

Thurston County Coroner



2020 Annual Report

Thurston County Coroner
2000 Lakeridge Dr SW
Olympia, 98502

Last Revised: September 25, 2025

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The Thurston County Coroner's Office

The Thurston County Coroner's Office investigates sudden, violent, unexpected, and suspicious deaths that occur in Thurston County. Deputy Coroners are medicolegal death investigators and respond to death scenes at any hour and anywhere within the boundaries of Thurston County. The Coroner's Office determines cause and manner of death after a complete investigation and postmortem examination, if required. In addition, the Coroner's Office provides cause and manner of death for the death certificate. Complete findings of the death investigation are distributed to families and law enforcement agencies as appropriate.

The main duties of the Coroner's Office are to determine the cause and manner of death. The cause of death is the disease process or injury that resulted in death. There are thousands of diseases and injuries that may result in death. The manner of death is a classification in which a determination is made regarding whether the death resulted from natural causes, homicide, suicide, or accident. On occasion, the manner of death is classified as undetermined.

Information collected during the investigation helps clarify the circumstances, such as the sequence of events prior to death. Evidence collected during an investigation and/or postmortem examination may help lead to the arrest or successful conviction of a suspect in a homicide case. Because deaths occur around the clock, Deputy Coroner Investigators are available 24 hours a day, 365 days per year.

With the skill and experience of the medicolegal death investigators and board-certified forensic pathologists, the quality of death investigations in Thurston County are among the best in the State. The death scene investigation reports by the Deputy Coroners are very thorough and supply comprehensive information to the pathologists.

Our Coroner and Deputy Coroners also extend their duties to the living by answering questions and addressing concerns regarding deaths within the county. Deputy Coroners are frequently in contact with family members of a deceased and assist them by providing appropriate answers regarding the circumstances of the death and directing next steps in making final arrangements for their loved one.

We extend our sincere gratitude to the Thurston County Board of Commissioners for their support of the Coroner's Office and the services we provide to the citizens of Thurston County.

Thurston County Coroner's Office Staff

Gary Warnock
Coroner

Molly Ivanovich
Administrative Assistant 2

Karen Peek
Deputy Coroner

Lisa Chase
Deputy Coroner

Donald Seese
Deputy Coroner

Charlotte Mitchell
Deputy Coroner

Kristina Vilsack
Deputy Coroner

Traci McCullah
Deputy Coroner

Meagan Heiden
Intern

Emily Diser
Intern

Joe West
Morgue Tech/Forensic Photographer

Eric Kiesel, MD, PhD
Forensic Pathologist

Emmanuel Lacsina, MD
Forensic Pathologist

Megan Quinn, MD
Forensic Pathologist

Types of Deaths Reportable to the Coroner

The Revised Code of Washington (RCW) 68.50.010 mandates that specific types of death be referred to the Coroner

for investigation (see list below). These deaths include sudden and unexpected deaths, accidental deaths, and violent deaths. The Coroner has the authority under the law to order an autopsy at any time it is deemed necessary to determine or confirm the cause and manner of death.

Deaths Reportable to the Coroner:

- Violent deaths (e.g., strangulation, gunshot, stabbing, poisoning, etc.)
- Accidental deaths (e.g., falls, drowning, motor vehicle collisions, burns, overdose, etc.)
- Death of a prisoner (e.g., deaths in any county or city jail while imprisoned or in custody)
- Suspicious Circumstances (e.g., Unidentified bodies or events surrounding death)
- Deaths caused by unnatural or unlawful means
- Sudden and Unexpected deaths (e.g., all deaths during a surgical procedure, anesthesia-related, unexpected natural death, occupational-related deaths)
- Death due to a violent contagious disease or suspected violent contagious disease
- Death of a mother due to an abortion
- Unexpected infant deaths
- Without medical attendance; In cases of chronic illness, the attending physician may sign the death certificate
- When a decedent is not claimed by relatives or friends

The Coroner would determine if an autopsy is needed for any of the reportable deaths listed above.

