



ANNUAL REPORT 2025

Delaware County Office of the Medical Examiner

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Executive Summary

In 2025, the Delaware County Office of the Medical Examiner (DCOME) continued strengthening its role as a regional leader in medicolegal death investigation, serving the residents of Delaware County. The year focused on reinforcing operational stability, advancing professional standards, and expanding the office's ability to support public health, public safety, and the justice system. Through continued investment in personnel development, improved operational coordination, and expanded partnerships, the agency maintained its commitment to delivering thorough, timely, and compassionate medicolegal death investigations.

Throughout the year, DCOME sustained strong performance across investigative, forensic, and administrative functions. Under the leadership of Chief Medical Examiner Dr. Albert Chu and Chief of Forensic Investigations Amber Cheety, the office continued refining internal procedures, strengthening investigative capabilities, and reinforcing quality assurance practices across the organization. Dr. Chu's leadership within the pathology division helped maintain efficient morgue operations and rigorous case review processes, while Ms. Cheety continued to advance investigator training, professional certification efforts, and specialized investigative review initiatives.

Key Accomplishments:

- **Professional Development & Certification:** The office continued to advance professional certification among its investigative staff. In 2025, six of the office's seven forensic investigators are now board-certified through the American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators (ABMDI), up from four investigators the previous year. This continued progress reflects the agency's commitment to professional excellence and nationally recognized standards in medicolegal death investigation and supports the office's ongoing efforts toward accreditation by the National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME). Internal professional development efforts also continued through structured peer case review, investigator training, wellness initiatives, and staff-led committees focused on training, outreach, and operational improvement.
- **Psychological Autopsy Initiative:** Building upon the Psychological Autopsy Initiative launched in 2024, the Delaware County Office of the Medical Examiner continued advancing this work in 2025 through the development of the Behavioral Mortality Intelligence Platform (BMIP). The initiative reconstructs the life circumstances, behavioral indicators, and environmental factors surrounding suicide deaths through structured case analysis, family interviews, and collaboration with public health and community partners. In 2025, efforts focused on organizing these findings into a structured data framework that will allow the office to identify patterns, risk indicators, and emerging trends across cases. The

development of the BMIP represents a forward-looking approach to medicolegal death investigation by transforming individual case insights into actionable intelligence that can inform prevention strategies, guide public health interventions, and support policy development. Early work has also generated interest among academic and research partners exploring how forensic data can contribute to a deeper understanding of suicide and behavioral health risks.

- **Bereavement Counseling Services**: The Delaware County Office of the Medical Examiner continues to support families experiencing the sudden or traumatic loss of a loved one through its Bereavement Counseling Program. Led by the Chief of Forensic Psychology, the program provides structured counseling services to individuals and families following deaths investigated by the Medical Examiner.

During 2025, the program provided counseling services to 45 clients across Delaware County. Counseling engagements typically extend four to five months, with sessions occurring weekly or monthly depending on the needs of the individual or family. Over the course of the year, these engagements resulted in more than 400 counseling sessions, reflecting the depth of support provided to families coping with traumatic loss. This sustained level of care demonstrates the office's commitment to compassionate service and recognizes the profound emotional impact that sudden and unexpected deaths can have on surviving family members. Through this program, the office continues to strengthen its role not only as a medicolegal investigative agency but also as a resource for families navigating grief and loss during some of the most difficult moments of their lives.

- **Technology & Systems Integration**: The DCOME continued strengthening its digital case management and reporting systems to improve efficiency and case processing. Integration with the National Medical Services (NMS) toxicology laboratory and Pennsylvania's electronic death reporting system (eVitals) remains a critical component of the office's workflow, reducing duplicative data entry and improving turnaround times for death certifications and postmortem reporting. In response to regional healthcare changes following the closure of Crozer Health facilities, the office successfully transitioned laboratory partnerships for blood and culture testing to Main Line Health, ensuring continued access to high-quality clinical laboratory services. This transition maintained operational continuity while strengthening collaboration with regional healthcare partners that support the medicolegal death investigation process.
- **Policy, Planning & Accreditation Readiness**: The DCOME continued strengthening its operational framework through ongoing policy development, training, and preparedness planning. Building on the digital Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) and training library introduced in 2024, the office

expanded its internal training resources and reinforced policy compliance across investigative and administrative functions. The agency also continued implementation of its Mass Fatality Plan, the first comprehensive plan of its kind for the county, designed to guide coordinated response efforts during large-scale incidents. Together, these efforts support organizational risk management, legal compliance, and the office's continued progress toward accreditation by the National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME).

- **Investigative Excellence & Specialization**: The DCOME continued to strengthen specialized investigative review processes across several case categories, including child deaths, violent deaths, motor vehicle fatalities, suicides, and cold cases. These focused review teams provide an additional layer of analysis and collaboration, allowing investigators and leadership to examine complex cases from multiple perspectives. The continued use of violent death review and peer oversight structures has enhanced quality assurance, improved case consistency, and reinforced the office's commitment to thorough and professional medicolegal death investigation.
- **Workforce Stability**: The DCOME maintained a stable and fully staffed investigative team throughout 2025, continuing the progress made in recent years to strengthen workforce retention and organizational stability. This sustained staffing level has allowed the office to focus on professional development, operational consistency, and team cohesion. As a result, the culture within the organization continues to evolve into a unified, mission-driven team committed to high-quality public service. Partner agencies increasingly recognize the office as a professional, responsive, and trusted partner in the medicolegal death investigation system.
- **Fleet Modernization & Operational Readiness**: The DCOME continued strengthening its operational capabilities in 2025 through targeted investments in investigative and transportation infrastructure. Through the strategic use of Act 122 funding, the office acquired a 2025 Chevrolet Tahoe to support medicolegal field operations, administrative functions, training activities, and evidence transportation, securing this essential response vehicle without any impact to the agency's operating or capital improvement budgets. This investment strengthens operational readiness and field response capabilities while preserving county financial resources

In addition, the office ordered two 2025 Ford Transit vans to modernize the agency's decedent transportation fleet. These vehicles were funded through the County's Capital Improvement Program (CIP) and will improve operational reliability, safety, and efficiency in the transport of decedents throughout Delaware County. Together, these investments strengthen the office's ability to respond to death

scenes, conduct investigations, and manage transportation operations in a timely and professional manner while ensuring the DCOME maintains modern and dependable operational equipment.

Fiscal Management & Grant Acquisition:

The Delaware County Office of the Medical Examiner continued to demonstrate strong fiscal management in 2025 by maintaining a stable and efficient operational model while leveraging external funding sources to support key initiatives. The office’s operating budget increased modestly from \$2,233,911 in 2024 to \$2,326,844 in 2025, representing an approximate 4.2 percent increase that supported continued operational improvements while maintaining careful cost control.

In addition to responsible budget management, the office continued to secure and utilize external funding sources that reduce reliance on the County’s general fund. Key funding sources supporting DCOME operations included:

- Opioid settlement funds supporting expanded toxicology testing and overdose-related forensic analysis (2025 reimbursement amount pending final reporting).
- \$95,000 Department of Justice / Bureau of Justice Assistance (DOJ/BJA) grant supporting forensic initiatives.
- \$130,000 in Pennsylvania state training and education funds, which continued in 2025 and fully covered staff development expenses including training, certifications, continuing education, subscriptions, and travel that were previously funded through the operating budget.

These external funding sources allow the DCOME to strengthen forensic capabilities, invest in staff development, and support innovative programs while minimizing additional financial impact on County taxpayers.

Statistical Data Highlights:

- **Total Jurisdictional Death Investigations:** 663
- **Total Non-Jurisdictional Death Investigations:** 936
- **Examinations Performed:** 491 (autopsies and external examinations), with an additional 179 record review/sign out type cases
- **Cremation Approvals:** 1749
- **Firearm-Related Deaths:** 33, including 22 suicides, 10 homicides, and 1 undetermined death (as of 5/7/26).
- **Child Death Reviews:** 8 pediatric child death reviews were conducted, excluding one fetal death review.
- **Total Homicides:** 15 (compared to 34 in 2024) *
- **Drug Related Deaths:** 114 deaths. This is a 5.79% decrease compared to 2024 (121 drug related deaths)
- **Suicides:** 55 (53 suicides in 2024)

* With the closure of Crozer Hospital facilities, a number of trauma patients from Delaware County were transported to hospitals outside the county and, in some cases, outside Pennsylvania. In several instances, those individuals later died in those jurisdictions.

Introduction

This report provides an overview of deaths investigated by the Delaware County Office of the Medical Examiner (DCOME) during the 2025 calendar year. The information contained in this report serves as an important resource for county leadership, public health professionals, and community stakeholders seeking to better understand mortality trends within the county. These insights help inform prevention strategies, public health initiatives, and policy decisions related to preventable deaths and community safety.

Delaware County operates under a medical examiner system, one of only three counties in Pennsylvania to do so. This system differs from the coroner model used in most counties across the Commonwealth. Under a medical examiner system, determinations of cause and manner of death are made by licensed forensic pathologists with specialized medical training in medicolegal death investigation. In contrast, coroner systems are led by elected officials who are not required to possess medical credentials but are legally authorized to certify death.

It is important to note that not all deaths occurring in Delaware County fall under the jurisdiction of the Medical Examiner. Most natural deaths are certified by attending physicians or primary care providers and do not require medicolegal investigation. However, Pennsylvania law requires that certain deaths be reported to the Medical Examiner. These include deaths that are sudden, unexpected, violent, suspicious, unattended, or that may present a public health concern.

When such deaths are reported, a board-certified medicolegal death investigator conducts an initial assessment to determine whether the circumstances meet the statutory threshold for jurisdiction. If jurisdiction is accepted, the DCOME assumes responsibility for the medicolegal investigation and works in coordination with law enforcement, healthcare providers, and other partners to determine and certify the official cause and manner of death.

