Skagit County Coroner's Office

2024 Annual Report

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Skagit County Coroner

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MISSON STATEMENT

The mission of the Skagit County Coroner's Office is to serve the community by conducting medicolegal death investigations in an independent, compassionate, and professional manner to determine the truth of the circumstances surrounding a death while serving as a representative for the decedents and an advocate to the survivors.

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.

DEDICATION

We acknowledge that each case featured in this report represents the death of a person whose absence is grieved by family, friends, and our community. We dedicate this report to those individuals, their loved ones, and the citizens of Skagit County we strive to serve with compassion every day.

About the Coroner's Office

The Skagit County Coroner's Office investigates the circumstances surrounding a person's death independently of any law enforcement agency with the primary role of determining the *cause* and *manner* upon notification of deaths that are unexpected, unexplained, suspicious, violent, or in which the cause and/or manner of death is unknown. In addition to this role, the coroner is responsible for identifying decedents and notifying next of kin. The coroner's office strives to provide every individual in need of our services with factual direction, professionalism, commitment, and care.

Core Values

Integrity:

Honesty in everything we do; knowing it is critical to do the best we can for all decedents and their families to arrive at the most accurate conclusion of each death we investigate.

Compassion:

To be able to recognize and respond with sincerity to the needs, concerns, and fears of those experiencing a loss.

Service:

To be available anytime we are needed, and to respond to provide our services quickly and with an emphasis on thoroughness. Assist other agencies, both public and private, in gathering and sharing information with them relative to their participation in the cases we investigate.

Prevention:

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.

Role of the Coroner

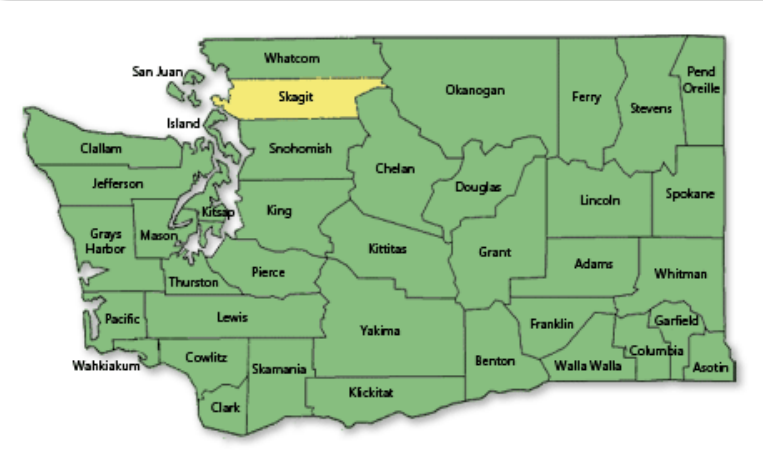
Figure 1: Role of the Coroner

Accreditation

In 2022, the Skagit County Coroner's Office began the process of obtaining international accreditation through the International Association of Coroners and Medical Examiners (IACME). The accreditation process is specifically designed to assist coroner offices around the country in improving medicolegal death investigations. Accreditation provides the opportunity to self-assess and subsequently have auditors representing IACME review and evaluate nearly 300 standard practices.

The successful completion of the accreditation process provides an outside endorsement that indicates that the Skagit County Coroner's Office operates at a high level, utilizing best practice concepts, to provide Skagit County residents with the best service possible. In January 2024, the Skagit County Coroner's Office completed the IACME accreditation process becoming the 39th office in the country and 7th in the State of Washington.

Skagit County



Skagit County covers 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 three Native American Tribes in the county: Swinomish Tribe, Upper Skagit Tribe, and Sauk Suiattle Tribe.

Per the US Census Bureau for 2024, Skagit County is home to approximately 131,512 people with a growth rate of 0.07%. Currently, Skagit County is ranked as the 11th largest county in Washington State. Skagit County's population is made up of 72.4% Caucasian, 19.7% 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.

Skagit County has three hospitals:

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

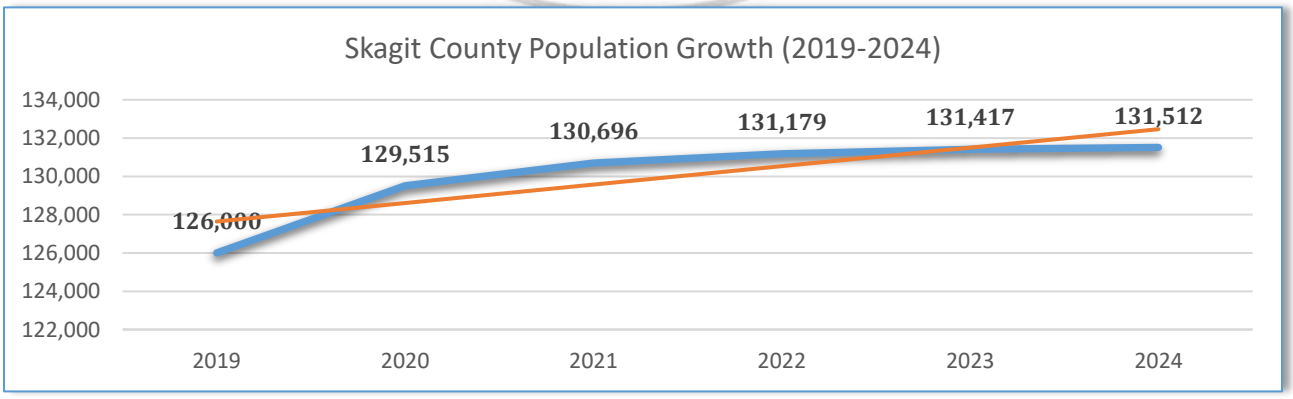


Figure 2. 2024 Skagit County Population Growth

Cause and Manner of Death

The *Cause of Death* is the official determination of the disease or injury and the sequence of events responsible for the occurrence which leads to the individual's death.

The *Manner of Death* is the description used to classify the conditions that caused a death and the circumstances by which they occur. Manner of death is determined largely by means of the investigation. This is a medicolegal classification mainly for statistical purposes and has no direct bearing on criminal prosecution, insurance settlements, or judicial purposes. Controlled substance homicides and vehicular homicides for example are considered accidents under the Coroner/ME system as there was no intent by the dealer or the driver to harm another person.

In Washington state there are (5) manners of death, listed below.

Natural: Death caused by disease process.

Suicide: Death as a result of purposeful action to end one's own life.

Accident: Death other than natural where there is no evidence of intent.

Homicide: Death resulting from injuries intentionally inflicted by another person.

Undetermined: Manner assigned when there is insufficient evidence, or conflicting/equivocal information (especially about intent), to assign a specific manner.

Jurisdiction and State Statutes

Washington State law requires that the Skagit County Coroner be notified when any person in Skagit County has been found deceased and was not under direct medical care at the time of death. Skagit County Coroner's Office is only authorized to investigate deaths that occur within the geographical boundaries of Skagit County regardless of if the decedent was a resident of the county or not at the time of death. If a Skagit County resident dies in another county, the county of death is responsible for investigating the death.

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.

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 order 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 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.

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 by another (Adult Protective Services or Child Protective Services involvement)
Violent or suspicious circumstances
Traffic-related deaths
Suicides
All infant and 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 indirectly contributed to the death, this includes those injuries that occurred months or 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.

Identification and Locating Next of Kin

In all cases, the identification and establishing and locating next-of-kin (NOK) is necessary. In certain cases, the identification process can be extensive requiring outside assistance from a forensic odontologist, forensic anthropologist, or out of state lab to analyze DNA. Finding the NOK can be complicated as some individuals may have died leaving no NOK. The Skagit County Coroner's Office ensures that all leads regarding NOK are exhausted before establishing the case as indigent.

Unclaimed and Indigent Cases

Occasionally there are individuals who pass away in Skagit County where the NOK cannot be located or the NOK declines responsibility for the decedent. In these situations, the Coroner's Office takes possession of the decedent and arranges for cremation. If after 45 days, NOK has not claimed the remains, any other family member or friend can claim the cremains. Claiming the cremains after the County has taken responsibility for disposition requires a fee of $600-$850 to compensate the county for the cost of the cremation. Beginning in 2025, an indigent ceremony for any unclaimed cremains will be performed every two years at the Mount Vernon Cemetery. Following this service, all unclaimed cremains will be dispersed out at sea to their final resting place. For those unclaimed cremains who are known to be a veteran, the cremains 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 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.

Sharing of Information

All coroner records including autopsy reports and related data from individual investigations are considered confidential and not subject to public record per RCW 68.50 and RCW 42.56. Outside of the agency/agencies involved in the case (law enforcement agencies, prosecuting attorneys, attending physicians, and other agencies such as Occupational Safety and Health Administration, Federal Aviation Administration, National Transportation Safety Board, Board of Consumer Product Safety, Adult or Child Protective Services and Labor and Industries), only the legal next of kin (NOK) and family members are authorized to request the coroner's reports including the autopsy and toxicology report. If an outside party has interest in obtaining reports or seeking additional information on the case, the legal NOK must provide authorization.

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 Facilities

The office utilizes (2) county vehicles: 2016 Ford Transit Van and 2018 Chevrolet Suburban.

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.

Coroner's Office Staff

ABMDI
American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators

The staff of the coroner's office come from diverse backgrounds with considerable training and experiences that immeasurably benefit our investigations.

Coroner 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. Coroner staff 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 2024, the coroner's office underwent a change in the staff organizational structure as the Chief Deputy Coroner resigned in September 2024 and the position was eliminated. The full-time deputy coroners were re-classified to Medicolegal Death Investigator I and II to allow for promotion within the office as well as offer supervisory/management powers to those with a higher level of training, experience, and certification. Both full-time deputy coroners were promoted to Medicolegal Death Investigator II's and a full-time Medicolegal Death Investigator I was added to the coroners' staff in November. The coroner's office also employed (2) on-call deputy coroners and (1) on-call autopsy technician in 2024. All full-time and on-call deputy coroners are to become certified with the State of Washington within 1 year of hire and nationally certified with the American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators (ABMDI) within 2 years. At the end of 2024, the Coroner and the 2 Medicolegal Death Investigator II's had both certifications.

Since the end of 2016, the coroner's office has managed an internship program allowing both students and those interested in the field to intern at the coroner's office. Since its inception, the coroner's office has had over 60 interns. Over the course of 2024, the coroner's office developed a partnership with intern programs at the Northwest Career Technical College in Mount Vernon, Whatcom Community College and Western Washington University in Bellingham. This resulted in transforming the internship program into a more professional opportunity for students adding specific requirements. In June 2024, a paid internship option was added for those enrolled in college. During each quarter, the coroner's office had 2-5 interns.

