

Thurston County Coroner



2021 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

Traci McCullah
Lead Investigator/Deputy Coroner

Molly Ivanovich
Administrative Assistant 2

Karen Peek
Deputy Coroner

Lisa Chase
Deputy Coroner

Donald Seese
Deputy Coroner

Charlotte Mitchell-Brennan
Deputy Coroner

Kristina Vilsack
Deputy Coroner

Meagan Heiden
Intern

Megan Quinn, M.D.
Forensic Pathologist

Emmanuel Lacsina, MD
Pathologist

Eric Kiesel, MD, PhD
Pathologist

Jermane Evans
Lead Morgue Technician

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.

RCW 68.50.010

Coroner's jurisdiction over remains.

The jurisdiction of bodies of all deceased persons who come to their death suddenly when in apparent good health without medical attendance within the thirty-six hours preceding death; or where the circumstances of death indicate death was caused by unnatural or unlawful means; or where death occurs under suspicious circumstances; or where a coroner's autopsy or postmortem or coroner's inquest is to be held; or where death results from unknown or obscure causes, or where death occurs within one year following an accident; or where the death is caused by any violence whatsoever, or where death results from a known or suspected abortion; whether self-induced or otherwise; where death apparently results from drowning, hanging, burns, electrocution, gunshot wounds, stabs or cuts, lightning, starvation, radiation, exposure, alcoholism, narcotics or other addictions, tetanus, strangulations, suffocation or smothering; or where death is due to premature birth or still birth; or where death is due to a violent contagious disease or suspected contagious disease which may be a public health hazard; or where death results from alleged rape, carnal knowledge or sodomy, where death occurs in a jail or prison; where a body is found dead or is not claimed by relatives or friends, is hereby vested in the county coroner or medical examiner, which bodies may be removed and placed in the morgue under such rules as are adopted by the coroner or medical examiner with the approval of the county commissioners, having jurisdiction, providing therein how the bodies shall be brought to and cared for at the morgue and held for the proper identification where necessary.

Thurston County Coroner Cases

2021 Population (approximate)	297,977
Deaths Reported to the Coroner	3,069
Number of jurisdiction assumed deaths	450
Number of scene responses	310
Number of jurisdiction declined deaths	2,619
Number of cases receiving a full autopsy	187
Number of cases receiving a limited autopsy	11
Number of cases receiving an external examination	58
Number of deaths certified by the Coroner	428
Number of decedents brought to the Coroner's Office	302
Number of unidentified bodies	0
Number of referrals for organ and tissue donation	889
Number of indigents	34