In addition, all deaths in Delaware County involving cremation must be reviewed and approved by the Medical Examiner's Office. This process includes verification of medical records, review of investigative findings, and confirmation of documentation submitted by funeral homes. This statutory safeguard helps ensure compliance with Pennsylvania law while maintaining transparency and integrity in final disposition practices.

Mission, Vision, and Core Values

Mission

Our mission is to conduct expert medicolegal investigations into deaths that occur under statutorily prescribed circumstances. The findings of these investigations are then independently shared with members of the public and relevant agencies to improve public safety and health.

Vision

By having licensed practitioners and professionally trained staff who conduct medicolegal investigations and adhere to industry standards in a setting striving for industry accreditation, we aspire to establish ourselves as a trustworthy source of accurate, scientifically supported assessments of deaths in our community.

Core Values

Service – The highest value that we uphold is service. We pledge to provide efficient, uplifting, moral, and compassionate service to the general public and to one another.

Integrity- We commit to conducting ourselves respectfully and professionally at all times when interacting with the people we serve and with one another. We commit to doing our best to be sincere, moral, and diligent. We commit to taking responsibility for our words and deeds and developing an organization that upholds integrity by demanding the same of others. When no one is looking, we still act morally.

Compassion - We agree to practice empathy for one another and the people we serve and be aware of the potential negative effects of our words and deeds on others. We understand that speaking openly and kindly, even in the midst of disagreement, is an act of compassion.

Positivity - We understand that perspective is important to attitude and that accurate assessments do not need to be pessimistic. We promise to face obstacles with a constructive mindset.

Adaptability - We understand that nothing remains the same. We pledge to look for the good in change and recognize that it presents an opportunity for development.

Teamwork - We understand how crucial it is to collaborate with people outside of our department and other department members; everyone on the team has a part to play. We strive to foster a positive, cooperative, service- and solution-oriented culture.

Boundaries - We understand that there are boundaries within which we must talk and act, and for our team to succeed, each member must put their all into playing their part. We pledge to work within the parameters of our responsibilities while being careful not to take on inappropriate roles or to criticize or undermine those in other jobs.

Legal Authority

The DCOME's mission is mandated by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania as follows:

Act 154, Section 1218-B

(A) Duty. The Coroner (Medical Examiner), having a view of the body, shall investigate the facts and circumstances concerning a death that appears to have happened within the county, notwithstanding where the cause of the death may have occurred, for the purpose of determining whether or not an autopsy or inquest should be conducted in the following cases:

- (1) A sudden death not caused by a readily recognizable disease or, if the cause of death cannot be properly certified by a physician on the basis of prior recent medical attendance.
- (2) A death occurring under suspicious circumstances, including if alcohol, a drug or another toxic substance may have had a direct bearing on the outcome.
- (3) A death occurring as a result of violence or trauma, whether apparently homicidal, suicidal or accidental, including, but not limited to, a death due to mechanical, thermal, chemical, electrical or radiational injury, drowning, cave-in or subsidence.
- (4) A death in which trauma, chemical injury, drug overdose or reaction to a drug or medication or medical treatment was a primary or secondary, direct or indirect, contributory, aggravating or precipitating cause of death.
- (5) A perioperative death in which the death is not readily explainable on the basis of prior disease.
- (6) A death in which the body is unidentified or unclaimed.
- (7) A death known or suspected to be due to contagious disease and constituting a public hazard.
- (8) A death occurring in prison or a penal institution or while in the custody of the police.
- (9) A death of an individual whose body is to be cremated, buried at sea or otherwise disposed of so as to be unavailable for examination thereafter.
- (10) A sudden and unexplained infant death.
- (11) A stillbirth.

(B) Purpose. The purpose of an investigation under subsection (a) shall be to determine:

- (1) The cause and manner of the death.
- (2) Whether or not 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.

(C) Requirements. As part of an investigation under subsection (a), the coroner shall determine the identity of the deceased and notify the next of kin of the deceased.

Organization of the Office of the Medical Examiner

The DCOME is organized into departmental sections as follows:

Administration and Administrative Support- This section provides leadership and strategic direction for the entire agency. Administrative staff manage business functions including reception, scheduling, records management, data entry, analytic reporting, and validation of electronic death certificates. This section also includes the Chief of Forensic Psychology, who oversees bereavement counseling services and spearheads the Psychological Autopsy Initiative focused on suicide-related deaths.

Morgue Operations- Led by the Chief Medical Examiner, this section is responsible for the medicolegal investigation of deaths through comprehensive postmortem examinations. Board-certified forensic pathologists (physicians trained in the subspecialty of forensic pathology) conduct autopsies, determine cause and manner of death, review investigative and clinical records, and produce autopsy reports, which serve as DCOME's final authoritative work product.

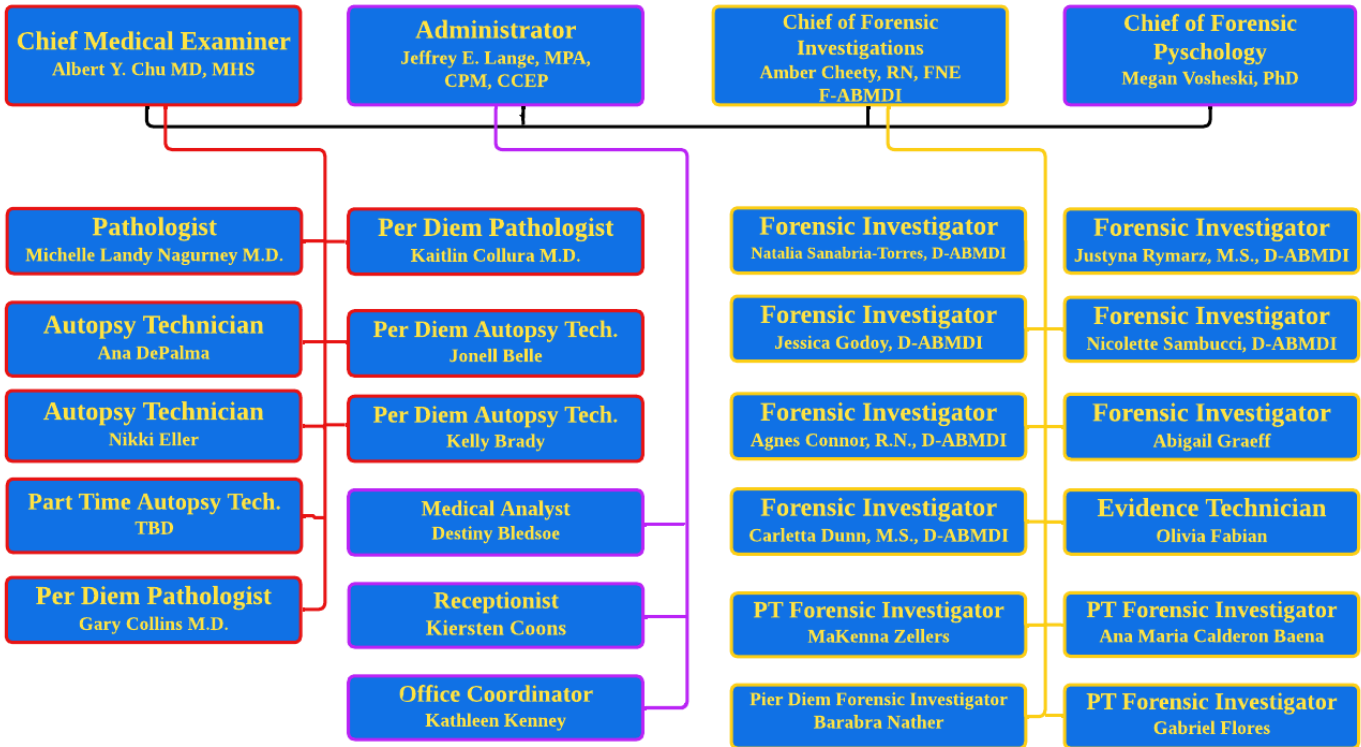
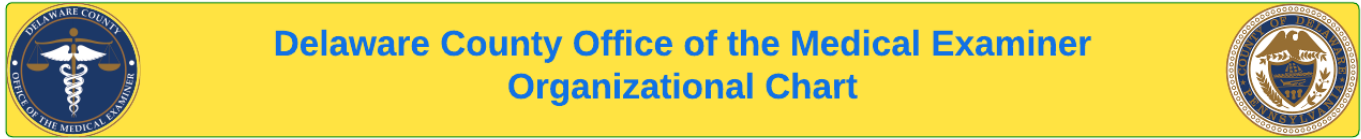
Autopsy technicians provide essential technical assistance in the morgue, including decedent intake, radiography, forensic photography, fingerprinting, and dissection support under the direction of the pathologists.

To ensure the highest level of expertise in complex cases, the Morgue Operations section is supported by a cadre of specialized forensic consultants, including a forensic odontologist, a forensic neuropathologist, and forensic anthropologists.

Forensic Investigations- Led by the Chief of Forensic Investigations, a Diplomate of the American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators (ABMDI), this section conducts scene investigations, interviews, evidence collection, and photographic documentation. Investigators assess the circumstances of death, obtain relevant records, and serve as the primary point of contact with families, hospitals, law enforcement, and community partners. They are considered the eyes and ears of the pathologists and are the public-facing representatives of DCOME.

Evidence Management-The Evidence Technician is responsible for the secure storage, distribution, and inventory of all collected physical evidence. This role is critical in maintaining the integrity of the chain of custody and supporting both investigative and legal processes.

Organizational Chart



Contracted Transportation Services Provided by

- Preston Griffin (First Class Mortuary Transport)

Staff Professional Growth

Employee Recognition

The DCOME remains committed to fostering a positive and highly performing workplace culture through its Employee Recognition Program. This quarterly award recognizes employees who demonstrate initiative, champion operational improvements, enhance the quality and efficiency of services, improve safety practices, mentor new staff, or otherwise go above and beyond their normal duties. Recipients exemplify the core values of professionalism, service, and innovation that guide the work of the Delaware County Office of the Medical Examiner.