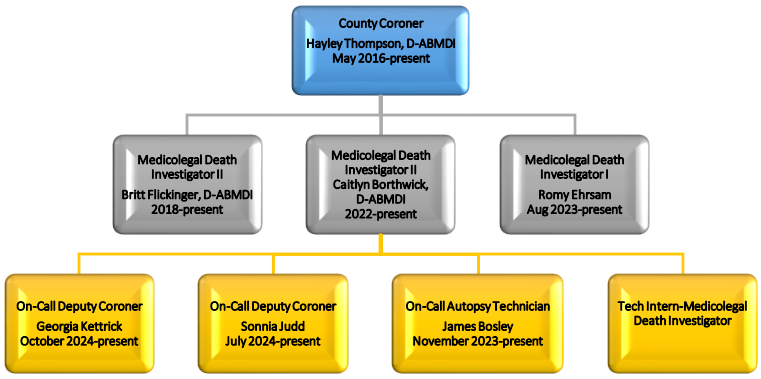


Figure 3. 2024 Skagit County Coroner Organization Chart

Strategic Goals of the Coroner's Office

To maintain accreditation as well as continue to provide timely and legally defensible death investigations, the Skagit County Coroner's Office has identified the following goals and objectives:

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 in a hospital, care facility, or hospice setting 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. The Skagit County Coroner's Office responds to all unattended deaths unless the person was in the final process of being admitted to hospice or had significant medical history and had sought medical care with a provider or hospital within the last 48 hours preceding death.

2024 Reported Cases	454
Jurisdictional Cases	401
Non-jurisdictional Cases	54
Death Certificates Certified by the Coroner's Office	215
Natural Deaths	275
Accidental Deaths	125
Suicide Deaths	30
Homicide Deaths	7
Undetermined Deaths	2
Human Skeletal Remains	2
Non-human Skeletal Remains (animal bones)	12
Full Autopsies	48
Partial Autopsies	1
External Examinations	88
Toxicology Tests Performed	164
Scene Responses	278
Unidentified Bodies	0
Unclaimed/Indigent Remains	12
Exhumations	0

Table 2. 2024 Statistical Summary

It should be noted that the Skagit County Coroner's Office Annual report does not include all deaths that occurred in Skagit County, but only the cases investigated by the Skagit County Coroner's Office. For a total description of deaths occurring in Skagit County, please consult with the Washington State Department of Health, Bureau of Vital Records.

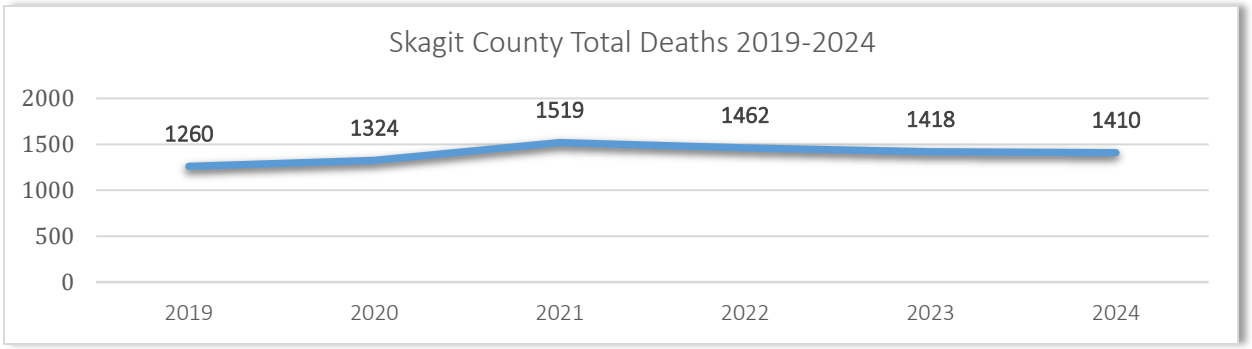


Figure 5. Skagit County Total Deaths per Year (2019-2024)

For the year 2024, there were a total of 1,410 deaths in Skagit County. The Skagit County Coroner's Office conducted 454 death investigations and assumed jurisdiction on 401 cases. Of the 401 cases, 215 (53%) were certified by the coroner's office. Please note that 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 last 5 years (2019-2024), the number of cases reported to the coroner's office have remained between 400 and 500. In September 2023, this office changed its policy criteria for scene responses requiring this office to respond to all unattended deaths. Prior to this change, this office responded to select cases and the average number of scene responses was 130. For 2024, the number of scene responses doubled from previous years ending at 278 scenes.

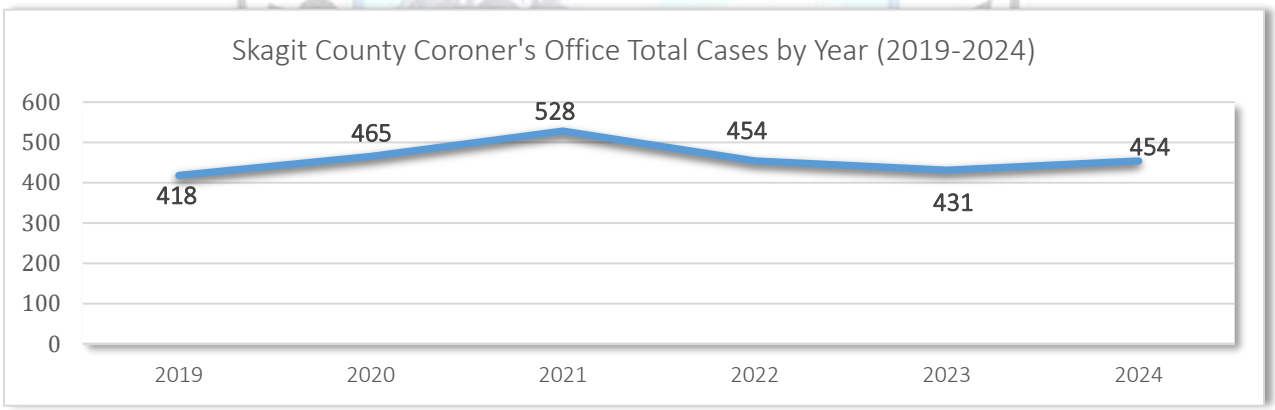


Figure 6. Skagit County Coroner Total Cases (2019-2024).

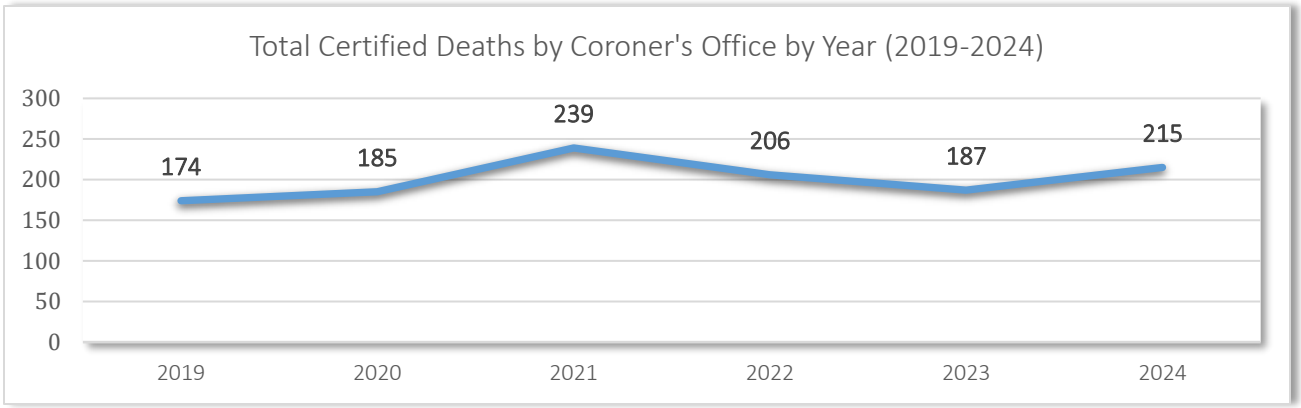


Figure 7. Skagit County Coroner Certified Deaths by Year (2019-2024)

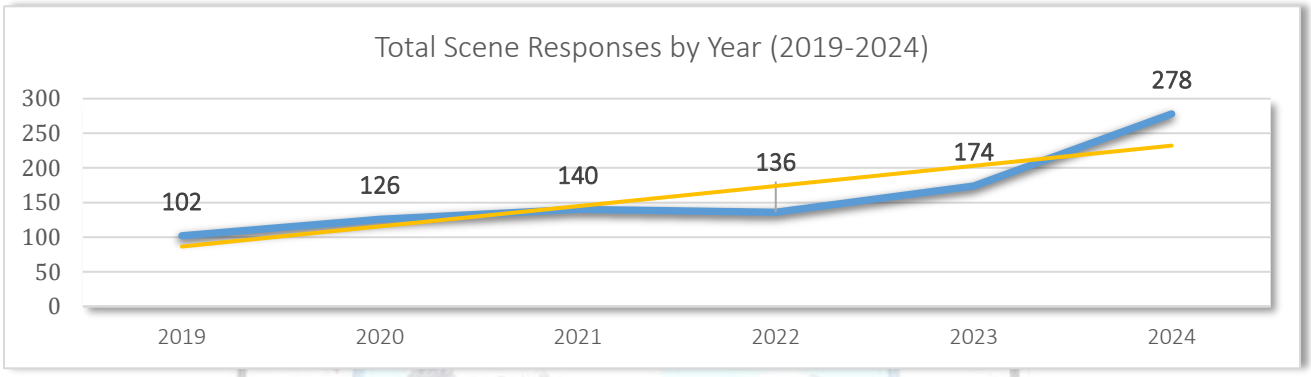


Figure 8. Total Scene Responses by Year (2019-2024). Yellow line indicates the upward trend for increase in scenes.

In 2024, there were a total of 131 post-mortem examinations conducted by the coroner's office. Post-mortem examinations include both autopsies and external body examinations. Of these 131 examinations, 49 required an autopsy to confirm or determine the cause and manner of death and 88 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 certain cases taking closer to 120 days. The majority of coroner cases were finalized in under 90 days.

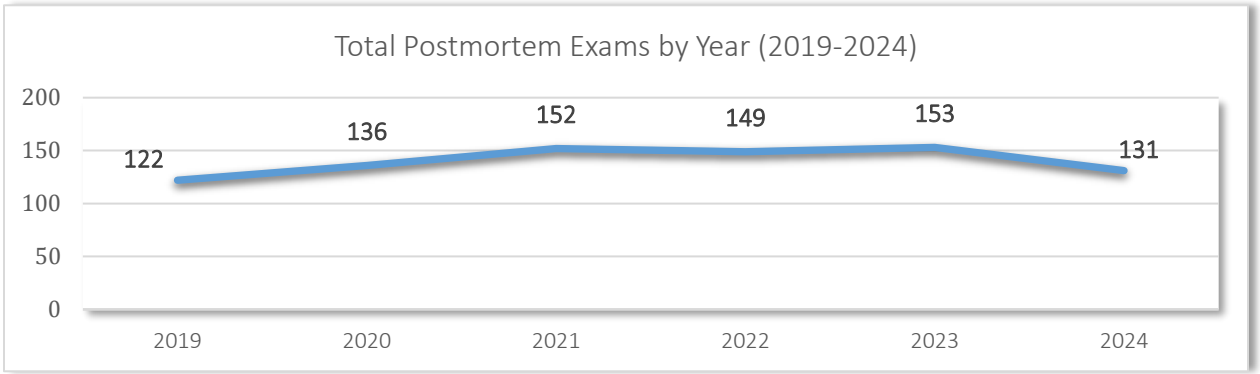


Figure 9. Total Postmortem Exams by Year (2019-2024)

