

Office of the Coroner Skagit County



Hayley L. Thompson, D-ABMDI

Coroner

2021 Annual Report

The Skagit County Coroner's Office is an independent agency who serves the residents of Skagit County by investigating the facts and circumstances concerning the deaths of those who have died suddenly, violently, or unexpectedly while in apparent good health within the geographic boundaries of the county. The goal of this office is to serve the citizens of Skagit County with the highest degree of compassion, professionalism, and integrity regarding those who have died within Skagit County.

While our work is centered about sudden, violent and traumatic death situations, the driving mission of our Office is centered about service to the living family and friends who are the victims of a tragic loss; service directed at understanding the truth about how and why their loved one died; and; service directed at revealing and enacting any means of preventing future, similar deaths with our County.

To achieve this mission, the Skagit County Coroner's Office will:

- * Treat decedents and their personal effects with dignity and respect and without discrimination.
- * Conduct investigations and autopsies professionally, scientifically, and conscientiously.
- * Provide honest information to family members compassionately and courteously, with sensitivity to cultural differences.
- * Complete reports expeditiously with regard for the concerns of family members, the criminal justice system, and public health and safety.
- * Research and implement new procedures to better investigate death scenes.
- * Promote and maintain adequate staffing levels in order to provide all mandated services.
- * Promote and maintain an emotionally and physically healthy and safe working environment for all Coroner staff.
- * Promote and provide adequate equipment, training, and support to all Coroner staff.
- * Provide assistance, training, and education to all agencies requesting our services.
- * Provide a statistical annual report of deaths within the county.
- * Prepare and plan for mass casualty incidents.
- * Provide for disposition of unclaimed, indigent citizens in accordance with RCW 36.39.030.
- * Strive to increase proficiency and professionalism of all Coroner staff members.

The Skagit County Coroner's Office has an important public health role in bringing causes and manners of deaths to the attention of the public and many involved agencies. The Coroner's Office works with community partners to adopt a proactive approach to reducing preventable deaths such as drug-related deaths as well as suicides.

Introduction

A Description of Skagit County and its Population

Skagit County encompasses an area over 1,920 square miles which consists of coastal, agricultural and mountain areas. Towns include: Mount Vernon, Burlington, Anacortes, Guemes Island, La Conner, Bow, Alger, Sedro Woolley, Lyman, Hamilton, Concrete, Rockport, and Marblemount. There are also three Native American Tribes in the county: Swinomish Tribe, Upper Skagit Tribe, and Sauk Suiattle Tribe.

Skagit County is home to approximately 130,696 people (per the United States 2021 Census). This was a 0.9% increase from 2020 (population 129,523). Skagit County’s population is made up of 74.1% Caucasian, 18.6% Hispanic or Latino, 2.7% American Indian/Alaska Native, 2.3% Asian, 1.1% African American, 0.4% Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander, and 3.2% identifying with two or more races (United States 2021 Census).

According to the US 2021 Census, Skagit County had 21.5% of the population under the age of 18 and 21.5% of the population was 65 years and over.

Skagit County has three hospitals:

- * Skagit Valley Hospital (137 bed) level III Trauma Center. This hospital offers a full range of services including surgical services, renal dialysis, and advanced diagnostics. The hospital also offers advanced heart and vascular care.
- * Peacehealth United General Hospital located in Sedro Woolley, WA is a 25 bed critical access hospital serving those in Burlington, Sedro-Woolley, Bayview, Samish Island, Concrete, Marblemount, Clear Lake, and areas of Mount Vernon.
- * Island Hospital in Anacortes WA is a level III trauma center and has 43 beds.

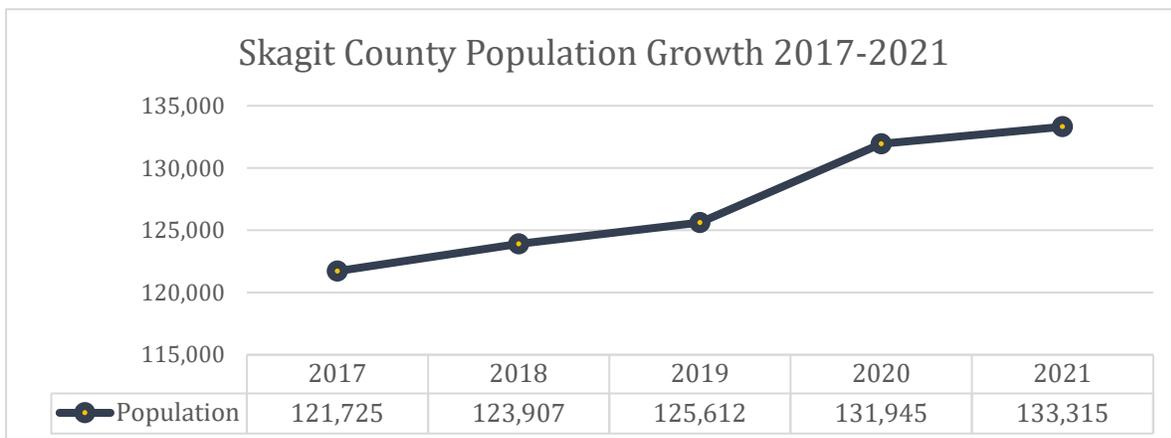


Figure 1. 2021 Skagit County Population Growth

Jurisdiction and State Statutes

Jurisdiction is assumed only on deaths that occur within the geographical boundaries of the county. This is regardless of whether the decedent is a resident of the county. Those Skagit County residents who die in another county do not fall under the jurisdiction of the Skagit County Coroner.

The Skagit County Coroner's Office assumes jurisdiction on all sudden, violent, traumatic, or unexpected deaths that occur within Skagit County. This includes deaths from apparent "natural diseases", but only when the individual had no recent physician of record or documented history of an existing medical condition that could credibly have caused the sudden death. Under these circumstances, it becomes the Coroner's responsibility to determine how and why a person died. Those who die of natural causes in a hospital, care facility, or under hospice care are not required by law to be reported to this office.

In accordance with the Revised Code of Washington (RCW 68.50), the following categories of deaths fall under the Coroner's jurisdiction:

- * Sudden death of an apparent healthy person with no known or significant medical history
- * Suspected natural deaths in which there is no current physician to certify the death
- * Deaths in which there are abuse or neglect concerns (Adult Protective Services or Child Protective Services involvement)
- * Violent or suspicious circumstances
- * Traffic-related deaths
- * Suicides
- * All child deaths
- * All premature births and still births over 20 weeks gestation
- * All accidental deaths (falls, industrial, recreational)
- * Deaths attributed to drug overdose or drug-related
- * Deaths that occur while in legal/court/jail/prison custody
- * Deaths due to unforeseen complications of therapy, surgery, or diagnostic procedures
- * Deaths due to an injury or fracture that either was directly or contributory to decline to death, this includes those injuries that occurred years earlier.
- * Deaths due to an undiagnosed or possible contagious disease that may be a public health hazard
- * Indigent or unclaimed bodies

Only the Coroner can certify a death that is not considered to be natural (accident, suicide, homicide, or undetermined).

The role of the Coroner in such deaths is to investigate the facts and circumstances concerning the death for the purpose of determining the cause and manner of death and whether there is sufficient reason for the Coroner to believe that the death may have resulted from a criminal act or criminal neglect of a person other than the deceased. If the investigation does not provide the necessary information to make this determination, then the Coroner may perform an autopsy.

As part of the death investigation, the Coroner shall determine the identity of the deceased and notify the next of kin of the death. Per standards and office policy, a scientific identification will be done on all homicides as well as whenever a visual identification is not able to be performed or is not confirmatory. Current acceptable methods of scientific identification include: fingerprint comparison, dental comparison, imaging comparison, or DNA comparison.

Coroner's Office Staff and Facilities

The scene, the examination of the body (external examination or internal examination), along with researching the history/background of the decedent all work together to provide the most accurate cause and manner of death. This can only be accomplished with a devoted team of investigators.

In 2021, the Coroner's Office staff included the Coroner, (1) full time Chief Deputy Coroner and (7) on-call part-time deputy coroners (3 of these on-call deputies resigned mid-year due to other employment). The office also had 2-3 interns to assist from time to time. The Coroner or Chief Deputy Coroner, along with an on-call deputy coroner are on duty 24/7/365. The Coroner's Office is contracted with (2) board certified forensic pathologists. It is the goal of this office, to have all deputy coroner's certified with the American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators (ABMDI) within 2 years of being hired.

Staff:

Hayley Thompson, D-ABMDI	Coroner
Deborah Hollis, D-ABMDI	Chief Deputy Coroner, 2016-present
Jacquelyn Scheer, D-ABMDI	Part-time Deputy Coroner (2017-mid 2021)
Brittanna Flickinger, D-ABMDI	Part-time Deputy Coroner (2018-present)
Ethan Greggerson, D-ABMDI	Part-time Deputy Coroner (2018-mid 2021)
Julia Welch	Part-time Deputy Coroner (2020-present)
Dylan Hartwig	Part-time Deputy Coroner (2020-present)
Uziel Gordillo	Part-time Deputy Coroner (2020-mid 2021)
Radovan Woods	Part-time Deputy Coroner (winter 2021-present)

The office utilizes (2) county vehicles: 2016 Ford Transit Van and 2018 Chevrolet Suburban that can be used in cases where terrain is difficult.

The administrative office is located at 1700 Continental Place in Mount Vernon, WA. The Skagit County Morgue and autopsy suite are located approximately 2 miles away at the Skagit Valley Hospital. This space is shared with the hospital. Morgue capacity is 6 and is routinely at capacity.