Training and Professional Development

The DCOME maintains a comprehensive training and professional development program to ensure staff possess the knowledge and technical skills required for excellence in medicolegal death investigation. The program includes both mandatory and elective training tailored to the responsibilities of each division, including Forensic Investigations, Morgue Operations, Evidence Management, and Administrative Support. Employees have access to more than 20 elective training courses annually, with participation requirements based on job classification. All new hires are also required to complete FEMA's Incident Command System (ICS) training within their first year to support readiness for coordinated emergency response and large-scale incidents. The office also supports advanced and specialized training. In 2025, one investigator completed certification training in Investigative Genetic Genealogy, expanding the office's ability to assist in identifying unknown decedents and unresolved cases. Another investigator completed specialized Osteology training, strengthening the office's expertise in the examination and analysis of skeletal remains.

Wellness and Mental Health Support

The work of medicolegal death investigation can be physically and emotionally demanding. The DCOME remains committed to supporting the mental health and wellbeing of its staff through proactive wellness initiatives. A weekly Peer Support newsletter provides employees with stress management strategies, mental wellness resources, and information on counseling services. In addition, the office's Chief of Forensic Psychology, a licensed mental health professional, provides onsite support during critical incidents and other high-stress events, ensuring staff have access to professional guidance when needed. Through these efforts, the DCOME continues to foster a supportive workplace where employees feel valued, prepared, and equipped to manage the challenges associated with medicolegal death investigation.

Meet the Team



Dr. Albert Chu was appointed as the Chief Medical Examiner in October 2023 and leads Morgue Operations, including managing all pathologists, forensic specialists, and autopsy technicians.

Dr. Chu completed undergraduate and graduate studies at Johns Hopkins University and received his medical degree from the State University of New York at Buffalo. Dr. Chu then completed a residency in Anatomic and Clinical Pathology at the University of Pennsylvania Hospital and a fellowship in Forensic Pathology at the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner for the State of Maryland.

Before becoming Chief Medical Examiner, he served as an Assistant Medical Examiner at the Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences in Houston, Texas, and as Deputy Chief Medical Examiner for the City of Philadelphia. He is board-certified in anatomic, clinical, and forensic pathology.



Jeffrey E. Lange was appointed Administrator of the Delaware County Office of the Medical Examiner in September 2022. In this role, he provides executive oversight of the office's administrative operations, personnel management, and strategic initiatives.

Originally from New Jersey, Mr. Lange is a retired Chief of Police from the State of Maine with a public safety career spanning more than 35 years. Since 1989, he has served in a variety of roles within corrections, fire services, and law enforcement, demonstrating a longstanding commitment to public service. His career also includes international anti-terrorism experience, having completed three tours as a Law Enforcement Professional (LEP) with the U.S. Department of Defense in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Mr. Lange holds a Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice Administration and a Master of Public Administration (MPA) from Columbia Southern University. He also holds several professional certifications, including Certified Public Manager (CPM) through Millersville University, Certified Compliance and Ethics Professional (CCEP), Certified Six Sigma Lean Black Belt (CSSBB), and Society for Human Resource Management Certified Professional (SHRM-CP). He is currently pursuing a Post-Graduate Certificate in Emergency Management through Columbia Southern University.



Amber Cheety was hired in June 2023 as the Chief of Forensic Investigations for the Office of the Medical Examiner. Ms. Cheety leads the Forensic Investigations and evidence sections of the office. She is an ABMDI board-certified Forensic Investigator.

Before joining the DCOME, Ms. Cheety served as an investigator with the State of New Jersey Southern Regional Medical Examiner's Office. She is a registered nurse in both New Jersey and Pennsylvania and holds a forensic nursing license in New Jersey. Ms. Cheety earned a Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology with a Crime Scene Investigation certification from the University of Central Florida and a Bachelor of Science in Nursing from Drexel University. She is currently completing her Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) degree through Hawai'i Pacific University. In 2024, she also completed the Executive Leadership Certificate through Villanova University's CLIMB leadership program for Emergency Management professionals in Delaware County, Pennsylvania.



Megan Vosheski, PhD was hired in April 2024 as the Delaware County Office of the Medical Examiner's Bereavement Coordinator and was promoted to Chief of Forensic Psychology in January 2025. Originally from New Jersey, she has a background in behavioral health and forensic psychology with extensive experience in counseling and program development. She established Delaware County's first bereavement counseling program and developed the Office of the Medical Examiner's Psychological Autopsy Initiative.

Mrs. Vosheski holds a Bachelor of Science in Behavioral Health from Drexel University and a Master of Science in Forensic Psychology from Walden University. She recently earned her PhD in Forensic Psychology/Criminology from Keiser University.

Jessica Godoy was hired in June of 2022 as a Forensic Investigator. She received her bachelor's degree in Biological Sciences with a focus on Health Sciences from Arizona State University. Ms. Godoy is an ABMDI board-certified Medicolegal Death Investigator, with a specialized focus on unidentified remains and unknown decedents. Additionally, Ms. Godoy works frequently as an autopsy technician at DCOME. Ms. Godoy hopes to continue her education in medical school to fulfill a career in emergency medicine or forensic pathology.

Destiny Bledsoe joined the Delaware County Office of the Medical Examiner in November 2022 as a Receptionist and was promoted to Medical Analyst in March 2024. Since joining the office, Destiny has demonstrated strong dedication to professional growth and expanding her role in support of the medicolegal investigation process. She has completed and graduated from the Autopsy Technician Certification Program at the Pennsylvania Institute of Technology (P.I.T.), further strengthening her ability to contribute to morgue operations and forensic investigations. Complementing her professional experience, Destiny is currently pursuing a Bachelor of Science in General Studies at Delaware County Community College. She plans to continue her education in pre-medical studies, with the long-term goal of becoming a forensic pathologist.

Justyna Rymarz was hired in January of 2023 as a Forensic Investigator for the Office of the Delaware County Medical Examiner. Justyna earned her Master of Science degree in Forensic Medicine from the Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine, laying the groundwork for her career in death investigation. Ms. Rymarz is an ABMDI board-certified investigator. As a dual citizen of Poland and the United States, her international perspective gives her a deep appreciation of diversity in all its forms. This also assists effective communication with different communities / nationalities and bridges cultural gaps in her work. In addition to her role as a death investigator, Justyna brings a diverse background in various professions, including rehabilitation, real estate, and investing. Justyna enjoys hiking, traveling, and spending time with her family outside of work.

Carletta Dunn was hired in February of 2023 as a Forensic Investigator with the County of Delaware Office of the Medical Examiner. Ms. Carley Dunn, professionally known as Carletta, is a dedicated forensic professional with a solid scientific background. Ms. Dunn holds a Bachelor of Science Degree in Biology from Temple University and a Master of Science Degree in Forensic Medicine from the Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine (PCOM). Ms. Dunn is a board-certified American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigator (ABMDI). She leads the Child Death Review Board for SUID (Sudden Unexplained Infant Deaths) for the office. She is currently working on a project to examine and enhance standard practices and guidelines in nursing training within public health settings for SUID. Ms. Dunn is deeply passionate about Forensic Medicine and aspires to attend medical school to become a Forensic Pathologist.

Agnes Connor was hired as a full-time Forensic Investigator in February of 2023. Before her current role, Ms. Connor was a contracted employee for the DCOME, fulfilling duties as an autopsy technician and subsequently as a forensic investigator since 2016. In addition to being an ABMDI board-certified Medicolegal Death Investigator, Ms. Connor has also over two decades of experience as an emergency room Registered Nurse.

Nicolette Sambucci was hired in February 2024 as the Evidence Technician for the Delaware County Office of the Medical Examiner. Ms. Sambucci earned her Bachelor of Arts and Science degree from the University of Tennessee, where she double majored in Forensic Anthropology and Criminology/Criminal Justice. She has since completed certification coursework in Investigative Genetic Genealogy through Ramapo College and is now board-certified through the American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators (ABMDI). Ms. Sambucci plans to pursue a master's degree in forensic science with a concentration in Forensic DNA and Genealogy as she continues advancing her career in medicolegal death investigation.

Dr. Michelle Nagurney was hired in March of 2024 as a Forensic Pathologist. Dr. Nagurney is board-certified in anatomic and forensic pathology from the American Board of Pathology. Before coming to Delaware County, she was a fellow in forensic pathology at the Allegheny County Office of the Medical Examiner and subsequently worked at the Philadelphia Medical Examiner's Office as an Associate Medical Examiner. She obtained her medical degree from the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine. Her forensic interests include child and maternal fatalities, and she has participated in co-sleeping and neonatal infectious disease research.

Nikki Eller was hired in July 2024 as an Autopsy Technician for the Delaware County Office of the Medical Examiner. She has completed the Autopsy Technician Certification Program at the Pennsylvania Institute of Technology (P.I.T.). With more than 13 years of experience in the medical field, Nikki has served in a variety of EMS roles across Philadelphia and Delaware County. She previously worked for two years at Lankenau Hospital and currently works per diem as an Emergency Room Technician in the Emergency Department at Riddle Hospital.

Natalia Sanabria Torres was hired in July 2024 as a Forensic Investigator for the Delaware County Office of the Medical Examiner. She earned her Bachelor of Science in Biological Anthropology with a minor in Psychology from Penn State University and is board-certified through the American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators (ABMDI). Natalia has developed a specialized interest in unidentified remains and works with investigative staff to assist in the review of cold cases and unidentified decedents. She is also bilingual in English and Spanish, serving as a key point of contact for cases involving Spanish-speaking families and individuals. Natalia plans to continue developing her expertise in the identification of unknown individuals and collaborating with partner agencies to help resolve long-standing unidentified cases.