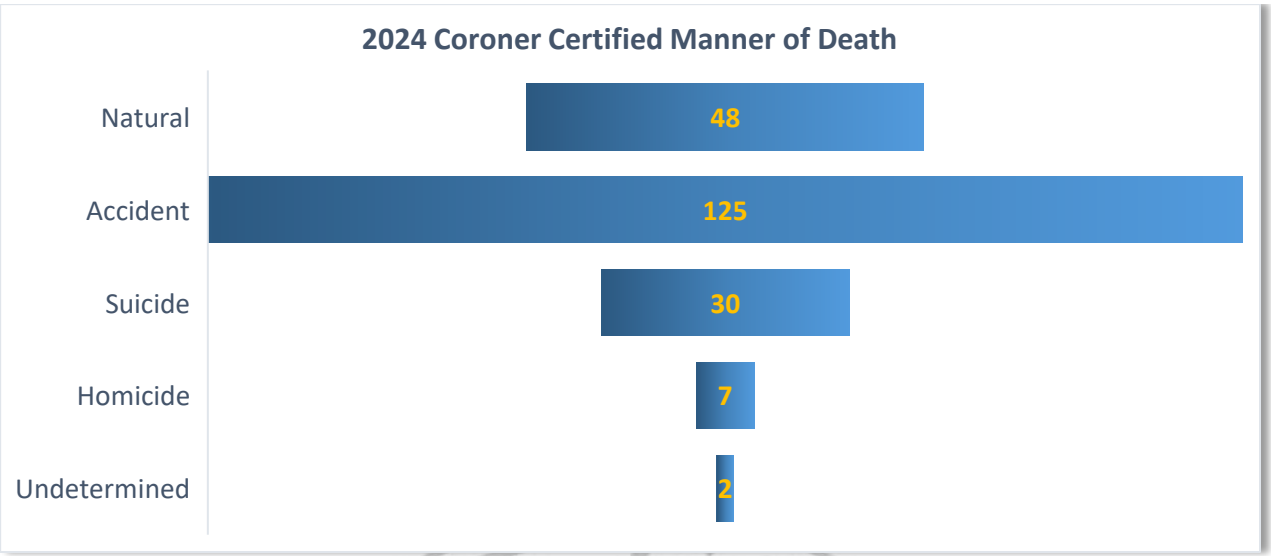
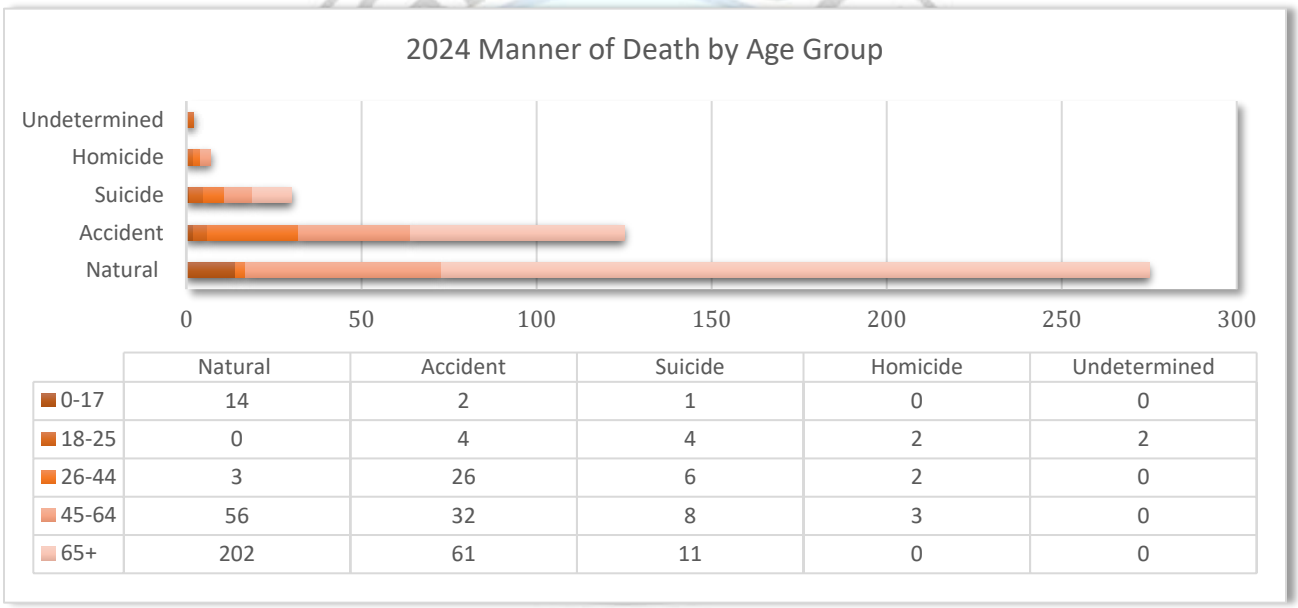


Figure 10. 2024 Coroner Certified Deaths by Manner



	Natural	Accident	Suicide	Homicide	Undetermined
0-17	14	2	1	0	0
18-25	0	4	4	2	2
26-44	3	26	6	2	0
45-64	56	32	8	3	0
65+	202	61	11	0	0

Figure 11. 2024 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 2024, there were 275 natural deaths investigated by the coroner's office accounting for 60% of the total deaths reported to the coroner's office. A total of 48 cases (48/206, 23%) were certified by the coroner's office. Of these 48 deaths, the primary cause of death was cardiac-related (23/48, 48%) followed by complications from chronic alcoholism (11/48, 23%). Figure 12 outlines the natural types of death for all reported natural deaths in 2024. Other natural causes included: (3) non-specific natural, (1) thromboemboli, and (1) blood disorder.

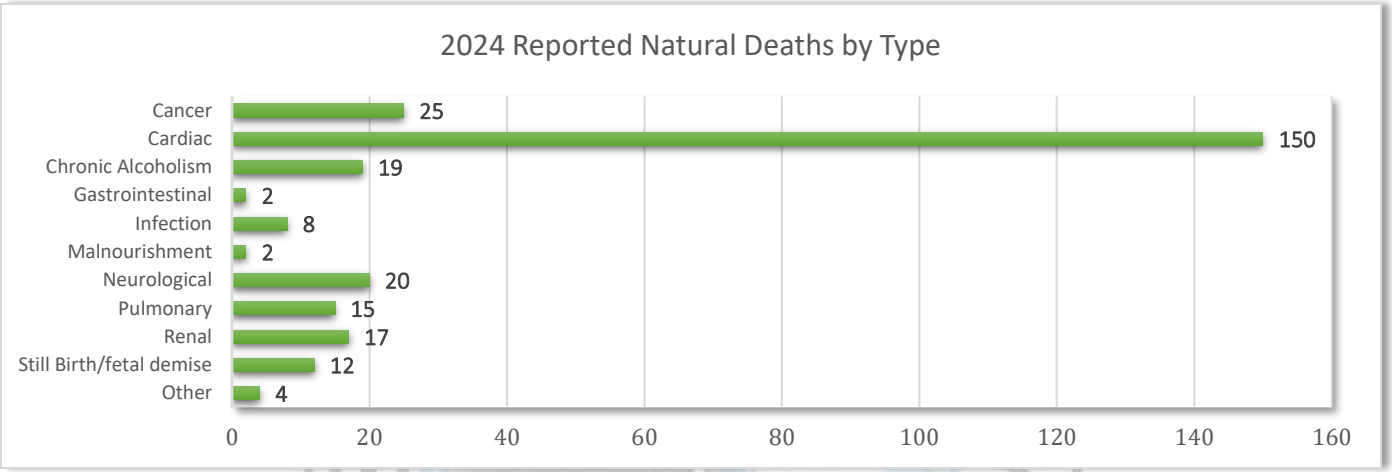


Figure 12. 2024 Skagit County Certified Natural Causes of Death by Coroner's Office

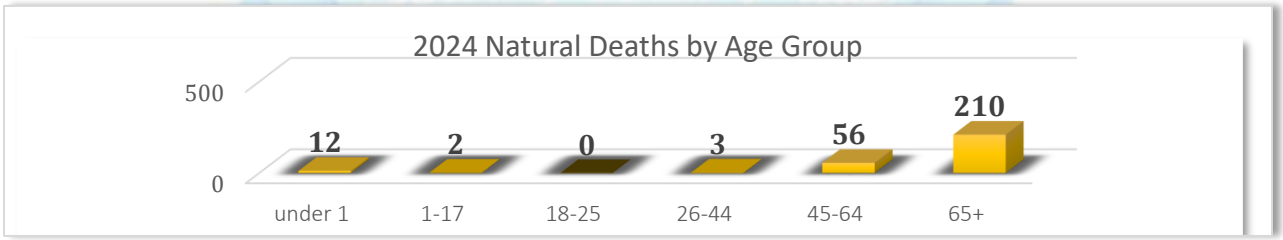


Figure 13. 2024 Reported Natural Deaths by Age Group (all those under 1 year of age were stillborn births which are required by law to be reported to the coroner's office).

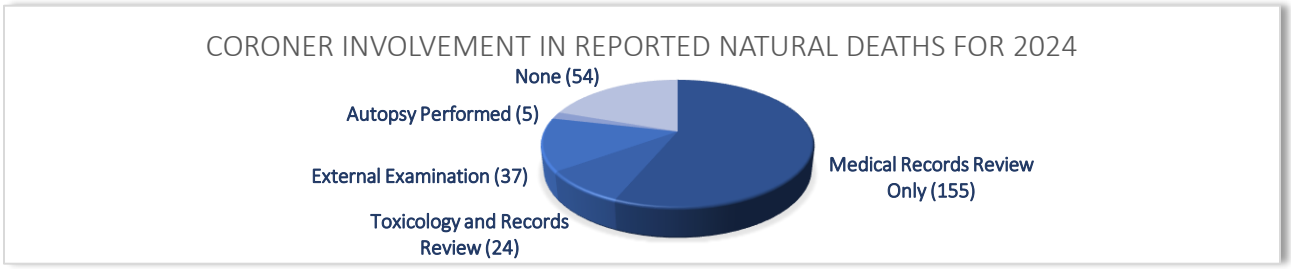


Figure 14. Coroner involvement for reported natural deaths in 2024

Manner of Death: Accident

The Skagit County Coroner's Office provides reports on all violent deaths to the Washington State Violent Death Reporting System (WA-VDRS). 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. Since all accidental deaths are theoretically preventable, each such death is investigated for public health purposes.

The Coroner certified 125 deaths as accidental in 2024 accounting for 27% of the total deaths reported to the coroner's office and 31% of jurisdiction assumed cases. Over 50% of the accidental deaths were males (69/125, 55%). The age group 65 and above had the highest number of accidental deaths (61/125, 48%) followed by age group 45-64 (32/125) and age group 26-44 (26/125). With regards to the types of accidental deaths, falls were the leading cause at 44% of the accidental deaths (56/125). Majority of these type of cases were elderly patients who had sustained an injury after a ground level fall resulting in a decline in health. Drug-related deaths were the second leading cause of accidental deaths (51/125, 40%). Traffic accidents (includes motor vehicle, motorcycle, pedestrian, train) made up 11% of accidental deaths (14/125). Other types of accidental deaths included: (1) asphyxia/confined space, (1) carbon monoxide, (1) hypothermia, and (1) blunt force work-related injury.

