

BEXAR COUNTY

MEDICAL EXAMINER'S OFFICE

2019 ANNUAL REPORT



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CHIEF MEDICAL EXAMINER

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Accredited by:
The National Association of Medical Examiners,
The American Board of Forensic Toxicology and
The American Council for Graduate Medical Education



The Bexar County Medical Examiner's Office is tasked with investigating deaths in Bexar County and is composed of the following sections: Administration, Medical Examiner, Morgue/Autopsy, Investigations, Office Services, and Toxicology.

VISION STATEMENT

The Bexar County Medical Examiner's Office is committed to the accurate determination of cause and manner of death in cases falling under the jurisdiction of the office. As an impartial, independent agency, the Medical Examiner strives to serve the public, medical professionals and justice system of our community by providing objective, valid and unbiased medical opinions on cause and manner of death. To this end, we insist on nothing less than excellence in practice, scrupulous integrity, and continuous quality improvement efforts.

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Medical Examiner's Office is to provide the citizens of Bexar County with accurate medical and scientific determinations of the cause and manner of death of those individuals dying as a result of violence, intoxication, sudden and unexpected natural disease, or unknown causes in Bexar County.

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INTRODUCTION:

The Bexar County Medical Examiner's Office (BCMEO) provides medicolegal death investigation for Bexar County, Texas as well as several surrounding counties. The office is accredited by the National Association of Medical Examiners; the Toxicology Laboratory is accredited by the American Board of Forensic Toxicologists (ABFT); and the Forensic Pathology Fellowship program is accredited by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME).

NAME ACCREDITATION:



The National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME) is the national professional organization of physician medical examiners, medicolegal death investigators and death investigation system administrators who perform the official duties of the medicolegal investigation of deaths of public interest in the United States. NAME was founded in 1966 with the dual purposes of fostering the professional growth of physician death investigators and disseminating the professional and technical information vital to the continuing improvement of the medical investigation of violent, suspicious and unusual deaths. Accreditation by NAME is an honor and significant achievement for an office. It signifies to the public that the office is performing at a high level of competence and public service. The Bexar County Medical Examiner's Office originally obtained accreditation in 1998 and remains accredited today.

ABFT ACCREDITATION:



Laboratories eligible to apply for American Board of Forensic Toxicology (ABFT) Accreditation are those performing postmortem toxicology or human performance toxicology, including at least the detection, identification, and quantitation of alcohol and other drugs in biological specimens such as whole blood, urine, and other tissues. Other areas of toxicology are not included (e.g., clinical toxicology, forensic urine drug testing, methadone maintenance testing). The BCMEO Toxicology Lab has been accredited since 1999 and is one of only approximately 40 institutions in the United States and Canada accredited by the American Board of Forensic Toxicology.

ACGME ACCREDITATION:



Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) is a private, non-profit organization that reviews and accredits graduate medical education (residency and fellowship) programs, and the institutions that sponsor them, in the United States. The mission of the ACGME is to improve health care and population health by assessing and advancing the quality of resident physicians' education through accreditation. The BCMEO is accredited for two fellowship positions in Forensic Pathology.

OFFICE HISTORY:

The Bexar County Medical Examiner's Office (BCMEO) was the first Medical Examiner's Office in the State of Texas. On May 6, 1955, the Texas Medical Examiner Act went into effect. Under the law, any Texas County with a population of more than 250,000 could change from a Justice of the Peace System for handling violent and unexpected deaths to a Medical Examiner System. Four counties fell under the provisions of this law: Bexar, Harris, Dallas and Tarrant, though none of the Counties adopted the Medical Examiner System.

On December 28, 1955, The Bexar County Commissioners' Court authorized the County Auditor to include in the 1956 Budget monies to be used to defray the salary and office expenses of the Medical Examiner. On April 2, 1956, the Commissioners' Court appointed Dr. Robert Hausman as the first Medical Examiner effective July 1, 1956. In addition, Dr. Hausman was authorized an assistant and a secretary. On July 2, 1956, Dr. Hausman received his first case, a suicide, two hours after the opening ceremony. Dr. Ruben Santos was appointed Assistant Medical Examiner in the summer of 1962. Dr. Hausman resigned October 1, 1968 and was replaced by Dr. Santos who was the Chief Medical Examiner until December 4, 1980. Dr. Vincent J.M. Di Maio was appointed Chief Medical Examiner, effective March 1, 1981 and remained in that position until his retirement December 31, 2006. He was succeeded by Dr. Randall Frost, who became Chief Medical Examiner January 1, 2007.

In 1956, Bexar County had an estimated population of 710,451. The Medical Examiner's Office consisted of 3 full time and 6 part time employees. The Medical Examiner, Dr. Robert Hausman, was a qualified Forensic Pathologist who performed both the administrative duties of the office and nearly all the medicolegal autopsies. In 1957, the cost to operate the Bexar County Medical Examiner's Office was 4.2 cents annually per capita. In the first 4 months of the office, 249 deaths (16.5% of all deaths in Bexar County) were investigated, 95 violent and 154 natural deaths, and 131 autopsies were performed. Blood alcohol samples were initially sent to Austin to the state crime lab. On May 15, 1958, the first Toxicologist was hired, with the first toxicology test performed on July 31, 1958 for arsenic. Medical Investigators employed by the Medical Examiner's Office did not begin to go to death scenes until January of 1982.

In 1969, the office was located in the Robert B. Green Hospital. It remained there until October 1978 when the BCMEO moved to a 16,000 sq. ft. building at 600 North Leona. In June 1993, the BCMEO moved to a 52,000 sq. ft. facility on the campus of the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio which it shares with the Bexar County Criminal Investigation Laboratory and where it still resides today. In 2018, the facility was renamed to the Vincent J.M. Di Maio Forensic Science Center.

Today, the Bexar County Medical Examiner's Office continues to expand to keep pace with a rapidly growing San Antonio metropolitan area. The goal of the office is to continue to provide the finest in forensic pathology and death investigation services to its citizens, while maximizing efficiency in the expenditures of taxpayer dollars. The office was initially accredited by the National Association of Medical Examiners in 1998, and has remained so without interruption. The office operates a fully accredited training program (fellowship) in Forensic Pathology, and provides pathology resident and medical student teaching services for the adjacent University of Texas Health Sciences Center School of Medicine and for the local military pathology training program. The Toxicology Section of the BCMEO is one of only approximately 40 institutions in the United States and Canada accredited by the American Board of Forensic Toxicology.