The Skagit County Coroner's Office staff are involved in a variety of activities in order to fulfill the required state statutes involving this office. These include responding to and investigating various death scenes, performing postmortem examinations, confirming identification, certifying the cause and manner of death, and providing information and assistance to families. Deputy Coroner's as well as the Coroner and Chief Deputy Coroner work to communicate directly with the families, which includes reviewing the findings and answering the many questions that accompany a sudden or traumatic loss of life.

In all cases, the identification and establishing and locating next-of-kin is necessary. In certain cases, the identification process can be extensive requiring outside assistance from an odontologist, pathologist, or out of state lab to analyze DNA. Finding the next of kin can be complicated as some individuals may have died leaving no next of kin or next of kin cannot be located. The Skagit County Coroner's Office ensures that all leads regarding next of kin are exhausted before establishing the case as indigent. This can be very time consuming but ultimately rewarding.

Occasionally there are individuals who pass away in Skagit County where the next of kin cannot be located or the next of kin declines responsibility for the decedent. In these situations, the Coroner's Office takes possession of the decedent and arranges for a cremation. The cremains of unclaimed individuals are kept by the Coroner's Office for a minimum of one year, after which the cremains are interred in a crypt donated to the county unless a family member or interested party come forward to claim the cremains. Claiming cremains after the County has taken responsibility for disposition requires a fee of \$600 in order to compensate the county for the cost of the cremation. Those unclaimed cremains who are veterans are released and transported down to the Tahoma National Cemetery where they are honored and interred.

All autopsies are performed by a contracted board-certified forensic pathologist at the direction of the Coroner. These pathologists work under the standards set forth by the International Association of Coroners and Medical Examiners (IACME). If an autopsy is required in order to determine the cause and manner of death, then various body fluids (blood and vitreous), tissues for microscopic and toxicological analysis will be taken in addition to the anatomical examination. Photographs are taken during autopsy and are essential to the case and the pathologist. Autopsy reports and related data from individual investigations are provided to law enforcement agencies, prosecuting attorneys, and other agencies such as Occupational Safety and Health Administration, Federal Aviation

Administration, National Transportation Safety Board, Board of Consumer Product Safety, and Labor and Industries if they are involved in the case.

The Coroner provides information to local law enforcement and medical personnel as well as various community groups on a regular basis regarding the role and function of the Coroner's Office. In addition, the Coroner's Office collects and analyzes data on various cases to assist the community with prevention. Media releases regarding cases of interest as well as up-to-date statistics are posted on the Coroner's website.

Strategic Goals of the Coroner's Office

The Skagit County Coroner's Office was awarded a \$250,000 grant through the National Institute of Justice in late September of 2020. The grant money as well as additional funds from the County will be used towards the improvement of the Skagit County Coroner's Office to include a modernized morgue and autopsy suite in the same building as the current administrative office. This project is to be completed by the summer of 2022 and requires the Coroner's Office to apply and achieve accreditation through the International Association of Coroners and Medical Examiners (IACME) by September 2022. The Skagit County Coroner's Office has identified the following goals and objectives necessary for the Coroner's office to continue to provide timely and legally defensible death investigations:

- * All on-call deputy coroners who have been employed by the Coroner's Office for 2 or more years will be certified with the American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators (ABMDI) by the end of 2022.
- * Shifts will be staffed to handle the daily caseload with little to no effect on the devised budget.
- * 100% of the decedents under the Coroner's jurisdiction will be stored in a modern refrigerated County Morgue by the fall of 2022.
- * Post-mortem examinations will take place in a well-ventilated and sterile autopsy suite by the fall of 2022.
- * Achieve accreditation with the International Association of Coroner and Medical Examiner's (IACME) by September 2022.
- * Improve communication by providing monthly up-to-date death statistics on the Coroners website every month.
- * Annual report to be completed and displayed on the Coroners website before the end of June each year.
- * Expand and continue to provide communication throughout the community regarding the role and functions of the Coroner's Office.

Death Investigations- An Overview

Death Investigations are categorized into 2 different categories: non-jurisdictional and jurisdictional. Non-jurisdictional cases are natural deaths that are reported to the Coroner’s Office when the death is unattended (excludes hospital, care facilities, and in-home hospice), but the decedent is under the care of a physician who has knowledge and awareness of the decedent’s health and will certify the death certificate. Jurisdictional cases, which can be natural or non-natural, are deaths where the Coroner certifies the cause and manner of an individual’s death. All non-natural (homicide, suicide, accident, undetermined, or pending) deaths must be certified by the Coroner.

Table 1. 2021 Statistical Summary

Reported Cases	528
Non-jurisdictional Cases	215
Jurisdictional Cases	313
Death Certified by Coroner’s Office	239
Natural Causes	337
Accidental	140
Suicide	32
Homicide	2
Undetermined	7
Skeletal Remains	1
Full Autopsies	54
Partial Autopsies	1
External Examination Only	82
Toxicological Tests Performed	157
Scene Responses	140
Unidentified Bodies	0
Exhumations	0

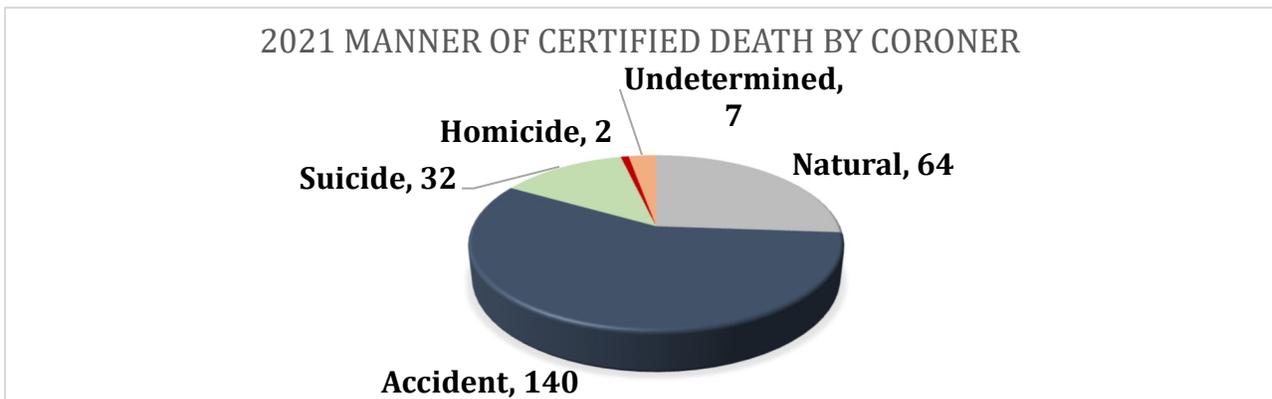


Figure 2. 2021 Skagit County Manner of Death

For the year 2021, there were 1,519 deaths in Skagit County. This was a 14% increase from the year 2020 (1,324 deaths) and 20% increase from the year 2019 (1,260 deaths). The Skagit County Coroner’s Office conducted 528 death investigations and assumed jurisdiction on 313 cases (11% increase from 2020). The cause and manner of death as well as the decisions for non-jurisdictional and jurisdictional cases are often a matter of judgment and strict comparisons across years are not valid. In review of deaths over the past 3 years (2019-2021), there has been a gradual increase in the number of death investigations conducted by the Coroner’s Office. In addition, there was a marked increase in the number of Coroner cases, scene responses, and body examinations performed in 2021 as illustrated in Figure 2. 2021 Skagit County Reported Cases and Coroner Involvement 2019-2021.

In the year 2021, there were 134 post-mortem examinations conducted by the Coroner’s Office. Of these 134 examinations, 55 required an autopsy to confirm or determine the cause and manner of death and 82 cases required an external examination of the body for documentation purposes. Toxicological testing was performed on all of these cases unless no samples could be obtained due to the circumstances of the case or the preservation of the decedent. Toxicology results averaged 90 days with some cases taking closer to 180 days. There was a 50% increase in the number of external examinations conducted in 2021 compared to previous years (59 external examinations in 2020 and 67 external examinations in 2019). Possible explanation of this increase can be attributed to the effects the COVID-19 pandemic had on the population such as: increase in drug and alcohol abuse, relationship and financial stress, depression, lack of medical care or ability to see a physician.