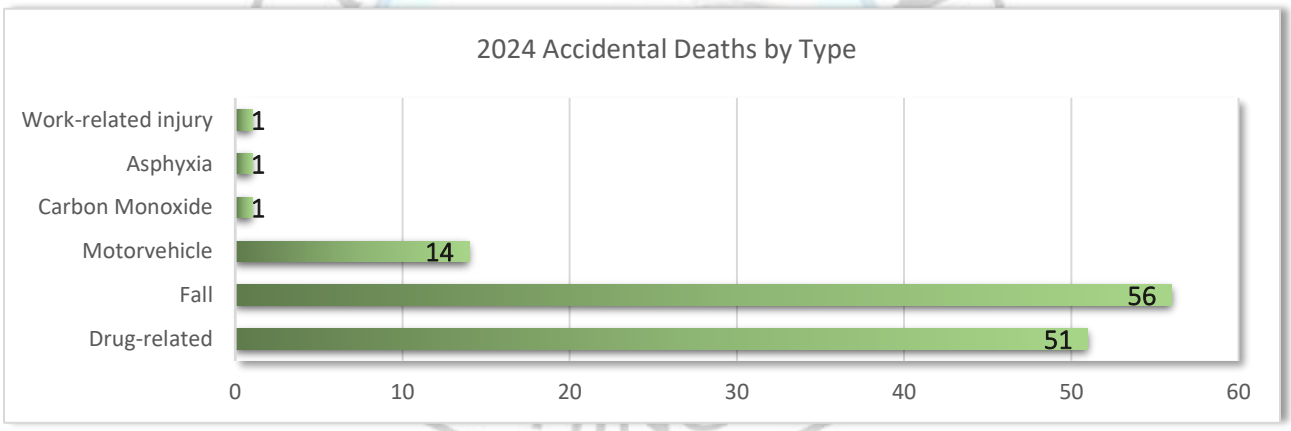


Figure 15. 2024 Skagit County Accidental Deaths
*Falls include elderly individuals who died from injuries related to a ground level fall

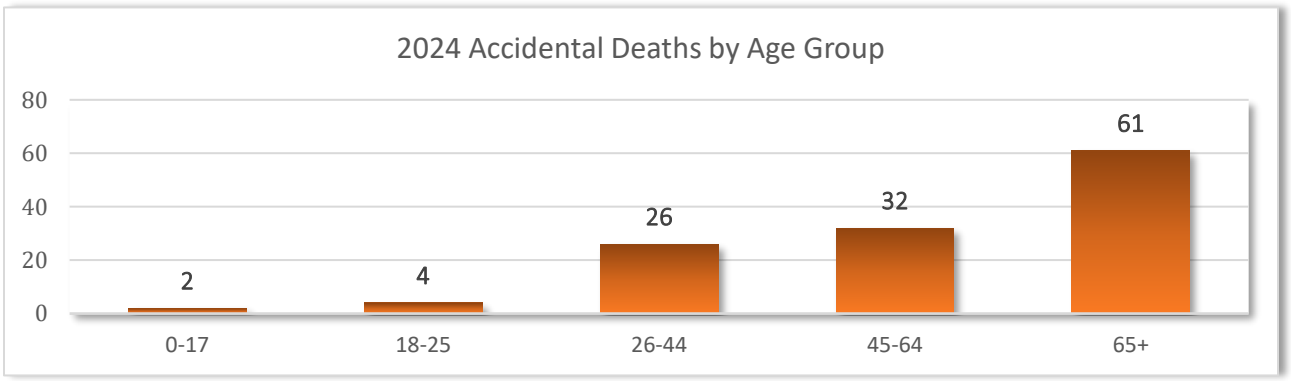


Figure 16. 2024 Skagit County Accidental Deaths by Age Group

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 2024, 51 deaths were certified by the coroner's office as an accidental drug overdose. This was a slight increase from 2023 in which there were 49 overdose deaths marking 2024 as the highest number of drug overdoses recorded for Skagit County (see figure 17, total drug overdoses 2018-2024).

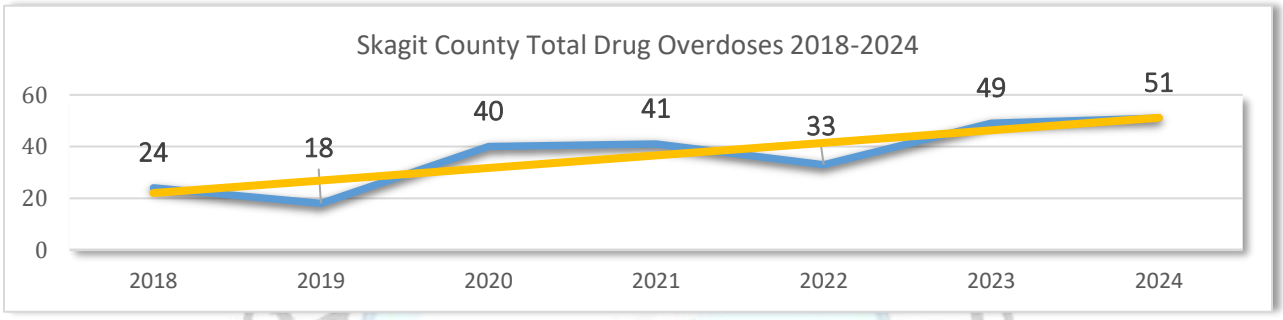


Figure 17. Skagit County Total Drug Overdose Deaths 2018-2024 (yellow line is a trend line noting the increase in overdose cases).

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. Fentanyl-related deaths in Skagit County are linked to the illicitly manufactured fentanyl and are being seen in both pill form or powder. Illicitly manufactured fentanyl is more commonly being mixed with other drugs to make it more powerful, addictive, and dangerous. In 2024, drugs commonly mixed with fentanyl included: methamphetamine, cocaine, bromazolam, and xylazine.

The number of fentanyl-involved drug overdose deaths has increased significantly since 2018. In 2023, the total number of fentanyl-involved deaths doubled from the previous year. For 2024, the total number of fentanyl-involved drug overdose deaths decreased slightly from 80% to 74% (38/51). Only 7% (4/51) of the 51 drug overdose deaths involved just fentanyl. See Figure 18 and 19 regarding Fentanyl overdose deaths from 2018-2024.

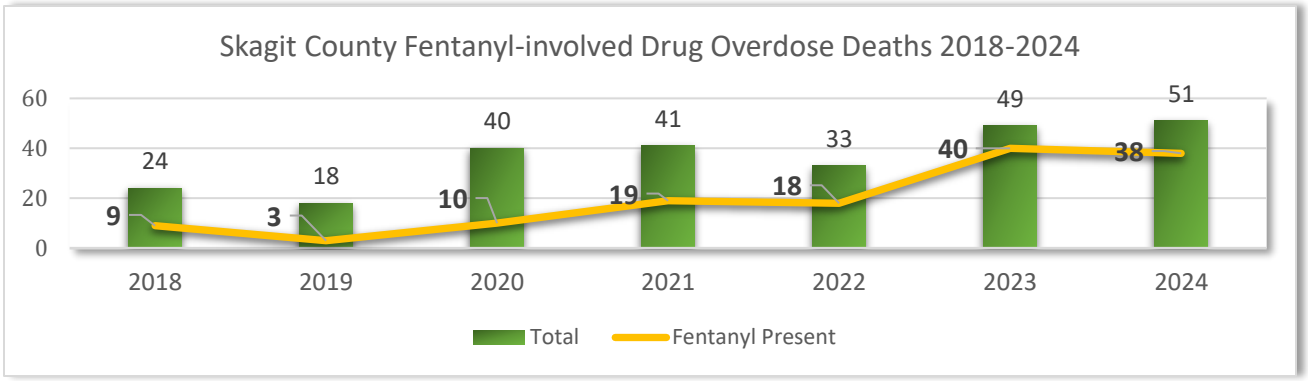
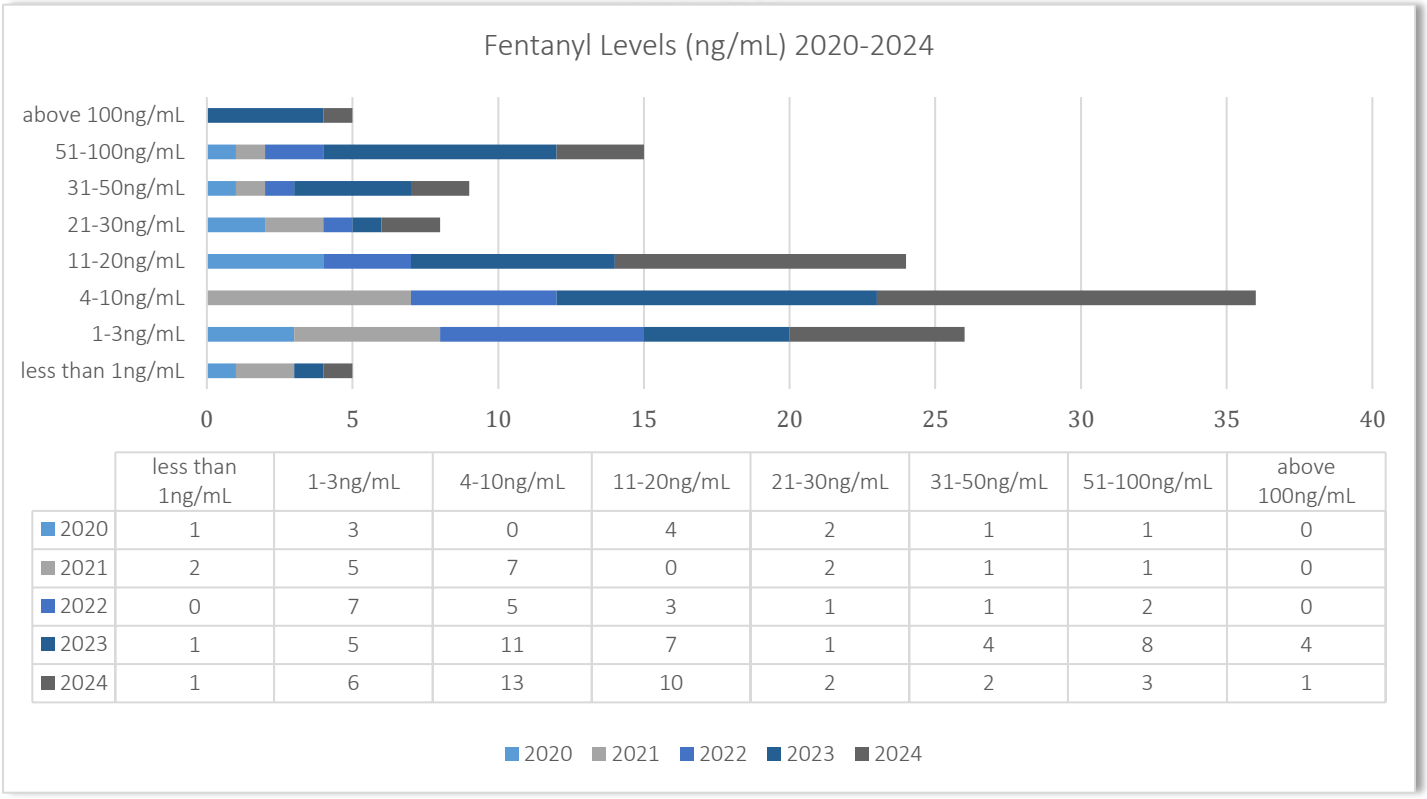


Figure 18. 2018-2024 Skagit County Total Accidental Overdose Deaths and Fentanyl involved.



	less than 1ng/mL	1-3ng/mL	4-10ng/mL	11-20ng/mL	21-30ng/mL	31-50ng/mL	51-100ng/mL	above 100ng/mL
2020	1	3	0	4	2	1	1	0
2021	2	5	7	0	2	1	1	0
2022	0	7	5	3	1	1	2	0
2023	1	5	11	7	1	4	8	4
2024	1	6	13	10	2	2	3	1

Figure 19. 2020-2024 Skagit County Fentanyl Levels

Demographic analysis showed males (35/51, 68%) and Caucasians (43/51, 84%) to be mostly represented in drug overdose death statistics for Skagit County. The age range for overdose deaths was 25-72 years of age with age group 45-64 (25/51, 49%) having the highest number of deaths. The second age group with the highest number of deaths was 26-44 (23/51, 45%). 68% of drug overdoses occurred inside a private residence (35/51) and 64% (33/51) were alone at the time of the overdose. In 45% (23/51) of the drug overdose deaths, the person had a previous history of an overdose with 1.1% having had an overdose within the last year (6/51). 52% (27/51) of the overdose deaths suffered from a mental health disorder and 37% (19/51) sought treatment for substance use. In 21% (11/51) of the cases, a family member or friend had died of an overdose. See Figures 20-26 regarding demographics and statistics concerning drug overdose deaths in 2024.