In addition to having jurisdiction over deaths occurring within Bexar County, the Bexar County Medical Examiner's Office also provides forensic autopsy services for many of the smaller, predominately rural counties, in the surrounding area of South and Central Texas. In such cases, jurisdiction over the case investigation is retained by the Justice of the Peace in the County of origin, but the BCMEO will provide autopsy services and professional consultation on a fee-for-service basis.

All staff Medical Examiners are required to be board certified in Anatomic and Forensic Pathology by the American Board of Pathology. The Medical Investigators in the office are required to obtain certification by the American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigation during their first two years of employment. The Chief Toxicologist is required to have a doctoral level degree and many of the Toxicology Chemists have advanced degrees in their field and are certified by the American Board of Forensic Toxicology.

Along with delivering excellent, state of the art death investigation services for the citizens of Bexar County, the office strives to provide outreach and training to the local medical community, civic groups, and law enforcement and judicial officials from Bexar and surrounding counties. To that end, Medical Examiners give frequent presentations on topics of forensic pathology to a variety of local groups. Our staff members also support local interdisciplinary organizations such as Child Fatality Review Teams on a regular basis. The training of young physicians in the field of forensic pathology is an ongoing priority of the office, and medical students, pathology and pediatric residents, and forensic pathology fellows train in the facility.

REPORTABLE DEATHS:

The Bexar County Medical Examiner's Office investigates the deaths of all individuals in Bexar County who die violently or suddenly and unexpectedly, in order to determine the cause and manner of death. Pursuant to Texas Code of Criminal Procedures Chapter 49, the following deaths must be reported to the Medical Examiner's Office:

- When a person dies within twenty-four hours after admission to a hospital or institution or in prison or in jail;
- When a person is killed or dies an unnatural death;
- When a person is found, the cause or circumstances of death are unknown;
- When the circumstances of the death of any person are such as to lead to suspicion that s/he came to his/her death by unlawful means;
- When any person commits suicide, or the circumstances of his/her death are such as to lead to suspicion that s/he committed suicide;
- When a person dies not under the care of a licensed physician in Texas; or
- When the person is a child who is younger than six years of age and the death is reported under Chapter 264, Family Code;

The Investigation Section of the Office conducts scene investigations and interview witnesses to the deaths, attending physicians, relatives and police. Based on the information gathered, a decision is made as to whether the case falls within the Medical Examiner jurisdiction and requires an examination. The Medical Examiners will then determine what type of examination is appropriate (i.e., full or limited autopsy, or external examination) and conduct the examination.

If the case falls within these guidelines, the decedent will be transported to the BCMEO for examination by a contract body transport company. In certain cases, a Medical Investigator may attend the death scene. Our Investigation Staff are available 24 hours/day, 365 days/year, and Medical Examiners are always on call for consultation or other matters.

BCMEO 2019 STAFF*

Chief Medical Examiner	Randall Frost, MD
Deputy Chief Medical Examiner	D. Kimberley Molina, MD
Fiscal and Administrative Services Manager	Steven Nicholson, MHA
Administrative Assistant	Elizabeth Leos
Deputy Medical Examiners	Jennifer Rulon, MD; Rajesh Kannan, MD; James Feig, MD; William McClain, MD; Samantha Evans, MD
Assistant Medical Examiners	Randall C. Bissessar, MD
Chief Toxicologist	Veronica Hargrove, PhD
Senior Toxicology Chemists	Mackenzie Dunn, MS and Barbara Garcia, MS
Toxicology Chemists	Jessica Gutierrez, MS; Sarah Limfueco; Christina Ornelas, MS; Laurel Porter, MS; Marie Renteria; Mariela Torres
Toxicology Technician	Chantel Rodriguez
Chief Medical Investigator	Jimmy Holguin
Senior Medical Investigators	James Akers; Nicole Healy; Jerry Leyva
Medical Investigators	Suzanne Casas, MS; Katelyn Flowers; Erin Fraga; Kimberly Freveletti; Kimberly Petter; Ali Ramirez; Douglas Ryan, MS; Meghan Ryan; Manuel Sanchez; Nathan Speer; Misty Torres, MS; Justin Trevino;
Investigative Office Assistant	Bridget Garza
Morgue Supervisor	Kelley Beyer
Senior Morgue Specialist	Michael Hernandez
Morgue Specialists	Alyssa Biediger; Dorothy Hunter; Kristian Jacobs- Ramos; Bradley Knapp; Angela Merz; Adriana Perry; Mark Rodriguez; Sol Roeun, MS; Ryan Yates
Records Analyst	Valerie Castellano
Lead Forensic Transcriber	Jennifer Flores
Forensic Transcribers	Rachael Clemons; Denise Martin; Jennifer Townsend
Office Assistants	Matilda Benavidez; Bernard Garcia; Jerry Morales

*Staff roster as of 31 December 2019

GENERAL STATISTICS

2019

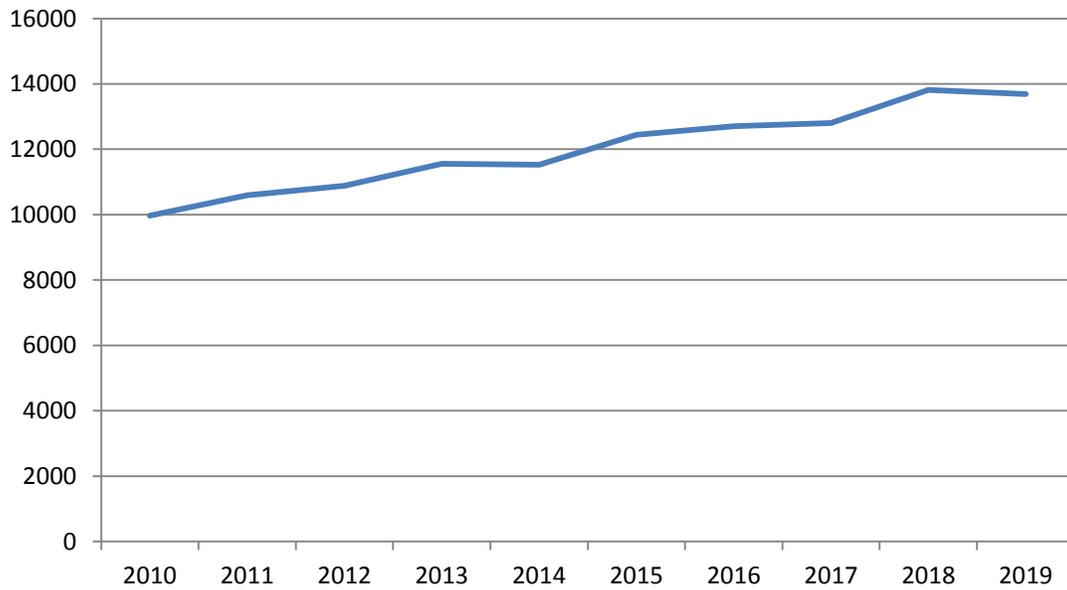
Total Number of Deaths in Bexar County (obtained from Texas Department of State Health Services)	15655
Total Number of Cases Investigated	13688
Cases Accepted	2959
Scene Investigations	1220
Bexar County Jurisdictional Cases	
Death Certificates Only	52
Autopsies (hospital autopsies retained under ME jurisdiction)	0
Examinations	2907
Autopsies	1735
Complete Autopsies	1644
Partial Autopsies	91
Inspections	1172
¹ Out of County Examinations	103
Autopsies	100
Complete Autopsies	100
Partial Autopsies	0
Inspections	3
Total Examinations	3010
Autopsies	1835
Complete Autopsies	1744
Partial Autopsies	91
Inspections	1175
Percentage of ME Cases with Toxicology Testing	78.3%
Unidentified Bodies (after case completion)	5
Exhumations	0
Bodies Transported (Contract Service)	3014
County Burials	94
Organ and Tissue Donations*	
Organ (Texas Organ Sharing Alliance)	65
Corneal (San Antonio Eye Bank)	263
Tissue (GenCure)	181