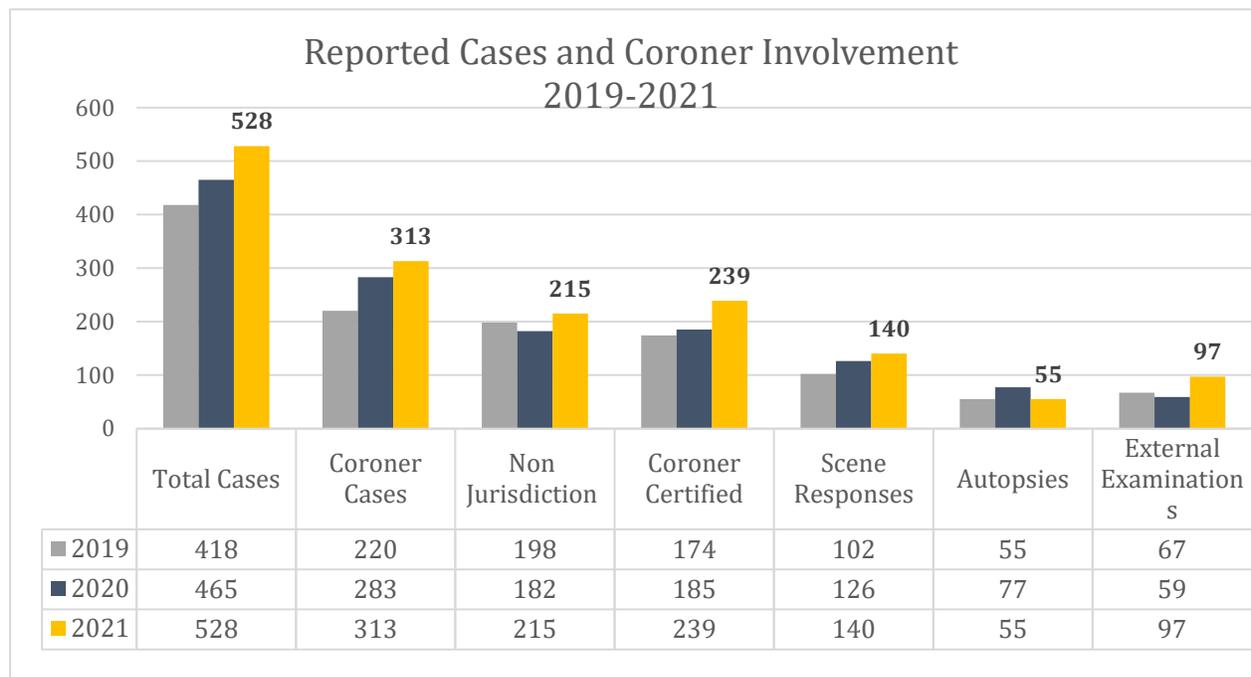


Figure 3. Skagit County Coroner Involvement 2019-2021

2021 Coroner Casework by Quarter

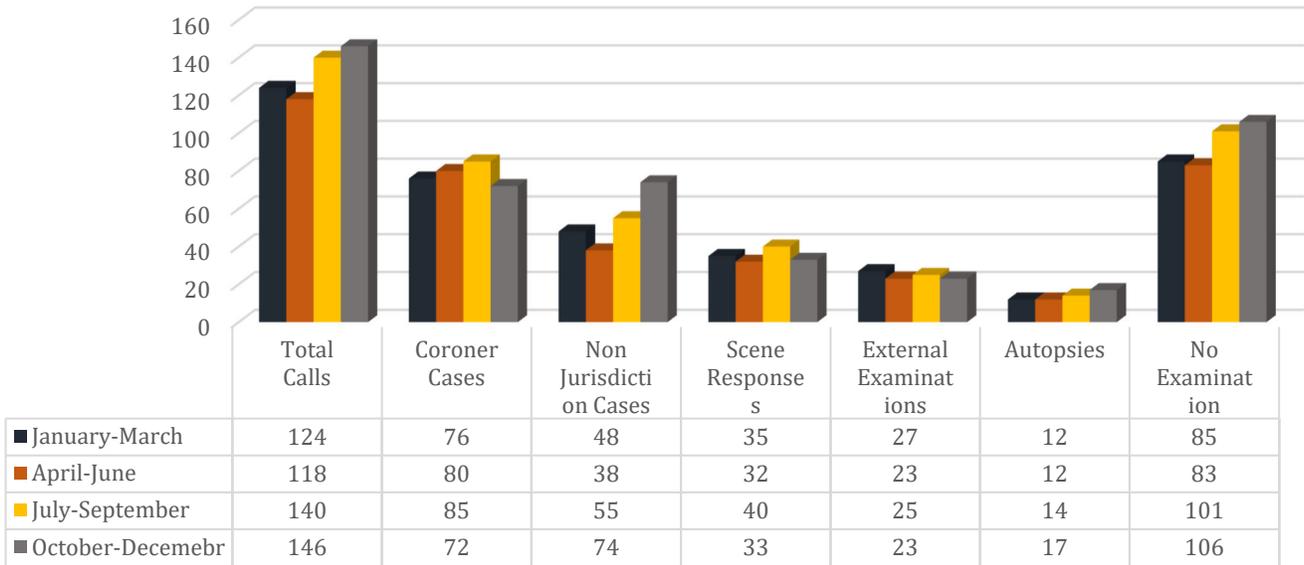


Figure 4. 2021 Skagit County Coroner Quarterly Casework

2021 Manner of Death by Age Group

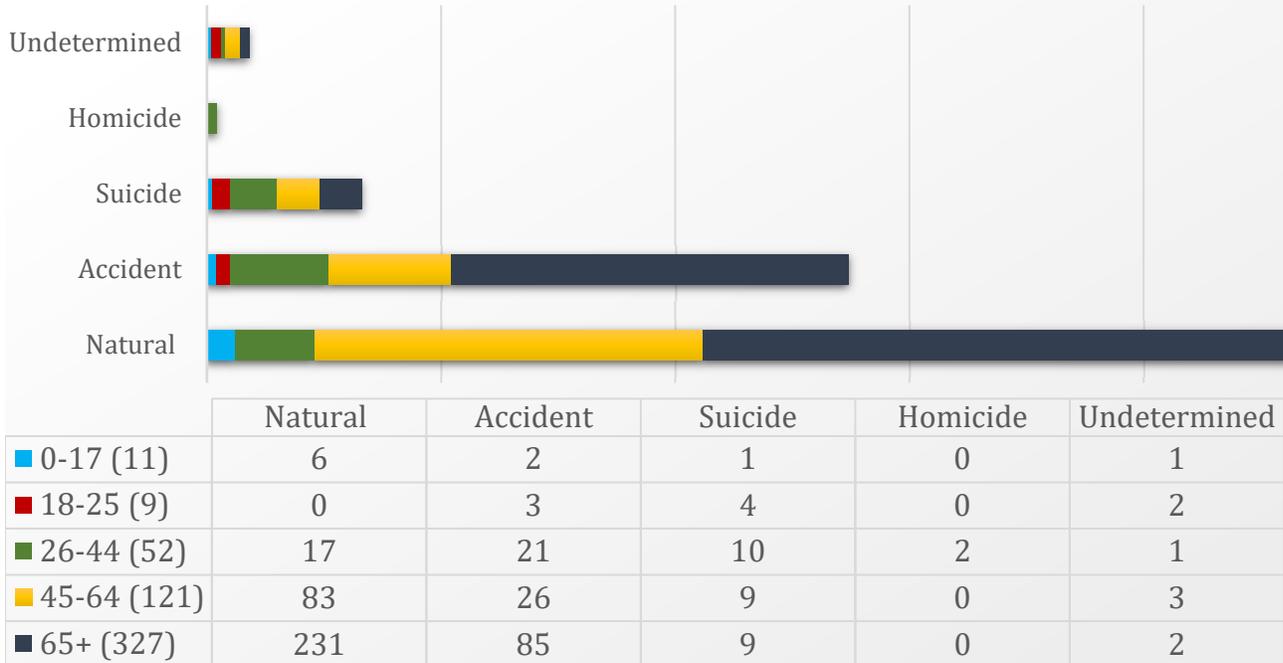


Figure 5. 2021 Skagit County Manner of Death by Age Group

Manner of Death: Natural

The Coroner may certify natural deaths under many circumstances. These include a sudden and unexpected death in an apparently healthy individual, when there is no physician able or willing to certify the death or when there are suspicious circumstances surrounding the death.

In 2021, there were 337 natural deaths investigated by the Coroner's Office accounting for 63% of the total deaths reported to the Coroner's Office. A total of 63 cases (18%) were certified by the Coroner's office. Of these 63 deaths, the primary cause of death was cardiac-related (34/63, 53%) followed by pulmonary (7/63), chronic alcoholism (5/63), and Covid-19 (4/63).



Figure 6. 2021 Skagit County Certified Natural Causes of Death by Coroner's Office

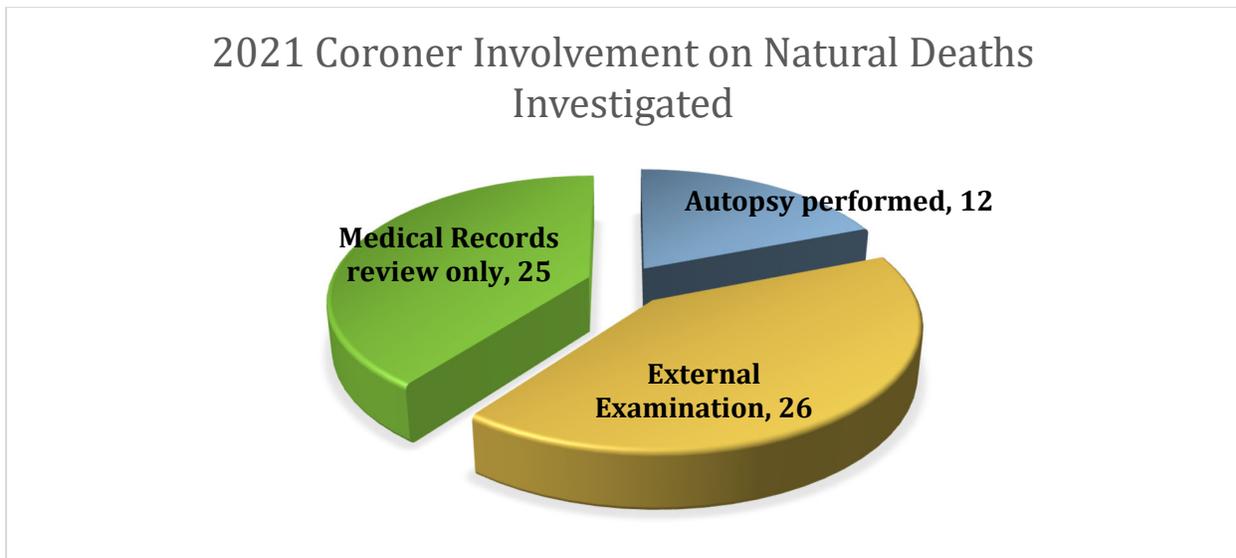


Figure 7. 2021 Skagit County Coroner Involvement on Reported Natural Deaths

The Skagit County Coroner’s Office provides reports on all violent deaths to the Washington State Violent Death Reporting System. This includes all deaths where the manner of death was determined to be a homicide, accident, or suicide. Accidents are the second most common manner of death after natural deaths for Skagit County. Accidental deaths include all motor vehicle accidents, falls, industrial accidents, drownings, choking/asphyxiation cases, structural fires, and drug overdoses.

