

SKAGIT COUNTY CORONER 2023 ANNUAL REPORT

Hayley Thompson, D-ABMDI Skagit County Coroner
SKAGIT COUNTY 1700 Continental Place, Mount Vernon, WA 98273



MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Skagit County Coroner's Office is to serve the community by providing accurate and timely medico-legal death investigations in a professional manner, while ensuring the highest level of compassion, dignity, and respect for the deceased and their families.

VISION STATEMENT

To be a leader in providing compassionate, professional and efficient assistance to the community of Skagit County and to work collaboratively with our partners to reduce preventable deaths.

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 community by providing accurate and timely Medico-Legal death investigations in a professional manner, while ensuring the highest level of compassion, dignity, and respect for the deceased and their families.

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.
- * Continual maintenance of adequate staffing levels in order to provide all mandated services.
- * Promote and maintain a working environment that emphasizes the importance of physical, mental, and emotional health for all Coroner staff.
- * Promote and provide adequate equipment, training, and support to all Coroner staff.
- * Render 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 1,730 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.

Per the US Census Bureau for 2023, Skagit County is home to approximately 131,417 people. Skagit County’s population is made up of 72.4% Caucasian, 19.9% Hispanic or Latino, 2.7% American Indian/Alaska Native, 2.6% Asian, 1.2% African American, and 3.4% identifying with two or more races. The median age for Skagit County is 42.1 years.

Skagit County has three hospitals:

- * **Skagit Valley Hospital** is located in Mount Vernon, WA and is a 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** is located in Anacortes WA and is a level III trauma center with a total of 43 beds.

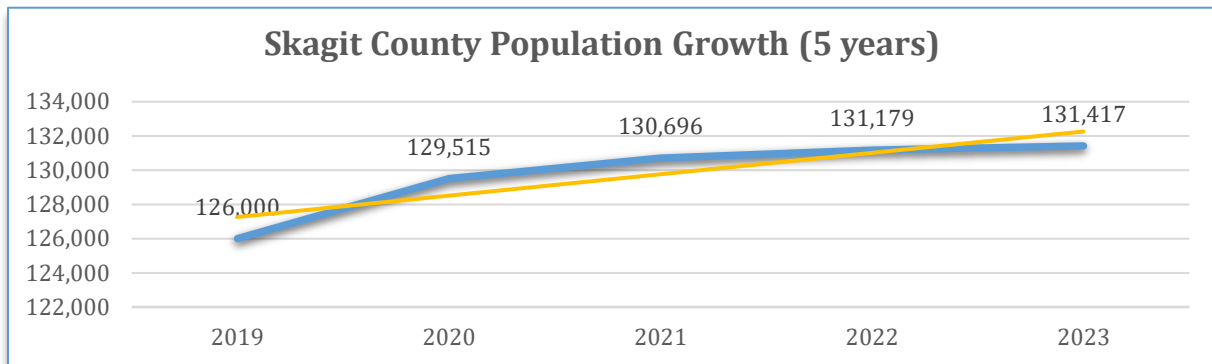


Figure 1. 2023 Skagit County Population Growth

Jurisdiction and State Statutes

Jurisdiction is assumed only on deaths that occur within the geographical boundaries of Skagit 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 and would be investigated by the county in which the death occurred.

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 deaths fall under the Coroner’s jurisdiction:

Deaths Requiring 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

Table 1. Categories of deaths required to be reported to Coroner’s Office.

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 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.

Role of the Coroner

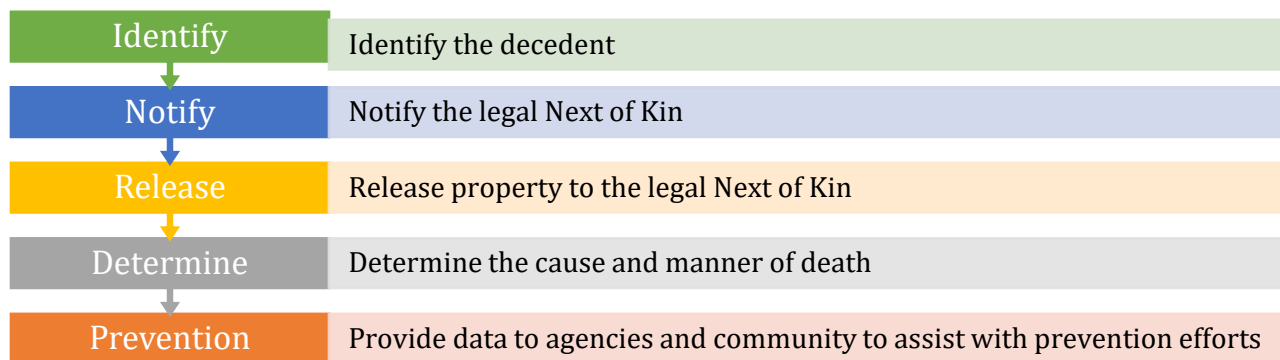


Figure 2. Role of the Coroner

Identification and Locating Next of Kin

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.

Unclaimed and Indigent Cases

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 remains of unclaimed individuals are kept by the Coroner's Office for a minimum of one year, after which the remains are interred in a crypt donated to the county unless a family member or interested party come forward to claim the remains. Claiming remains 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 remains who are veterans are released and transported down to the Tahoma National Cemetery where they are honored and interred.

Autopsy Services

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.

Sharing of Information

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.

Coroner's Office Staff and Facilities

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 Skagit County Coroner's Office is located at 1700 Continental Place in Mount Vernon, WA and has a fully functional facility including office space and morgue/autopsy suite.

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. The Coroner, Chief Deputy Coroner, and Deputy Coroners 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 2023, the Coroner's Office staff included the Coroner, (1) full time Chief Deputy Coroner (2) Full Time Deputy Coroners and (6) on-call part-time deputy coroners. The Chief Deputy Coroner and 3 of the on-call deputy coroners resigned mid 2023 due to outside opportunities. The office also had 1-3 interns to assist from time to time. The Coroner or Chief Deputy Coroner, along with the full time or 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.

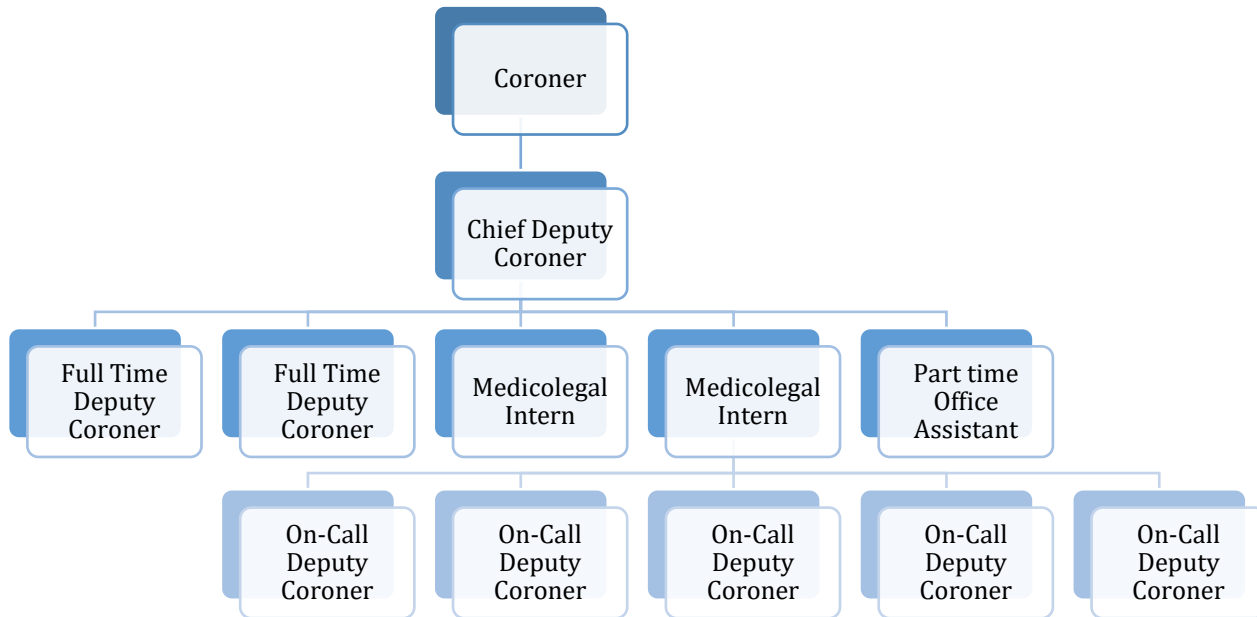


Figure 3. Skagit County Coroner Organization Chart

2023 Coroner Staff:

NAME	POSITION	TIME OF SERVICE
Hayley Thompson, D-ABMDI	Coroner	May 2016-present
Deborah Hollis, D-ABMDI	Chief Deputy Coroner	Nov 2016-May 2023 (resigned)
Bryce Elder	Chief Deputy Coroner	July 2023 <i>Promoted from Full Time Deputy Coroner (Feb-July 2023)</i>
Britt Flickinger, D-ABMDI	Full Time Deputy Coroner	Oct 2022-present <i>Promoted from On-call Deputy Coroner (2018-2022)</i>
Caitlyn Borthwick	Full Time Deputy Coroner	Full Time Deputy Coroner (July 2023-present) <i>Promoted from On-call Deputy Coroner (2022-2023)</i>
Alicia Jones	Part-time Office Assistant	March 2022-May 2023
Payton Richards	On-call Deputy Coroner	March 2022-Oct 2023 (resigned)
Amanda Neumann	On-call Deputy Coroner	May 2023-present
Romy Ehrsam	On-call Deputy Coroner	August 2023-present
Allicyn Kelley	On-call Deputy Coroner	August 2023-present
Julia Welch, D-ABMDI	Reserve On-call Deputy Coroner	2020-present

Table 2. 2023 Skagit County Coroner Staff

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 as well as additional funds from the County were 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 was completed in September 2022. As part of the grant requirement, the Coroner's Office initiated the accreditation process through the International Association of Coroners and Medical Examiners (IACME) and at the end of 2023, were awaiting final approval for accreditation. 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:

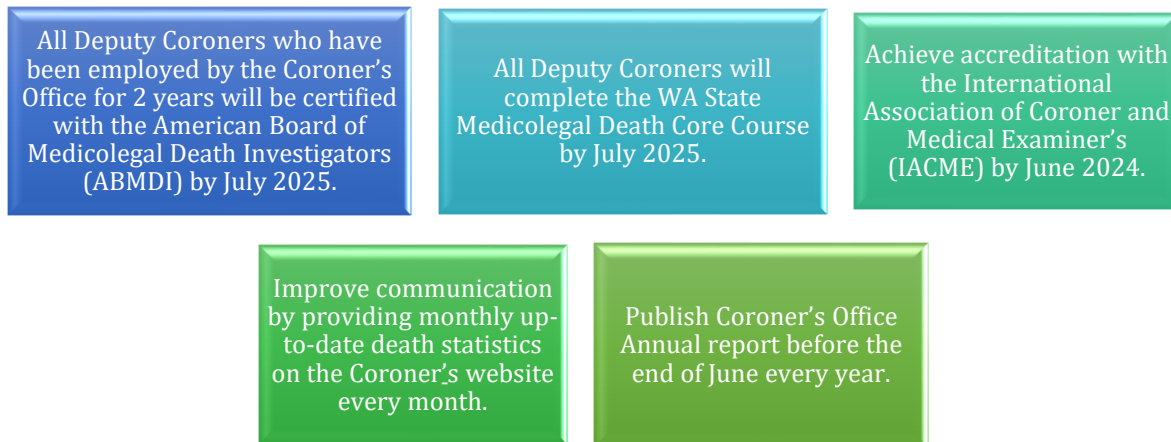


Figure 4. Strategic Goals of Skagit County Coroner's Office

Death Investigations- An Overview

Death Investigations are categorized into 2 different categories: non-jurisdictional and jurisdictional. **Non-jurisdictional cases** are attended natural deaths that occur in a hospital, care facility, or hospice that are reported to the Coroner’s Office and determined that no further investigation is needed by the office. The decedent’s healthcare provider must be willing to certify the death as natural causes, otherwise the case becomes jurisdictional. **Jurisdictional cases**, which can be natural or non-natural deaths, are deaths that meet statutory requirements for reporting to the Coroner’s Office. A decision is made that further investigation by the office is needed to determine the cause and manner of death.

Washington State’s death certificates allow for five manners of death: Natural, Accident, Suicide, Homicide, and Undetermined. During a death investigation, the death certificate can list *Pending* as a manner of death, but this will need to be changed once the investigation is complete. The manner of death for jurisdictional cases can be natural or non-natural (homicide, suicide, accident, or undetermined) Only a Coroner can certify a death with a manner other than Natural.

Reported Cases	431
Non-jurisdictional Cases	127
Jurisdictional Cases	304
Death Certified by Coroner’s Office	187
Natural Causes	273
Accidental	113
Suicide	25
Homicide	4
Undetermined	4
Skeletal Remains	9
Full Autopsies	69
Partial Autopsies	0
External Examination Only	66
Toxicological Tests Performed	153
Scene Responses	174
Unidentified Bodies	0
Unclaimed/Indigent Remains	18
Exhumations	0

Table 3. 2023 Statistical Summary

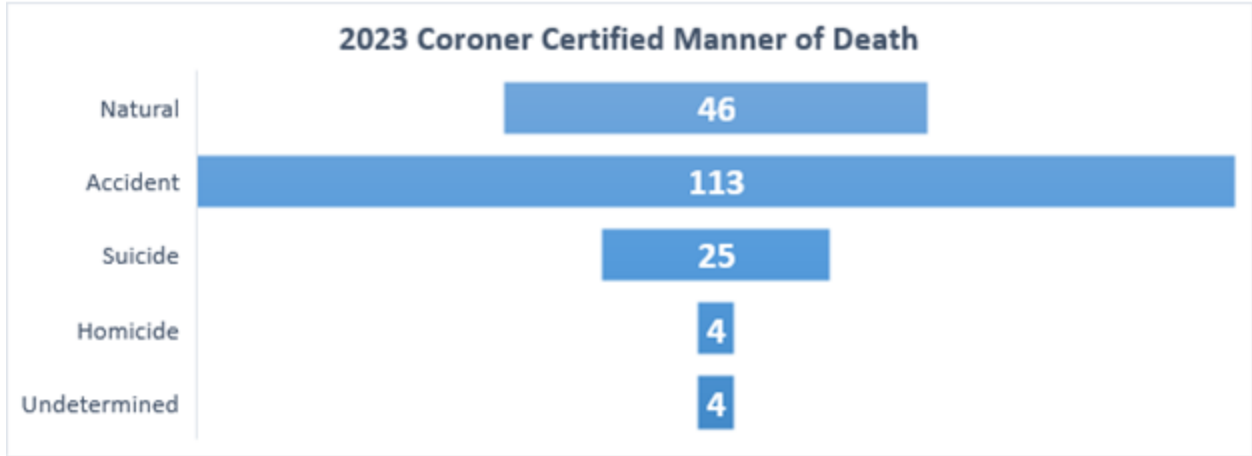


Figure 5. 2023 Coroner Certified Deaths by Manner

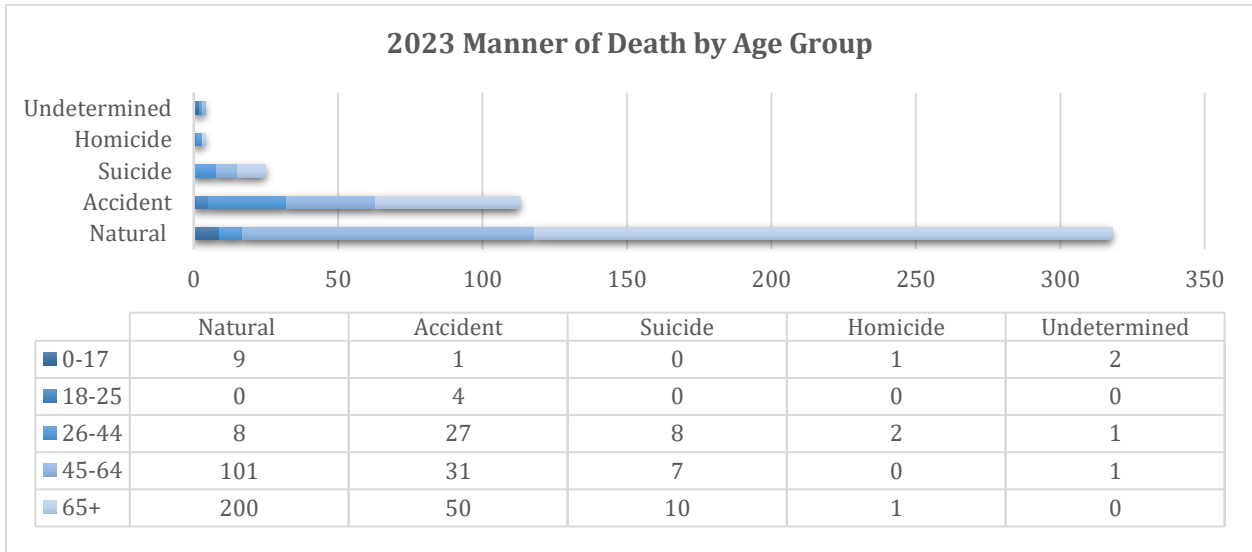


Figure 6. 2023 Manner of Death by Age Group

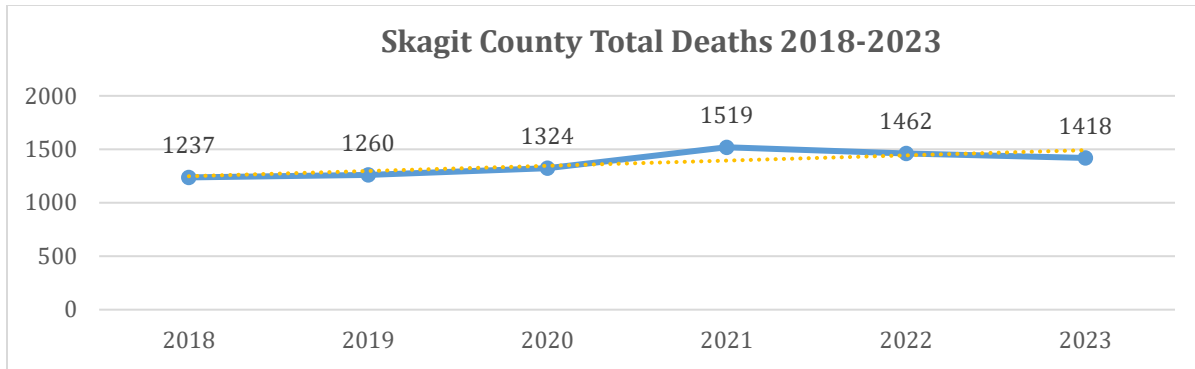


Figure 7. Skagit County Total Deaths per Year (2018-2023)

For the year 2023, there were 1,418 deaths in Skagit County. The Skagit County Coroner's Office conducted 431 death investigations and assumed jurisdiction on 304 cases in 2023. Of those 304 cases, 187 were certified by the Coroner. 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 5 years (2018-2023), the number of cases reported to the Coroner's Office has remained between 400 and 500. The average number of autopsies per year has been 65 with an average of 75 external examinations (thorough body examination with toxicology samples). In September 2023, this office changed its policy criteria for scene responses in that the office would respond to all unattended deaths. This resulting in a 50% increase in scene responses for the 4th quarter of 2023. With that being said, the number of scene responses increased from 102 in 2019 to 174 in 2023 (70% increase).