¹Out of County cases are reported on this page for the purpose of performance indicators. For County statistical purposes, only Bexar County cases will be reported for the remainder of the annual report.

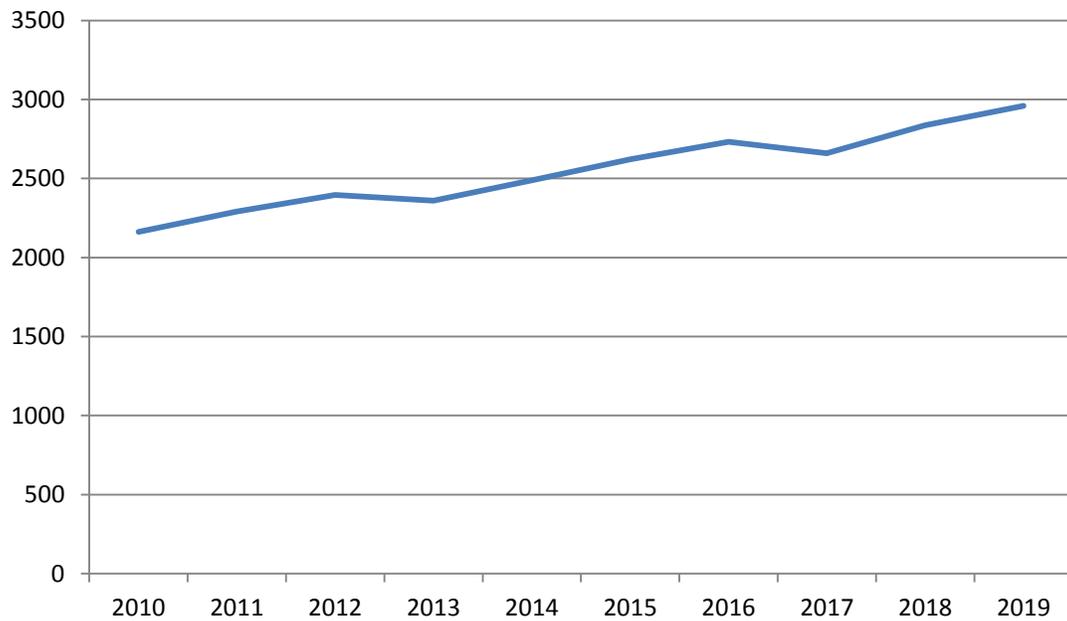
*Organ and tissue donation only approved by BCMEO after next of kin consent has been obtained; the data obtained was provided by the agencies listed in parentheses)