Manner of Death: Accident

The Coroner certified 140 deaths as accidental in 2021 accounting for 26% of the total deaths reported to the Coroner’s Office (44% of jurisdiction assumed cases). Of these 140 accidental deaths, 29% were due to drug overdose (41/140). Falls resulting in trauma including those deaths in which elderly patients had fallen resulting in trauma accounted for 47% of accidental deaths (67/140). Motor vehicle accidents made up 8% of accidental deaths (12/140). In 2021, there were (5) drowning accidents, (6) heat-related (hyperthermia), and 2 cases in which were caused by choking on food. Accidents included in the *other* category were: (1) train accident, (1) sharp force tool, (1) complication of treatment, (1) carbon monoxide, (1) blunt force injury from horse, (1) asphyxia by hanging, and (1) infant death (not SIDS). Since all accidental deaths are theoretically preventable, each such death is investigated for public health purposes.

2021 Accidental Types of Death = 140

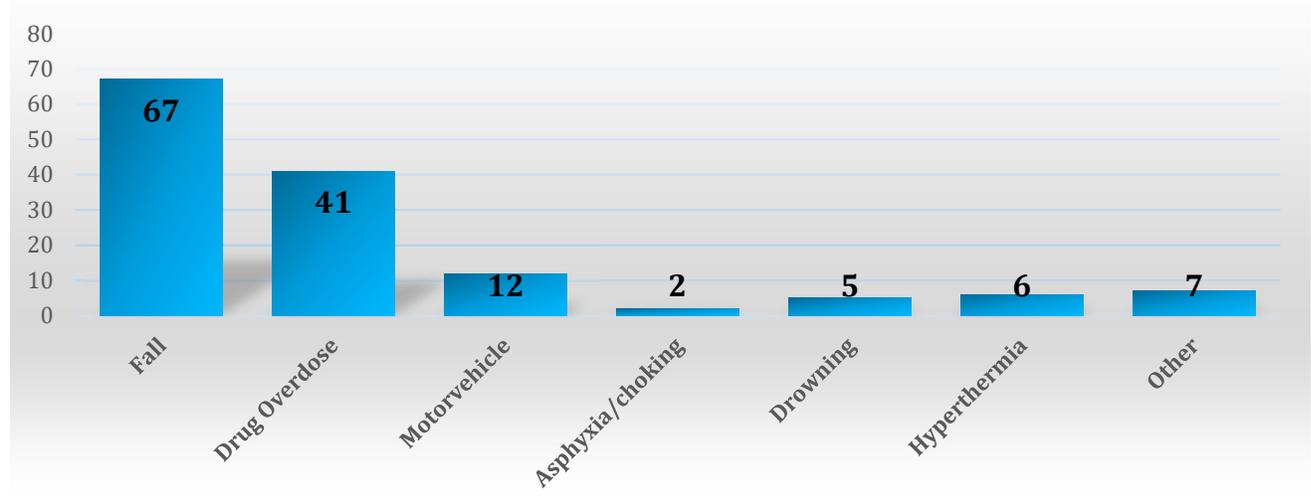


Figure 8. 2021 Skagit County Accidental Deaths
 *Falls include elderly individuals who died from injuries related to falling

2020 Accidental Deaths by Age Group

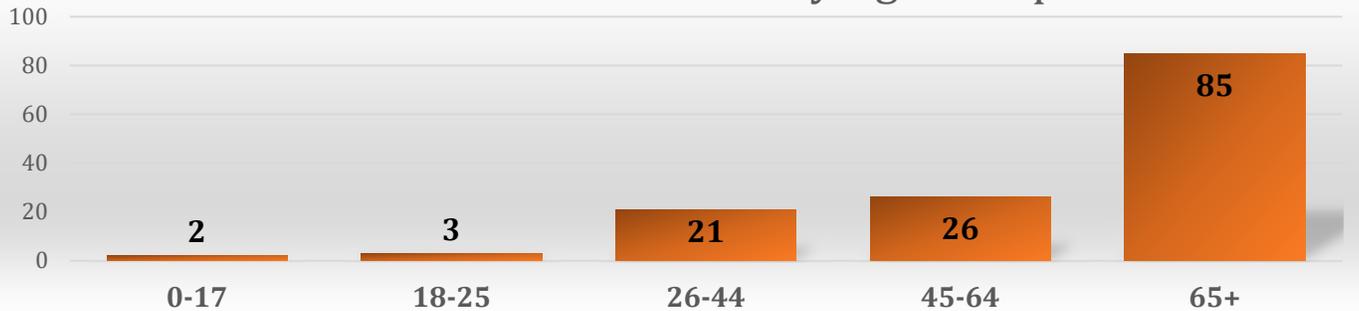


Figure 9. 2021 Skagit County Accidental Deaths by Age Group

Falls

There were 67 falls in 2021 accounting for 48% of accidental deaths. All of these deaths were in those age 65 years and older. Falls were sometimes a direct cause of death, such as when the fall results in head trauma leading to a subdural hemorrhage. Falls were also an indirect cause of death, especially in the elderly. For example, a fall may result in a fracture that requires surgery and the decedent later develops pneumonia or sepsis. Even though the decedent died of pneumonia, the fracture impacted their overall health and contributed to the death. This requires the manner of death to be an accident. In 2021, 66/67 of these cases were from a ground level fall that resulted in trauma that contributed directly or indirectly to the death. Only 1 case involved a person who had fallen while hiking.

Drug Overdose

Drug overdose deaths are extensively investigated. It is important to note that a drug overdose is a diagnosis of exclusion requiring an autopsy to be performed on those who have little to no medical history in order to rule out other causes of death. The Skagit County Coroner's Office takes an active role in sharing its data and insights regarding overdose deaths with the county and outside partners.

The number of drug overdoses classified as accidental in Skagit County for 2021 was 41. This was the second largest group of accidental deaths. The 2 most common drugs seen in Skagit County were methamphetamine and fentanyl. Expanded forensic toxicology testing was performed on all suspected drug overdose deaths, allowing confirmation of the cause of death and the identification of both illicit and prescription drug abuse trends in Skagit County.

Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid pain reliever that is 50 times stronger than heroin and 100 times stronger than morphine. There are two types of fentanyl: pharmaceutical fentanyl and illicitly manufactured fentanyl. Most of the fentanyl-related deaths are linked to the illicitly manufactured fentanyl and are being seen in pill form (blue round pill with M/30 stamp) as well as mixed with other drugs to make it more powerful, addictive, and dangerous.

In 2017, Skagit County had its first fentanyl-related drug death. In 2018, there were a total of 24 accident drug overdose deaths with 9 of these deaths certified by the Coroner’s Office as fentanyl-related drug overdoses. A change in community outreach and support regarding substance abuse resulted in a decrease in the total number of overdoses (18) as well as fentanyl-related drug overdoses (3). Unfortunately, in 2020, the outreach and support services offered in the county ceased due to COVID-19. As a result, the total number of drug overdoses reached a record high of 40 cases. Of these 40 overdose deaths, 10 were ruled as fentanyl-related. In 2021, the total number of drug overdose deaths was 41. Of these 41 deaths, almost half (19/41, 46%) were fentanyl-related. Of these 41 overdose deaths, 25 were considered opioid overdoses. Only 4 of them involved a single opioid (example: heroin). In majority of the opioid drug overdoses, there were no prescription medications involved. These were from pills or illicit drugs laced with other drugs such as fentanyl, methamphetamine, cocaine, benzodiazepines.

Aside from Fentanyl overdoses, methamphetamine was the second highest drug present in overdose deaths. In 2021, the total number of deaths attributed to acute methamphetamine toxicity was 10, but methamphetamine was found in 21 out of 41 (51%) drug overdose deaths.

Demographic analysis showed males (30/41, 73%) and Caucasians (32/41, 78%) to be mostly represented in drug overdose death statistics for Skagit County. The age range for overdose deaths was 22-71 years of age with age groups 26-44 (17/41) and 45-64 (17/41) having the highest number of deaths. There were 6 overdose deaths for the age group 65 and older and no overdose deaths for those aged 0-17. In a large proportion of the overdose deaths (14/41, 34%), the individual was alone at the time of the overdose. Of the 41 drug overdoses, 10 had a previous history of overdose and of those 10, 5 of those individuals had overdosed in the last 12 months.