Ana DePalma joined the Delaware County Office of the Medical Examiner in August 2024 as the Office Receptionist. Originally from New Jersey and now a proud Delaware County resident, Ana holds a

Bachelor of Science in Criminology from West Virginia University. She also completed the Autopsy Technician Certification Program at the Pennsylvania Institute of Technology (P.I.T.). In September 2025, Ana transitioned into her current role as a full-time Autopsy Technician. Her academic background, dedication to public service, and commitment to professional development have made her a valuable member of the office's morgue operations team.

Abigail Graeff joined the Delaware County Office of the Medical Examiner in September 2024 as the Evidence Technician after first serving as an extern with the office during the summer of 2024. She graduated from West Chester University with a Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice. She has since transitioned into the role of Forensic Investigator and is currently studying toward board certification through the American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators (ABMDI). Abigail also contributes to the office's Mass Fatality Review Board, assisting with response planning and strategic guidelines for large-scale fatality incidents. Outside of work, Abigail enjoys spending time with friends and family and traveling.

Kathleen Kenney was hired in May 2024 by the Delaware County Health Department and transferred to the DCOME in February of 2025 as the Office Coordinator. Kathleen has over 20 years' experience in the customer service and administrative fields. Kathleen is also an educational advocate for individuals with disabilities, demonstrating a passion for helping others and making a positive impact.

Olivia Fabian joined the Delaware County Office of the Medical Examiner in November 2025 as an Evidence Technician. A Delaware County native, she is proud to serve her community. She graduated from West Virginia University with a Bachelor of Science in Forensic Examination. Ms. Fabian is currently pursuing a Master of Science in Forensic Medicine at the Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine and hopes to build a career in death investigation or crime scene investigation.



Extern and Intern Programs

Externship Program

The Delaware County Office of the Medical Examiner offers a **non-paid externship program** designed to provide students with educational exposure to the field of medicolegal death investigation. The five-week program (approximately 100 hours) allows students to observe autopsies, learn the investigative process, and gain insight into the daily operations of the Medical Examiner's Office. The externship is primarily observational and focuses on academic learning, professional development, and introducing students to careers in forensic science and medicolegal investigations.

Internship Program

The DCOME also offers a **paid summer internship program** that provides students with hands-on experience in medicolegal death investigation. The eleven-week program requires a minimum of 20 hours per week and allows interns to observe autopsies, participate in investigative activities, and assist staff under direct supervision. The internship is designed to provide practical training and professional development for students pursuing careers in forensic science, forensic anthropology, pathology, and related fields.



Budget, Capital, and Grant-Funded Projects

The office's operating budget increased modestly from \$2,233,911 in 2024 to \$2,326,844 in 2025, representing an approximate 4.2 percent increase that supported continued operational improvements while maintaining careful cost control.

The **Morgue Operations Division** accounts for the majority of the operating budget, reflecting high costs associated with medical and scientific functions. Major expenditures include:

- Salaries and benefits for board-certified forensic pathologists
- Pathology examinations and autopsy procedures
- Scientific testing, including toxicology and histology
- Medical and laboratory supplies

The DCOME operates in a manner comparable to healthcare institutions, with significant investments in specialized personnel, diagnostic tools, and laboratory infrastructure necessary for medicolegal investigations.

Capital Funded Purchases

The office purchased two 2025 Ford Transit Vans utilizing capital funded expenditures totaling approximately \$180,000. This included the cost of the vans and upfitting them with specialized equipment.

Grant-Funded Equipment

In 2024, DCOME was awarded a **\$95,054** grant from the **Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance**. The funds will be used until the end of the 2026 fiscal year to enhance operational capacity through the following equipment purchases:

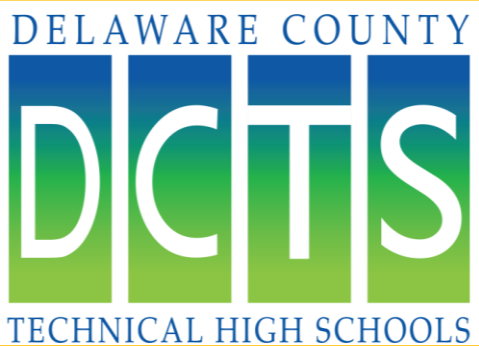
- **Three forensic microscopes** (average cost: **\$12,836–\$14,689** each- 2 purchased in 2025 and 1 in 2026)
- **Software system upgrades** for case and data management (**\$10,000**)- Purchased in 2025
- **CO-Oximeter analyzer** for rapid measurement of blood carboxyhemoglobin (**\$16,700**)- Purchased in 2025
- **Turnout gear** for forensic investigators entering fire-related scenes (**\$15,318**)- Purchasing in 2026

These enhancements reflect the DCOME's continued commitment to operational excellence, evidence-based practice, and workforce safety.

Professional Partnerships

The DCOME has maintained its ongoing paid work agreement with the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania’s Department of Public Health, Office of Drug Surveillance and Misuse Prevention. Under this multi-year agreement, the DCOME submits biannual statistical reports on drug-related deaths to support the Commonwealth’s statewide surveillance, prevention, and intervention strategies.

In exchange, Delaware County receives \$10,000 annually, which is allocated to the County’s general fund. This collaboration not only strengthens Pennsylvania’s data-driven public health efforts but also reinforces the critical role of medicolegal death investigation in informing policy and supporting local government resources.



The DCOME has a partnership with the **Delaware County Technical School (DCIU)** to expand educational opportunities for high school juniors and seniors enrolled in medical



career programs. Through this initiative, students are granted supervised access to observe adult autopsies, offering them a rare and valuable glimpse into the field of forensic medicine. This real-world experience deepens students' understanding of human anatomy, pathology, and the role of medical examiners in the broader healthcare and public safety systems. The program supports career exploration and inspires the next generation of healthcare and forensic science professionals.

The DCOME has also partnered with the **Delaware County Health Department** and the Delaware County Department of Human Services to support a range of multidisciplinary death review initiatives. Established in November 2022, this collaboration remains active and continues to grow in scope and impact.



The DCOME plays an active role on the steering committee for the County’s Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP), contributing medicolegal expertise to public health strategies aimed at improving community outcomes. The partnership also provides critical insight into various types of death reviews, including:

- Child death reviews
- Suicide reviews
- Overdose fatality reviews
- Violent death reviews
- Motor vehicle fatality reviews

These collaborative efforts ensure that fatalities are examined through both public health and forensic lenses, enabling more effective prevention strategies, informed policy development, and a more comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to avoidable deaths in the county.

The DCOME has a collaborative partnership with the **Pennsylvania Institute of Technology (PIT)** to provide Licensed Practical Nursing (LPN) students with hands-on clinical experience in a forensic setting. As part of their clinical rotations, PIT students work alongside DCOME’s pathologists three days per week, gaining valuable exposure to forensic medicine, postmortem care, and medico-legal procedures.



This partnership enhances the educational experience of nursing students by offering a unique perspective on the intersection of healthcare, pathology, and public service, while also fostering interest in specialized fields such as forensic nursing and death investigation.



The Delaware County Office of the Medical Examiner (DCOME) maintains a strong and ongoing partnership with **Gift of Life**; an organization committed to coordinating the recovery of organs and tissues for transplantation. The donation and transplant process is inherently complex, requiring seamless collaboration among medical examiners, healthcare providers, investigative teams, and transplant specialists.

Through this partnership, DCOME works closely with Gift of Life to ensure that each potential opportunity for donation is approached with compassion, professionalism, and the utmost respect. By supporting this mission, DCOME helps provide hope to recipients and families while honoring the selfless decisions of donors and their loved ones.



The PA Healthcare Preparedness Program and the Southeast Healthcare Coalition

These coalitions are defined as “a formal collaboration among healthcare organizations and public and private partners organized to prepare for, respond to, and recover from an emergency, mass casualty, or catastrophic event” (Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, DOH, 2022). The DCOME has been a member in good standing with both organizations and recently benefited from the generous loan of a portable X-ray machine, an urgently needed asset. Previously, DCOME relied on a third-party provider to conduct all postmortem radiographs. The loaned machine, valued at nearly \$45,000, enhances our operational capabilities and will be deployed regionally in the event of mass fatality incidents.

Lastly, the DCOME) has reestablished and strengthened professional working relationships with key partner agencies, including the Delaware County Office of the District Attorney, Delaware County Police Chiefs Association, Delaware County 911 Center, Delaware County Emergency Management, the Delaware Emergency Management Agency, the Delaware County Regional EMS Office, local hospital systems, and numerous funeral and cremation service providers across Delaware and surrounding counties. These partnerships are essential to ensuring coordinated response, effective communication, and high standards of service across the region.



Data Sharing and Interagency Collaboration

As part of its commitment to public service and community health, the DCOME shares statistical data with various government agencies at both the county and state levels, as well as with non-governmental and civic organizations. This data includes information on:

- Drug-related deaths
- Firearm-related fatalities
- Suicides
- Infant and child deaths
- Other significant public health indicators

These data-sharing partnerships play a critical role in evidence-based decision-making. By providing timely and accurate data, the DCOME supports the development of targeted prevention strategies, informs outreach efforts, enhances safety planning, guides adjustments to service delivery, and contributes to the formulation and revision of public policy.



Community Involvement

The Delaware County Office of the Medical Examiner participated or assisted in community-sponsored events in Delaware County. Some included the Toys 4Tots Toy Drive, the Delaware County Health Department Food Drive, Delco Helping Hands, and Touch-a-Truck Halloween celebration at the Pennsylvania Institute of Technology.