REPORTABLE DEATHS

**DEATHS REPORTED
2010-2019**

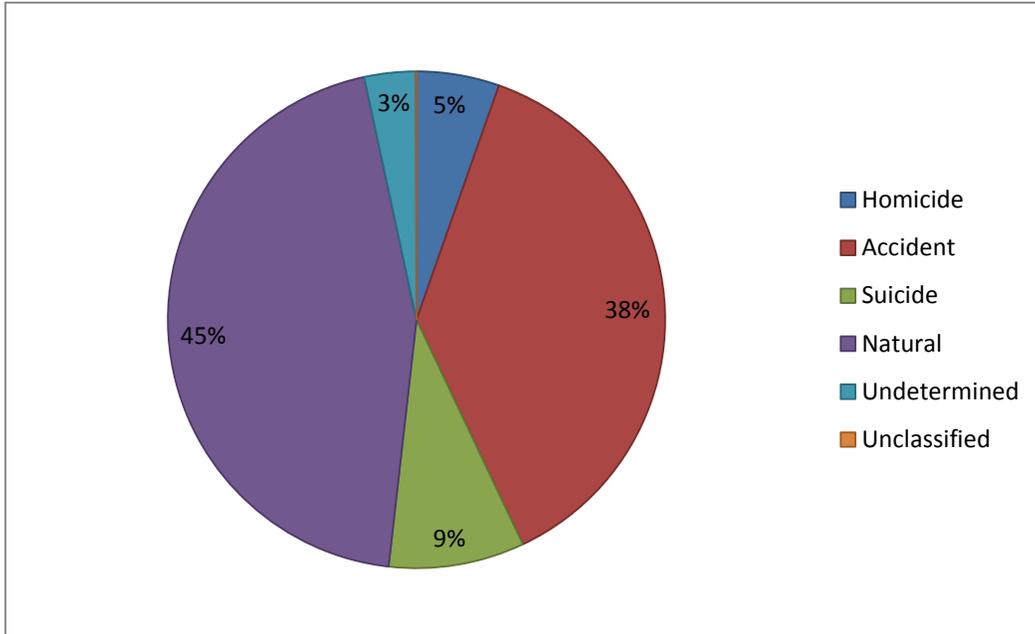


**BEXAR COUNTY DEATHS WHERE JURISDICTION WAS ACCEPTED
2010-2019**

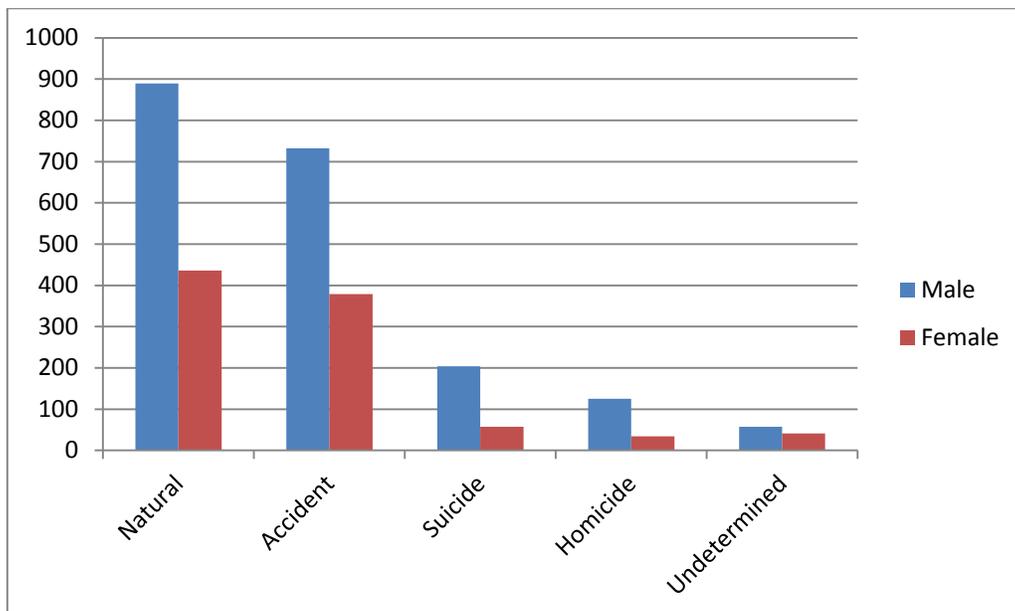


MANNER OF DEATH

MANNER OF DEATH BY METHOD



MANNER OF DEATH BY SEX



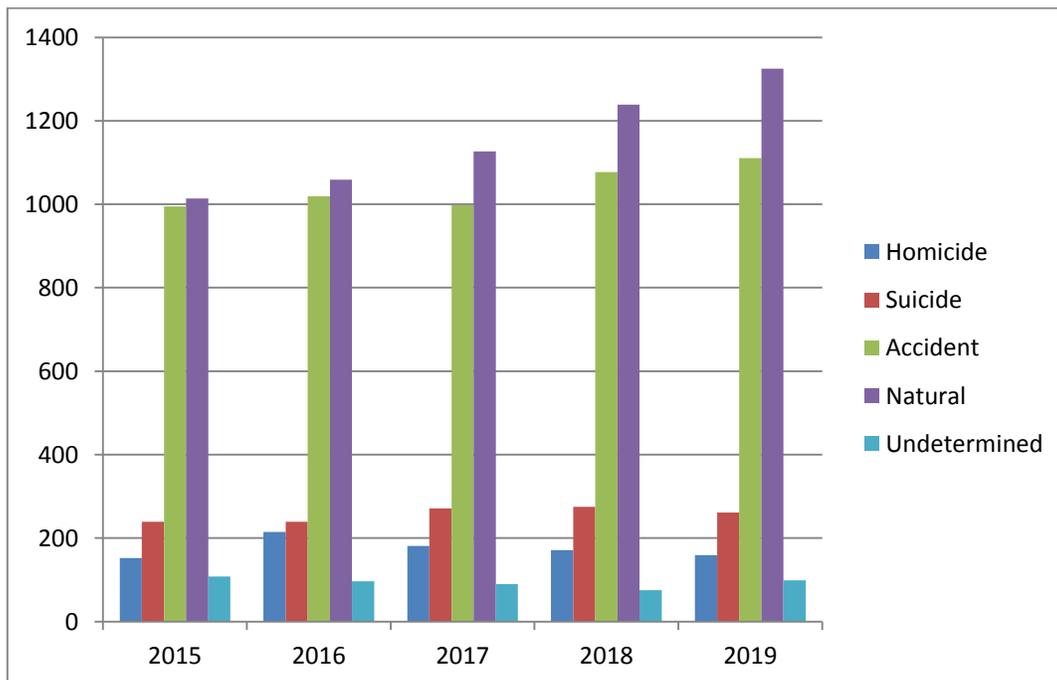
AUTOPSIES BY MANNER OF DEATH

<u>Manner</u>	<u>Total Cases</u>	<u>Number Autopsied*</u>	<u>Percent Autopsied</u>
Homicide	159	158	99%
Suicide	261	257	98%
Accident	1111	573	52%
Natural	1325	645	49%
Undetermined	99	98	99%
No manner listed [‡]	1	1	100%
Total			