Thurston County Coroner Cases

2020 Population (approximate)	284,698
Deaths Reported to the Coroner	2,649
Number of jurisdiction assumed deaths	336
Number of scene responses	251
Number of jurisdiction declined deaths	2313
Number of cases receiving a full autopsy	119
Number of cases receiving a limited autopsy	6
Number of cases receiving an external examination	13
Number of deaths certified after a postmortem examination	138
Number of deaths certified by the Coroner	307
Number of decedents brought to the Coroner's Office	235
Number of cases with toxicology testing	171
Number of unidentified bodies	0
Number of referrals for organ and tissue donation	711
Number of indigents	22

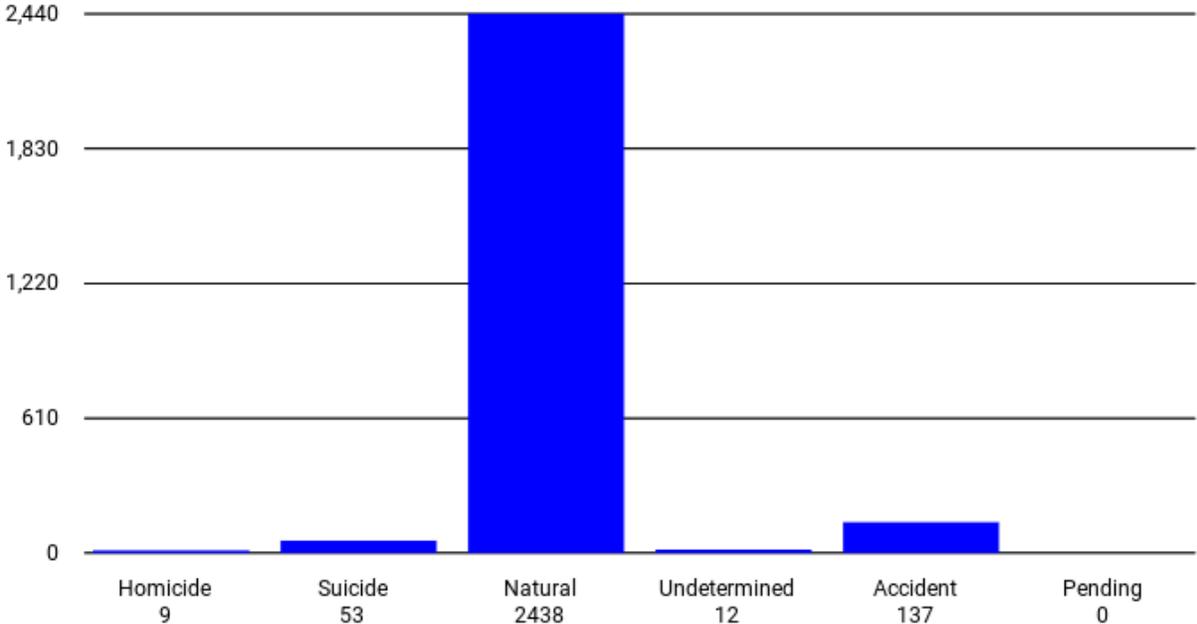
Definitions

Full Autopsy: A complete external and internal examination of a decedent

Limited Examination: An examination which is focused on a specific organ or region of the body, i.e., heart. The limited examination also includes an external examination.

External Examination: An examination of the exterior of a decedent.