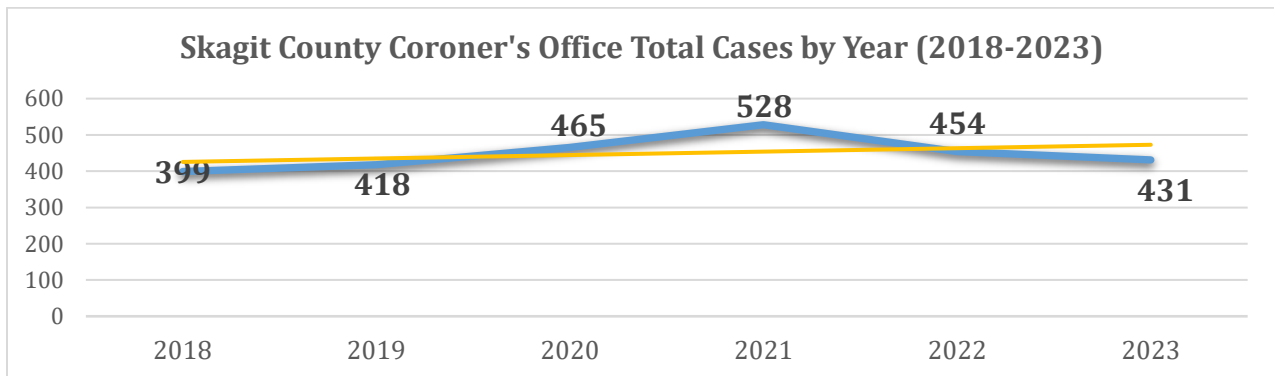


Figure 8. Skagit County Coroner Total Cases (2018-2023)

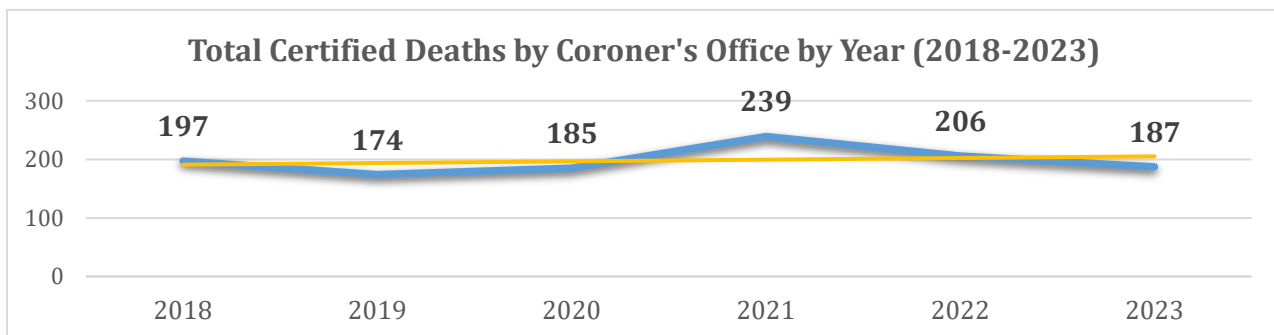


Figure 9. Skagit County Coroner Certified Deaths by Year (2018-2023)

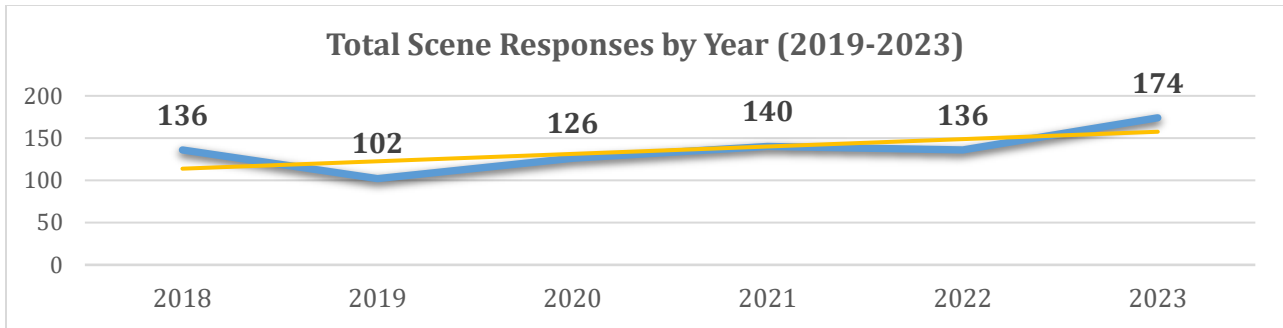


Figure 10. Total Scene Responses by Year (2018-2023)

In the year 2023, there were 153 post-mortem examinations conducted by the Coroner’s Office. As illustrated in Figure 7, since 2021, the number of post-mortem exams has increased. Of these 153 examinations, 69 required an autopsy to confirm or determine the cause and manner of death and 84 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 45-90 days with some cases taking closer to 120 days.

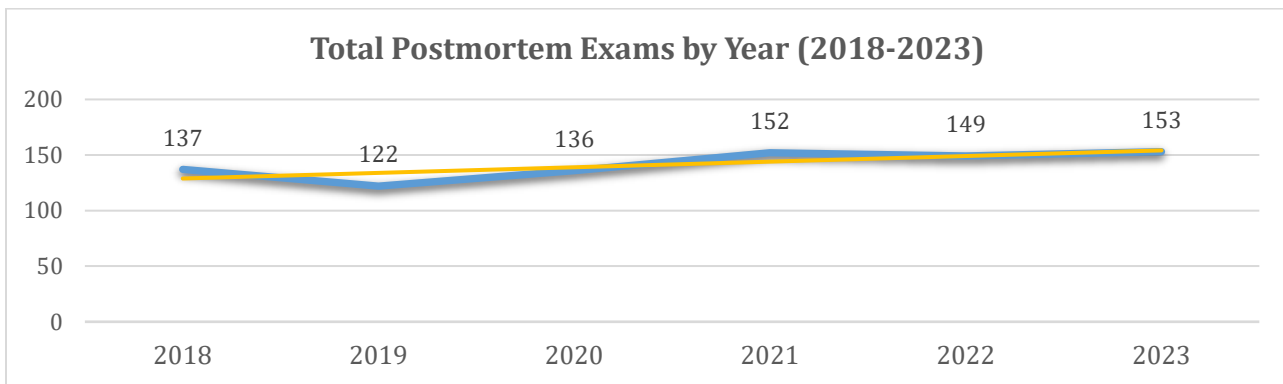


Figure 11. Total Postmortem Exams by Year (2018-2023)

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 2023, there were 273 natural deaths investigated by the Coroner’s Office accounting for 63% of the total deaths reported to the Coroner’s Office. A total of 49 cases (49/187, 26%) were certified by the Coroner’s office. Of these 49 deaths, the primary cause of death was cardiac-related (29/49, 59%) followed by respiratory (4/49, 8%). Other natural causes included: (2) cancer, (3) renal disease, (3) chronic alcoholism, (2) thromboemboli, and (2) cerebrovascular.

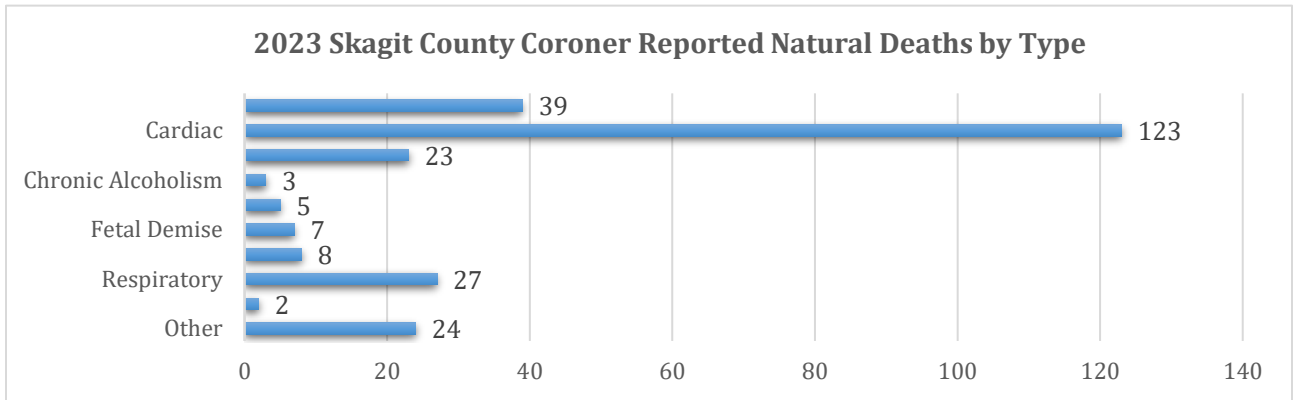


Figure 12. 2023 Skagit County Certified Natural Causes of Death by Coroner’s Office

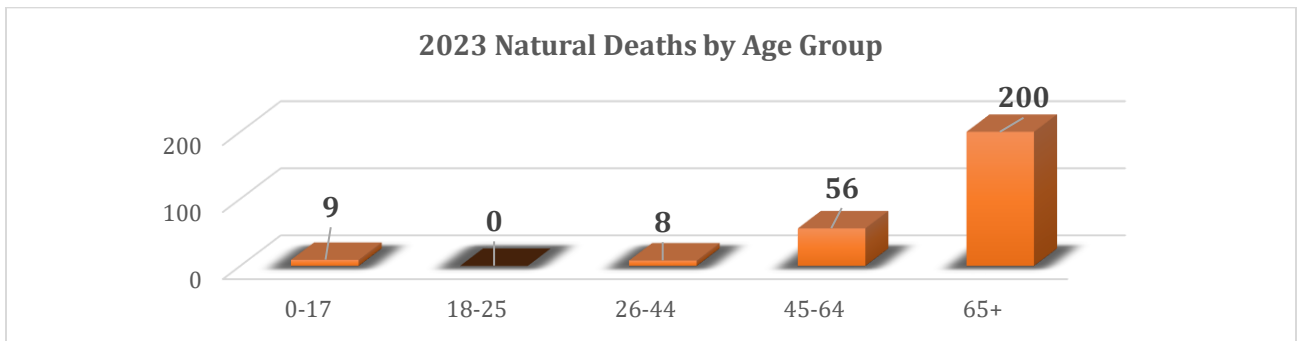


Figure 13. 2023 Reported Natural Deaths by Age Group

CORONER INVOLVEMENT IN REPORTED NATURAL DEATHS FOR 2023

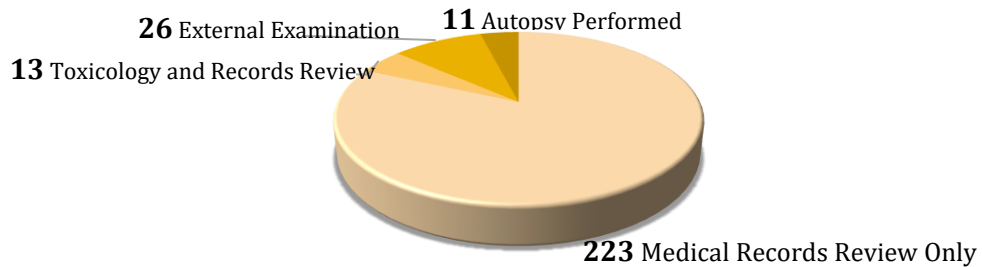


Figure 14. Coroner involvement for reported natural deaths in 2023

Manner of Death: Accident

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.