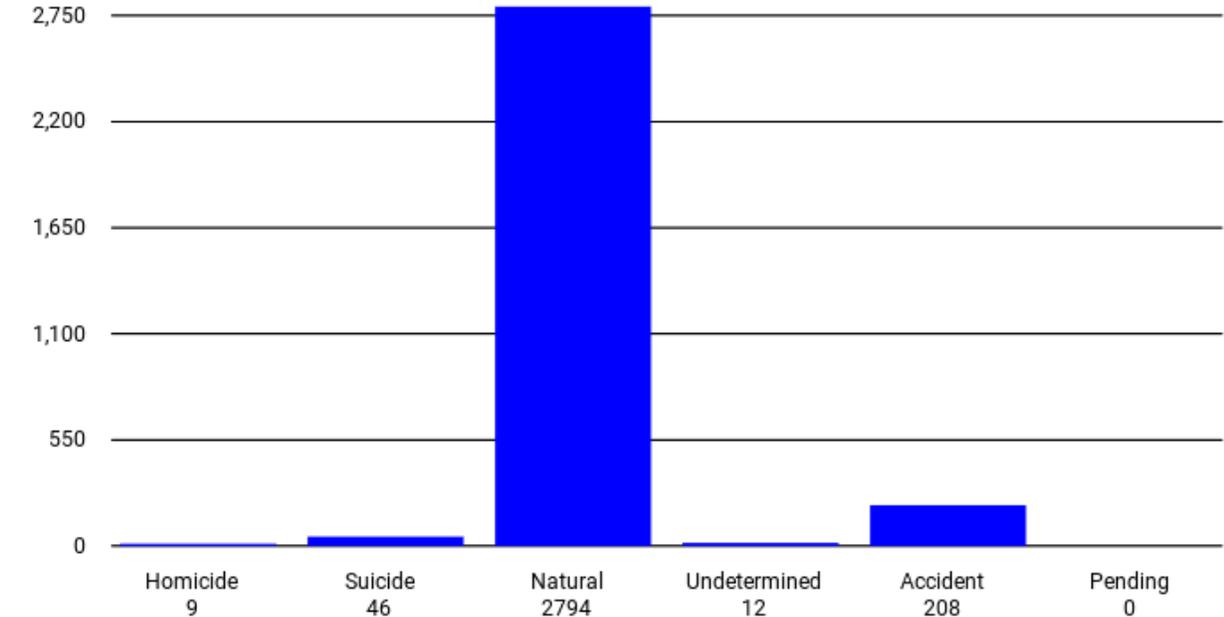
Definitions

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.

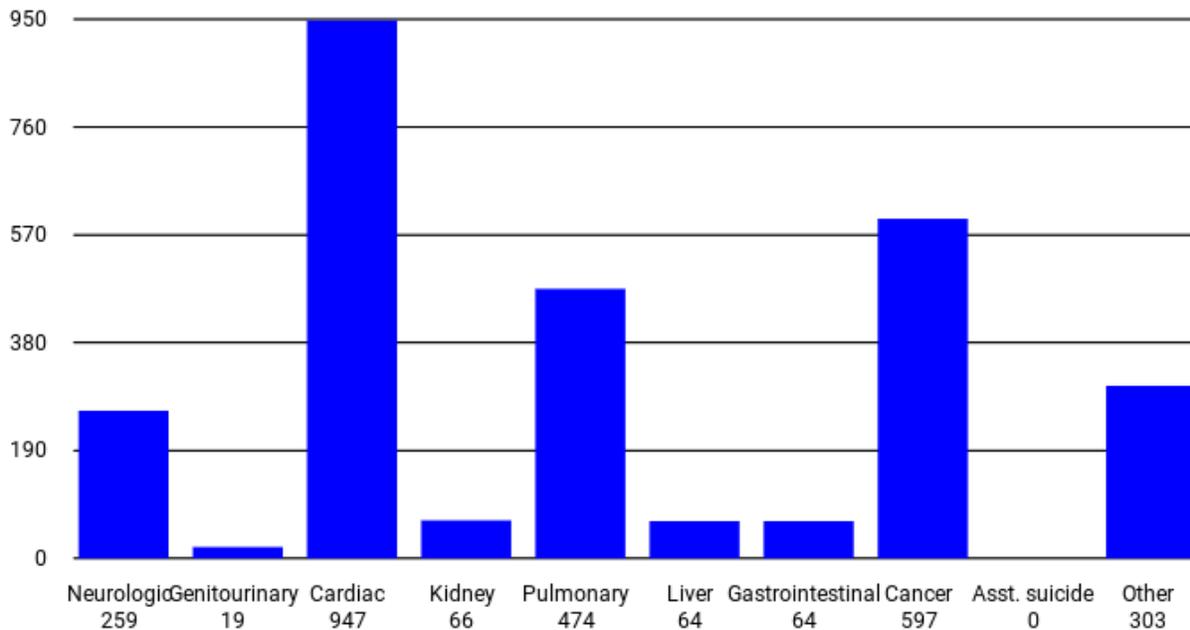
Cases by Manner of Death



Number of Deaths by Manner

Homicide	9
Suicide	46
Natural	2,794
Undetermined	12
Accident	208
Pending	0
Total	3,069