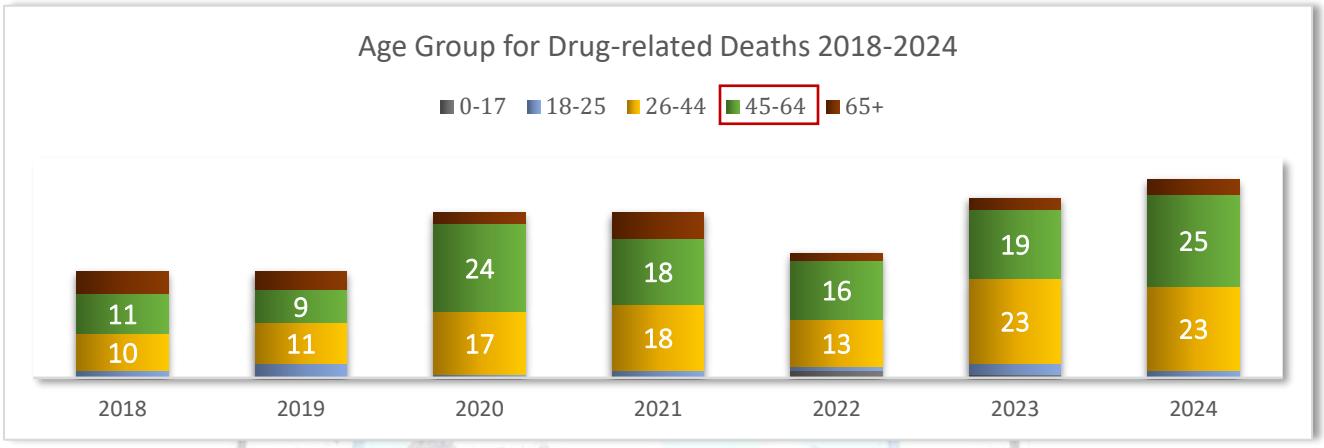


Figure 20. 2024 Drug overdose deaths by age group.

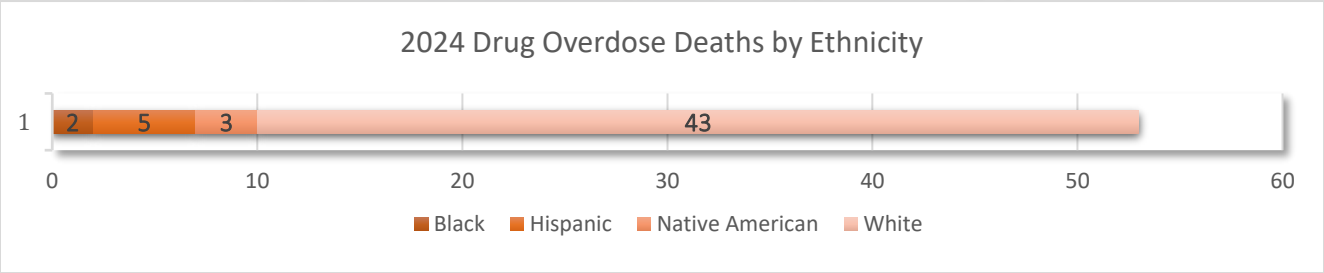


Figure 21. 2024 Drug overdose deaths by ethnicity.

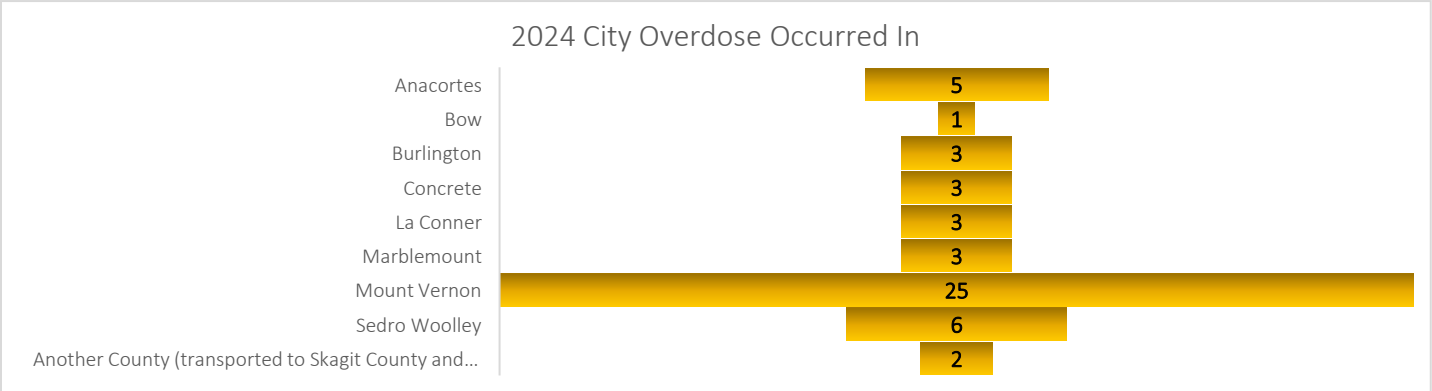


Figure 22. 2024 Drug deaths by city overdose occurred in.

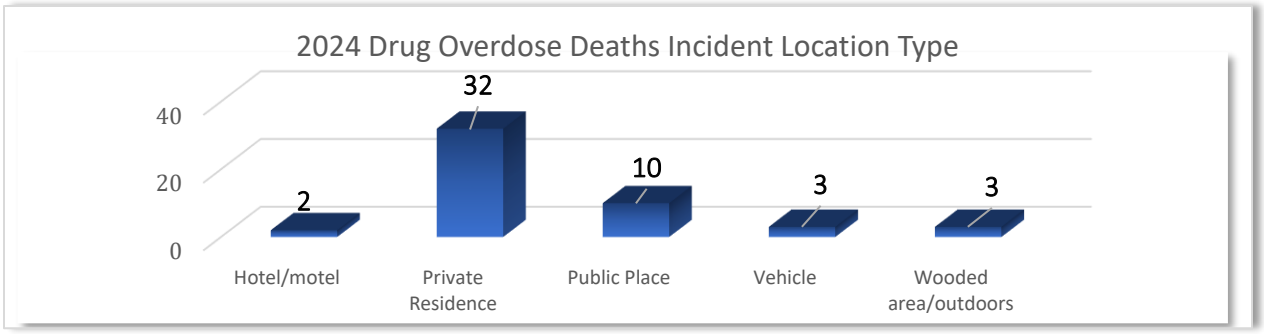


Figure 23. 2024 Overdose deaths by location type.

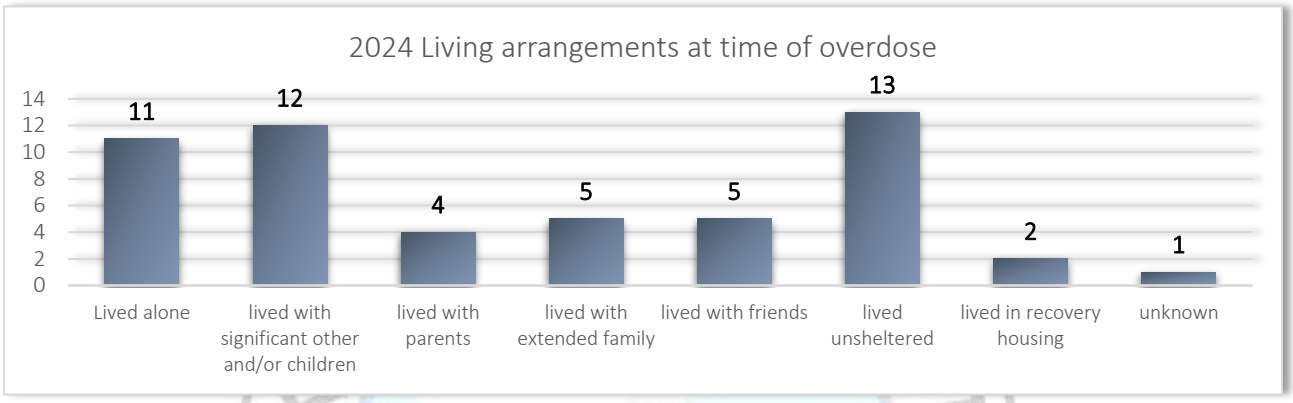


Figure 24. 2024Lliving arrangements at time of overdose

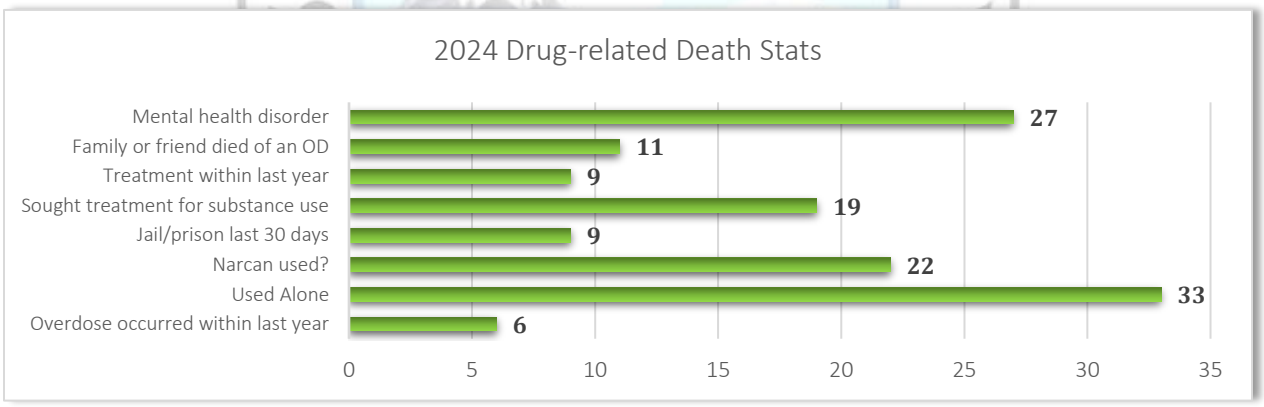


Figure 25. 2024 Drug-related death stats.