Future Opportunities for 2026

The Delaware County Office of the Medical Examiner (DCOME) is actively expanding its community outreach efforts to increase awareness and improve compliance with mandatory death reporting requirements. Planned initiatives include targeted educational programs for hospitals, hospice agencies, nursing homes, and the general public, as well as specialized awareness training for law enforcement, EMS personnel, and fire departments across Delaware County.

In addition, the DCOME continues to play a key role in regional mass fatality preparedness, working in close collaboration with Delaware County Emergency Management, the Southeast Healthcare Coalition, and the Delaware County Healthcare Emergency Preparedness Group. These partnerships are essential to strengthening the county's capacity to respond to large-scale fatality events with coordinated, effective strategies.

The DCOME is also enhancing its efforts to address missing persons and unidentified decedents. Led by the agency's Investigative Division, these initiatives focus on improving the notification process, leveraging advances in forensic technology, and expanding engagement with both community members and law enforcement agencies. The goal is to increase identification rates and bring closure to families impacted by unresolved cases.



Bereavement Office

Sincere Words

We encourage you to consider attending grief counseling and support groups during this incredibly difficult time. Grief has no set timeline, and everyone experiences it differently. It's important to remember that, with time and support, you may begin to find moments of peace and healing at your own pace. You are not alone—help is available as you navigate this journey.

Our Services

Delaware County extends its deepest condolences to you and your loved ones during this time of profound loss. When you feel ready, the Delaware County Office of the Medical Examiner is here to offer resources, support, and guidance to help you navigate the days ahead, free of charge. Our Chief of Forensic Psychology, Megan Vosheski, is available to provide individualized counseling, connect you with specialized programs, and recommend additional agencies that can support you during this difficult transition. Please see the next couple of pages for resources that may assist you.

Please do not hesitate to reach out at 484-750-2150. We are here for you.

Grief and Bereavement Support Groups

Children Impacted by Grief

- *Youth Empowerment for Advancement Hangout (YEAH)*
267-469-3002

[YEAHPhilly – Reaching Philly Teens the Right Way](#)

- *Urban Youth Leadership Academy*
215-204-8917
- *Uplift Center for Grieving Children*
267-437-3123

[Uplift Philly – Uplift Center for Grieving Children](#)



Outpatient Agencies in Delaware County

- *Holcomb Behavioral Services*
126 E. Baltimore Pike, Media, PA

Hotline number 484-444-0412 can gain general information

Website-www.chimes.org/about/chimes-family/Holcomb-behavioral-health-systems/

Call to schedule an intake appointment for services to begin. Fees might apply office does take select providers.

- *Thrive Works Counseling*
Hotline 610-808-9923
Website www.thriveworks.com/media-counseling/ you can find information, fees, and providers offered. Call to schedule an intake appointment for services to begin. Fees might apply. The office does take select providers.

- *Family and Community Service*
600 N. Olive Street, Media PA
610-566-7540
- *Glen Mills Counseling Center*
485 Baltimore Pike, Suite 201,
Glen Mills PA

Or
210 W. Front St. Media PA
610-656-1424

National Suicide Prevention Hotline

- *1-800-273-TALK*
24-hour hotline if you or someone you know is considering an act of suicide, experiencing trauma caused by losing a loved one to suicide
- *Mercy Fitzgerald Hospital Crisis Center* 610-237-4210

- *Survivors of Suicide, Inc*
215-545-2242
www.sosphilly.org
- *Crozer Chester Mental Health Crisis Center* 610-447-7600
- *Healthy Minds (Phila. BHIDS)*
215-685-6444 (24/7)
- <https://healthymindsphilly.org/>
- *NAMI Bucks County PA*
215-343-3055
<http://namibuckspa.org/>
- *Center for Grief and Bereavement*
610-222-4110
<http://bereavementcenter.org/>

Suicide Resources (Trained Persons to Help)

- *Greater Philadelphia*
610-649-5250
- Prevent Suicide PA- Delaware County Task Force
Delaware County - Prevent Suicide PA
- *Delco Suicide Prevention Org*
delcosuicideprevention.org
- *Delaware County Crisis Connection*
855-889-7827
24/7 emergency aid



Support Groups for Families impacted by Homicide

- *Victim's Compensation Program*
24-hour hotline- 610-566-4342
Possible reimbursement of expenses. Funeral arrangements, medical bills, etc. Victims Assistance Advocate appointed; attend court appearances, compensation status.
- *Parents of Murdered Children*
484-557-1370
- *Mothers in Charge*
215-228-1718
- *Operation Save our City*
856-745-6045
- *Healing Hurt People*
215-762-1177
- *Court Financial Services*
610-891-5060
- *Network of Neighbors Responding to Violence*
267-233-4387
- *AVP's hotline of murder victims*
215-686-8033

Delaware County Mental Health Services

- Mental Health Office
20 S. 69th Street, Upper Darby, PA
19082
610-713-2365

Peters Place

A Center for Grieving Children and Families
336 King of Prussia Rd., Radnor, PA
19087- 610-687-515

2025 Delaware County Statistics

It is important to remember that each statistic in this report represents a human life lost leaving behind grieving families, friends, and communities. Our hope, as always, is that by understanding these trends, policymakers, public health officials, and professionals across healthcare and public safety can work together to create informed strategies that protect lives and promote community well-being.

Understanding the 5 Manners of Death

Natural- Death that occurs from a disease, illness, medical condition or failure of body functions due to age.

•Ex: Heart Attack, Stroke, Cancer, Etc..

Accident- Death that occurs from an unintentional injury or event.

•Ex: Car Accident, Fall, Drowning, Etc..

Suicide- Death that occurs when an individual intentionally takes their own life.

•Ex: Hanging, Self-inflicted Gun Shot Wound, Exsanguination from cutting, Etc..

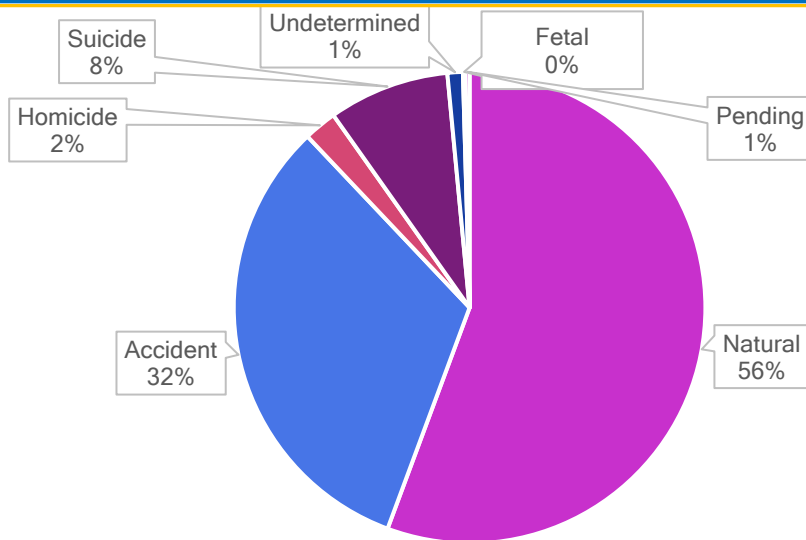
Homicide- Death that occurs when one individual kills another.

•Ex: Shooting a person that results in their death, Etc...

Undetermined- When a death cannot be definitively classified.

•Ex: Ambiguous information surrounding the death, Inconclusive evidence, Etc..

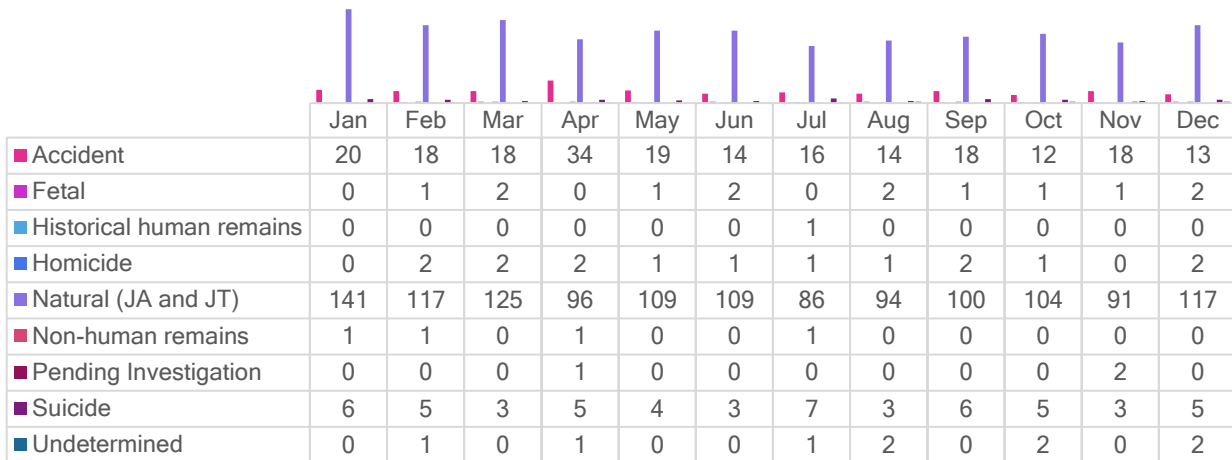
2025 DCOME Jurisdictional Accepted (JA) Cases by Manner