The Coroner certified 113 deaths as accidental in 2023 accounting for 26% of the total deaths reported to the Coroner’s Office and 37% of jurisdiction assumed cases. Over 50% of the accidental deaths were males (73/113, 64%). The age group 65 and above had the highest number of accidental deaths (50) followed by age group 45-64 (31) and age group 26-44 (28). With regards to the types of accidental deaths, drug-involved deaths were the leading cause of death (49/113, 43%). Falls resulting in trauma including those deaths in which elderly patients had sustained a fall resulting in a decline in health accounted for 36% of accidental deaths (41/113). Motor vehicle accidents made up 13% of accidental deaths (15/113) and drownings made up 4% of natural deaths (5/113). Other types of accidental deaths included: (1) asphyxia related, (1) fire, and (1) hyperthermia. Since all accidental deaths are theoretically preventable, each such death is investigated for public health purposes.

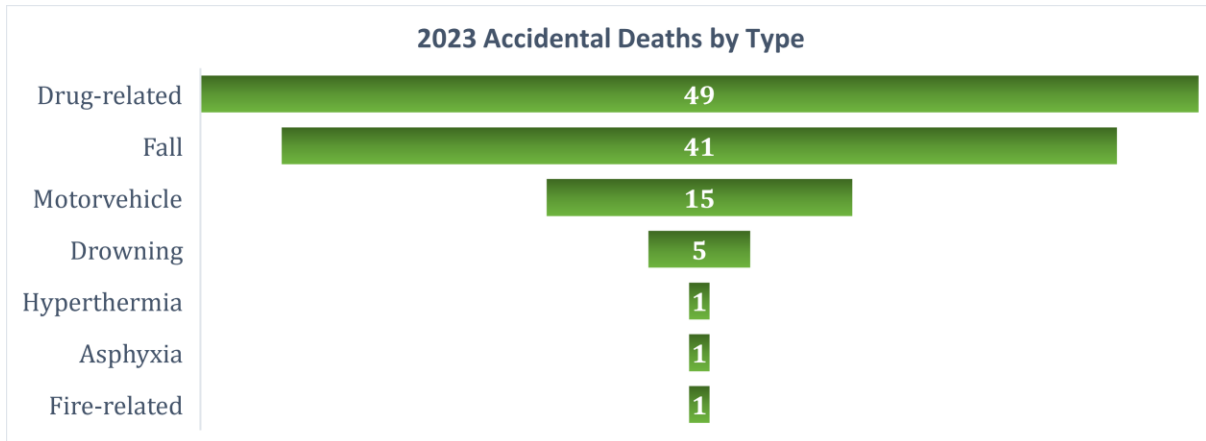


Figure 15. 2023 Skagit County Accidental Deaths

*Falls include elderly individuals who died from injuries related to a ground level fall

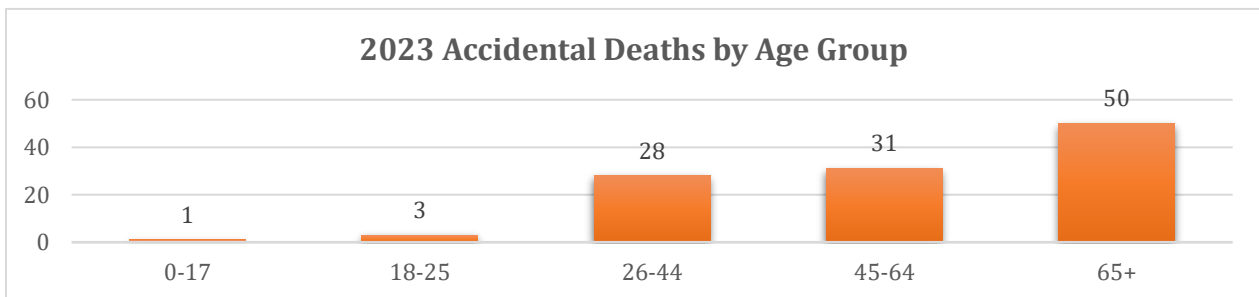


Figure 16. 2023 Skagit County Accidental Deaths by Age Group

Drug Overdose Deaths

Drug overdose deaths are extensively investigated as there are no findings at autopsy to confirm an overdose. 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. 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. 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.

In 2023, 49 deaths were certified by the Coroner's Office as an accidental drug overdose. This was a 48% increase from 2022 (33 drug related deaths) as well as the highest number of drug overdoses recorded for Skagit County (see figure 17, total drug overdoses 2017-2023). The 2 most common drugs seen in Skagit County were methamphetamine and fentanyl.

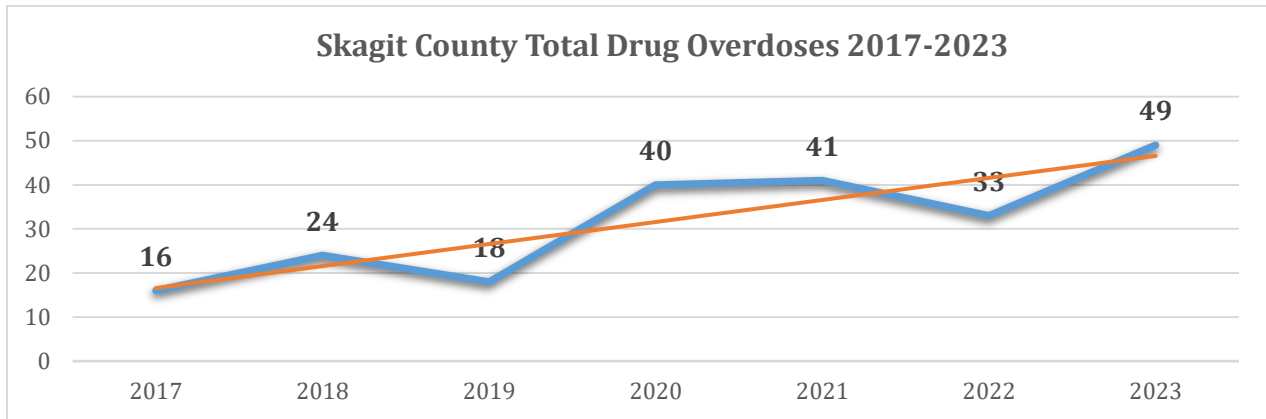


Figure 17. Skagit County Total Drug Overdose Deaths 2017-2023

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. The majority of fentanyl-related deaths are linked to the illicitly manufactured fentanyl and are being seen in both pill form (blue round pill with M/30 stamp) or powder. Illicitly manufactured fentanyl is more commonly being mixed with other drugs to make it more powerful, addictive, and dangerous.

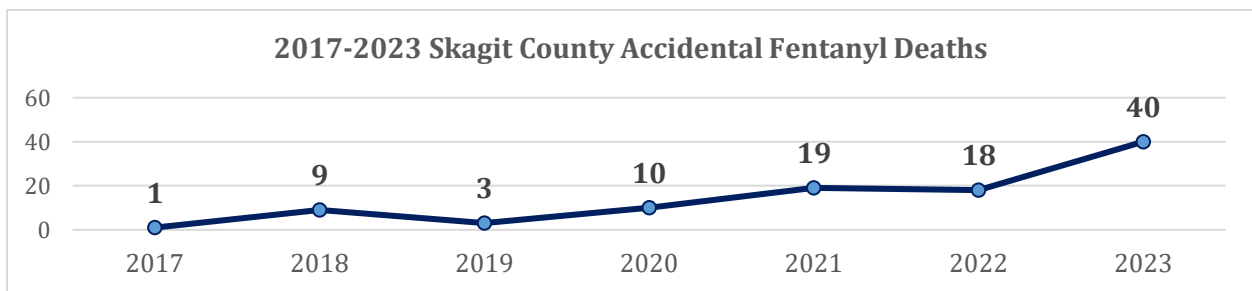


Figure 18. 2017-2023 Skagit County Accidental Fentanyl Deaths

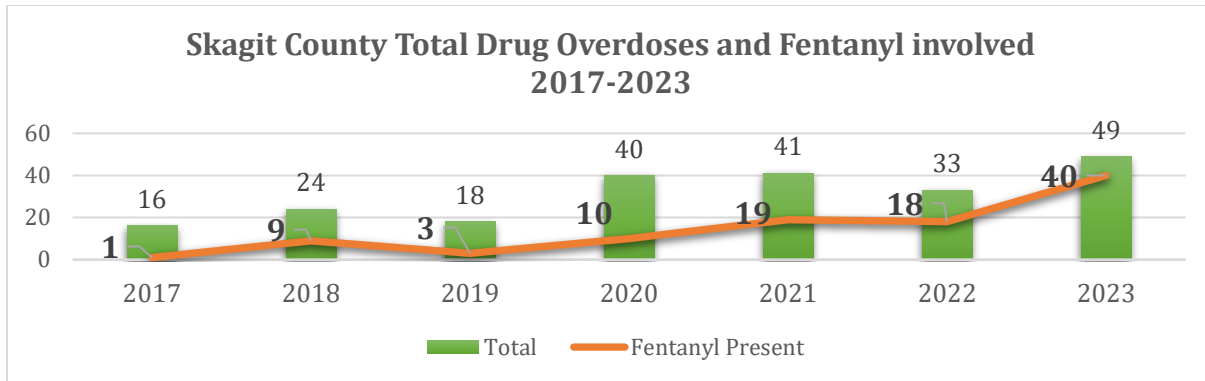


Figure 19. 2017-2023 Skagit County Total Accidental Overdose Deaths and Fentanyl involved.