2017-2021 Drug Overdose Totals

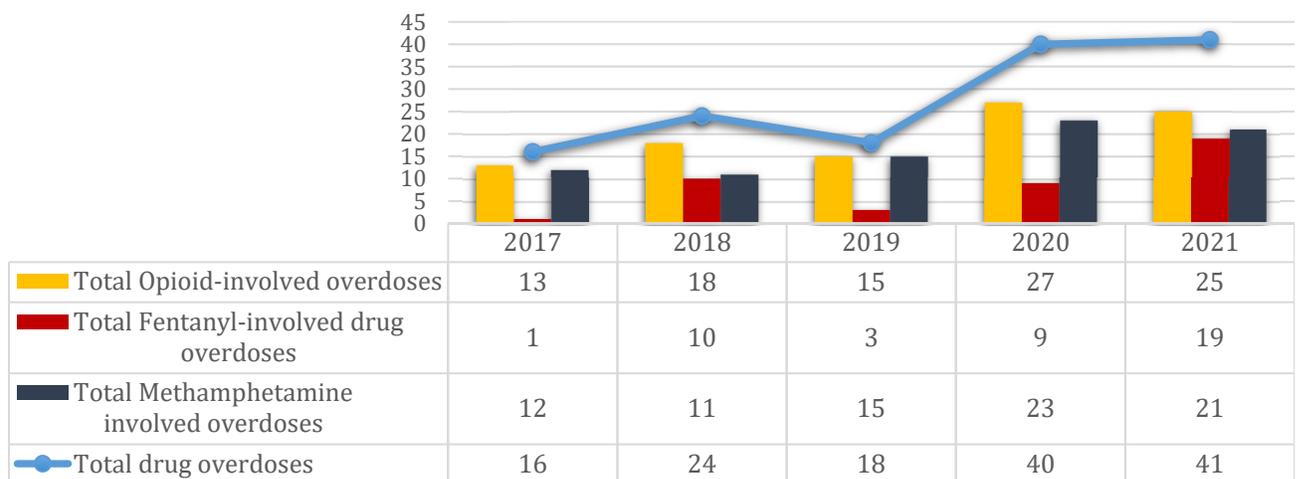


Figure 10. 2017-2021 Skagit County Total Accidental Overdose Deaths

2017-2021 Drug Overdose Deaths by Quarter

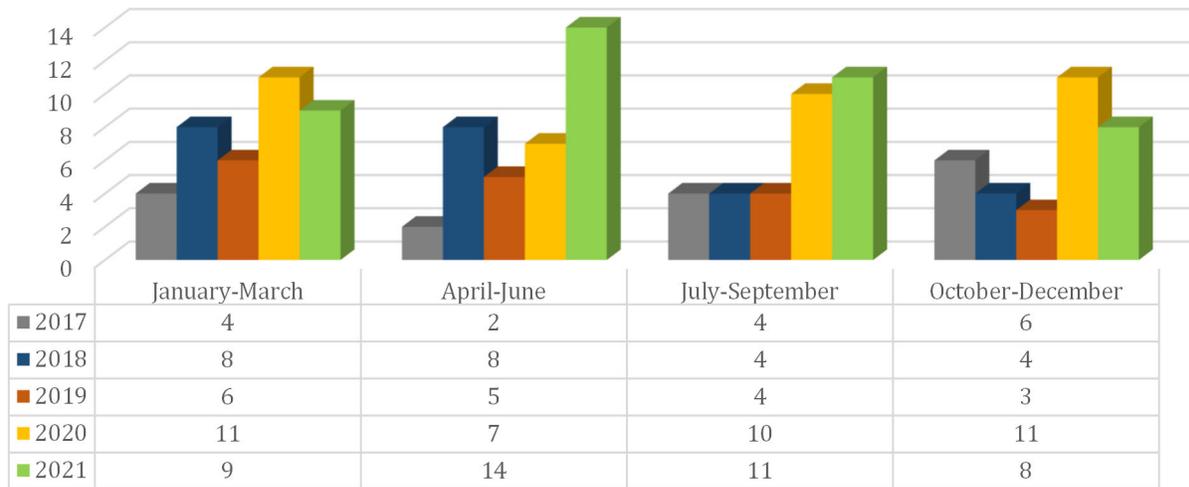


Figure 11. 2017-2021 Skagit County Overdose Death by Quarter

2017-2021 Drug Overdose Deaths by City

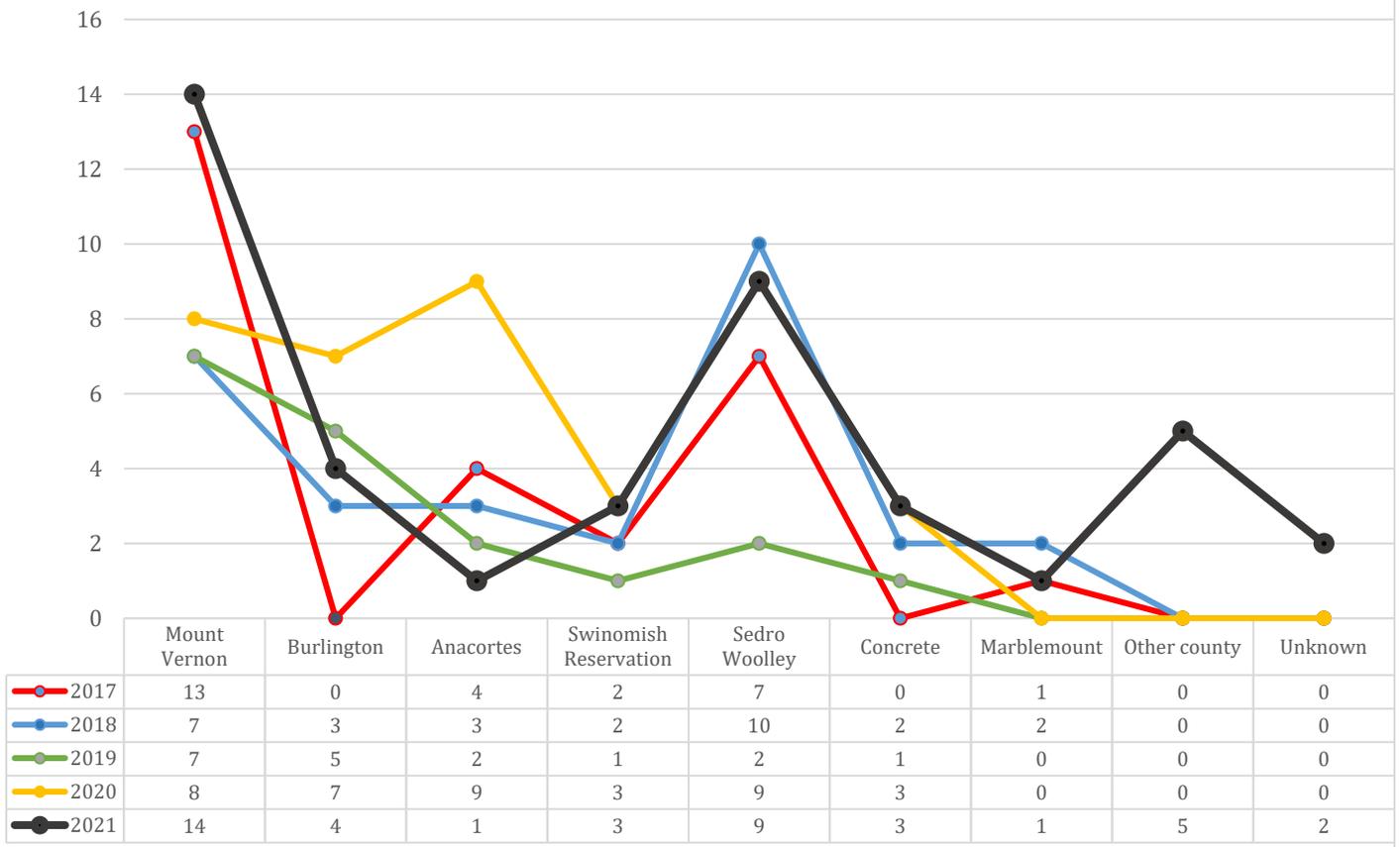


Figure 12. 2017-2021 Skagit County Overdose Death by City

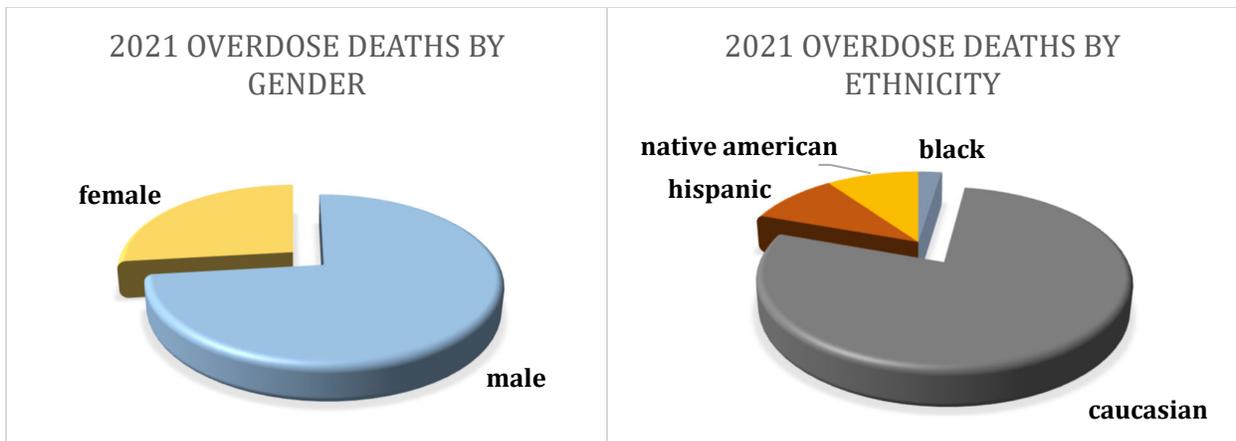


Figure 13. 2021 Skagit County Overdose Deaths by Gender and Ethnicity

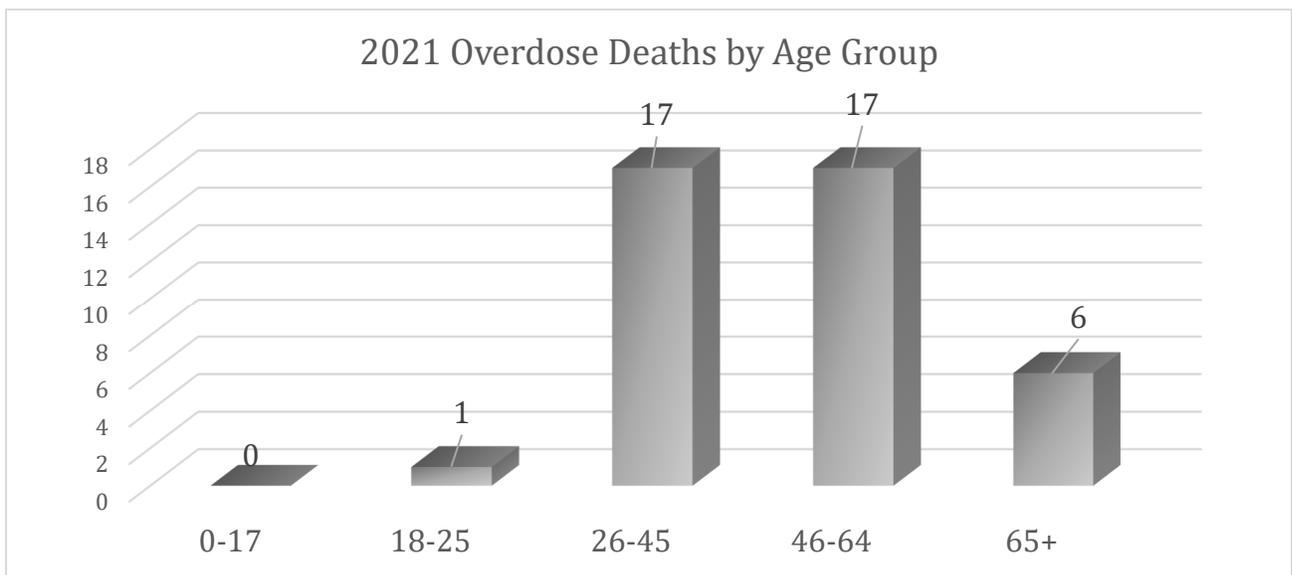


Figure 14: 2021 Skagit County Overdose Deaths by Age Group

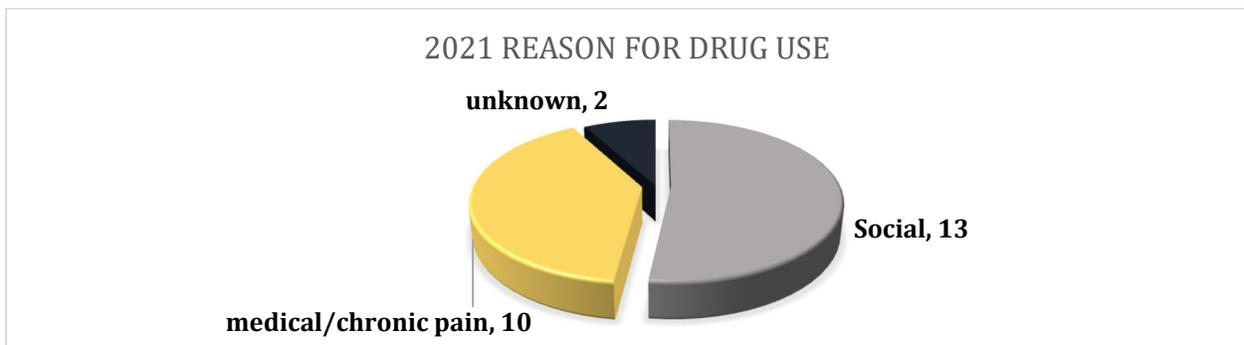


Figure 15: 2021 Skagit County Reason for Drug Use

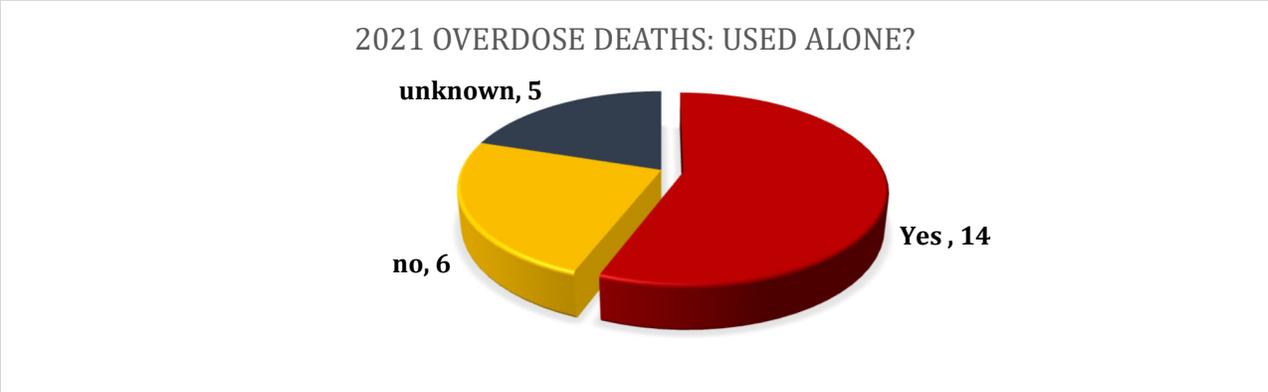


Figure 16: 2021 Skagit County Drug Overdose Use Alone

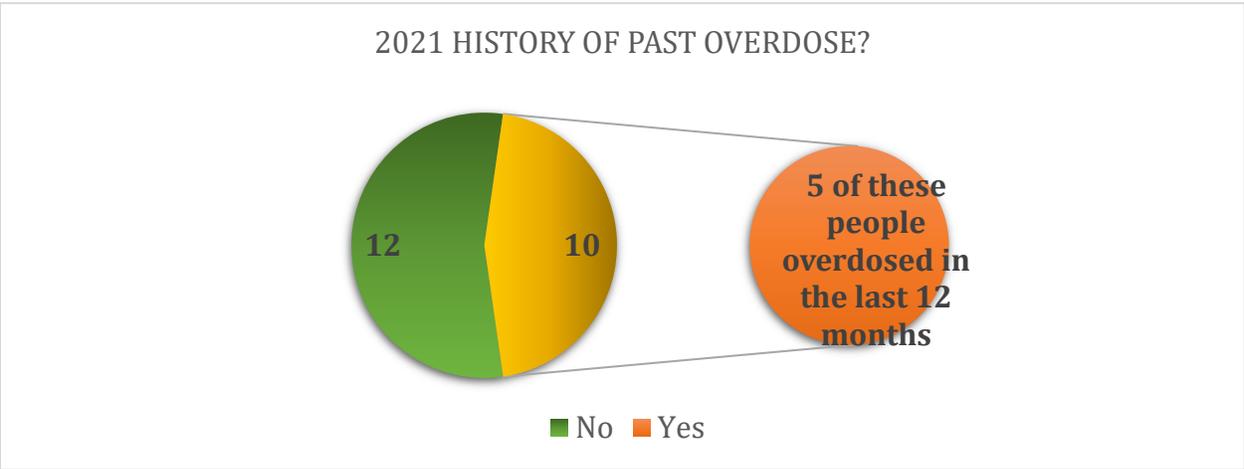