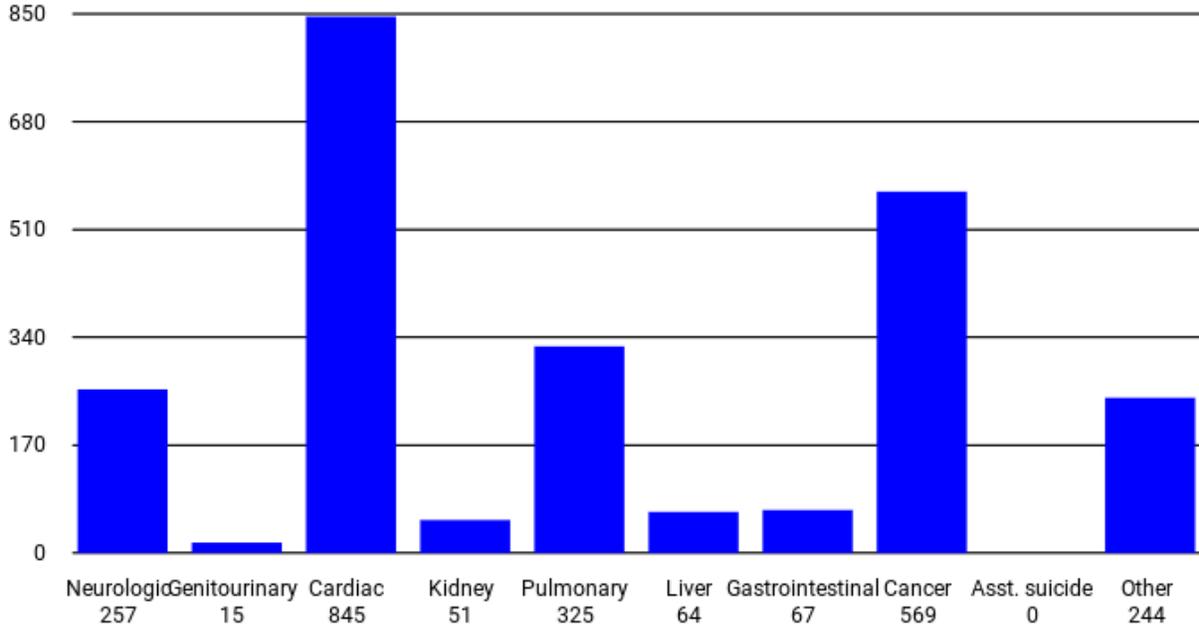
Cases by Manner of Death



Number of Deaths by Manner

	2649
Homicide	9
Suicide	53
Natural	2438
Undetermined	12
Accident	137
Pending	0

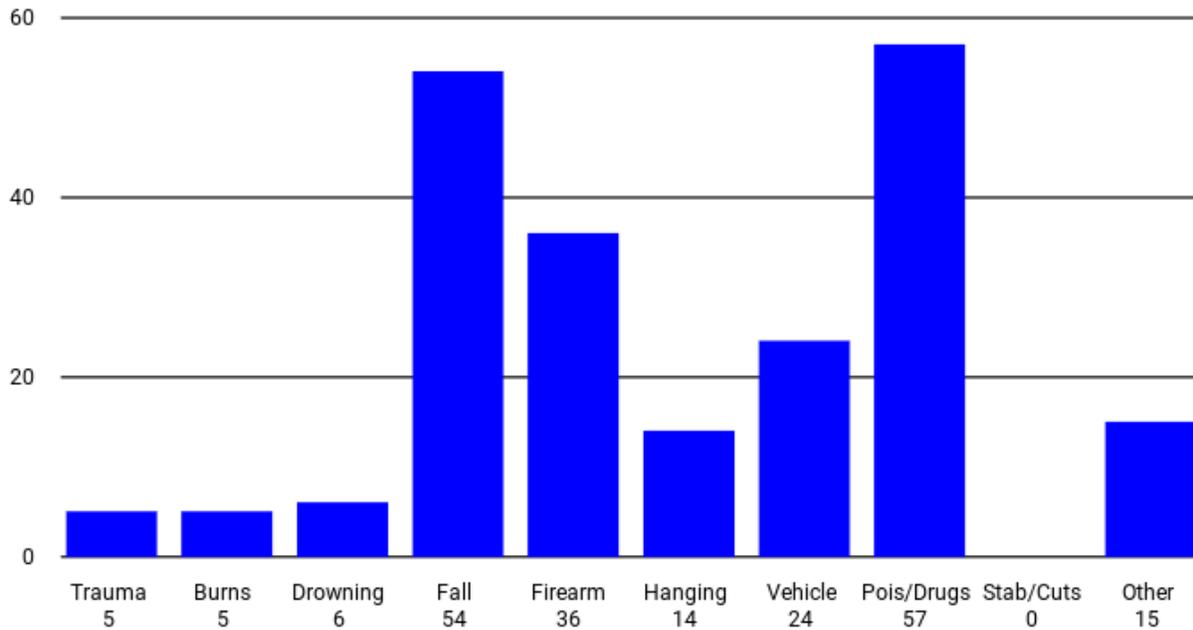
Natural Causes of Death by Category



Natural Deaths by Category

Neurologic	257
Genitourinary	15
Cardiac	845
Kidney	51
Pulmonary	325
Liver	64
Gastrointestinal	67
Cancer	569
Other	244