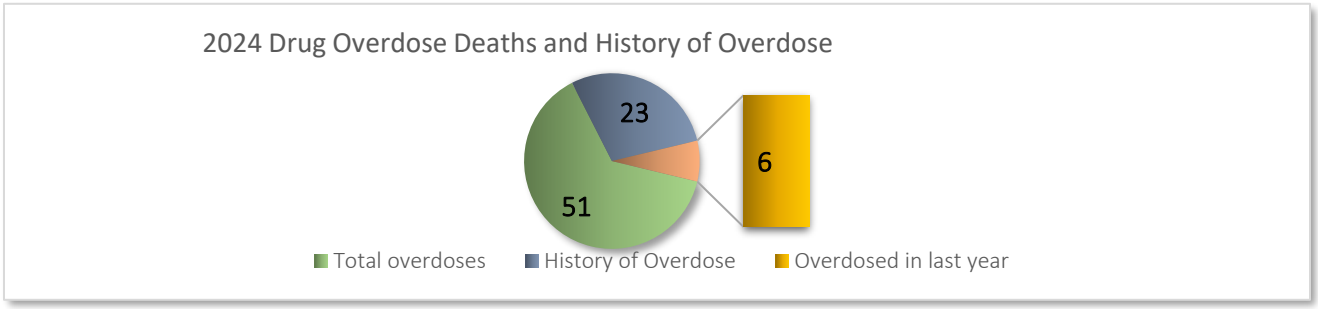


Figure 26: 2024 Skagit County History of Past Overdose.

Falls

In 2024, there were 56 deaths certified as fall-related accounting for 44% of the accidental deaths in Skagit County. Except for 1 case (age 46), all of these deaths were in those aged 60 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 2024, all 56 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 11% of the accidental deaths in Skagit County for 2024 (14/125 cases). This was the third largest group of accidental deaths. See figures 27 and 28 for further statistics related to traffic fatalities.

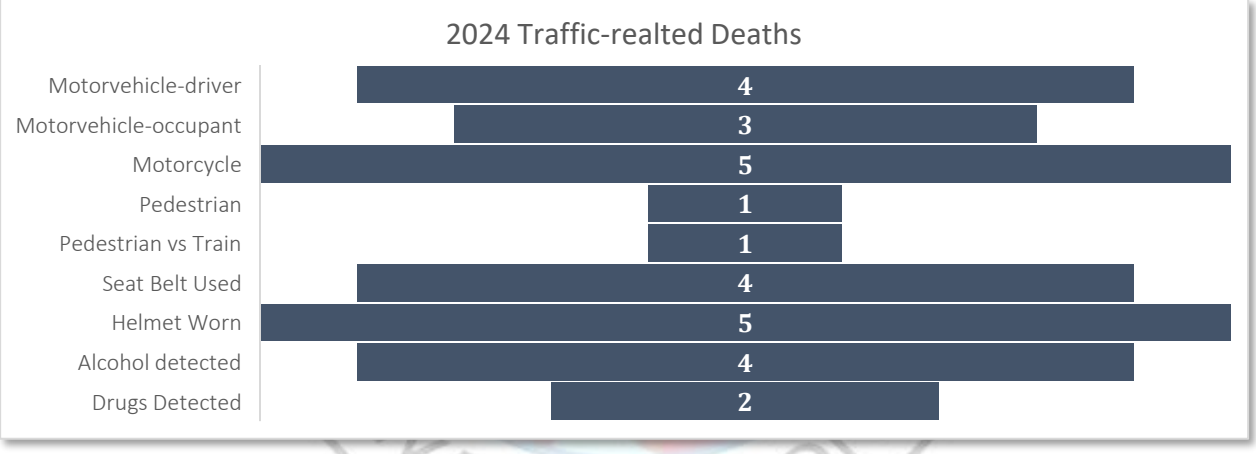


Figure 27. 2024 Traffic related Death Data

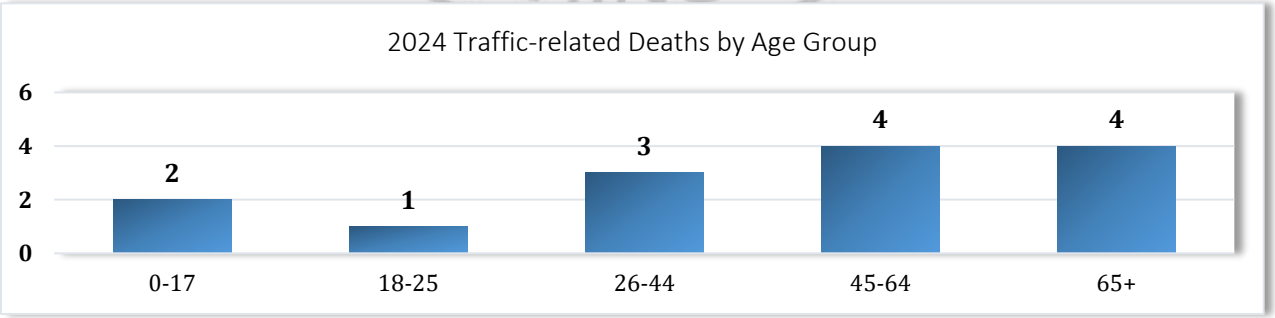


Figure 28. 2024 Traffic related deaths by Age Group

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 2024, there were 30 suicides, accounting for 6.6% (30/431) of the total deaths reported to the coroner's office and 14% (30/215) of deaths certified by the Coroner's Office. The primary method of suicide for 2024 was via firearm (15/30, 50%), followed by intentional drowning (4/30, 13%) and ligature hanging (4/30, 13%). Additionally, there were 3 intentional overdoses, 2 asphyxia with inhalation of helium, 1 jump from height, and 1 intentional sharp force injury. 50% (15/30) of suicides occurred in a private residence and 30% (9/30) took place outdoors.

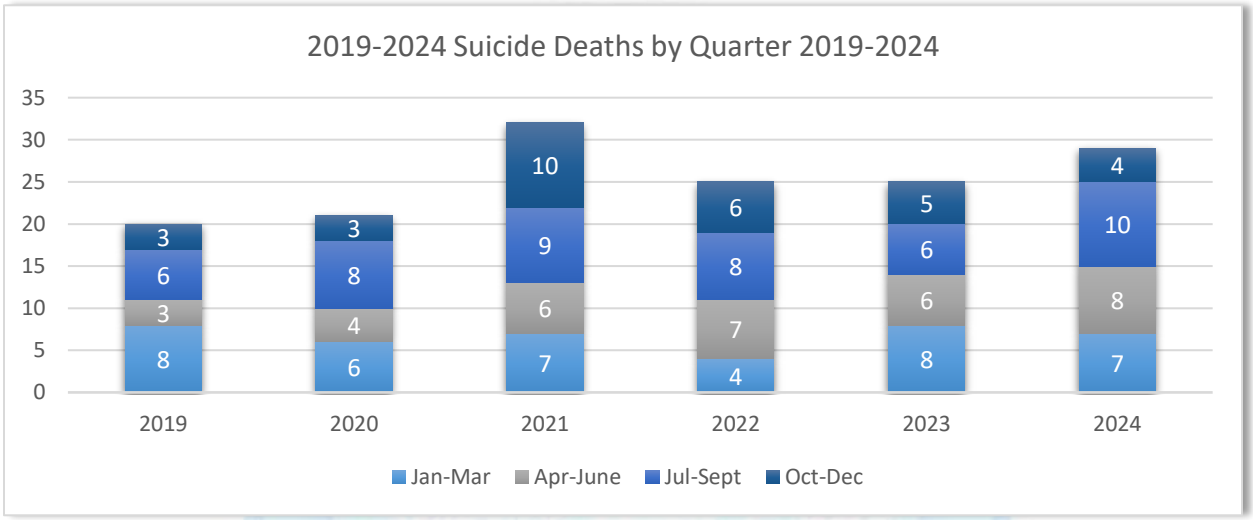
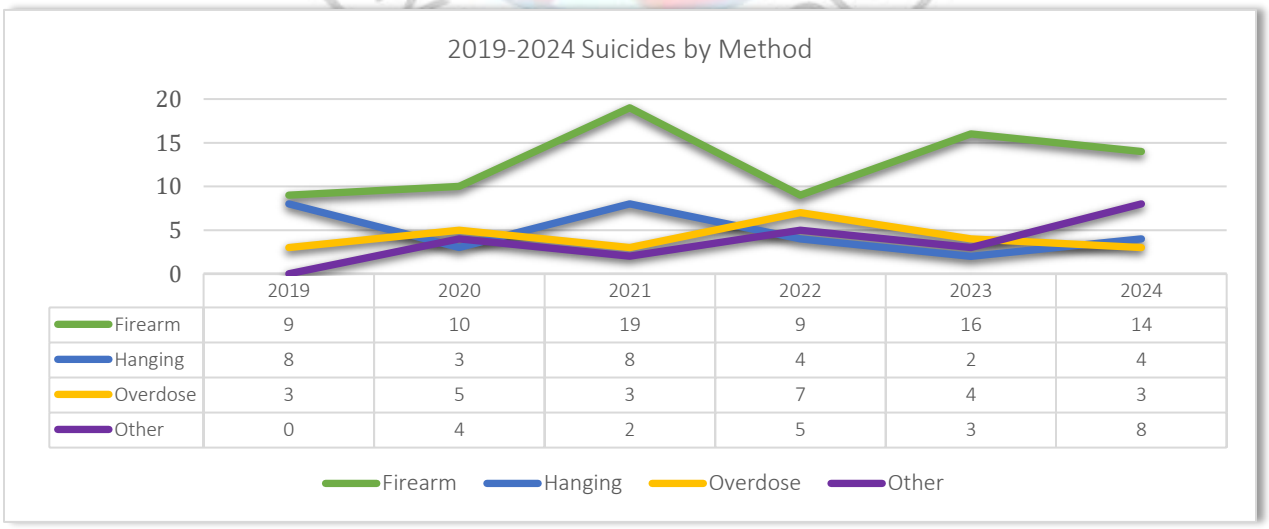


Figure 29. 2019-2024 Skagit County Suicides by Quarter.



	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Firearm	9	10	19	9	16	14
Hanging	8	3	8	4	2	4
Overdose	3	5	3	7	4	3
Other	0	4	2	5	3	8

Figure 30. 2019-2024 Skagit County Suicides by Method.