Natural Causes of Death by Category

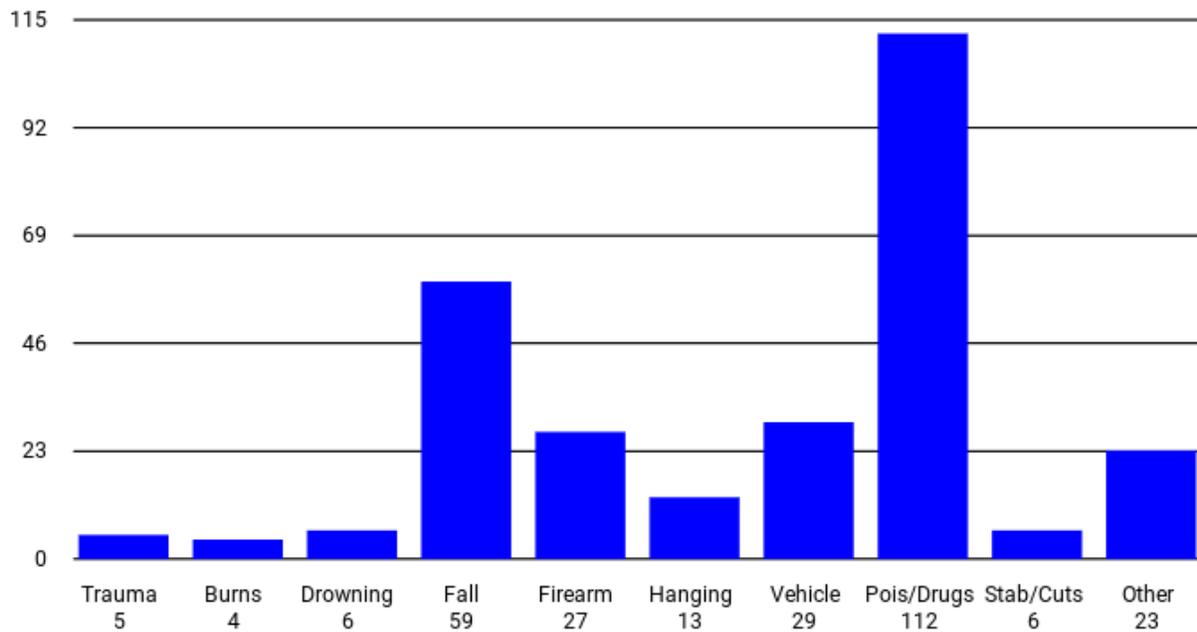


Natural Deaths by Category **2794**

Neurologic	259
Genitourinary	19
Cardiac	947
Kidney	66
Pulmonary	474
Liver	64
Gastrointestinal	64
Cancer	597
Other	303