Figure 17: 2021 Skagit County History of Past Overdose?

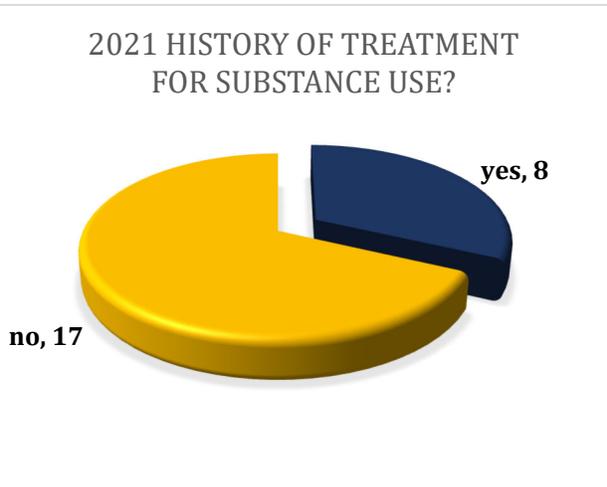
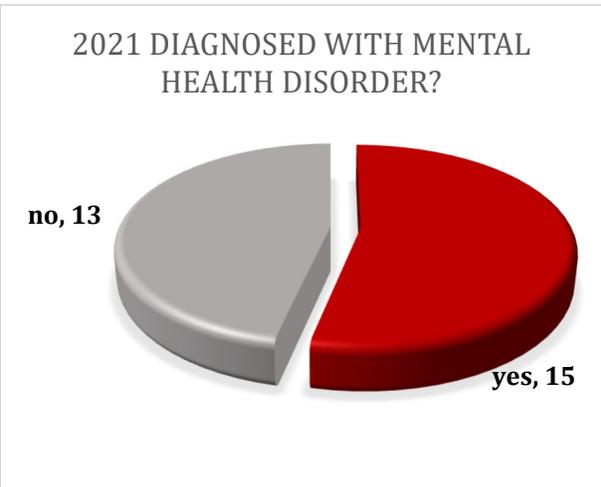


Figure 18: 2021 Skagit County History of Mental Health Disorder and History of Treatment

Motor Vehicle Accidents

Motor vehicle accidents accounted for 8% of the accidental deaths in Skagit County for 2021 (12/140 cases). This was the third largest group of accidental deaths. Decedents in the driver's seat accounted for 9 of the 12 deaths. The remaining three accidents involved (2) motorcycle fatalities and (1) ATV fatality. All cases had toxicological testing performed. Of the 12 motor vehicle accidents, 3 (25%) of those were positive for alcohol with 2 having levels above the legal limit of BAC 0.08. Presence of marijuana was found in 3 of the cases and 2 cases had mixed drugs in their system. Three of the cases had no drugs or alcohol present in their system.