■ Natural ■ Accident ■ Homicide ■ Suicide ■ Undetermined ■ Fetal ■ Pending

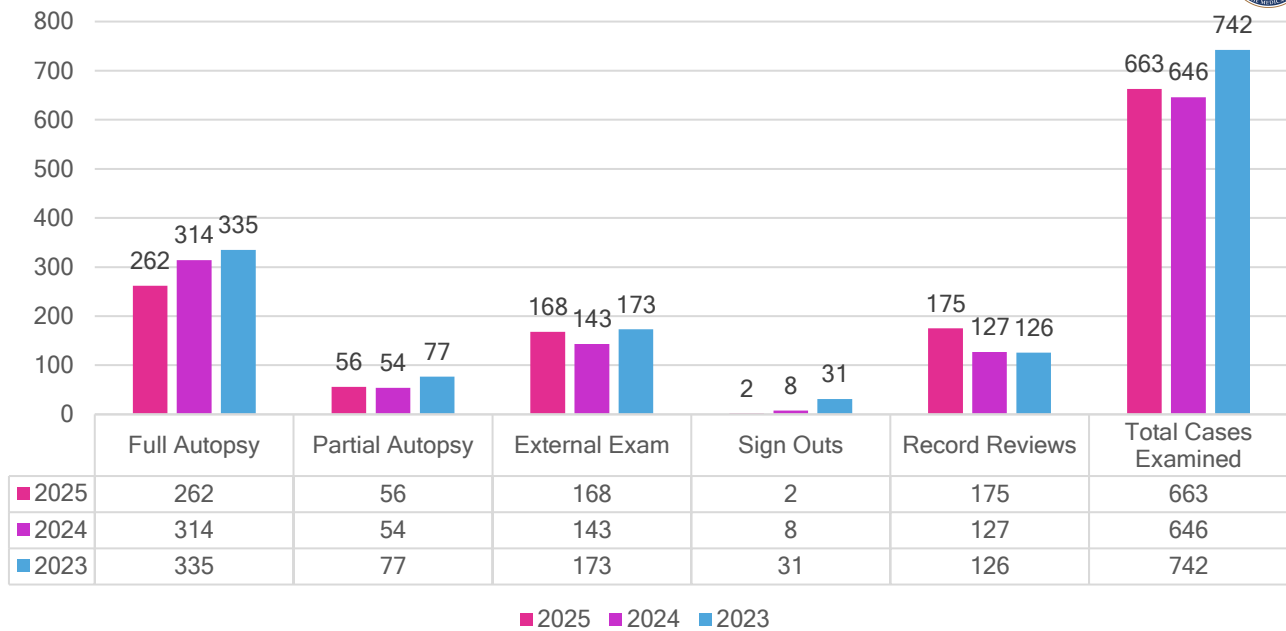


Manner of Death by Month- Jurisdictional Accepted (JA) and Jurisdictional Terminated (JT) Cases

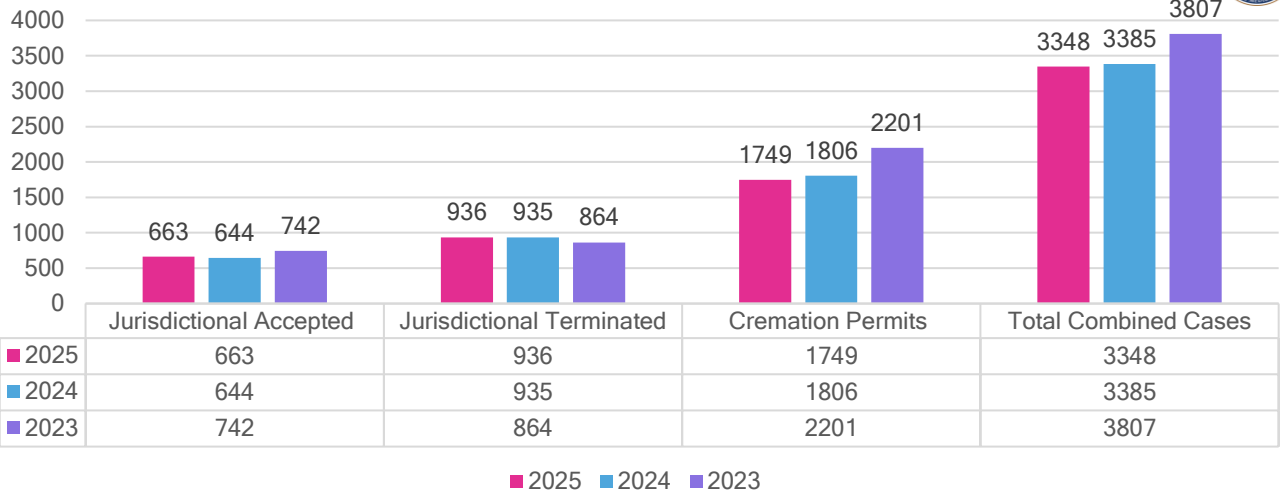


JA & JT is Jurisdictional Accepted (JA) cases and Jurisdictional Terminated Cases (not accepted) (JT)

2025 DCOME Types of Examinations



2025 DCOME Total Cases Investigated

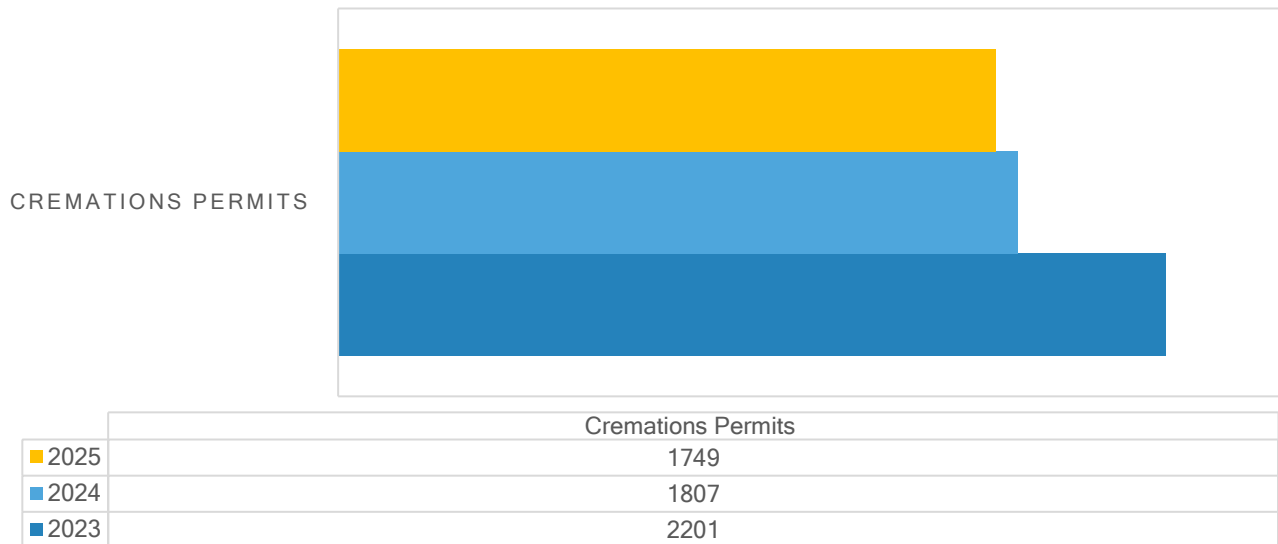


Both Jurisdictional and Terminated cases are all investigated along with a review of the cremation permits requests.