+Some deaths can be in more than one category

Deaths by Unnatural Causes

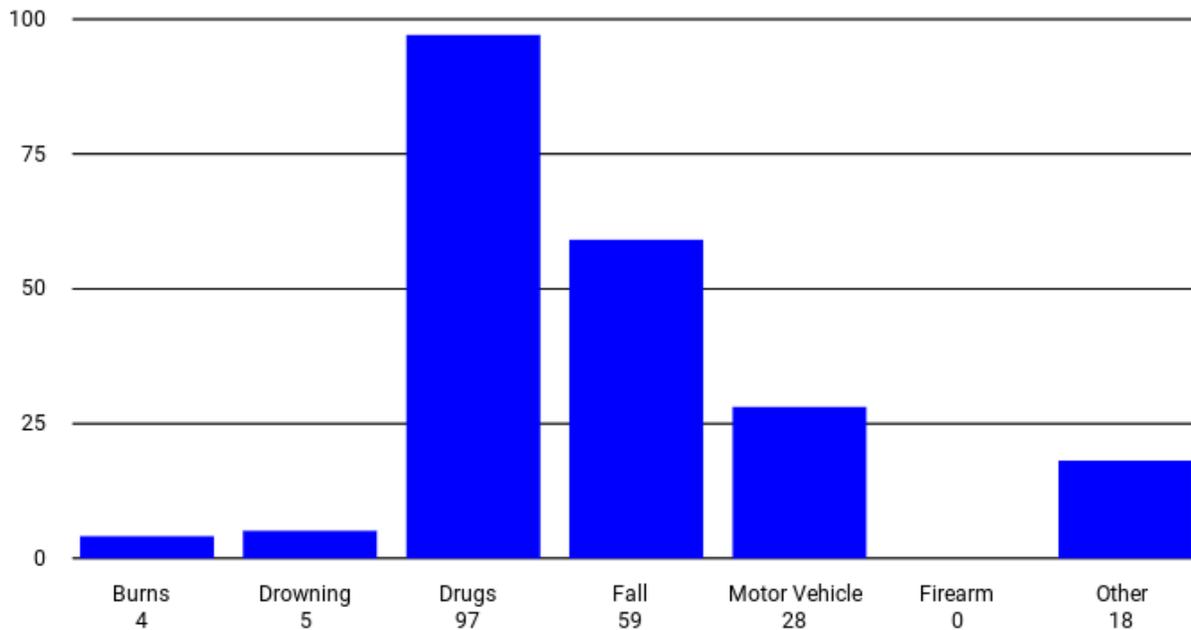


Unnatural Causes of Death 275

Trauma	5
Burns	4
Drowning	6
Fall	59
Firearm	27
Hanging	13
Vehicle	29
Drugs/Poison	112
Stabs/Cuts	6
Other	23