In 2017, Skagit County had its first fentanyl-related drug death. In 2018, that number rose to 9 fentanyl-involved deaths. A change in community outreach and support regarding fentanyl resulted in a decrease in the number of fentanyl overdoses (3). Unfortunately, in 2020, 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 and of those, 10 involved fentanyl. Since this time, the total number of fentanyl-involved drug overdose deaths has increased each year. In 2022, 54% of drug overdose deaths involved fentanyl (18/33) and in 2023, 81% of drug overdoses were fentanyl related (40/49). Only 4 of the 49 drug overdose deaths involved just fentanyl. For Skagit County, fentanyl was commonly mixed with methamphetamine and/or cocaine. See Figures 18 and 19 regarding Fentanyl overdose deaths from 2017-2023.

Demographic analysis showed males (39/49, 79%) and Caucasians (38/49, 77%) to be mostly represented in drug overdose death statistics for Skagit County. The age range for overdose deaths was 0-77 years of age with age group 26-44 (23/49 46%) having the highest number of deaths. The second age group with the highest number of deaths was 45-64 (19/49, 38%). In a large proportion of the overdose deaths (32/49, 65%), the individual was alone at the time of the overdose. In 20% of drug deaths (10/49), the person was living unsheltered at the time. The primary location of these overdoses occurred in a private residence (34/49, 69%), followed by outdoors (6/49) and public place (5/49). Narcan was used on 15/49 of the deaths (30%). The city with the most drug overdose incidents was in Mount Vernon (15/49, 30%) with the second being both Burlington (9/49) and Sedro Woolley (9/49). Four of the overdoses occurred in another county and were transported to a hospital in Skagit County where they were declared deceased. Of the 49 drug overdoses, 16 had a previous history of overdose and of those 16, 7 of those individuals had overdosed in the last 12 months. In 18% of the deaths (9/49), a family member or friend had died of an overdose. Only 38% of the overdose deaths had sought support for substance abuse (19/49). The primary method of drug use was smoking (28/49, 57%) and in 21 out of the 49 deaths (42%), fentanyl was a drug of choice.

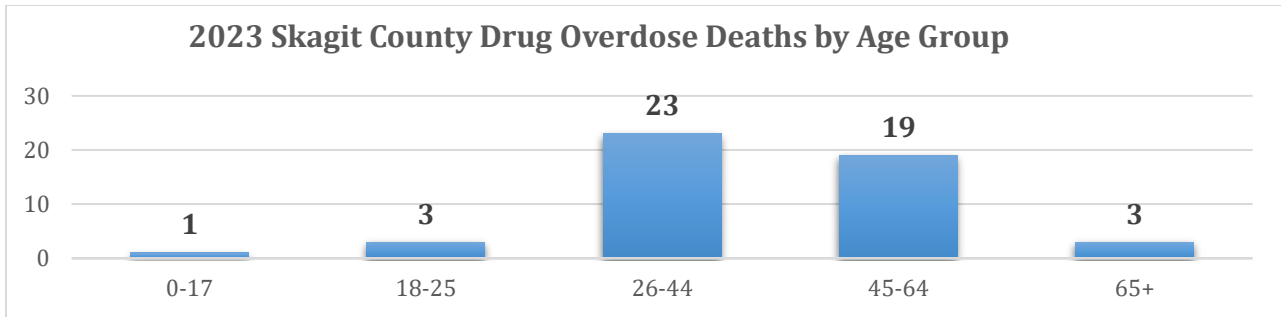


Figure 20. 2023 Drug overdose deaths by age group.

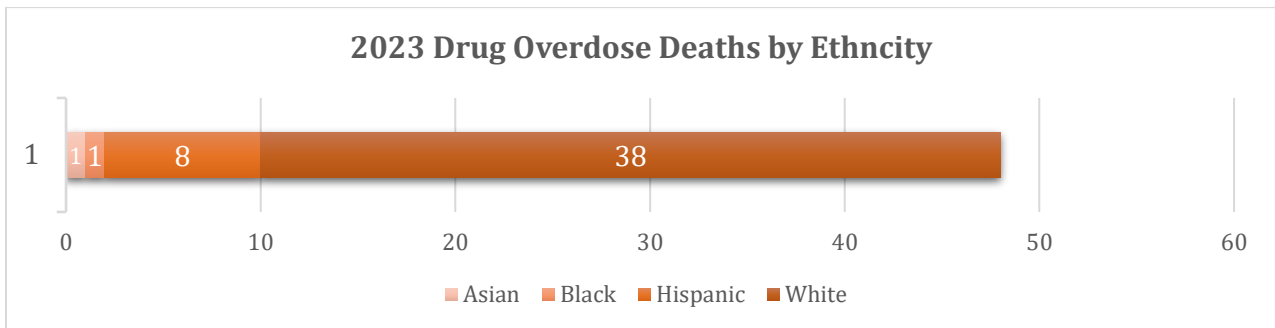


Figure 21. 2023 Drug overdose deaths by ethnicity.

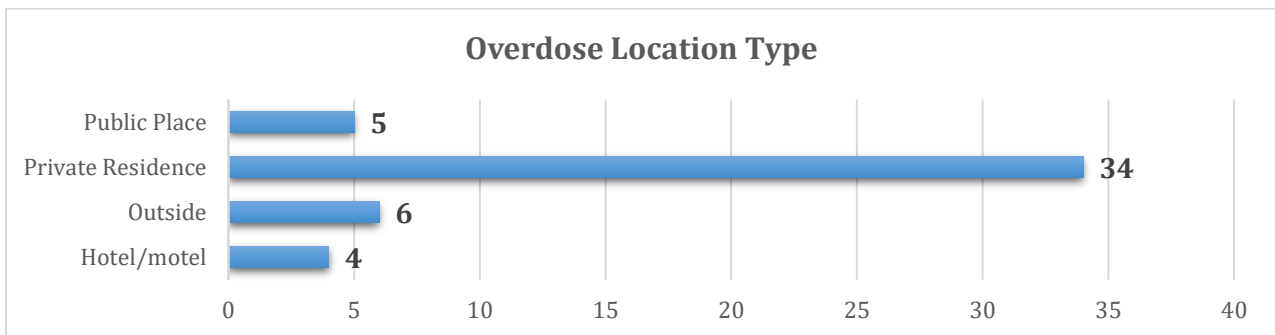


Figure 22. 2023 Overdose deaths by location type.

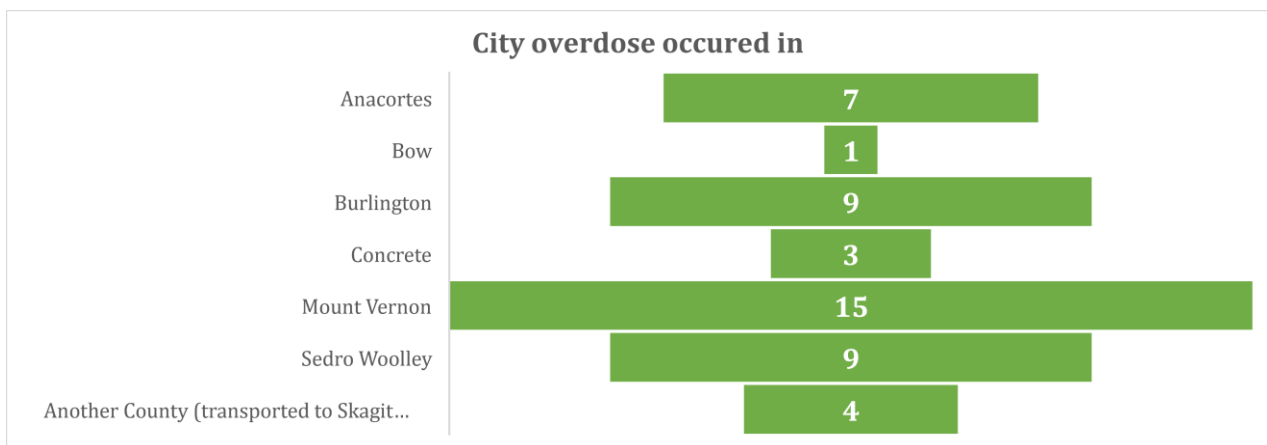


Figure 23. 2023 Drug deaths by city overdose occurred in.

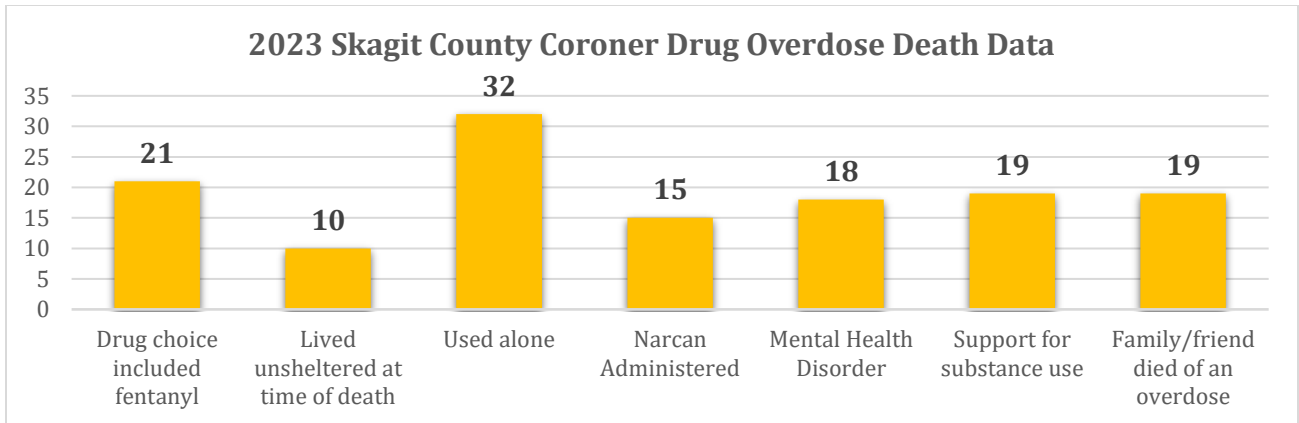


Figure 24. 2023 drug overdose death data.