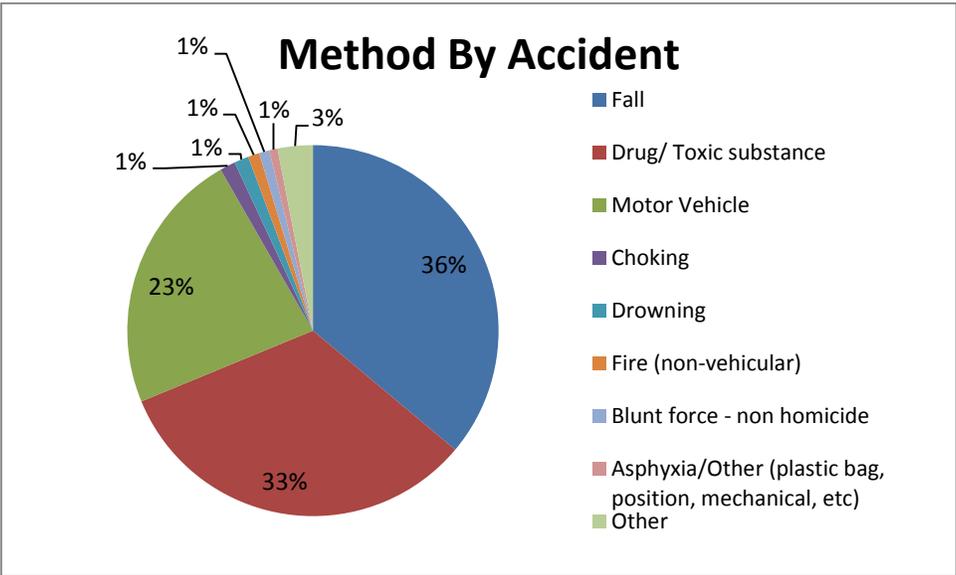
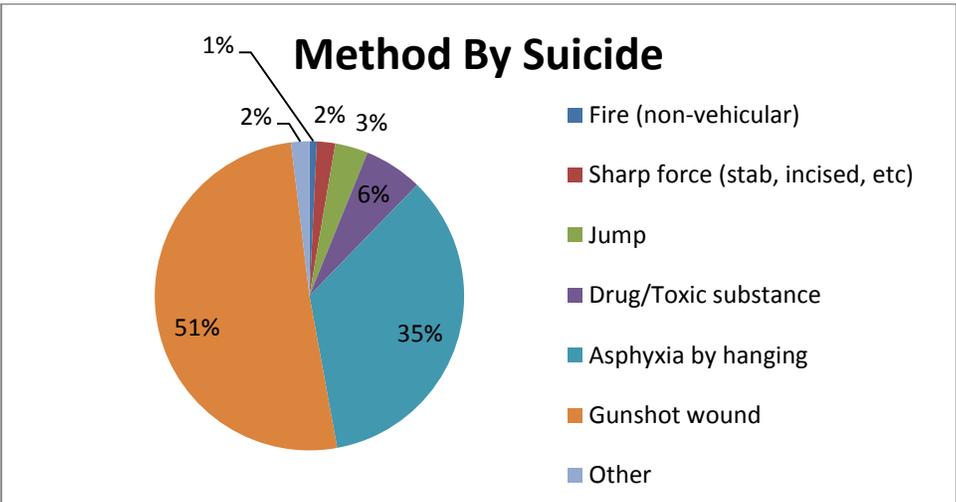
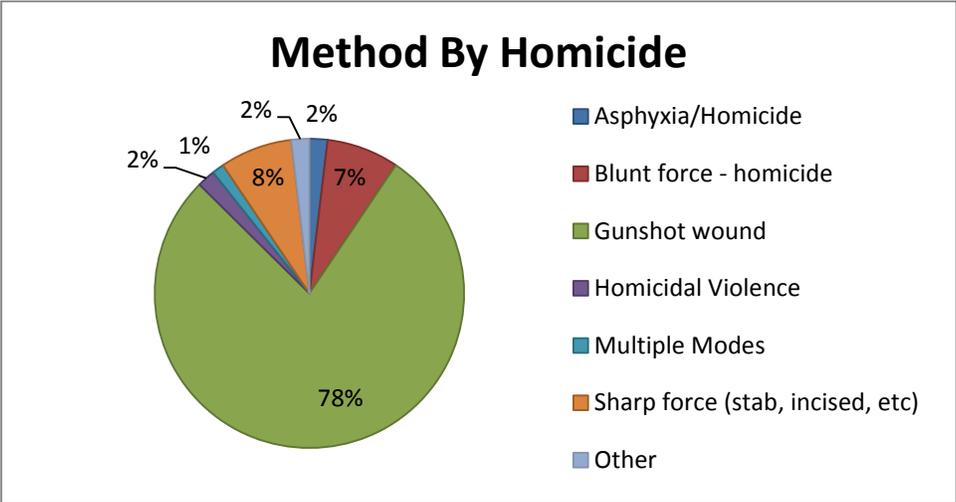
*Includes complete and partial autopsies

[‡]Includes fetal deaths and/ or isolated single human appendicular bones

MANNER OF DEATH OVER THE LAST 5 YEARS



METHOD OF DEATH BY MANNER

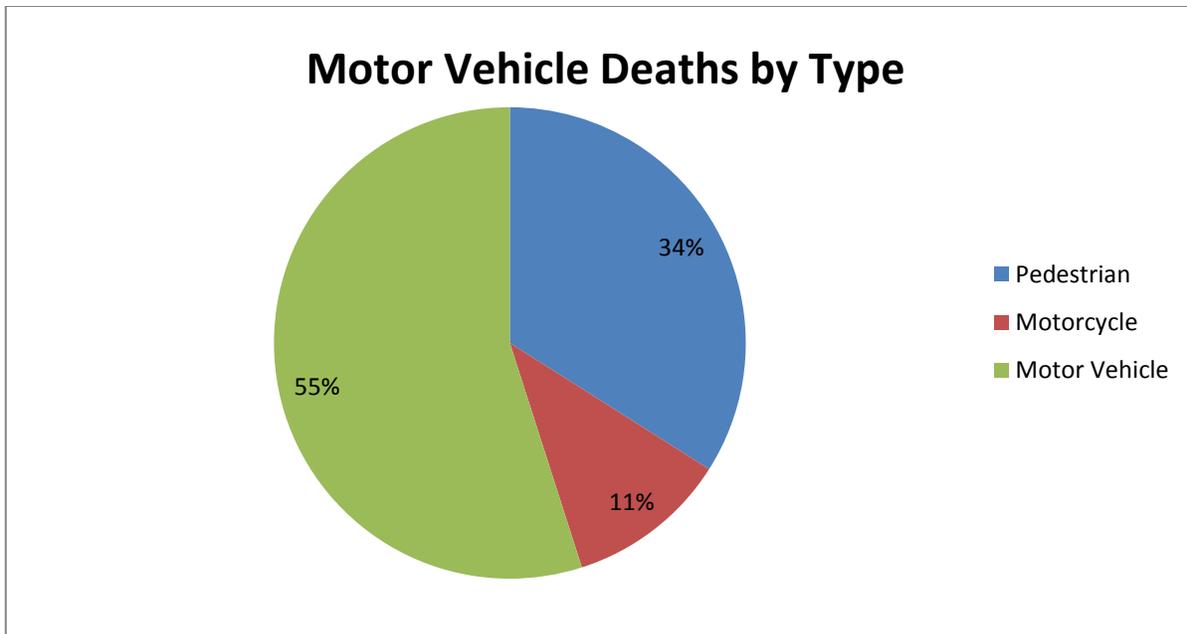


*Includes pedestrian incidents

MOTOR VEHICLE DEATHS

MOTOR VEHICLE DEATH AUTOPSIES

	Total	% Autopsied
MVA Accident	253	72%
Non-MVA Accident	858	46%
Total Accidents	1111	52%



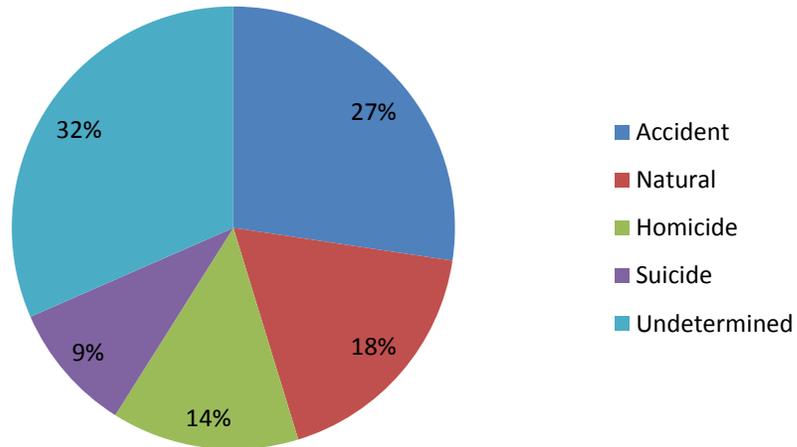
MOTOR VEHICLE DEATHS WITH DRUGS AND ALCOHOL PRESENT

<u>Substance Detected</u>	<u>Percentage of MVA Deaths</u>
Ethanol (> 0.08 g/dL)	36%
Drugs**	24%
No drugs** or ethanol detected	44%