Deaths by Unnatural Causes

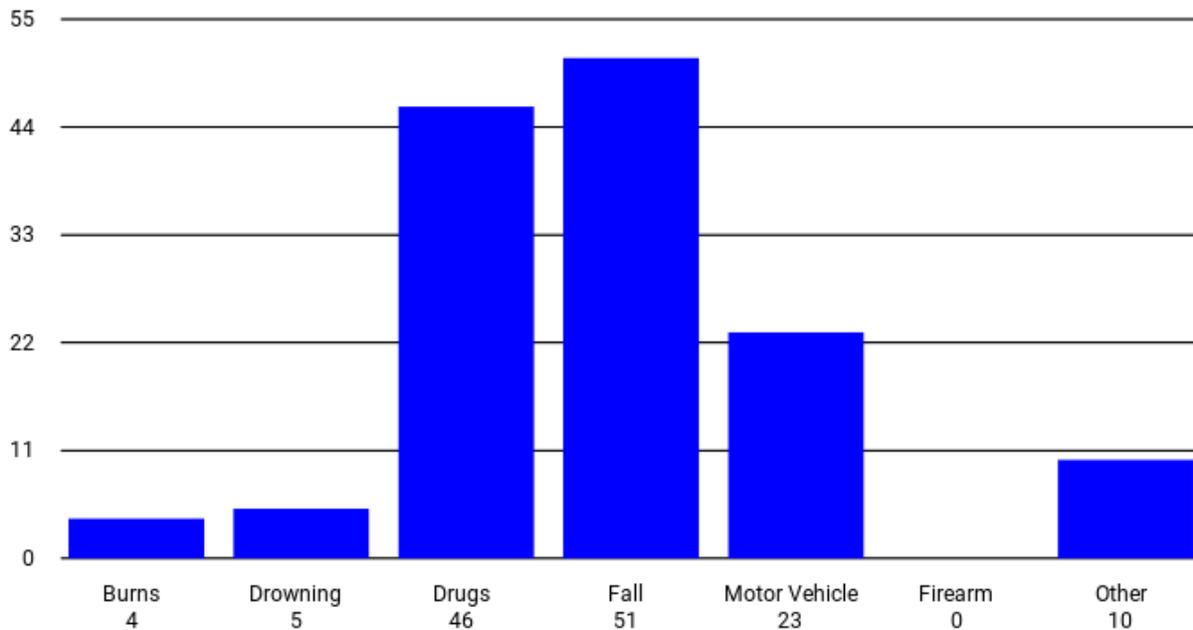


Unnatural Deaths Categorized (Some deaths may be in multiple categories) **211**

Trauma	5
Burns	5
Drowning	6
Fall	54
Firearm	36
Hanging	14
Vehicle	24
Drugs/Poison	57
Stab/Cuts	0
Other	15

"Other" could include hypothermia, asphyxia (choking) on food, etc.