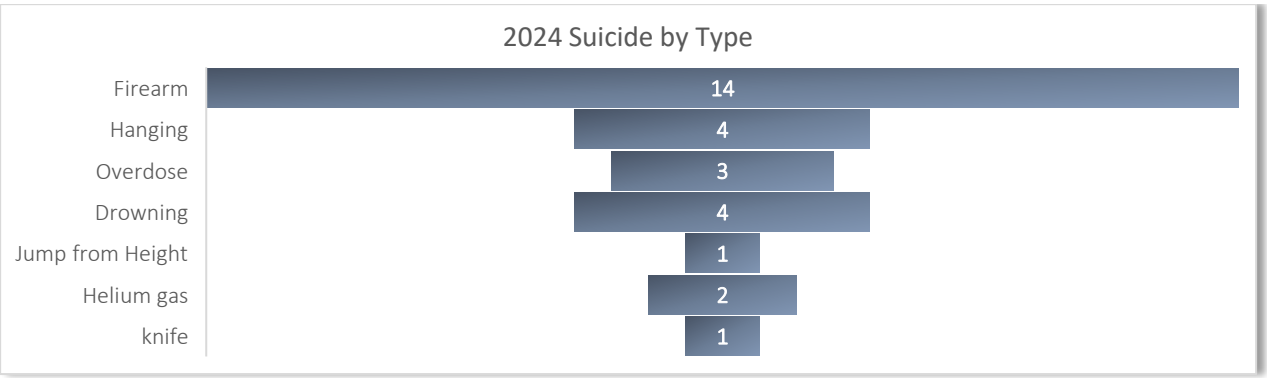


Figure 31. 2024 Suicides by Type.

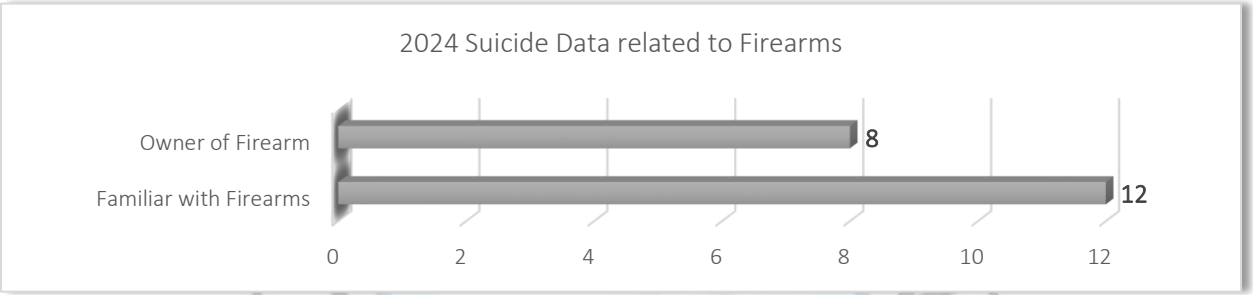


Figure 32. 2024 Suicide Data related to Firearm familiarity and registry.

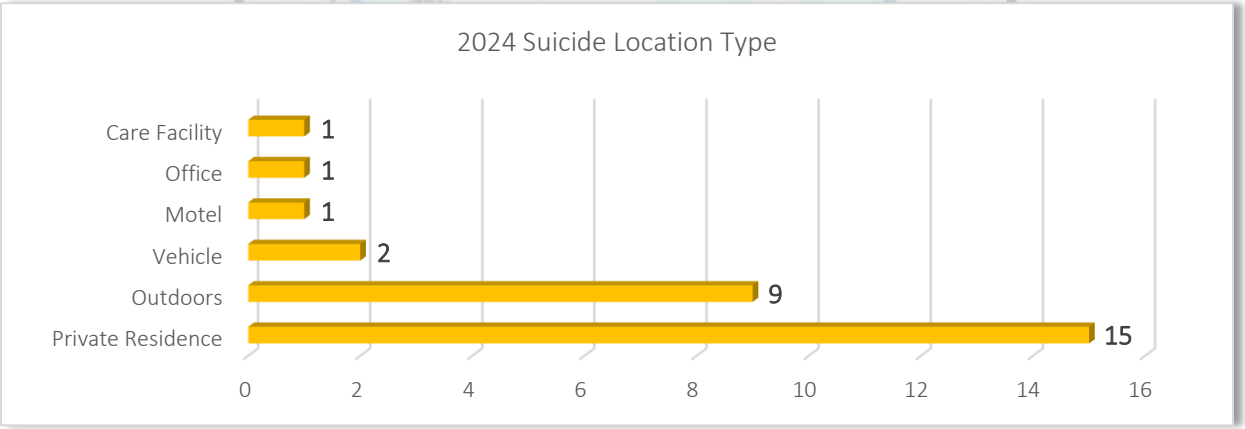


Figure 33. 2024 Suicides by Location Type.

Individuals who committed suicide were between the ages of 15 and 95 years. The primary age group was 65+ (10/30, 33%) followed by age group 46-64 (8/30, 26%) and then 26-45 (6/30, 20%). 73% of suicides in 2024 involved males (22/30). 67% of suicides did not leave a note of intent. The primary reason for suicide was relationship-related (9/30, 30%) with medical/poor health being second (8/30, 26%). Mental health (4), Financial (3), and Addiction (1) were among other reasons. 40% (12/30) of suicide deaths had a history of mental health disorder and 43% (13/30) had a history of substance use. Sadly, 30% of suicides (9/30) had a family history of suicide. In 33% (10/30) of suicide deaths, there was a history of suicide ideations and 40% (12/30) had a history of suicide attempts.

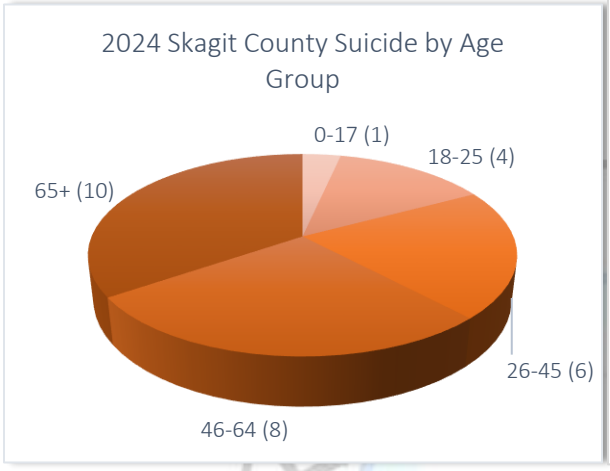


Figure 34. 2024 Suicide by Age Group

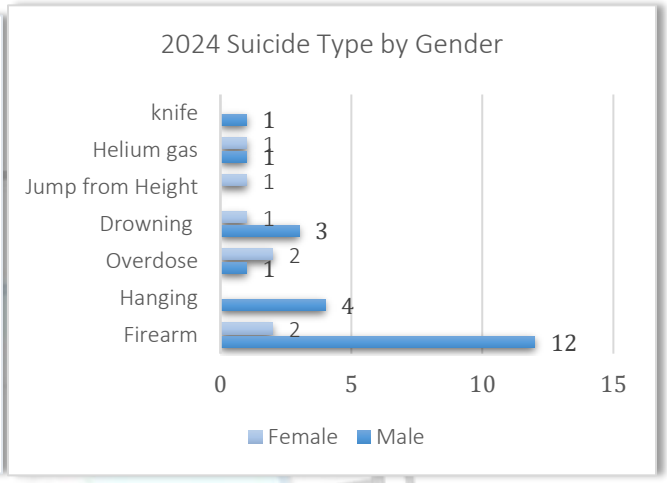


Figure 35. 2024 Suicide Type by Gender

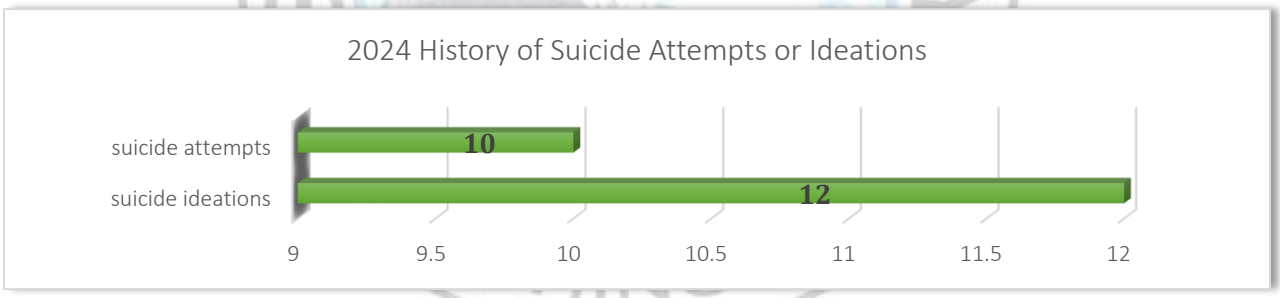


Figure 36. 2024 History of Suicide Attempts or Ideations

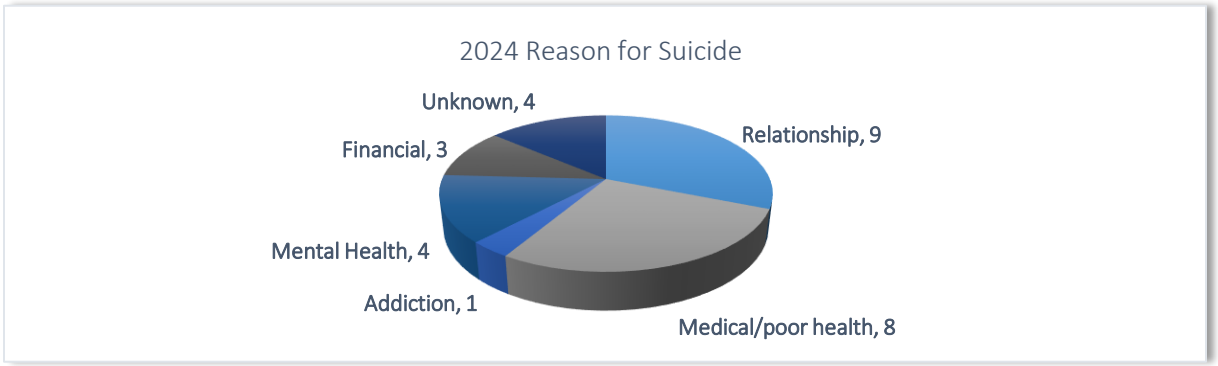


Figure 37. 2024 Reason for Suicide.

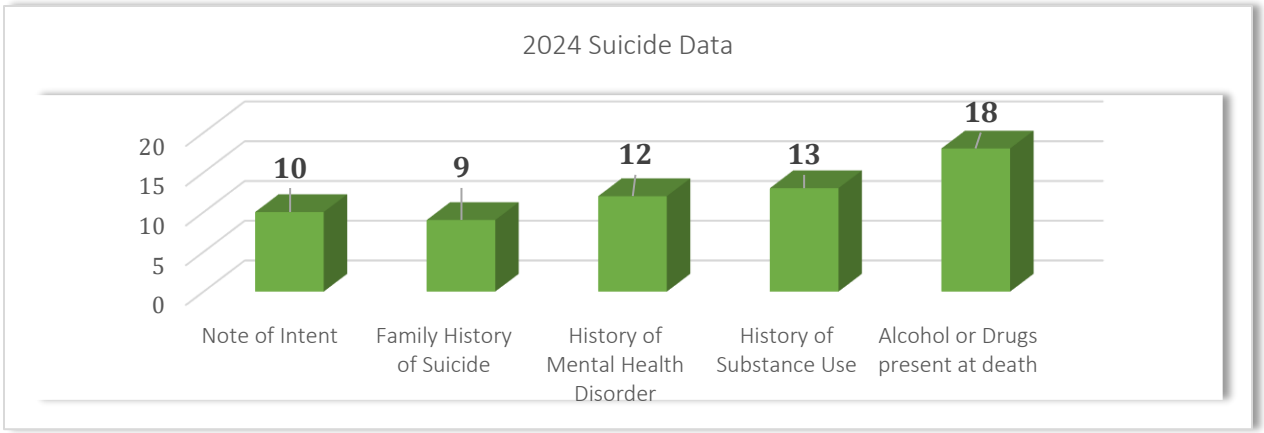


Figure 38. 2024 Suicide Data.