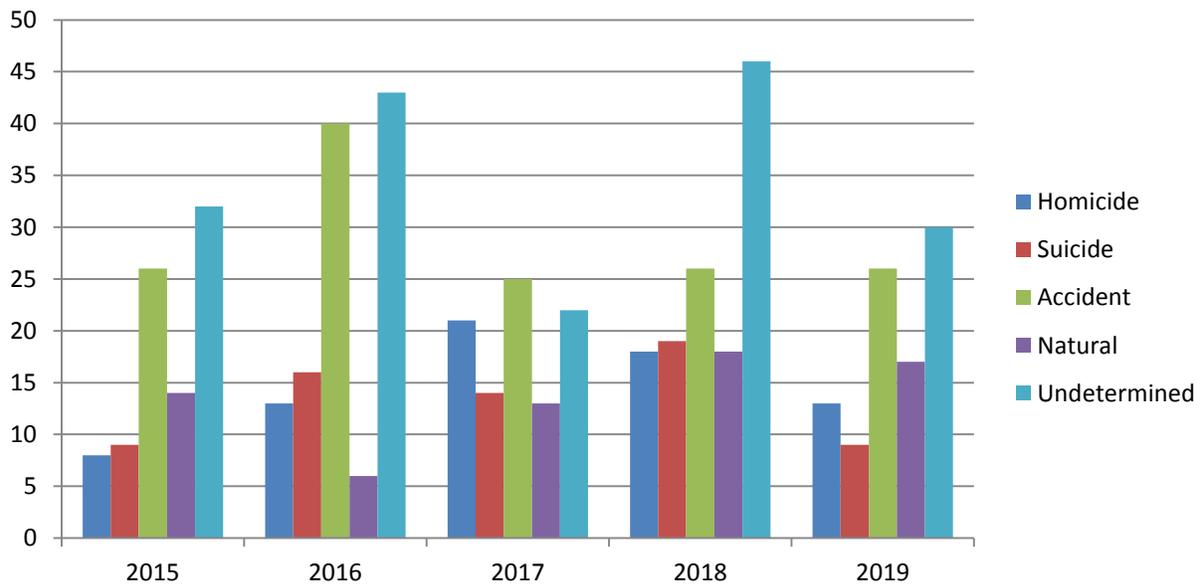
*Includes only those deaths where the motor vehicle incident also occurred in Bexar County
 **Drug data includes ONLY: methamphetamine, cocaine and metabolite, morphine, hydrocodone and alprazolam
 ***Totals do not equal 100 because some cases had both drugs and alcohol present

PEDIATRIC DEATHS

MANNER OF DEATH AGE < 18 YRS

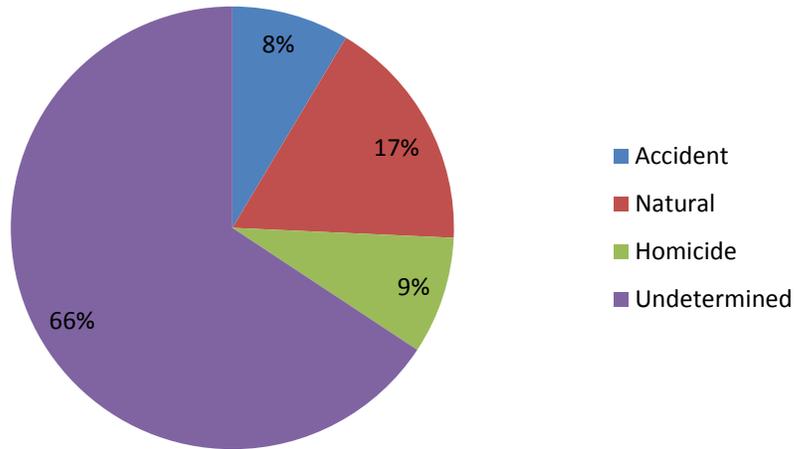


MANNER OF DEATH AGE < 18 YRS OVER THE LAST 5 YEARS

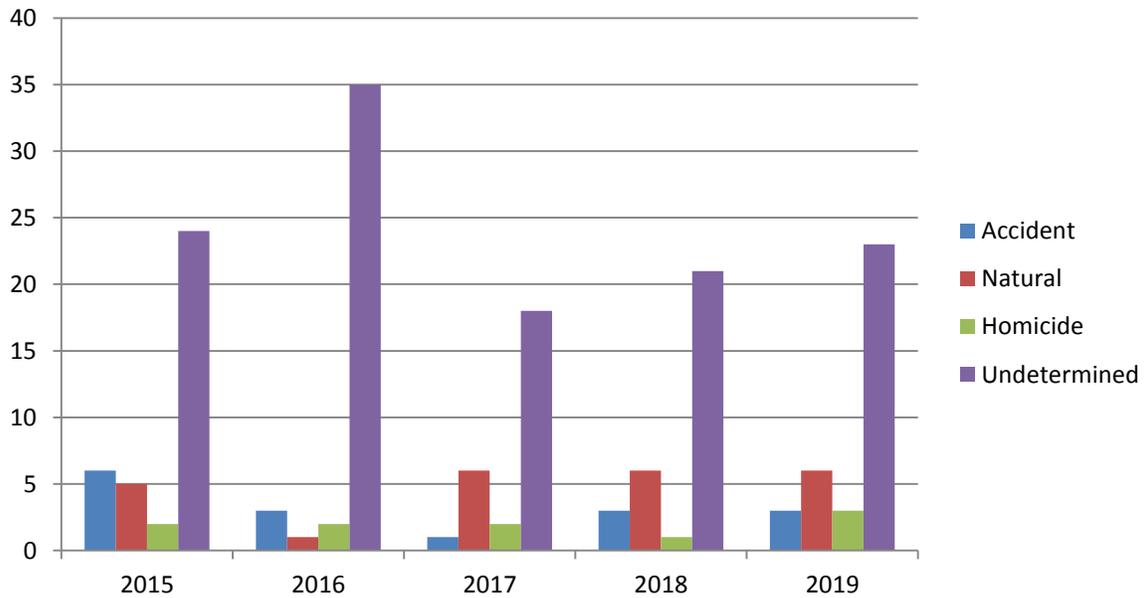


INFANT DEATHS (< 1 yr)