+Some deaths can be in more than one category

Accidental Deaths by Type

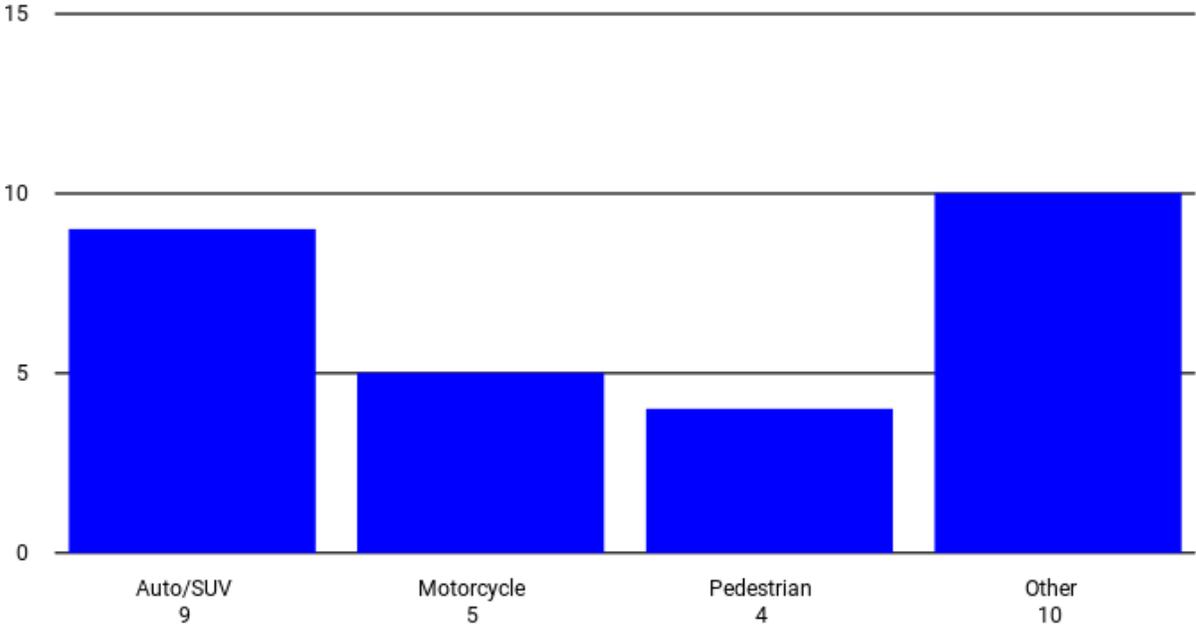


Accidental Deaths by Type 208

Burns	4
Drowning	5
Drugs	97
Fall	59
Vehicle	28
Firearm	0
Other	18

+Some deaths can be in more than one category

Accidental Deaths - Motor Vehicle Crashes

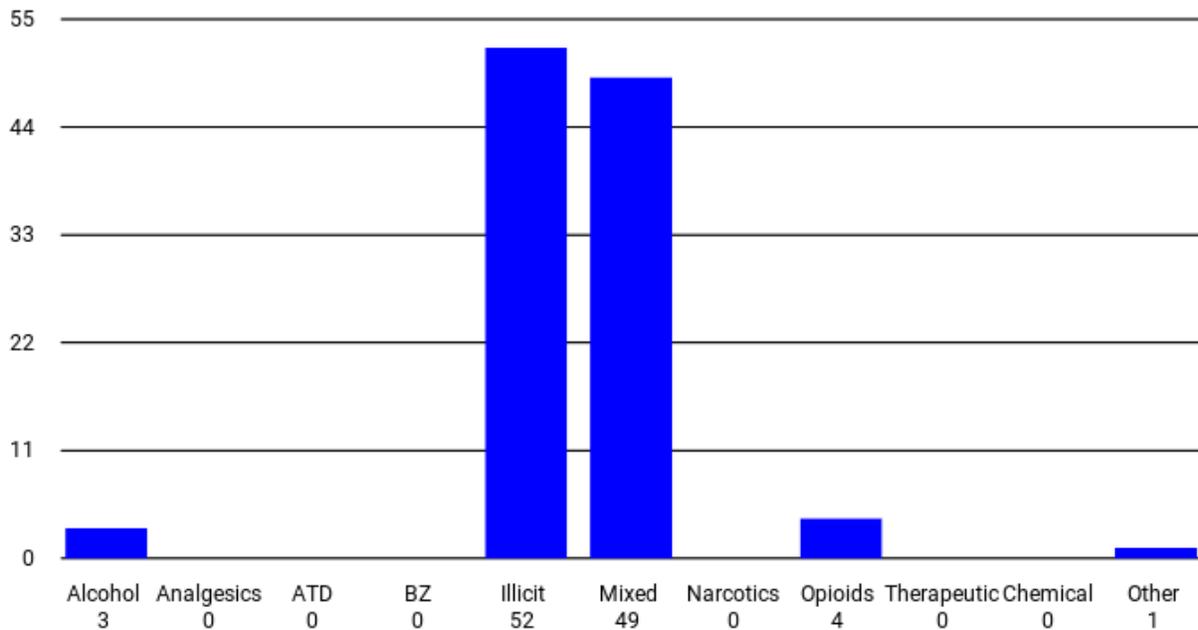


Accidental Deaths - Motor Vehicle Crashes 28

Auto/SUV	9
Motorcycle	5
Pedestrian	4
Other	10