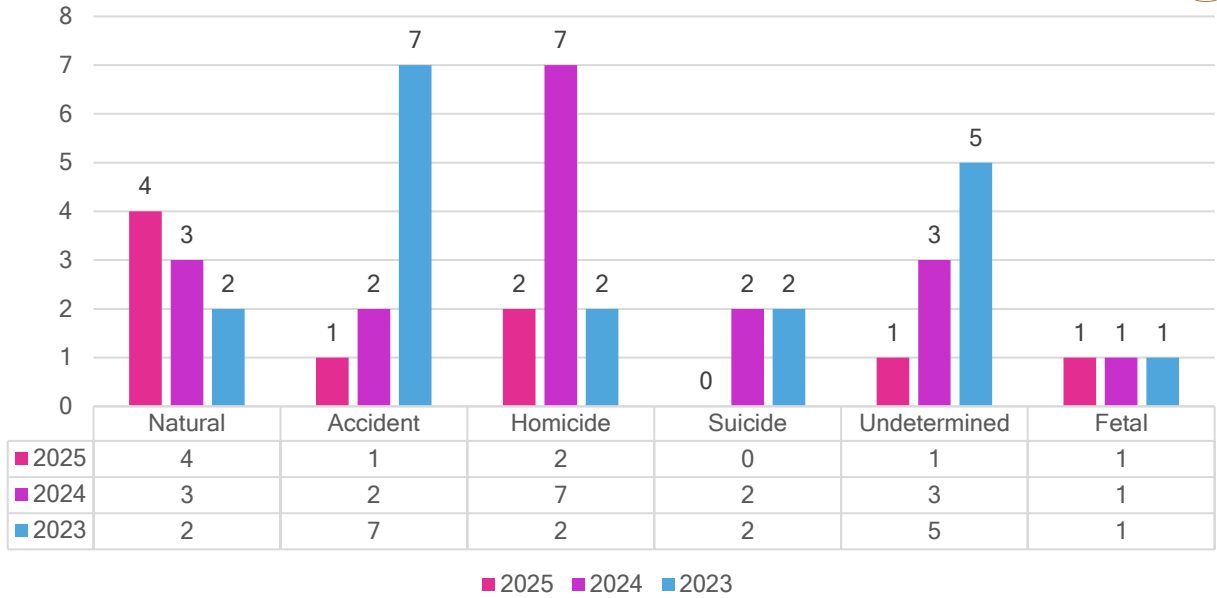
2025 DCOME Cremation Permits



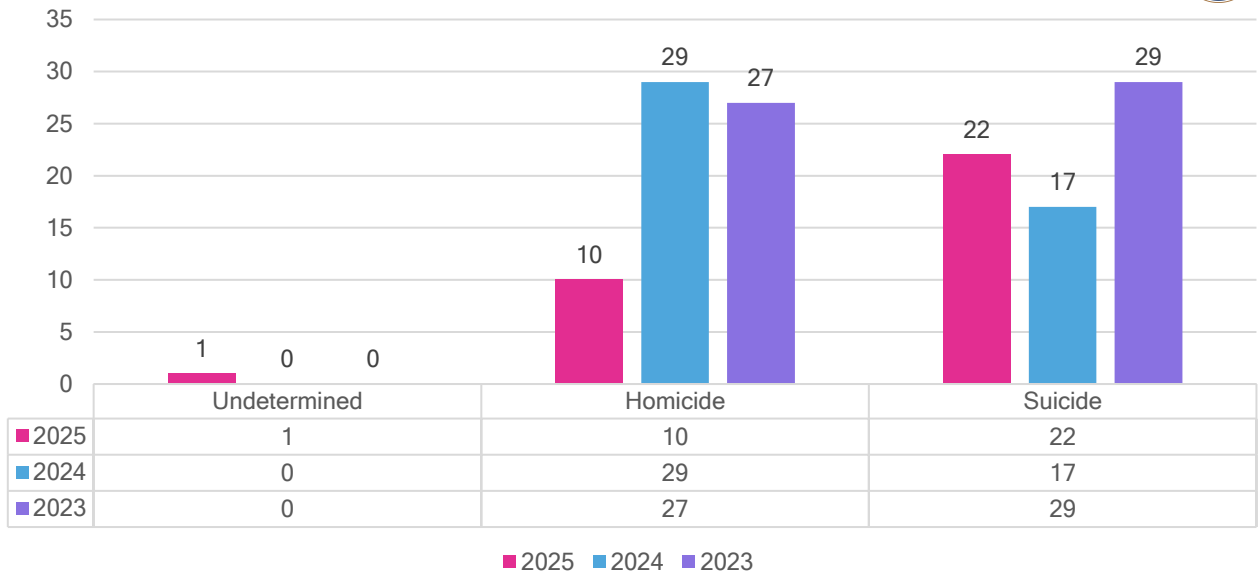
■ 2025 ■ 2024 ■ 2023



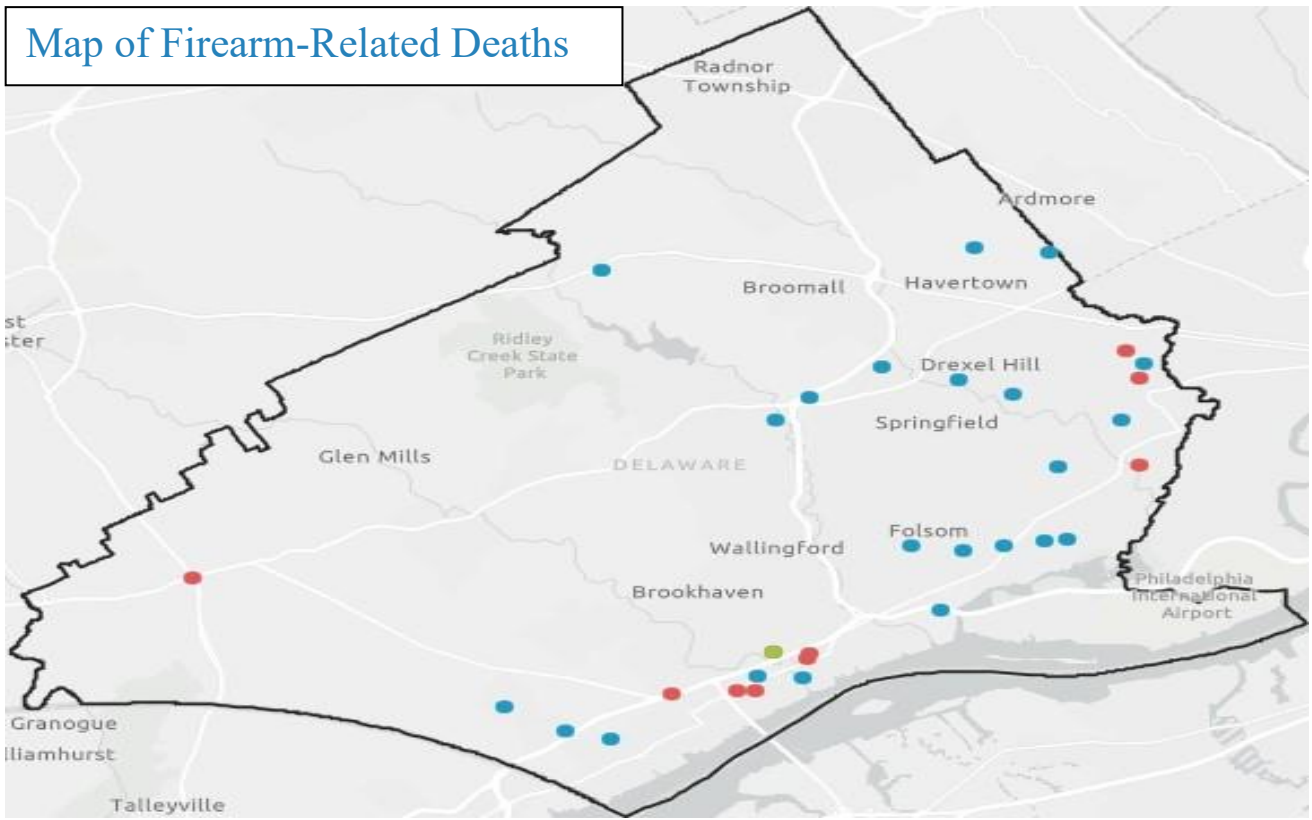
2025 DCOME Deaths, 0-17 years



2025 DCOME Firearm Related Deaths

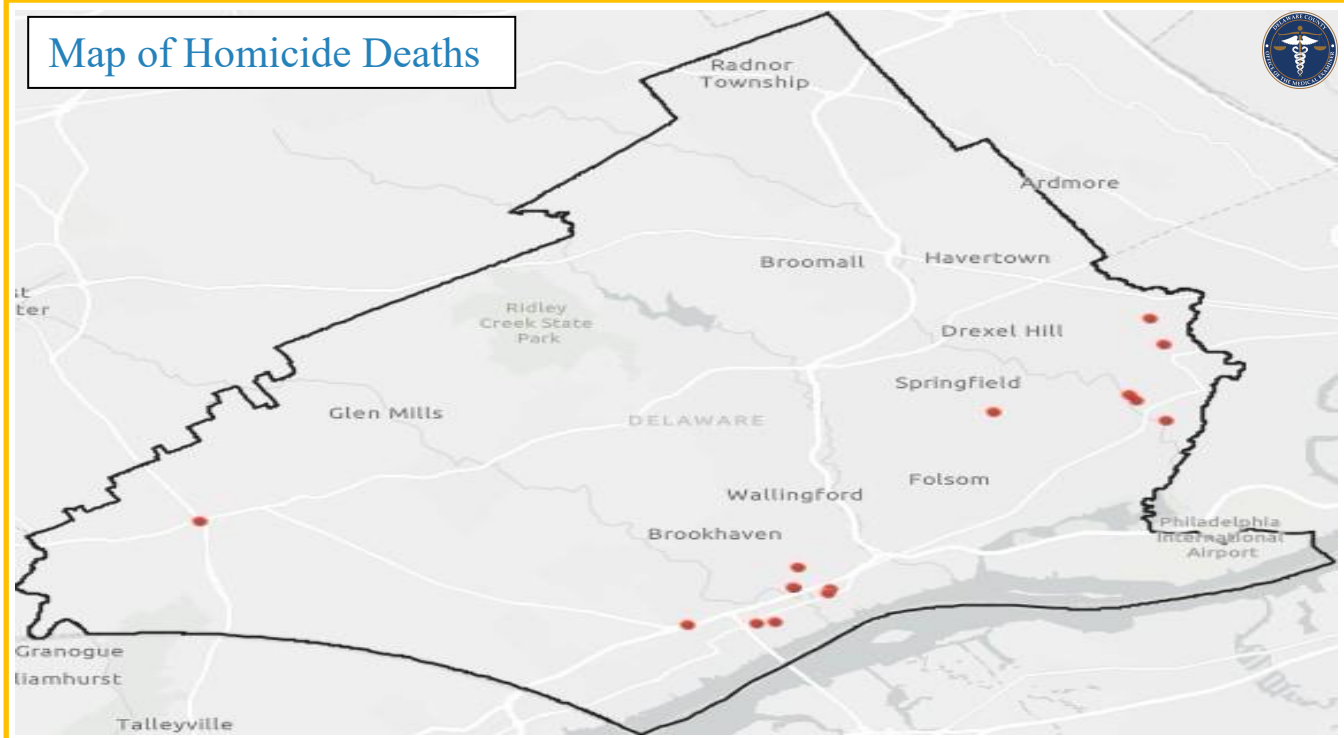


Map of Firearm-Related Deaths