Accidental Deaths by Means

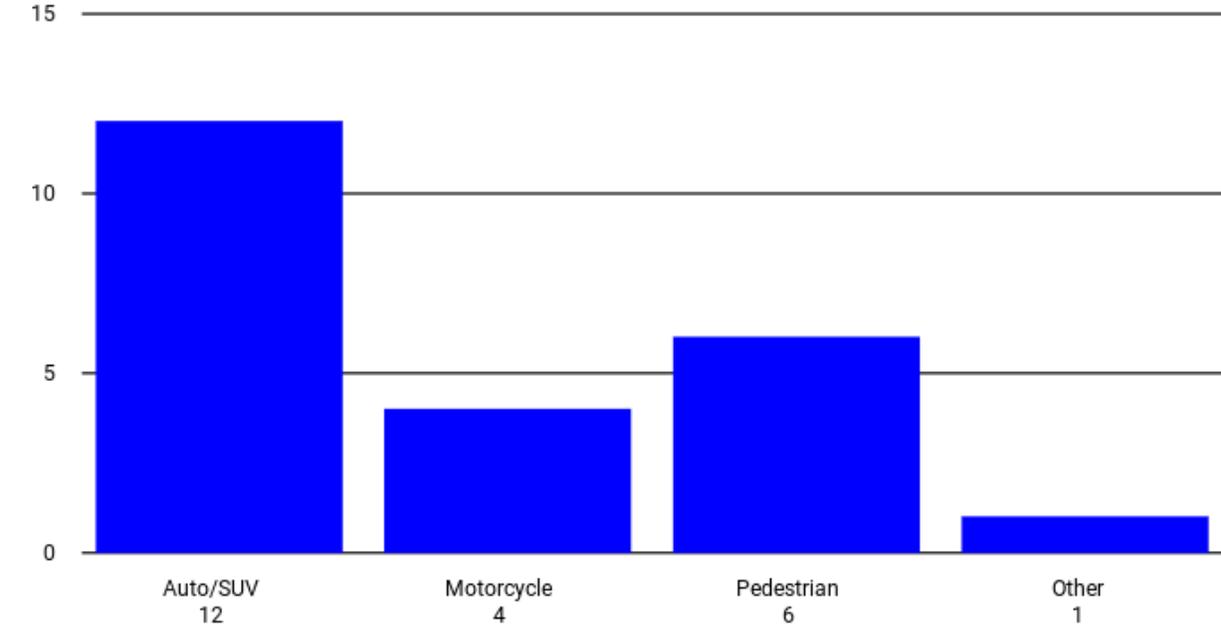


Accidental Deaths by Means (Some deaths may be in multiple categories) **137**

Burns	4
Drowning	5
Drugs	46
Fall	51
Vehicle	23
Firearm	0
Other	10

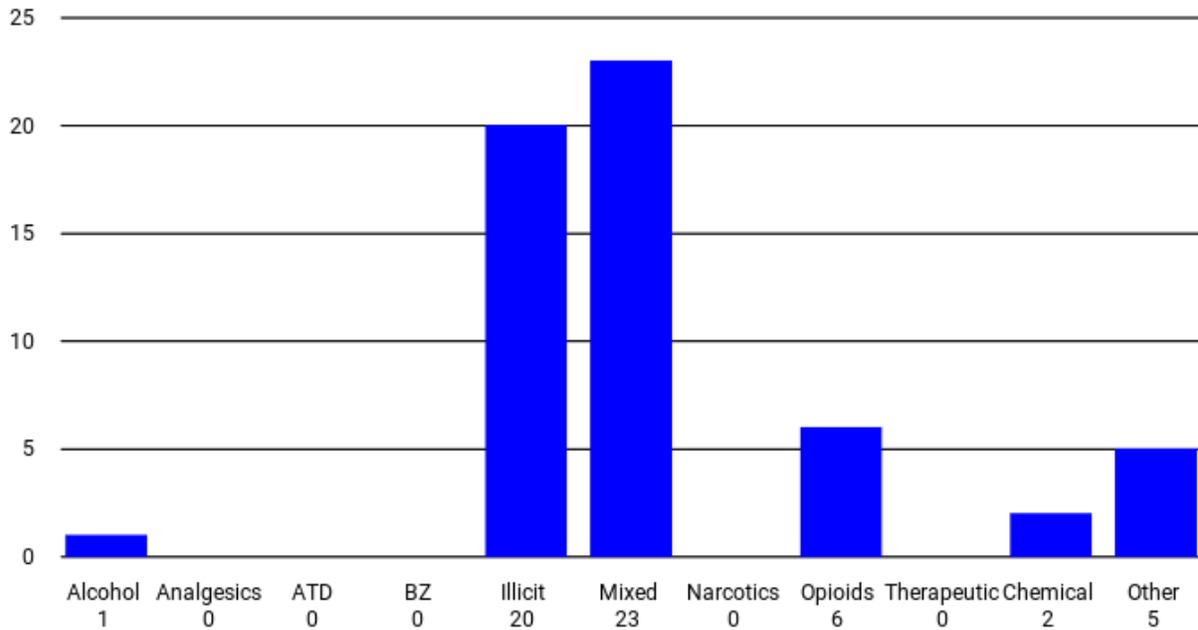
"Other" could include hypothermia, choking on food, etc.