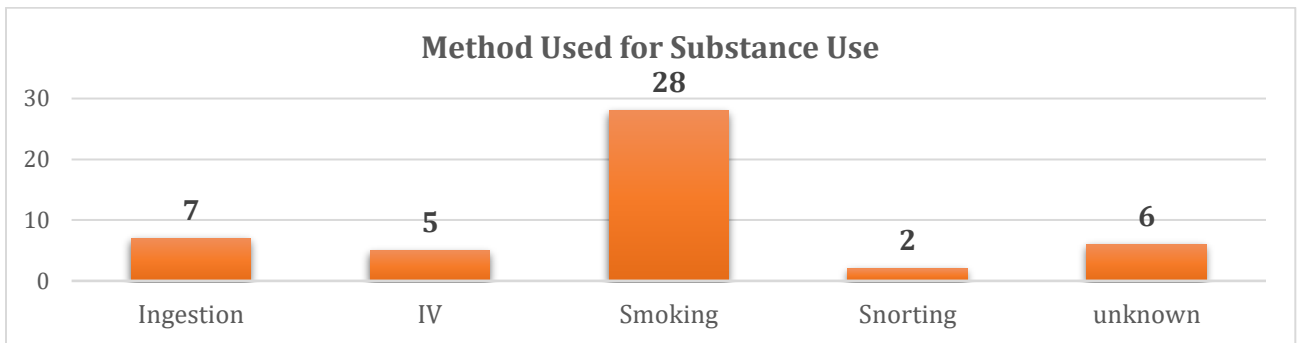


Figure 25. 2023 drug overdose deaths method used for substance use.

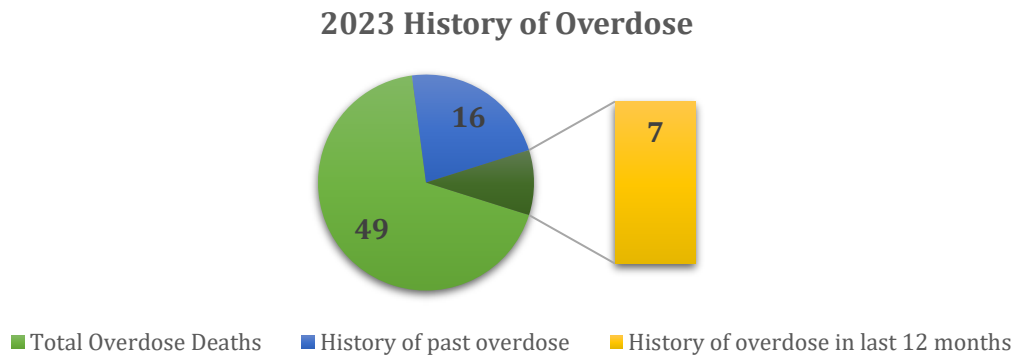


Figure 26: 2023 Skagit County History of Past Overdose.

Falls

In 2023, there were 41 deaths certified as fall-related accounting for 36% of the accidental deaths in Skagit County. With the exception of 1 case (age 480), all of these deaths were in those aged 65 years and older. Falls were sometimes a direct cause of the 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 required 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 2023, all 41 cases were from a ground level fall that resulted in trauma that either contributed directly or indirectly to the death.

Traffic-related Accidents

Motor vehicle accidents accounted for 13% of the accidental deaths in Skagit County for 2023 (15/113 cases). This was the third largest group of accidental deaths.

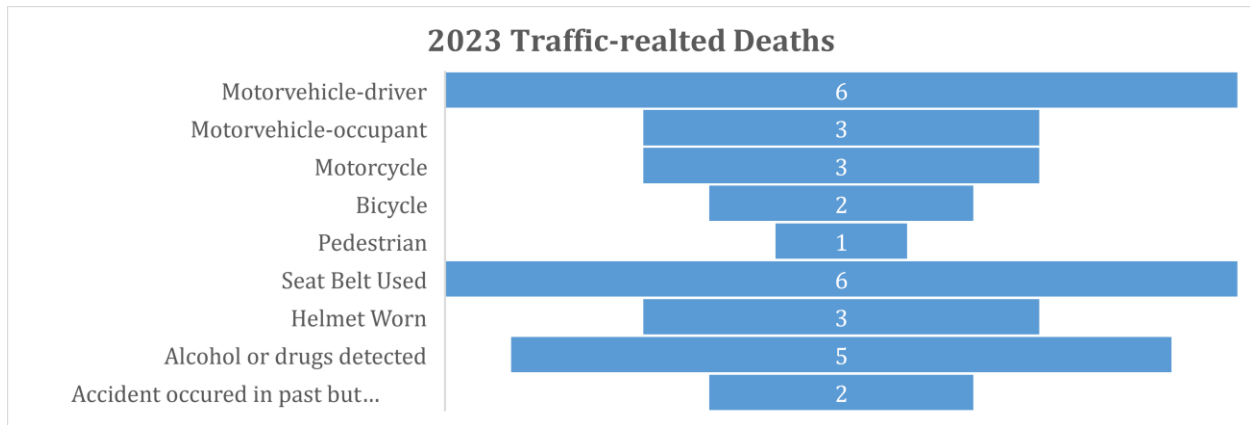


Figure 27. 2023 Traffic related Death Data

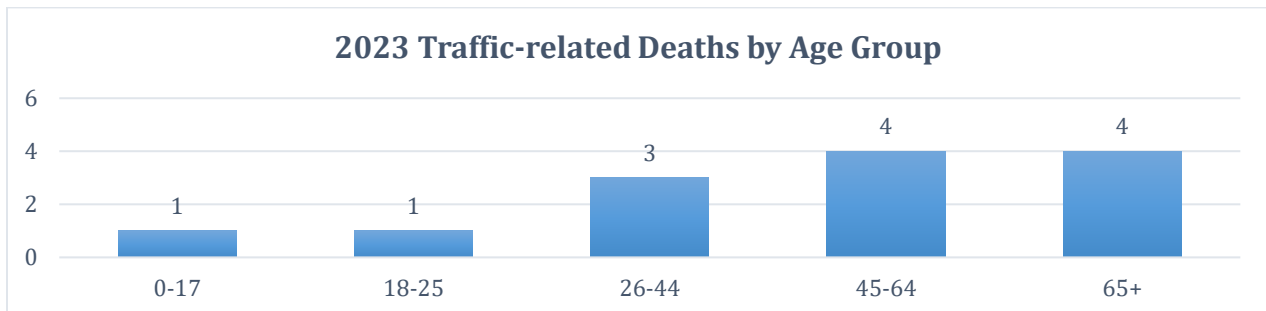


Figure 28. 2023 Traffic related deaths by Age Group

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 2023, there were 25 suicides, accounting for 5.8% (25/431) of the total deaths reported to the Coroner’s Office and 13% (25/187) of deaths certified by the Coroner’s Office. The primary method of suicide for 2023 was via firearm (16/25, 64%), followed by intentional overdose (4/25, 16%), and then hanging (2/25, 8%). Additional types of suicide included (1) involving inhalation of nitrogen gas, (1) involving a knife, and (1) by train. With exception of 1 case, all suicides by firearm were familiar with firearms and 14/16 were the owner of the firearm.

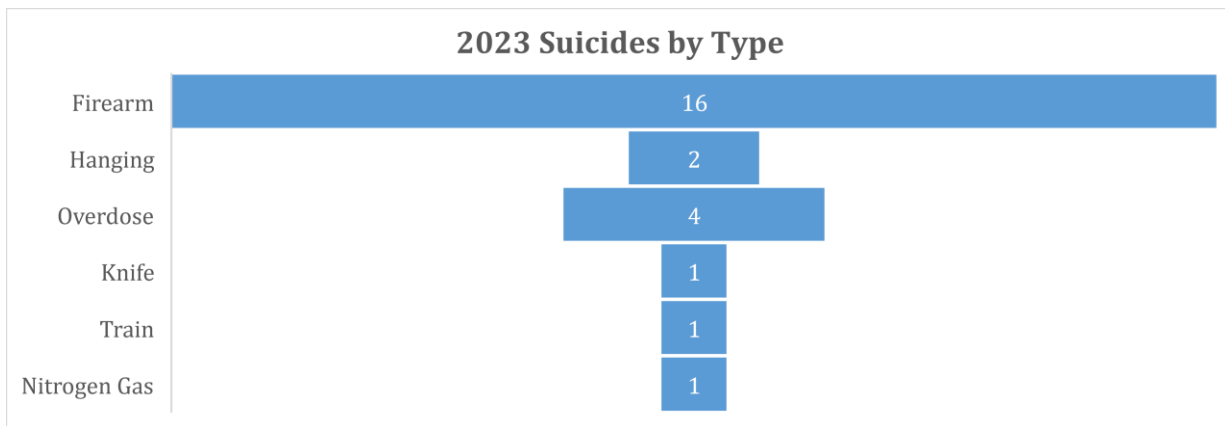


Figure 29. Suicides by Type.

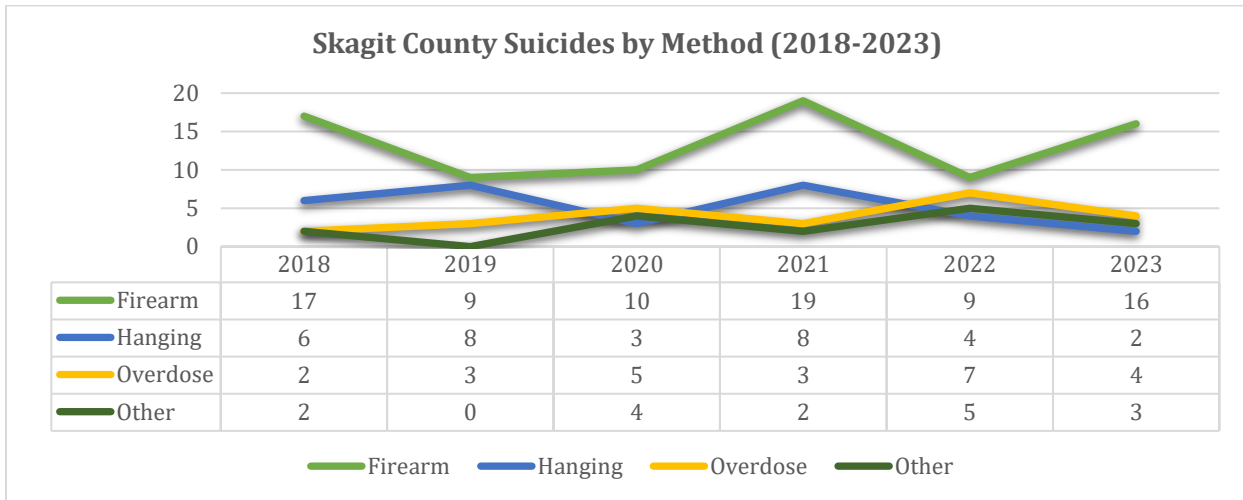


Figure 30. 2018-2023 Skagit County Suicides by Method.