Manner of Death: Suicide

Suicides are those deaths caused by self-inflicted injuries with the evidence of intent to end one’s life. Evidence of intent can include explicit expression such as a suicide note or verbal threat, or an act constituting implicit intent, such as deliberately putting oneself on the train tracks in a roadway or placing a gun to one’s head.

In 2021, there were 32 suicides, accounting for 6% (32/528) of the total deaths reported to the Coroner’s Office and 13% (32/239) of deaths certified by the Coroner’s Office.

Historically, suicides for Skagit County have been in the low-mid 20’s. 2021 was the first year in which suicide deaths were over 30. The cause for this significant increase in suicide deaths, might be related to the Covid-19 pandemic and the stressors it caused.

Individuals who committed suicide were between the ages of 12 and 77 years. The primary age group was 26-44 (10/32, 31%) followed by age groups 45-64 (9/32) and 65 and older (9/32). There was only 1 case in the 0-17 age group. There was a significantly higher number of males (28/32, 87%) to females (4/32). The primary method of suicide for 2021 was by way of firearm (19/32, 59%). Asphyxia by ligature hanging was the second highest method (8/32, 25%). There were (3/32) intentional drug overdoses, (1) by carbon monoxide, and (1) by self-inflicted knife wound.

Looking at suicides quarterly for 2021, the 4th quarter (Oct-Dec) had the most suicides (10/32, 31%) followed by the 3rd quarter (July-Sept) (9/32). With regards to notes of intent, there were (11/32, 34%) of the cases in which a note of intent was left or a verbal statement was made. In (15/32, 46%) of the cases, the individual had a history of suicidal ideations and/or attempts. The primary reason for suicide was related to relationships (8/32) and medical problems (8/32) followed by mental health (7/32) and financial problems (5/32).