Accidental Deaths - Motor Vehicle Crashes



Motor Vehicle Deaths	23
Auto/SUV	12
Motorcycle	4
Pedestrian	6
Other	1

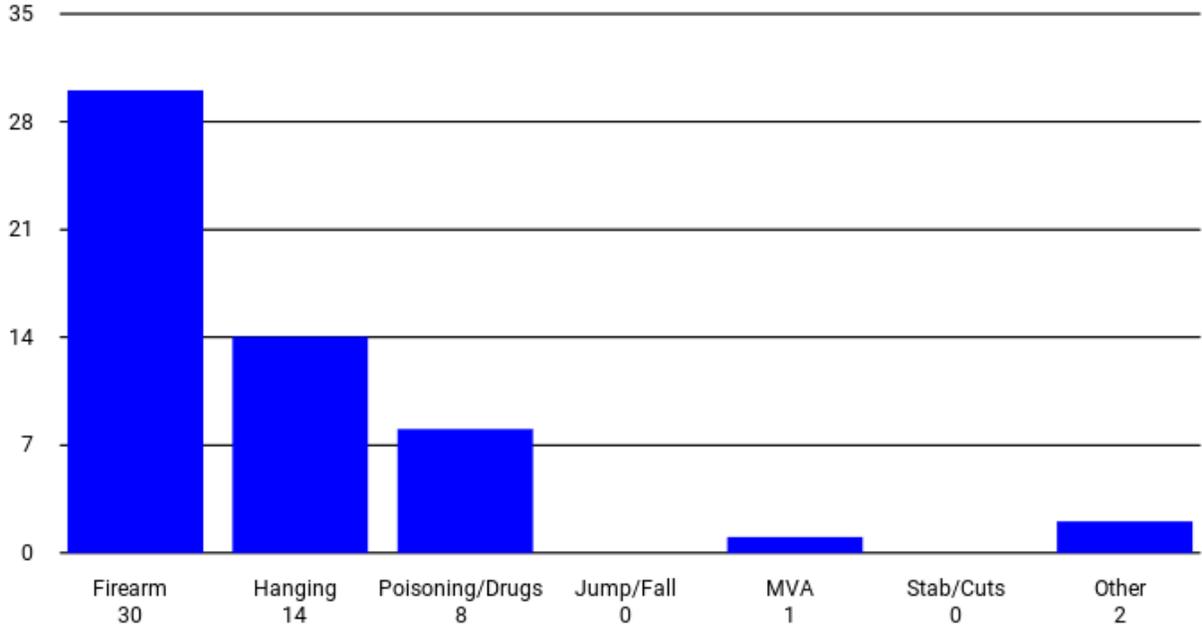
Drugs Contributing to Cause of Death



Drugs Contributing to Cause of Death (Some deaths may be in multiple categories)

Alcohol	1
Analgesics	
Antidepressants	
Benzodiazepines	
Illicit (Single drug)	20
Mixed	23
Narcotics	
Opioids	6
Therapeutic	
Chemical	2
Other	5