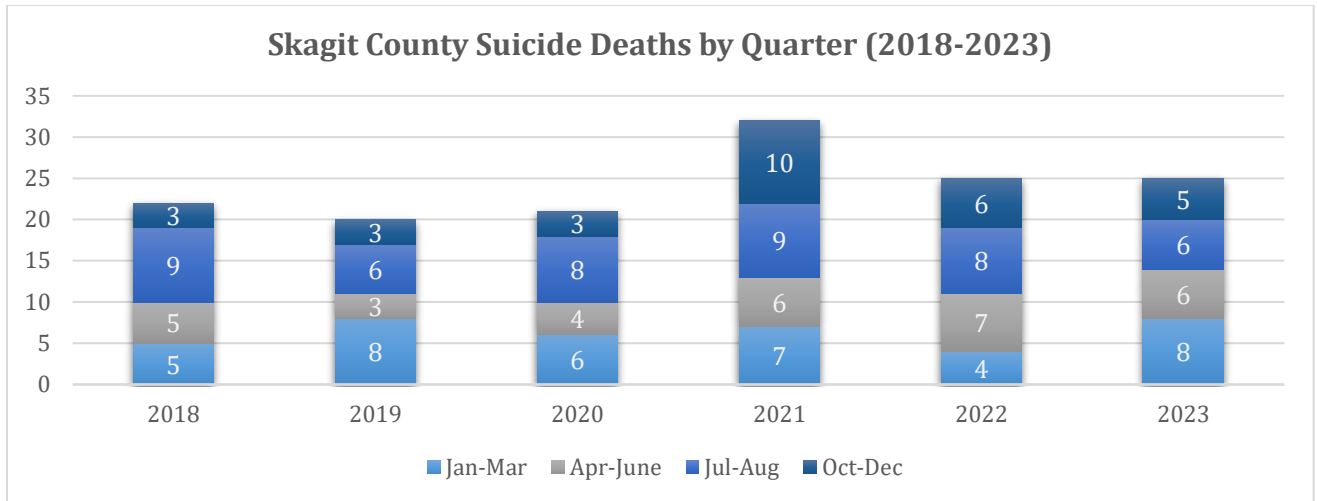


Figure 31. 2018-2023 Skagit County Suicides by Quarter.

Individuals who committed suicide were between the ages of 27 and 85 years. The primary age group was 65+ (10/25, 40%) followed by age group 26-44 (8/25, 32%) and then 45-64 (7/25, 28%). Suicides in 2023 primarily involved males (19/25, 76%). Of the 25 suicides, 8 left a note of intent. The primary reason for suicide was relationship related (7/25) with medical/poor health being second (5/25). Addiction (2), mental health (4) and mix reasoning (4) were the other reasons. A total of 10 suicides had a history of mental health disorder and 7 had a history of substance use. Of the 25 suicides, 6 had a family history of suicide. 10 suicides had a history of suicide ideations and 6 had a history of suicide attempts.

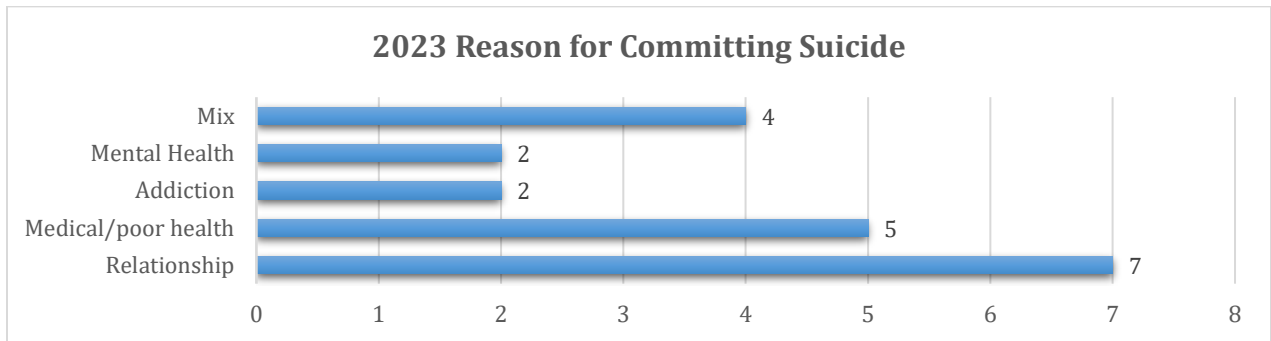


Figure 32. 2023 Reason for Suicide.

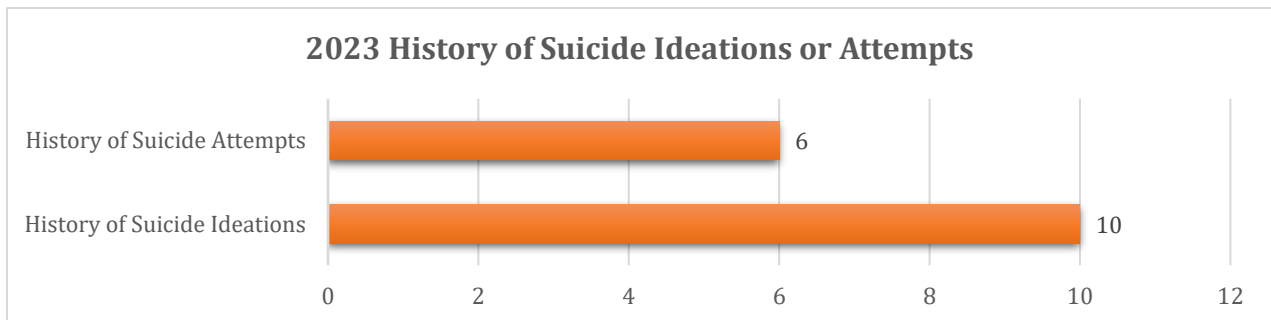


Figure 33. 2023 History of Suicide Attempts or Ideations.

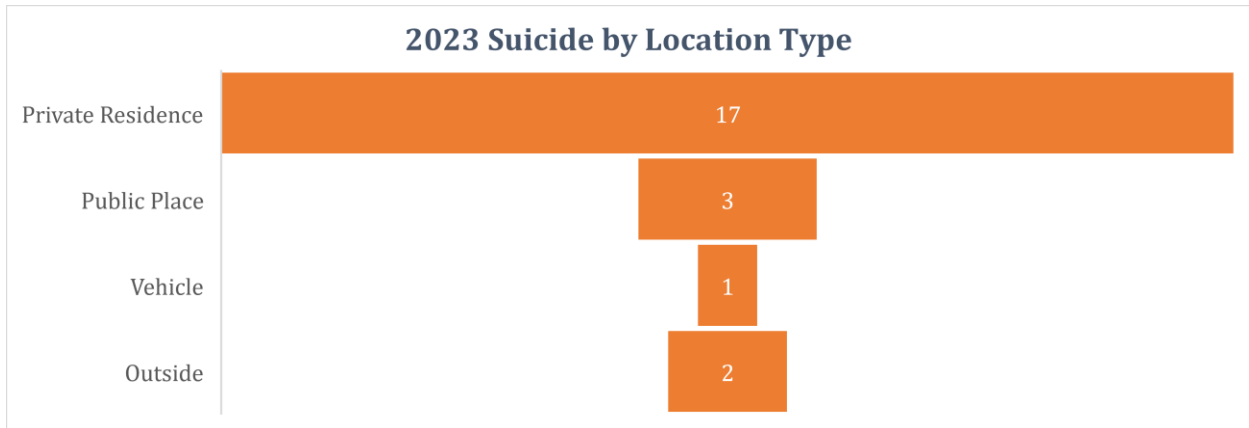


Figure 34. 2023 Suicides by Location Type.

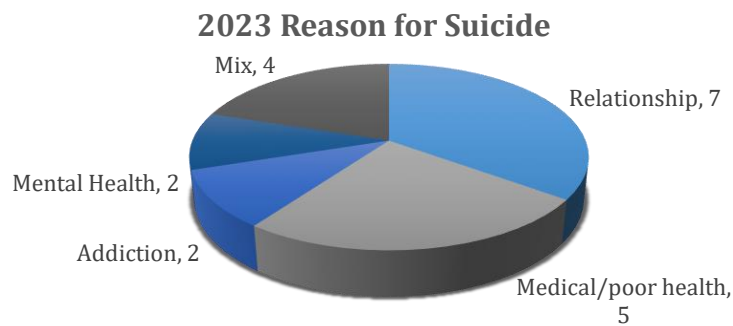


Figure 35. 2023 Reason for Suicide.

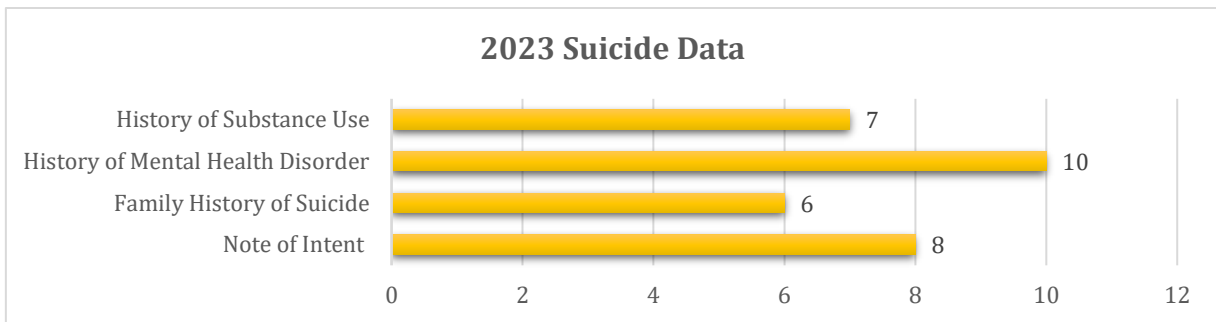


Figure 36. 2023 Suicide Data.