+Some deaths can be in more than one category

Drugs Contributing to Cause of Death

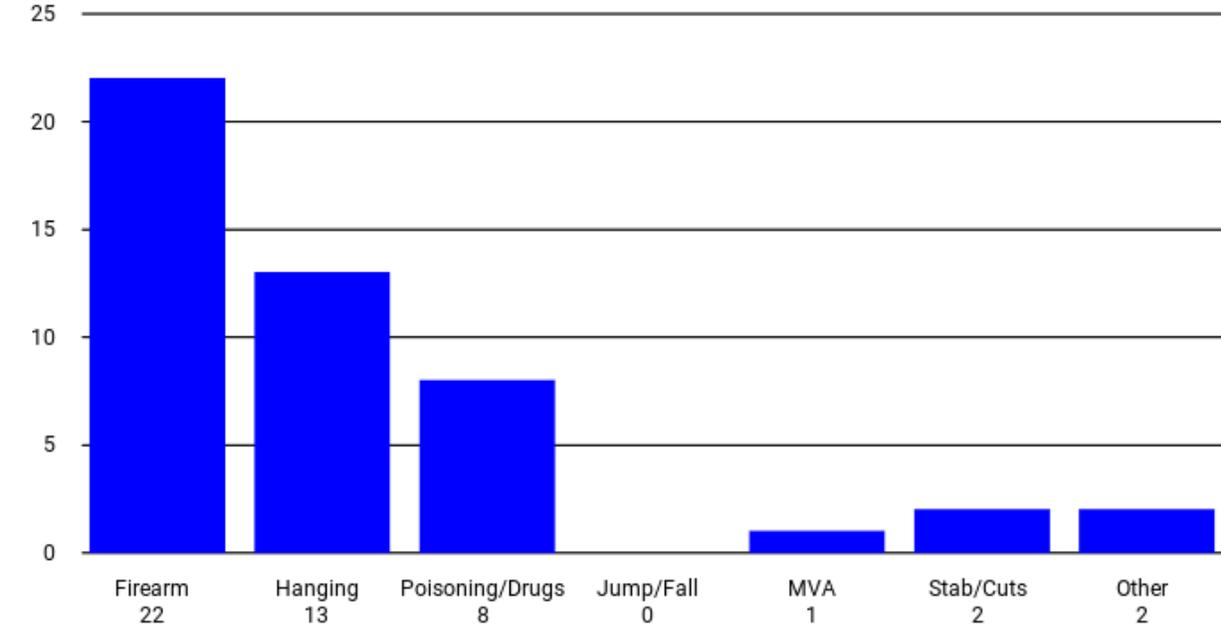


Drugs Contributing to Cause of Death

Alcohol	3
Illicit (Single drug)	52
Mixed	49
Opioids	4
Other	1

+Some deaths can be in more than one category
 ++Numbers need to be updated

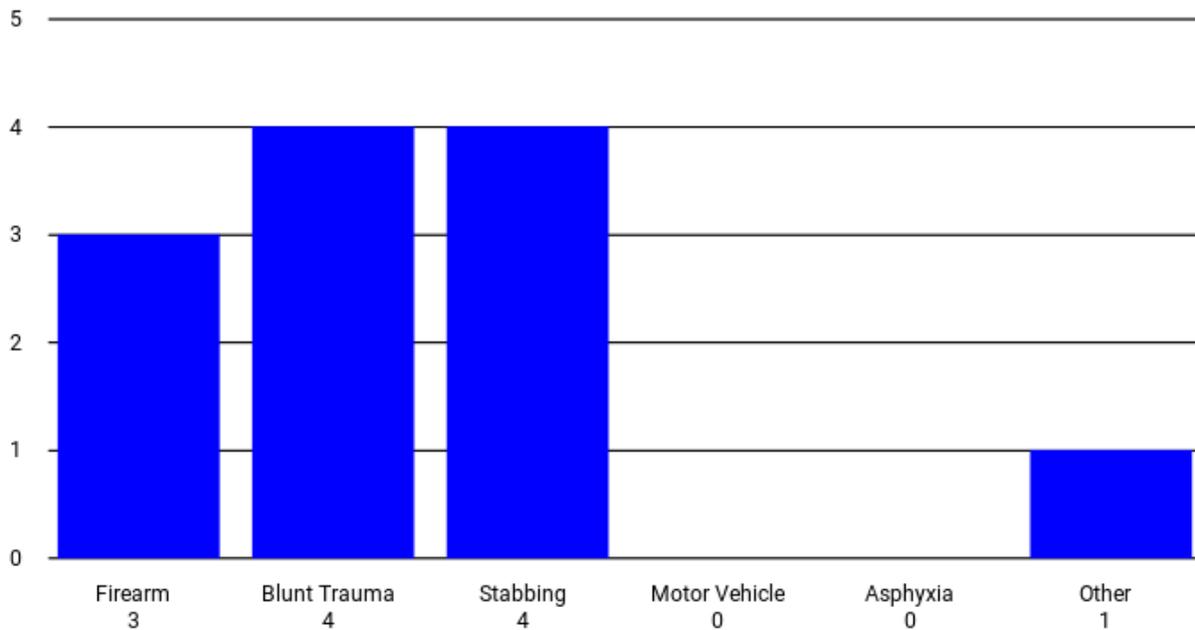
Suicide by Means



Suicide by Means	46
Firearm	22
Hanging	13
Drugs/Poison	8
Jump/Fall	0
Vehicle	1