MANNER OF DEATH AGE < 1 YR

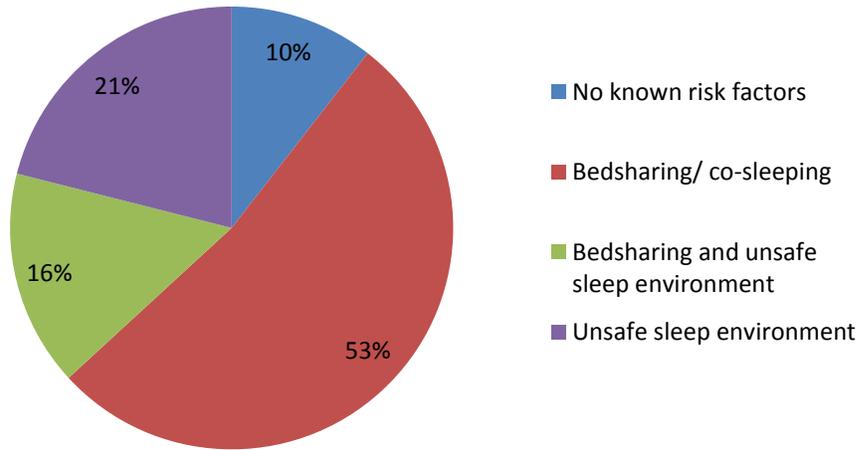


MANNER OF DEATH AGE < 1 YR OVER THE LAST 5 YEARS

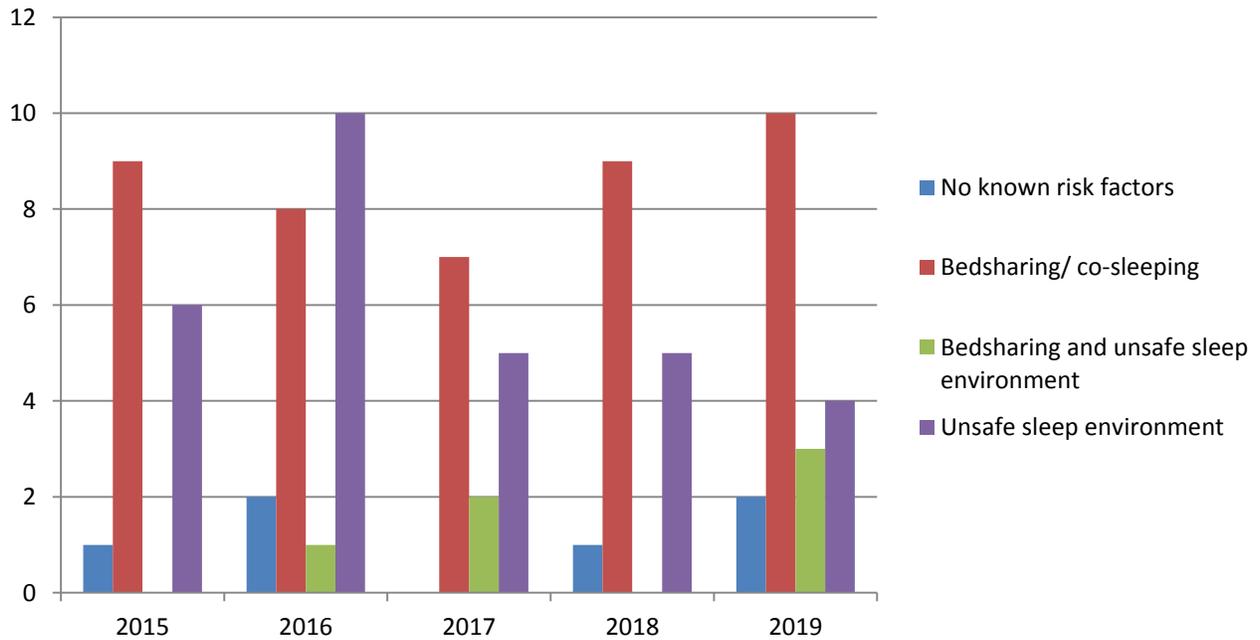


SUDDEN UNEXPLAINED INFANT DEATHS

SUDDEN UNEXPLAINED DEATHS IN INFANCY BY RISK FACTORS

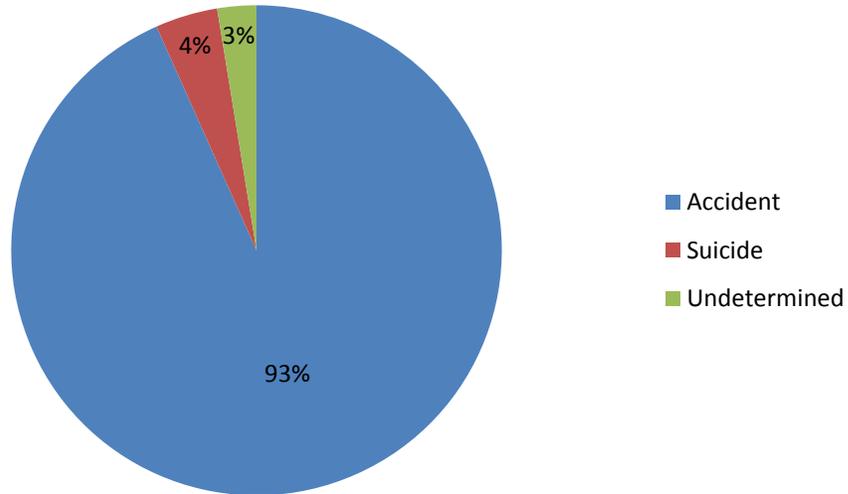


RISK FACTORS FOR SUDDEN UNEXPLAINED INFANT DEATHS 2015-2019

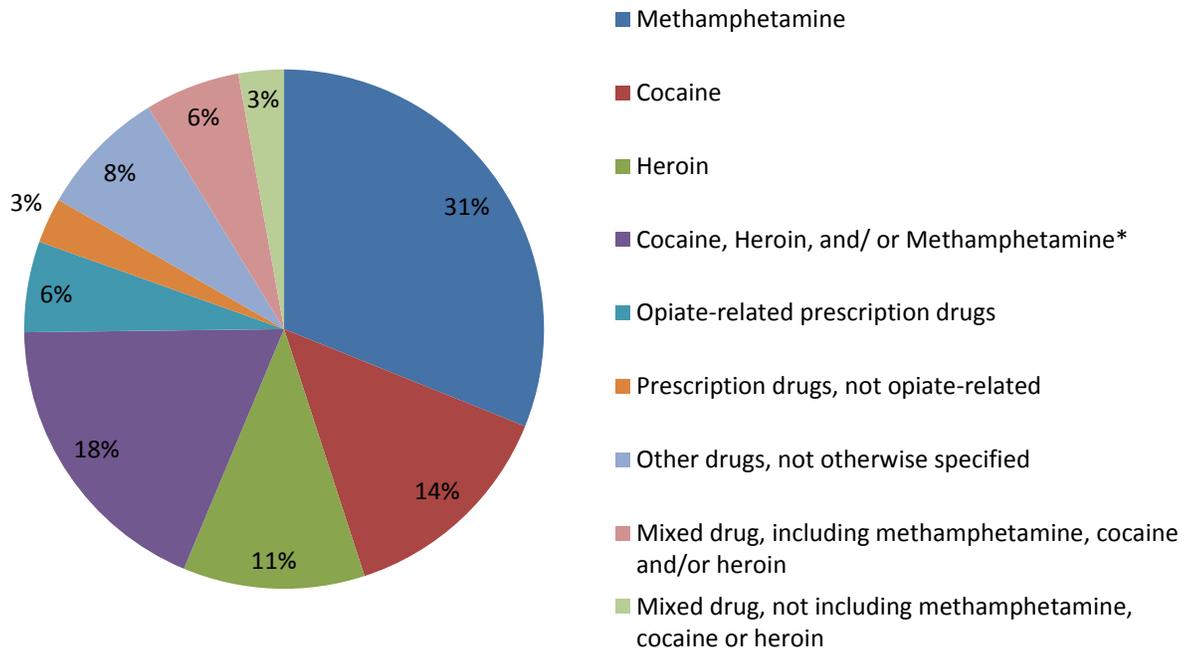


OVERDOSE DEATHS

BY MANNER OF DEATH



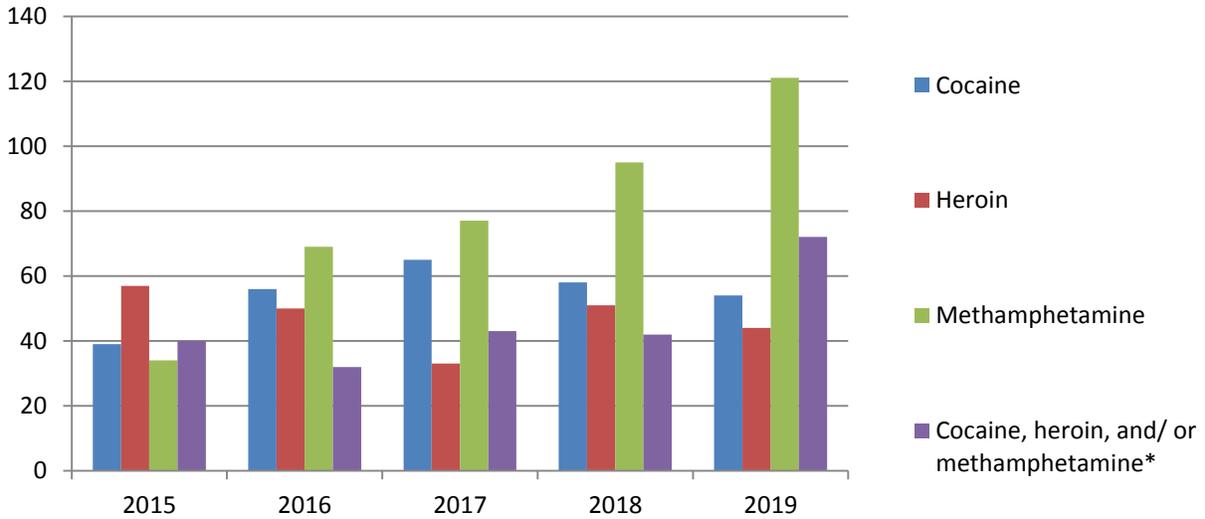
BY TYPE OF DRUG PRESENT