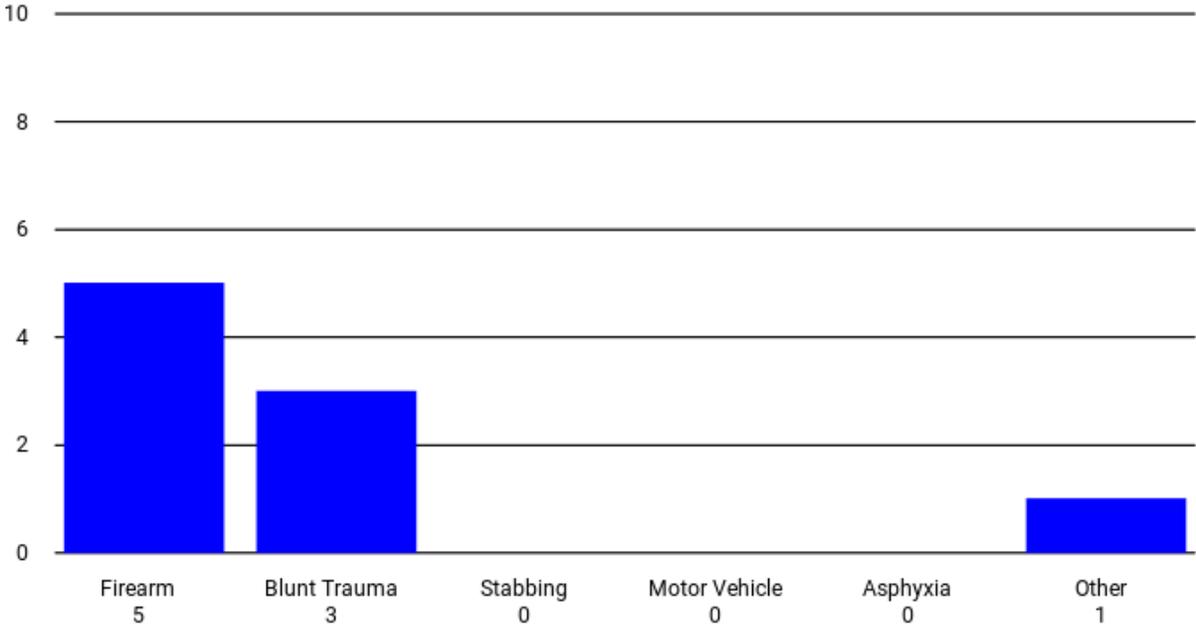
Suicide by Means



Suicide Deaths by Means (Some deaths may be in multiple categories) **53**

Firearm	30
Hanging	14
Poisoning/Drugs	8
Jump/Fall	0
Motor Vehicle Crash	1
Stab/Cuts	0
Other	2

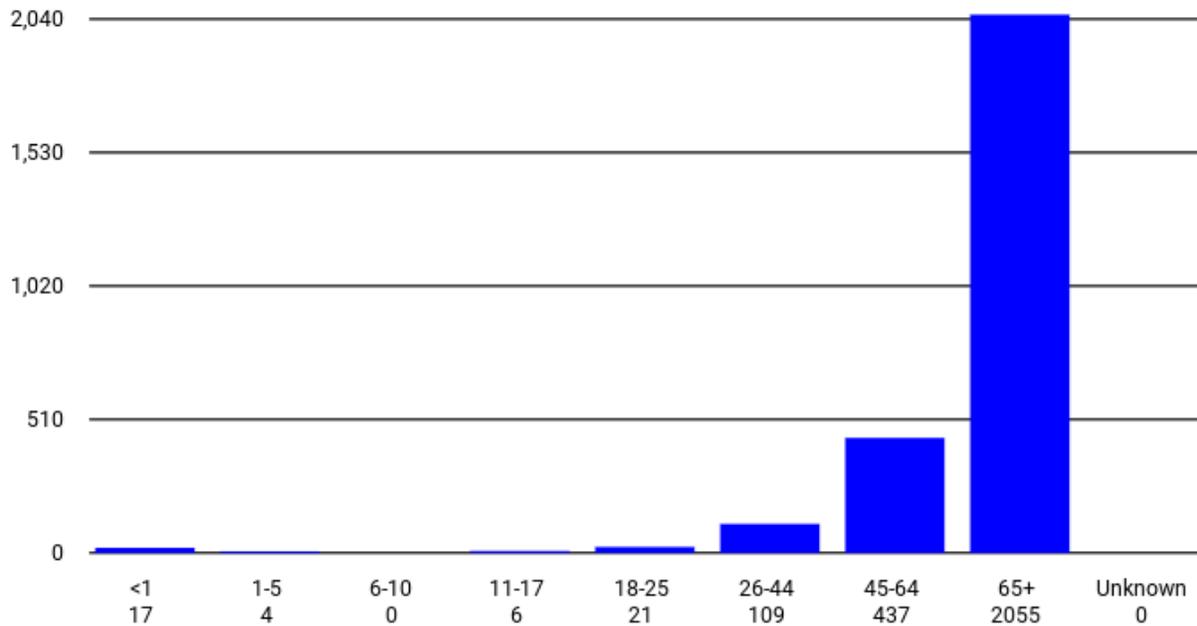
Homicide Deaths



Homicide Deaths by Means (Some deaths may be in multiple categories)

Firearm	5
Blunt Trauma	3
Stabbing	0
Motor Vehicle	0
Asphyxia	0
Other	1
Total	9

Deaths by Age Group



Deaths by Age Group

Less than 1 year	17
1-5 years	4
6-10 years	0
11-17 years	6
18-25 years	21
26-44 years	109
45-64 years	437
65+ years	2055
Unknown	0

Disclaimer

The Coroner's Office endeavors to provide accurate and up-to-date information in the Annual Report; however, this report is not complete and may be updated at any time. When the report is updated, the previous report will be removed and a new report will be posted.

Updated: September 2025