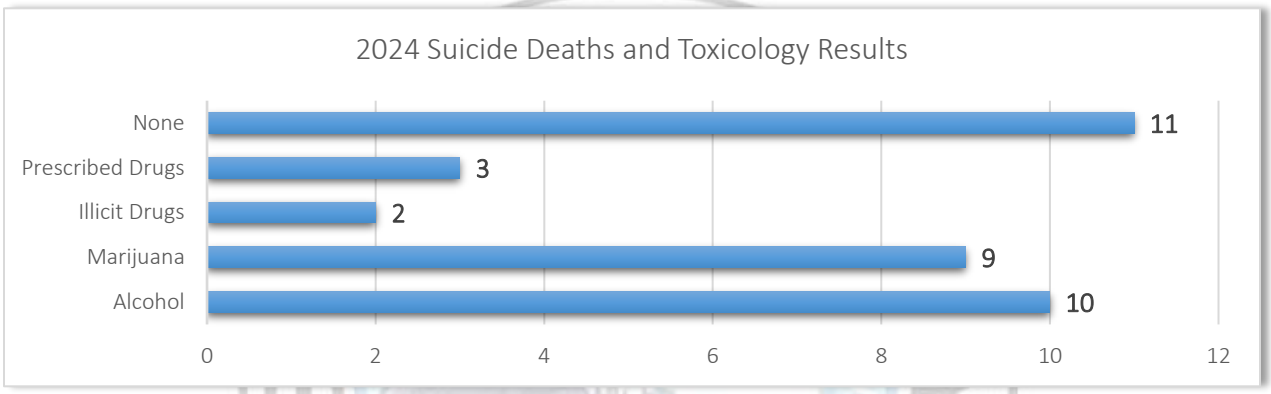


Figure 39. 2024 Suicide deaths and toxicology results.

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 investigated 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 2024, the coroner's office classified 7 deaths as homicide, which accounts for 1.7% of the total coroner jurisdiction cases. The method of homicide included (5) firearm, (1) asphyxia, and (1) sharp instrument. The age range for homicides in 2024 was 18-61 years of age. Homicides involved (4) females and (3) males.

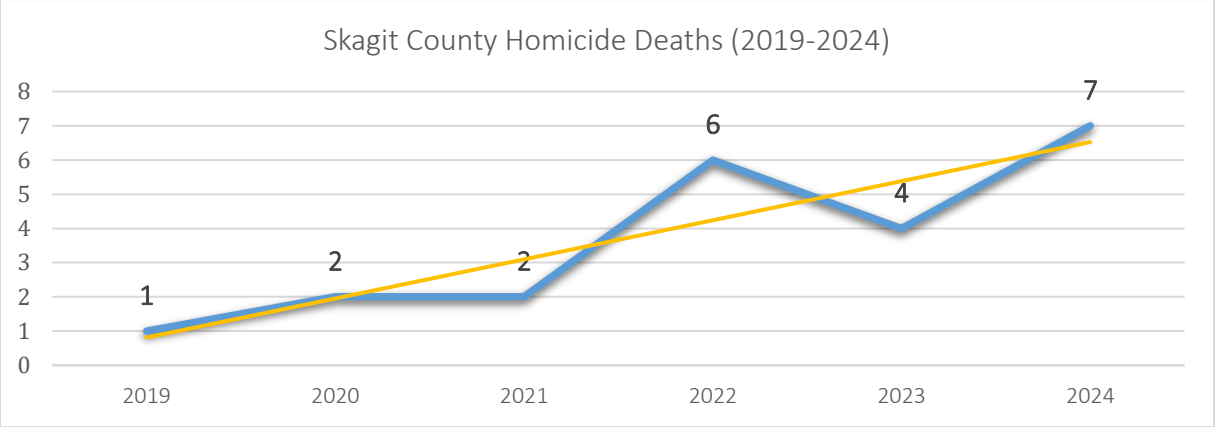


Figure 40. 2019-2024 Skagit County Homicide Cases (yellow line illustrates the increase in homicide cases).

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 other 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 2024, the Skagit County Coroner's Office certified 2 deaths as undetermined, which accounted for only 0.4% (2/401) of coroner involved cases. In one of the cases, the decedent was a pedestrian struck by a motor vehicle while in the roadway for unclear reasons. The other case was a residential fire in which the circumstances were unclear.

Cornea and Tissue Donation

The Skagit County Coroner's Office supports 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 of 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 late 2023, the coroner's office successfully signed contracts with Lion's World Vision Institute and LifeNet Health to allow procurement of corneas and/or tissue at the coroner's office.

Cornea Donation

In 2024, 37% (171/453) of reported deaths were referred from the coroner's office. As a result of having predominantly full-time staff handling cases, the total number of referrals increased significantly from 2022 (See Figure 41). Of the 171 cases referred in 2024, 50 were potential donors and 26 of those became cornea donors. As a result, a total of 39 corneas were transplanted in 2024.

Tissue Donation

In 2024, 32% (149/453) of reported deaths were referred for tissue donation from the coroner's office. Of these 149 referrals, 40 cases had potential for tissue donation and 12 became tissue donors. As seen in Figure 42, the total number of tissue donors doubled from 2023 in which there were only 6 donors.

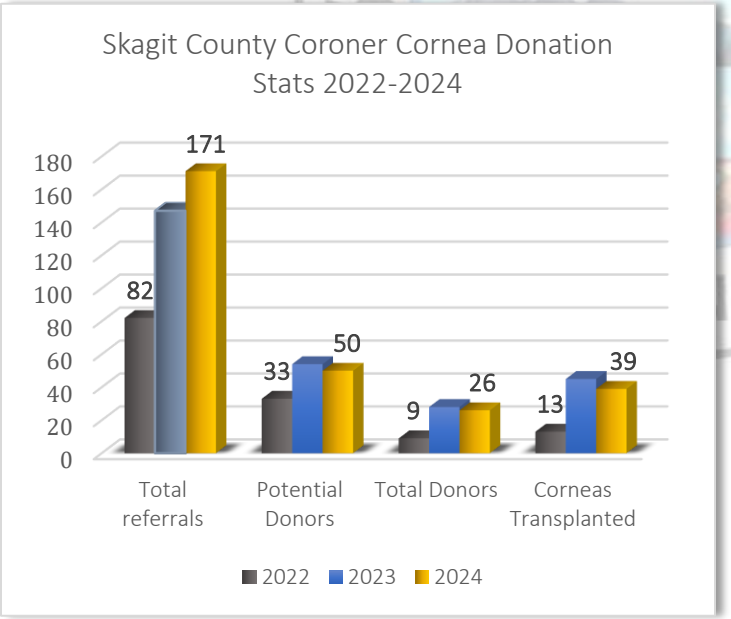


Figure 41: 2022-2024 Cornea Donation

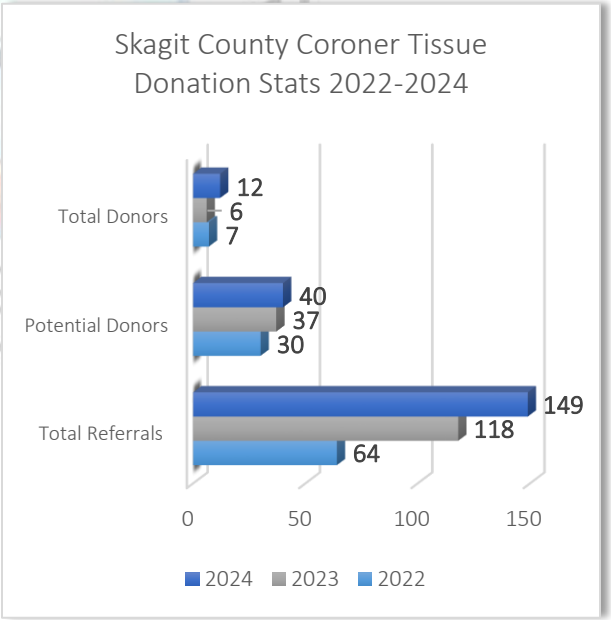


Figure 42: 2022-2024 Tissue Donation

Indigent or Unclaimed

In 2024, 2.6% (12/454) of the reported deaths to the coroner's office were deemed indigent or the next of kin declined responsibility for claiming the decedent. Thanks to dedicated staff devoting time to searching all leads for next of kin, 4 of the 12 cases were claimed by family or friends. Refer to Figure 43 for the yearly total of unclaimed cases from 2019-2024.

In the fall of 2019, the coroner's office held its first memorial ceremony for Skagit County honoring indigent and unclaimed cremains. A total of 25 cremains were put to rest in the Mount Vernon Cemetery Mausoleum. Unfortunately, planning of a second ceremony was delayed due to Covid and other unforeseen events. As a result, the Skagit County Coroner's Office currently has close to 50 cremains that are considered indigent or unclaimed. A second memorial ceremony honoring these indigent and unclaimed cremains is now officially planned for May 2, 2025 at the Mount Vernon Cemetery. This ceremony will be open to the public to attend and will continue to occur every 2 years moving forward.

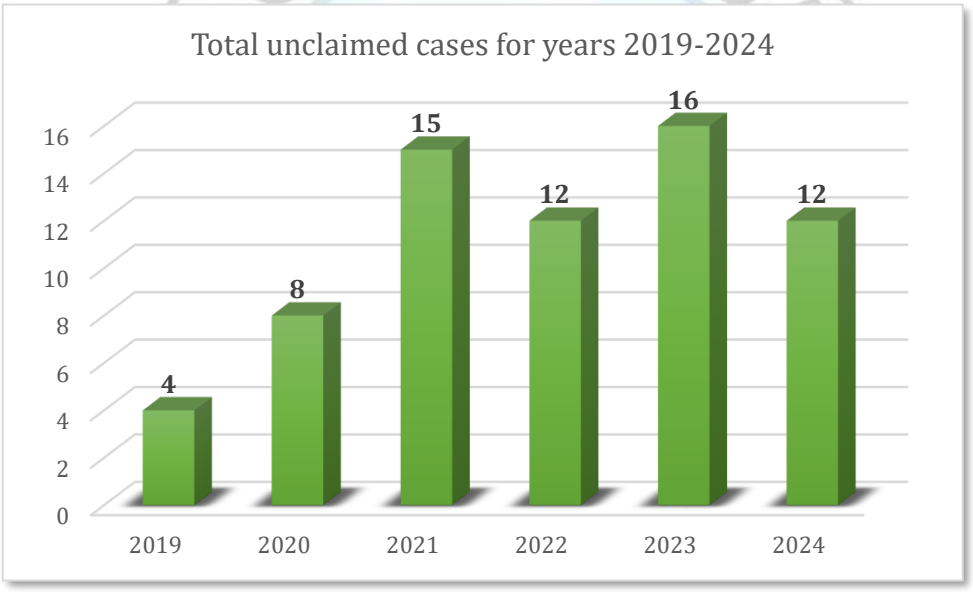


Figure 43: 2019-2024 Unclaimed Cases