Stabs/Cuts	2
Other	2

+Some deaths can be in more than one category

Homicide Deaths



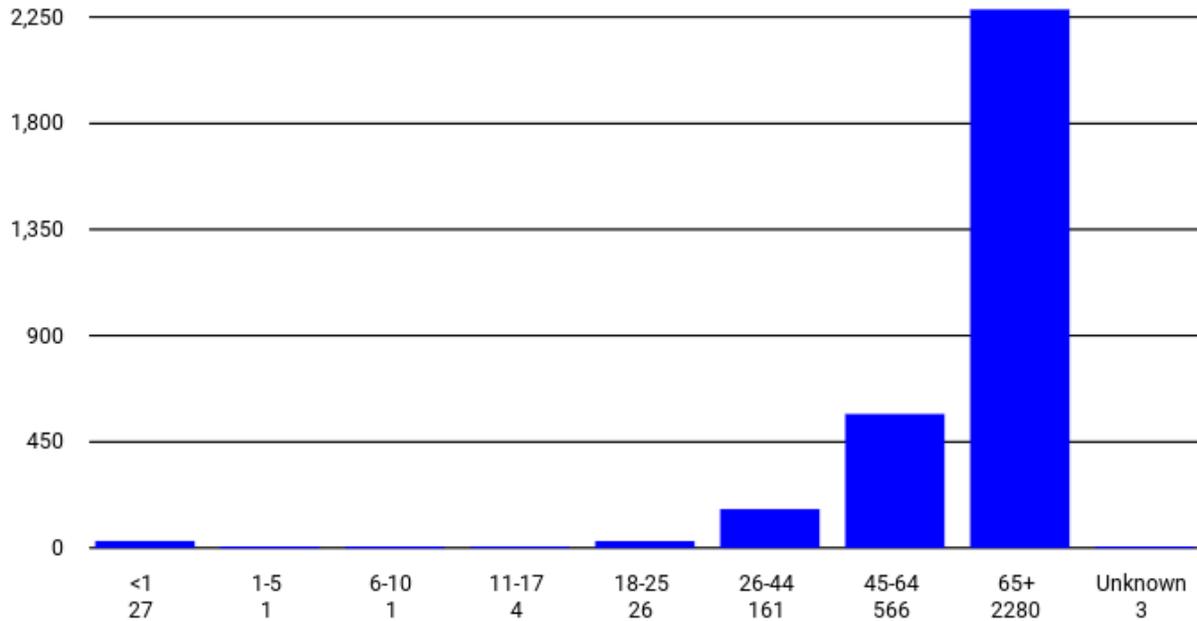
Homicide Deaths

9

Firearm	3
Blunt Force Trauma	4
Stabbing	4
Vehicle	0
Ashpyxia	0
Other	1

+Some deaths can be in more than one category

Deaths by Age Group



Deaths by Age Group

<1	27
1-5	1
6-10	1
11-17	4
18-25	26
26-44	161
45-64	566
65+	2280
Unknown age	3

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