorded in the subsequent year.

RBDM birth registration data are provided in raw, uncoded format. For this reason only the variables listed below are available for analysis.

RBDM birth registration data only includes births registered in NSW, and only births occurring in NSW can be registered in NSW.

Birth registration data represents the family structure at the time the birth was registered, which is not necessarily the family structure at the time of the birth. Not all births are registered within 60 days of the birth. Late birth registrations are accepted but involve strict verification of the child’s details, and more proof of identification is required.

The other parent on the RBDM birth registration file is not necessarily the biological parent.

The ability to assign family links is only as good as the available data. It is not possible to contact participants to confirm information about relationships or explain gaps in the family structure.

# Access to information on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

An application to the Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council (AH&MRC) ethics committee should be made for research projects for which one or more of the following apply:

The experience of Aboriginal people is an explicit focus of all or part of the research

Data collection is explicitly directed at Aboriginal peoples

Aboriginal peoples, as a group, are to be examined in the results

The information has an impact on one or more Aboriginal communities

Aboriginal health funds are a source of funding

Research that is not specifically directed at Aboriginal people or communities, such as for the total population or a sub-population (eg. rural NSW, people over 50 years old) can still potentially impact on Aboriginal people.

However, an application for such research need only be made to the Committee if any one of the following applies:

Any of the five factors listed above are present; or

Aboriginal people are known, or are likely, to be significantly over-represented in the group being studied (eg. compared to the 2.1% of the total NSW population as shown in the 2006 Census); or

The Aboriginal experience of the medical condition being studied is known, or is likely, to be different from the overall population; or

There are Aboriginal people who use the services being studied in distinctive ways, or who have distinctive barriers that limit their access to the services; or

It is proposed to separately identify data relating to Aboriginal people in the results.

The AH&MRC ethics committee have some specific requirements, including evidence of community engagement in the research. Relevant documents can be found on the AH&MRC website at: <http://www.ahmrc.org.au>. If you are unsure whether an application to the AH&MRC Ethics Committee is required, please seek the advice of the Ethics Committee secretariat (T: 02 9212 4777).

# Data custodian

The Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages is the data custodian of birth registration data. The CHeReL organises data custodian sign-off for RBDM Birth registration data on behalf of the researcher. To arrange sign-off, please contact:

Research Project Manager

Centre for Health Record Linkage

NSW Ministry of Health

100 Christie St

ST LEONARDS NSW 2065

Post: Locked Mail Bag 961

North Sydney NSW 2059

Phone: 02 9391 9924

Fax: 02 9391 9686

Email: MOH-CHeReL@health.nsw.gov.au

# Variable Information

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Variable | Description | Notes / Categories |
| Baby’s date of birth |  | Full date of birth will only be supplied if sufficient justification is supplied that age and month/year of birth is insufficient.  |
| Mother’s date of birth |  | Full date of birth will only be supplied if sufficient justification is supplied that age and month/year of birth is insufficient.  |
| Other parent’s date of birth |  | Full date of birth will only be supplied if sufficient justification is supplied that age and month/year of birth is insufficient.  |
| Age of mother |  |  |
| Age of other parent |  |  |
| Postcode |  |  |
| Date of registration |  |  |
| Year of registration |  |  |
| Stillbirth flag |  | 0 = No | 1 = Yes | 9 = Not stated |
| Baby’s sex | Sex of baby | 1 = Male | 2 = Female | 3 = indeterminate | 9 = unknown |
| Plurality |  |  |
| Birth order |  |  |
| Aboriginality | Information on the parents’ Aboriginality | See Codes: Aboriginality |
| Torres Strait Islander | Information on the parents’ Torres Strait Islander status | See Codes: Torres Strait Islander status |

# Appendix – Code lists

## Codes: Aboriginality

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Code | Description |
| 0  | Both parents are non-Aboriginal |
| 1  | Both parents are Aboriginal  |
| 2  | Mother Aboriginal |
| 4  | Other Parent Aboriginal |
| 9  | Not Stated |

## Codes: Torres Strait Islander status

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Code  | Description |
| 0  | Both parents are non-Torres Strait islander |
| 1  | Both parents are Torres Strait islander  |
| 2  | Mother Torres Strait islander |
| 4  | Other Parent Torres Strait islander |
| 9  | Not Stated |