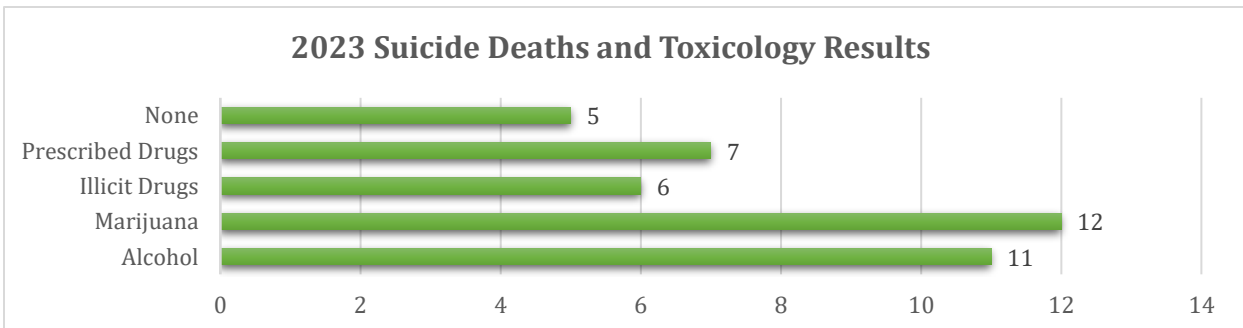


Figure 37. Suicide deaths and toxicology results.

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. 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.

In 2023, the Coroner classified 4 deaths as homicide, which accounts for 1.3% of the total coroner cases. The method of homicide included (2) sharp instrument, (1) firearm, and (1) neglect. The age range for homicides from 2023 was from 16-79. Homicides involved (3) males and (1) female.

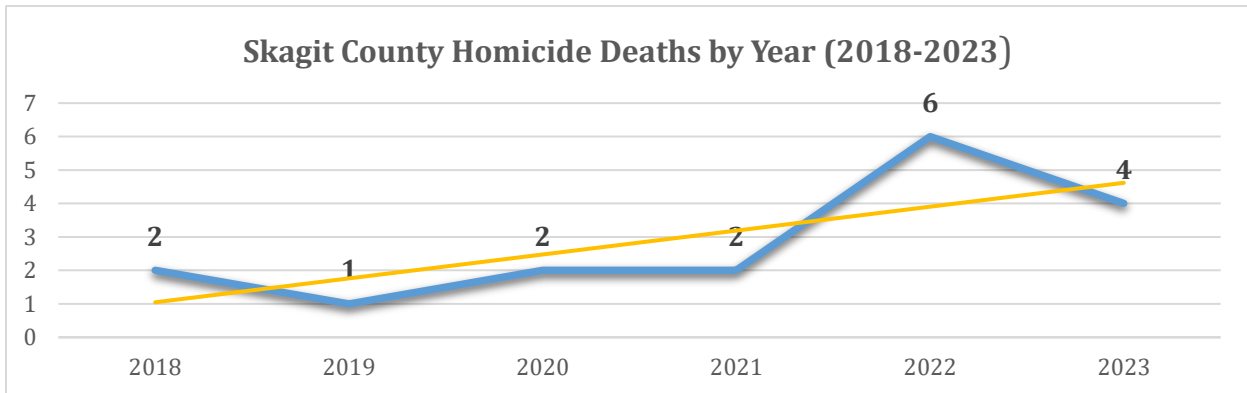


Figure 38. 2018-2023 Skagit County Homicide Cases.

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 2023, the Skagit County Coroner’s Office certified 4 deaths as undetermined, which accounted for only 1.3% (4/304) of coroner involved cases. The cause of death included (2) drug related, (1) blunt force injuries, and (1) sudden unexplained infant death (SUID). The ages involved included (2) infants ages 1 month and 3 months and (1) in the age group of 26-44 and (1) in the age group of 45-64.

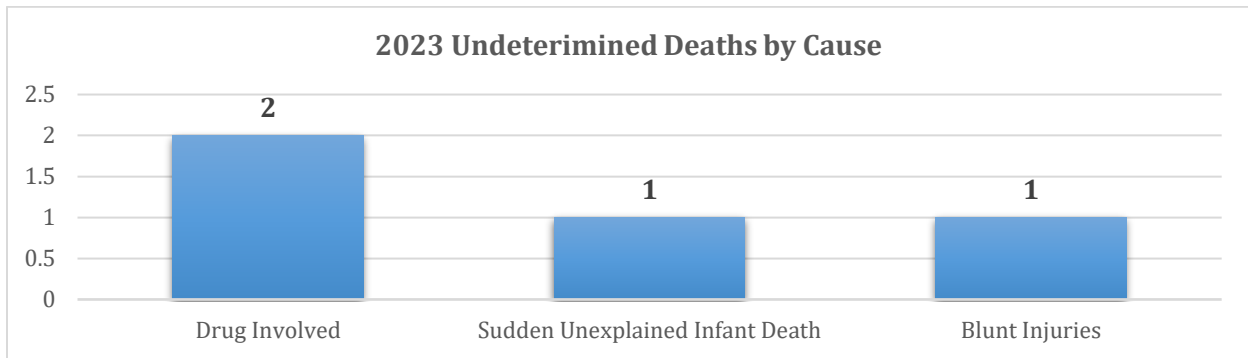


Figure 39. 2023 Undetermined Deaths by Cause.

Cornea and Tissue Donation

The Skagit County Coroner's Office are adamant supporters of facilitating donation within the Skagit County Community. The Coroner's Office uses a case reporting system that is linked to the Organ Procurement Organizations (OPO's). This allows 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 are 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 the last quarter of 2023, the Coroner's Office successfully signed contracts with Sight Life and LifeNet Health for cornea donation and tissue donation to be performed at the Coroner's Office.

Cornea Donation

For 2023, 147 cases were referred from the Coroner's Office. This was a significant increase from 2022 which resulted in only 82 referrals. Of the 147 cases, 54 were potential donors and only 28 became cornea donors. A total of 45 corneas were transplanted in 2023. In 2022, only 13 corneas were transplanted.

Tissue Donation

In 2023, there were a total of 118 referrals from the Coroner's Office. Of these 118 referrals, 37 cases had potential for tissue donation and 6 became tissue donors.

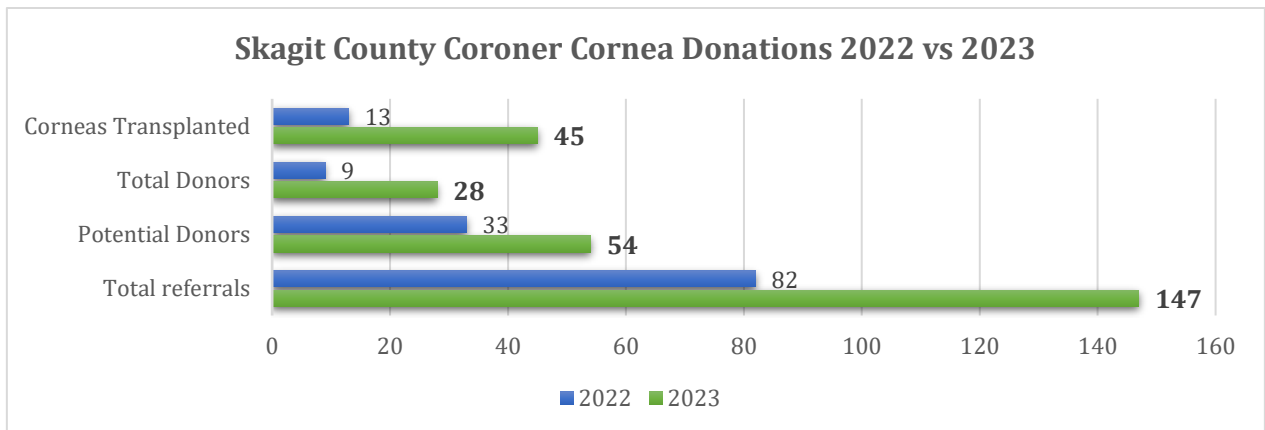


Figure 40. 2022 vs 2023 Skagit County Coroner Cornea Donations.

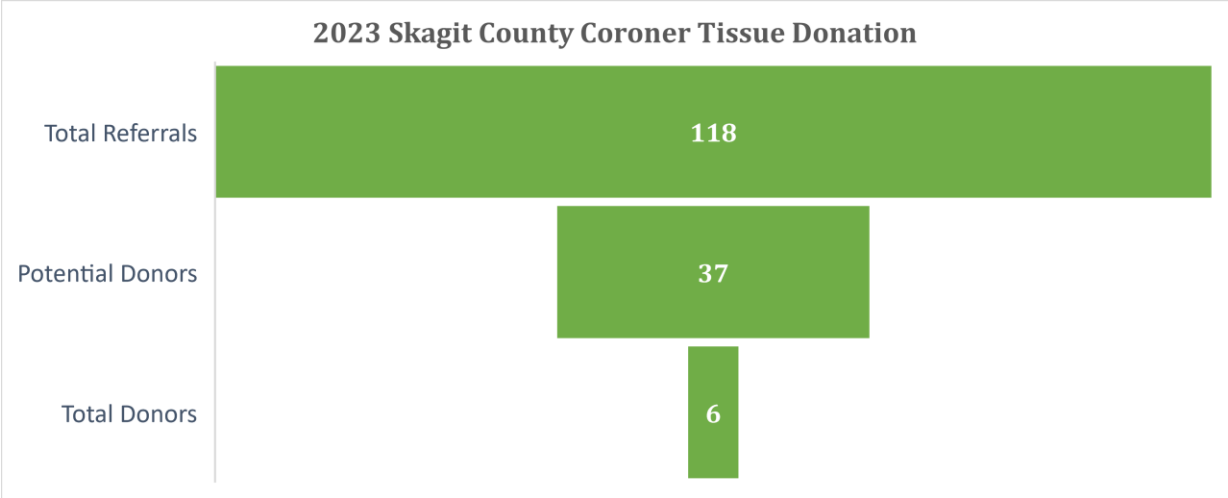


Figure 41. 2023 Skagit County Coroner Tissue Donation.

Indigent or Unclaimed

In 2023, there was a total of 16 cases in which the decedent was considered indigent or the next of kin declined responsibility for claiming the decedent. Thanks to dedicated staff devoting time to searching for next of kin, this office was able to have 11 of the 16 cases claimed by family or friends.