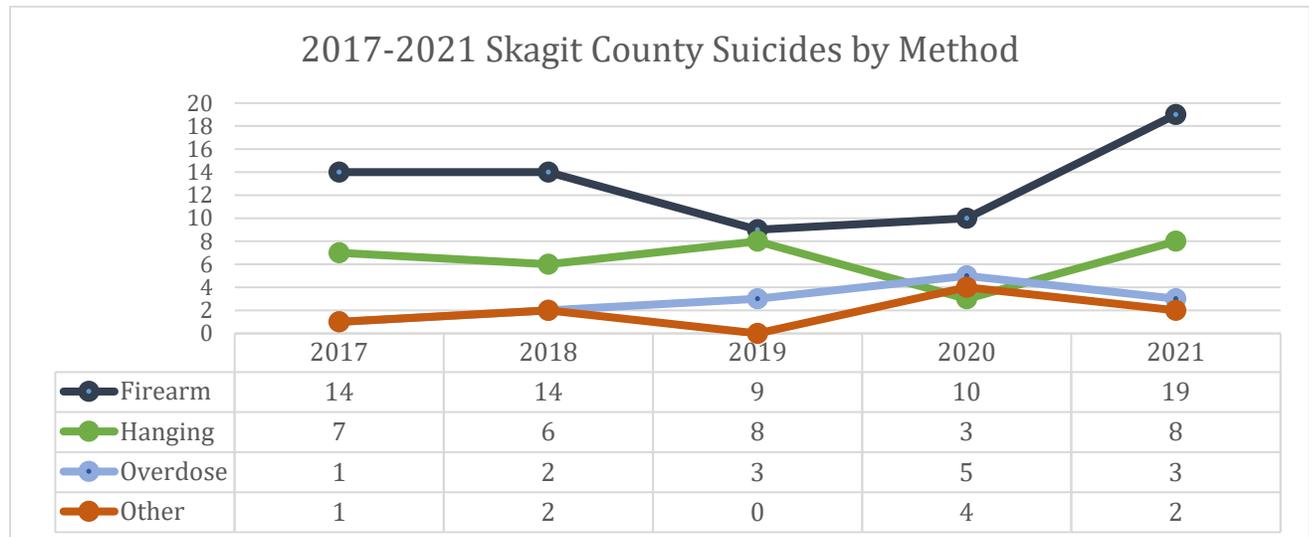


Figure 19. 2017-2021 Skagit County Suicides by Method

2017-2021 Suicides by Quarter

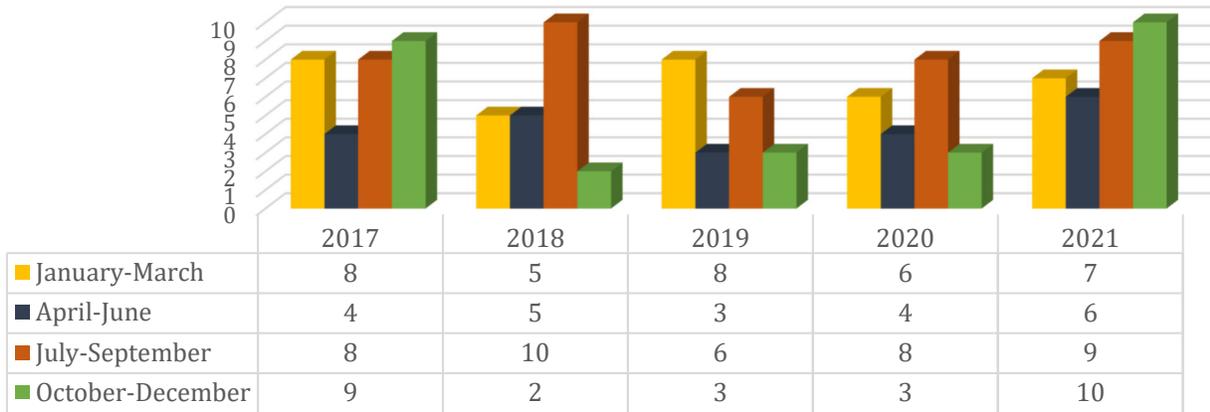


Figure 21. 2017-2021 Skagit County Suicides by Quarter

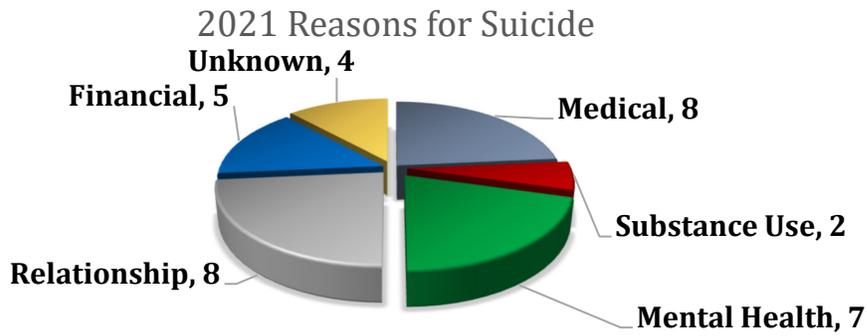


Figure 22. 2021 Skagit County Reason for Suicide

2017-2021 Suicide by Age Group

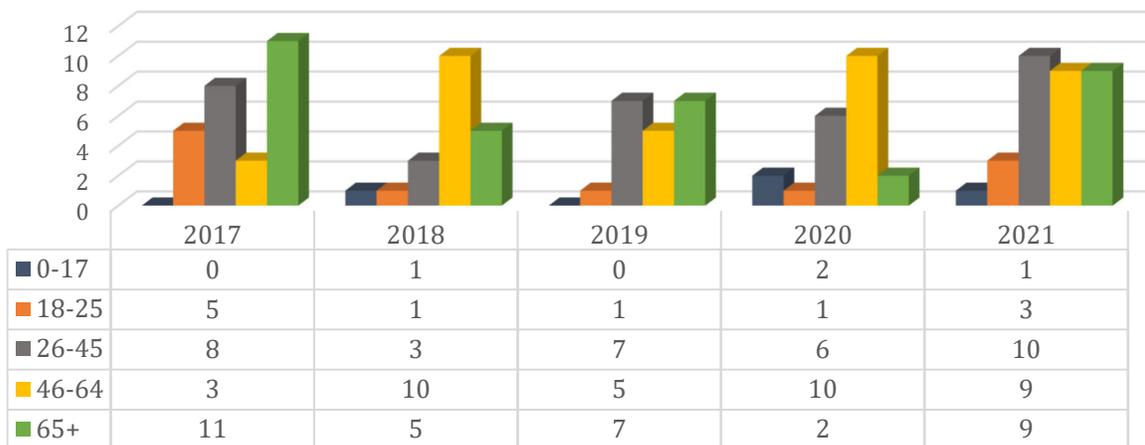


Figure 23. 2017-2021 Skagit County Suicides by Age Group

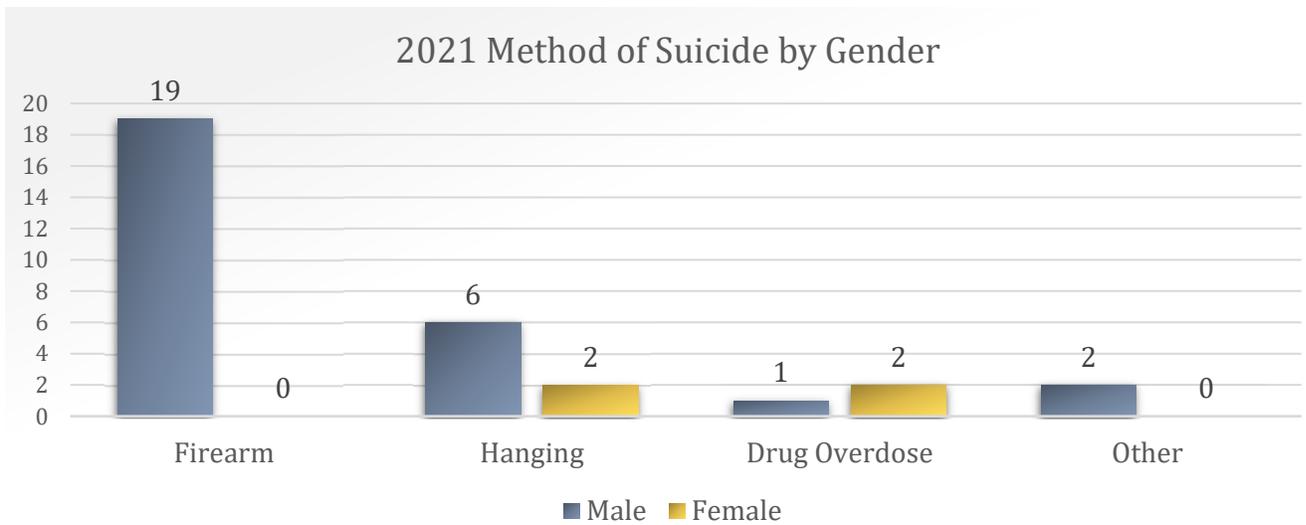


Figure 24. 2021 Skagit County Method of Suicide by Gender

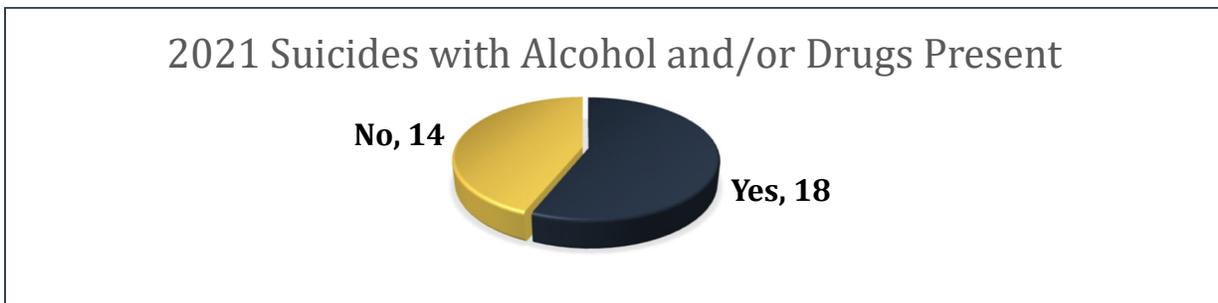


Figure 25. 2021 Skagit County Suicide Presence of Drugs or Alcohol

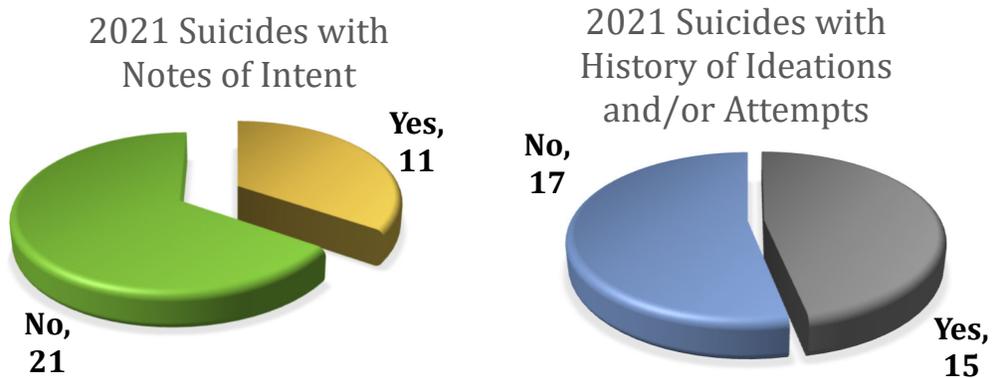


Figure 26. 2021 Skagit County Suicide with Note of Intent and History of Attempts and/or Ideations

Manner of Death: Homicide

Classification of Homicide is determined by the Coroner when the death results from injuries inflicted by another person. This does not imply the existence of criminal intent behind the action of the other person. In 2021, the Coroner classified 2 deaths as homicide. In both cases, the victim was shot by another.

There are cases in which the investigating law enforcement agency will investigate the case as a homicide. It is important to note, that there are certain cases in which this office will certify the death as an accident even though the case is being looked into as a homicide. Traffic fatalities in which a pedestrian is killed and the driver may show negligent behavior, probable intoxication, or fleeing of the scene will be classified as accident even though these causes may meet a legal definition of vehicular homicide. This decision is based on the assumption that there was no intent to kill the individual. Whether or not this type of case meets the legal definition of vehicular homicide, it is better left to the criminal justice system to decide. This goes the same for motor vehicle accidents and deaths resulting from acute drug intoxication. As long as there was no intent to kill the individual, then the manner of death will be classified by the Skagit County Coroner's Office as Accident.

Manner of Death: Undetermined

The Coroner's Office certifies the manner of death as undetermined when available information regarding the circumstances of the case is insufficient to classify the death into one of the four manners of death: natural, accident, suicide, homicide. In some cases, serious doubt exists as to whether the injury occurred with intent or as a result of an accident. The information obtained from the case, may be lacking due to absence of background information or witnesses, or because of the lengthy delay between the time of death and the discovery of the body. If an extensive investigation and autopsy cannot clarify the circumstances, the death is classified as undetermined. If new credible information regarding the case is provided at a later time, then the manner of death can be changed. In 2021, the Skagit County Coroner's Office certified 8 deaths as undetermined (8/239, 3%) for the manner of death.

Tissue and Cornea Donation

The Skagit County Coroner’s Office are adamant supporters of facilitating donation within the Skagit County Community. The Coroner’s Office is proud of its partnership with SightLife and LifeNet Health. In late 2017, the Coroner’s Office upgraded its case reporting system to a national case management system that is linked to the Organ Procurement Organizations (OPO’s). This has allowed the Coroner’s Office to automatically notify the OPO’s of all potential organ, tissue (skin, long bones, heart for valves), and cornea donation cases regardless if the person died in the hospital or at another location. It is important to note, that there is specific criteria that qualifies cases for donation. The time interval between the last known alive time and the time of death as well as the decedent’s age and social history (drug use) are three main determining factors.

In 2021, the Skagit County Coroners Office and local hospitals referred 577 cases for tissue and cornea donation. Of these 577 cases, the Skagit County Coroner’s Office, referred 69 cases. This was a 14% increase in referrals from 2020. Overall, there was a 10% increase in the total number of successful donors for Skagit County.

Cornea Donation

For 2021, Skagit County had a total of 74 cornea donors with 23 of those donors coming from the Skagit County Coroner’s Office (31%).

Tissue Donation

In 2021, a total of 458 tissue donation referrals were made from the local hospitals in Skagit County: Skagit Valley Hospital (406) and Island Hospital (52). Of the 458 referrals, 11 became tissue donors. The Skagit County Coroner’s Office referred 63 cases for potential tissue donation. Of those 63 cases, 26 had potential for donation and only 10 became tissue donors.

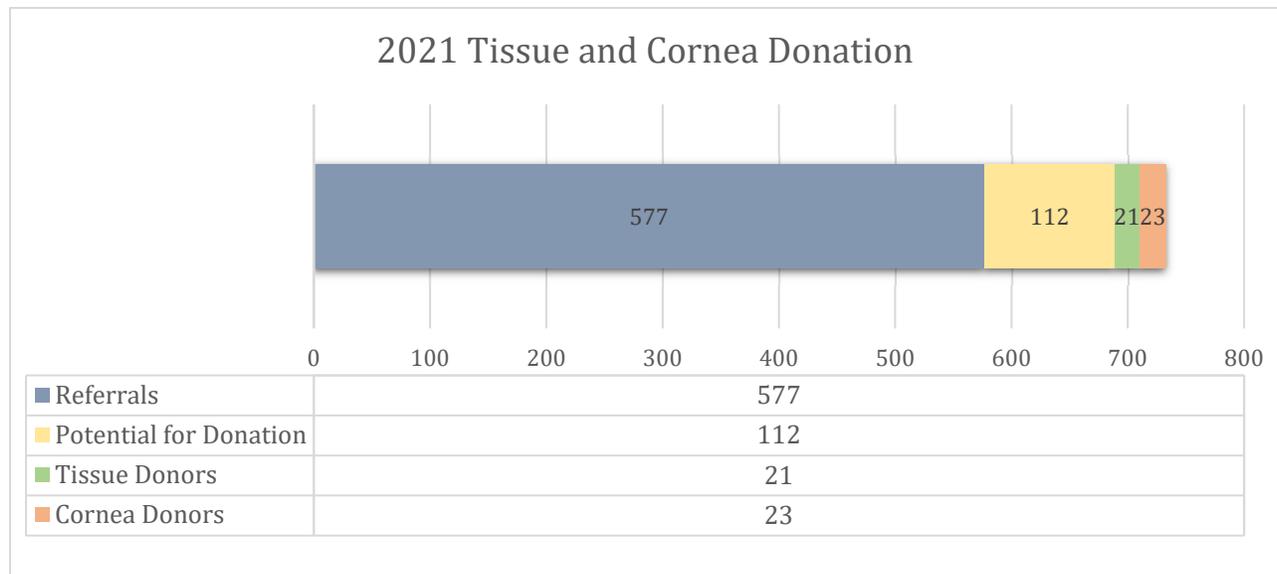


Figure 27. 2020 Skagit County Tissue and Cornea Donation