*Includes any combination of these three drugs including: cocaine and heroin; cocaine and methamphetamine; heroin and methamphetamine; and cocaine, heroin and methamphetamine

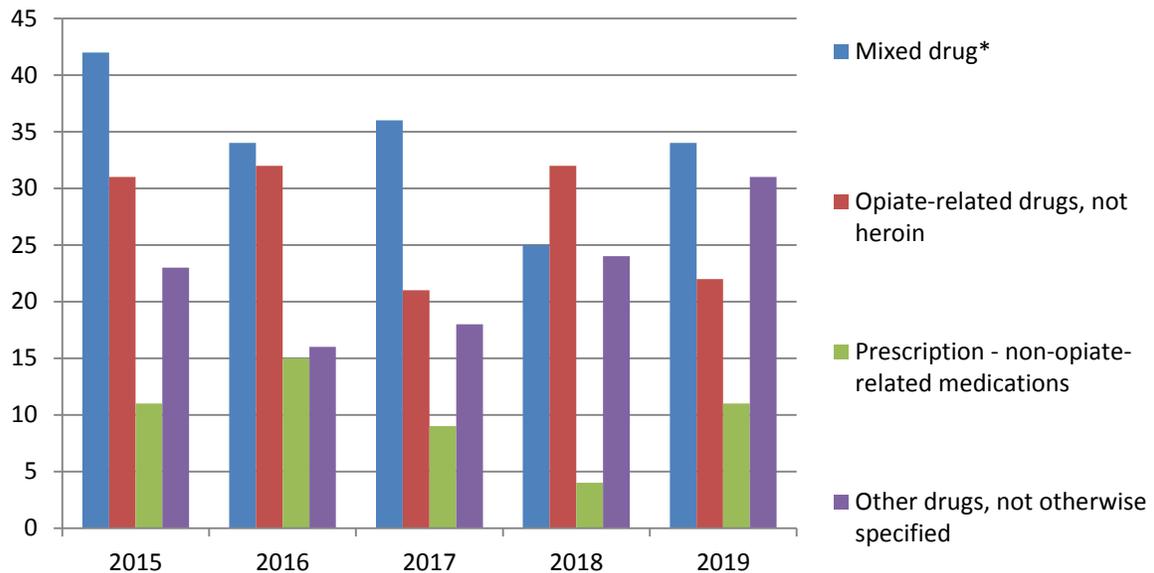
OVERDOSE DEATHS 2015-2019

KNOWN ILLICIT DRUGS



*Includes any combination of these three drugs including: cocaine and heroin; cocaine and methamphetamine; heroin and methamphetamine; and cocaine, heroin and methamphetamine

OTHER DRUG TYPES OR COMBINATIONS



*Mixed drug cases may include illicit, opiate-related, prescription, over-the-counter and/ or any other drug(s) combination