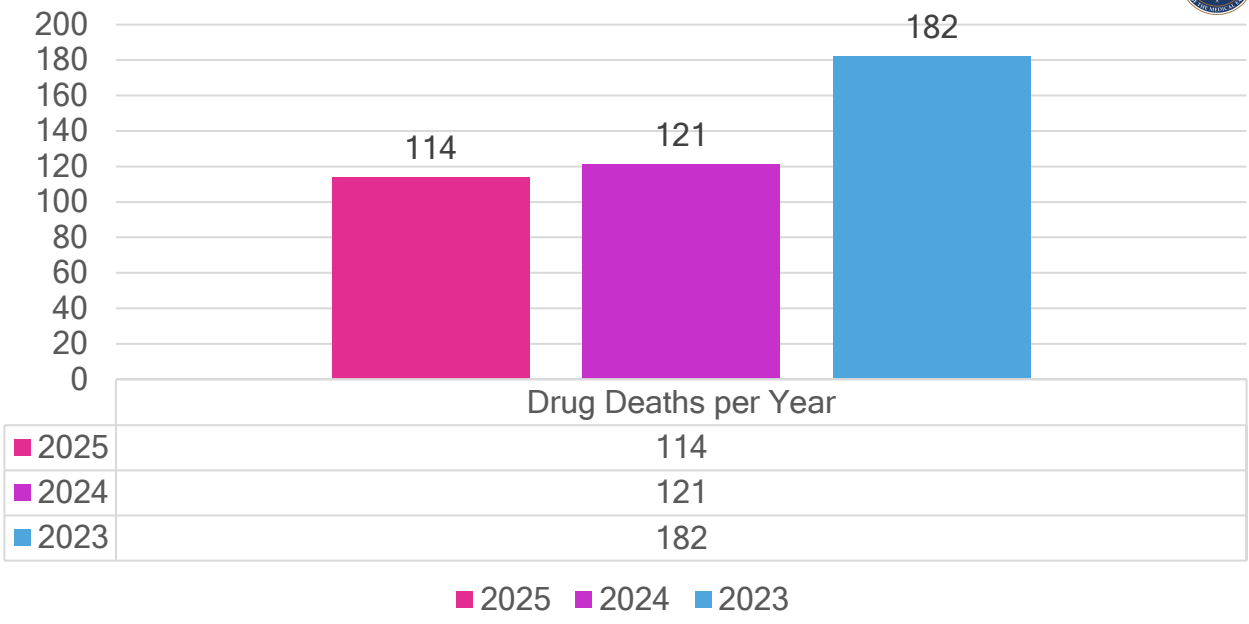


Red: Homicides Blue: Suicides Green- Undetermined

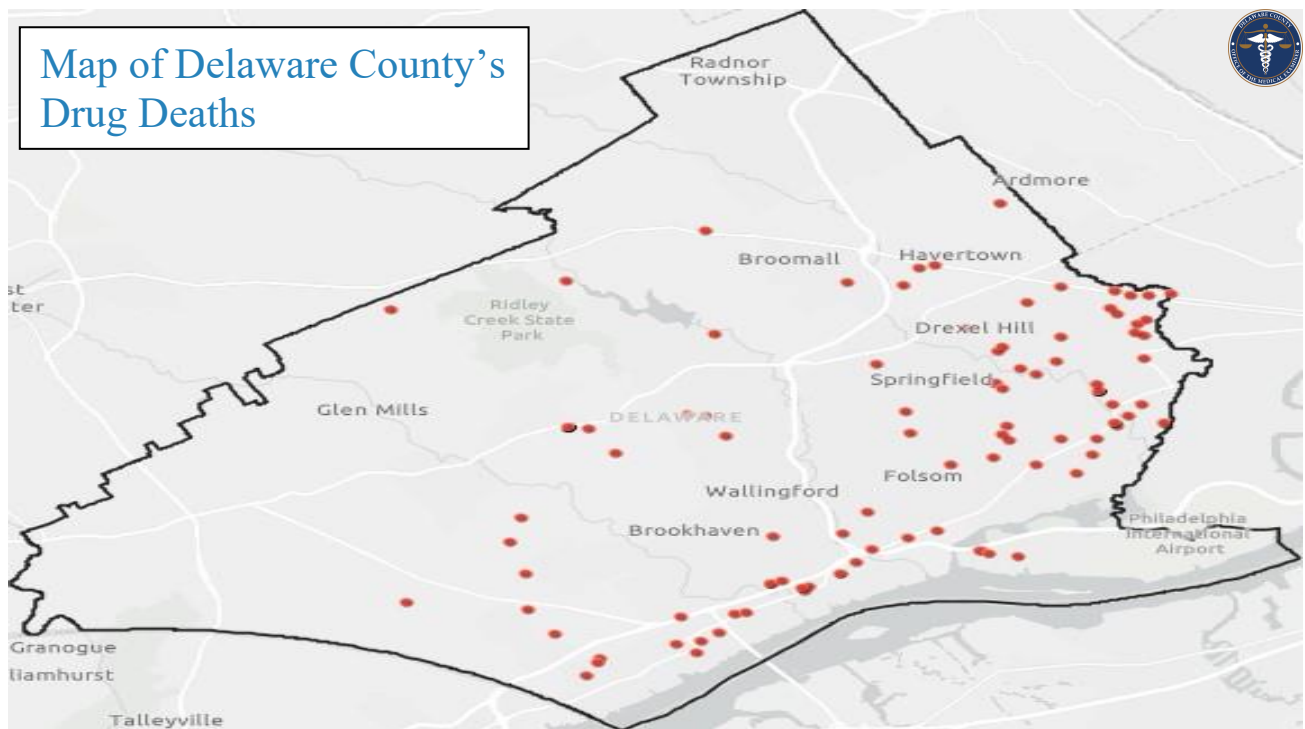
Map of Homicide Deaths



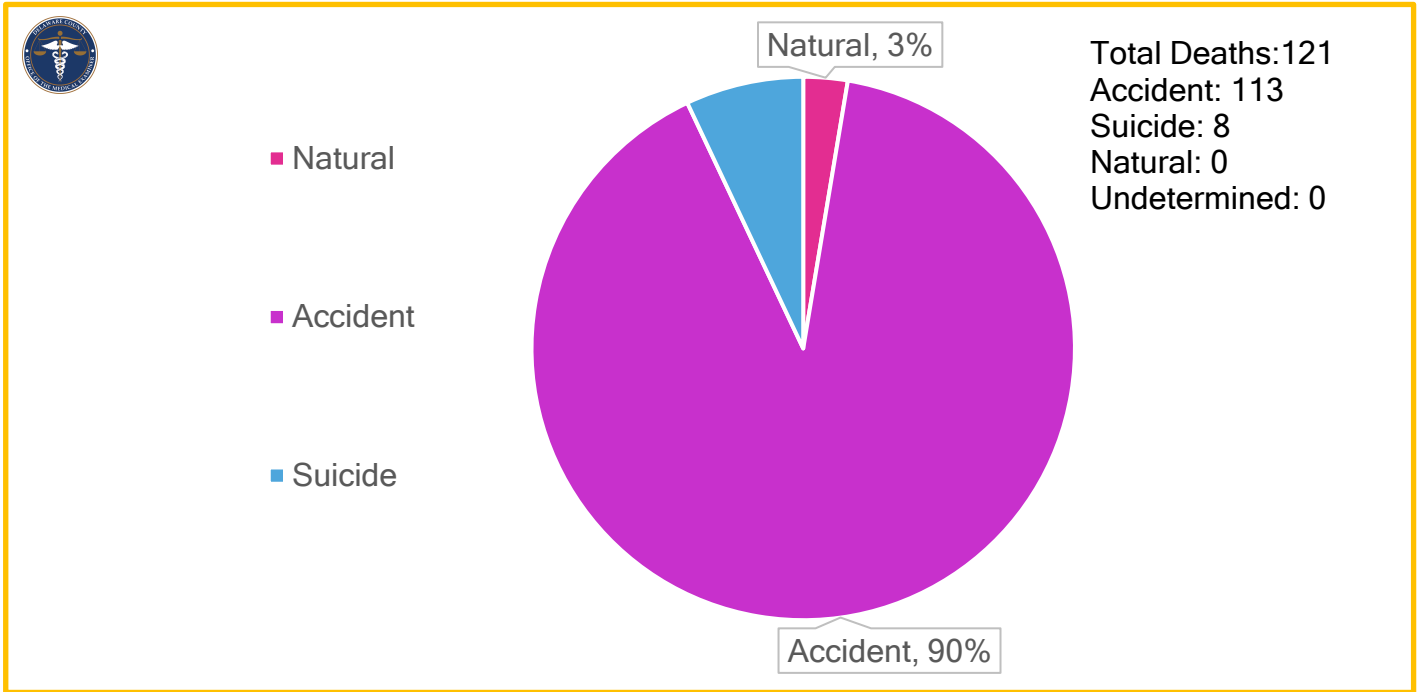
DCOME Drug Deaths by Year



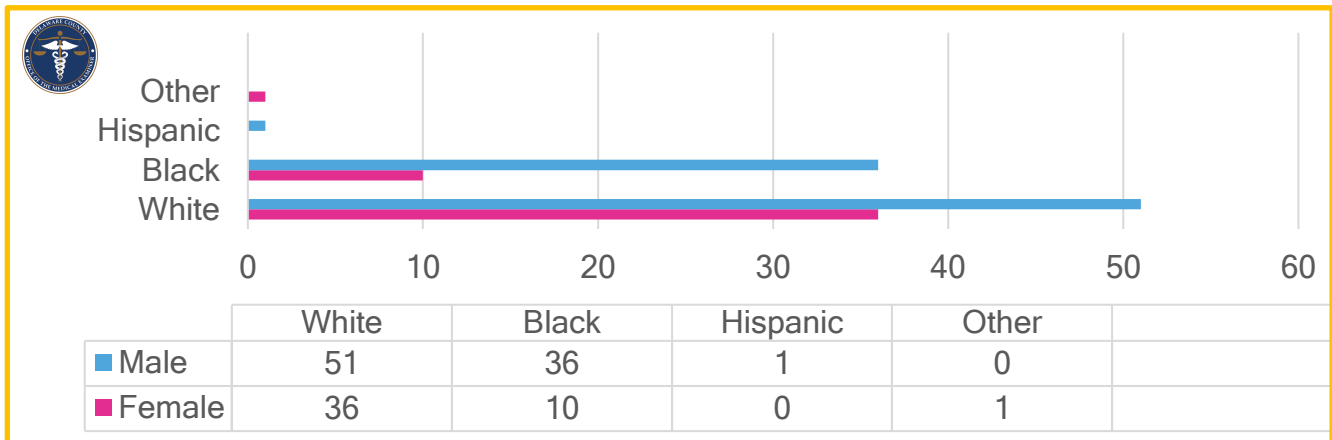
Map of Delaware County's Drug Deaths



2025 DCOME Drug Related Deaths by Manner



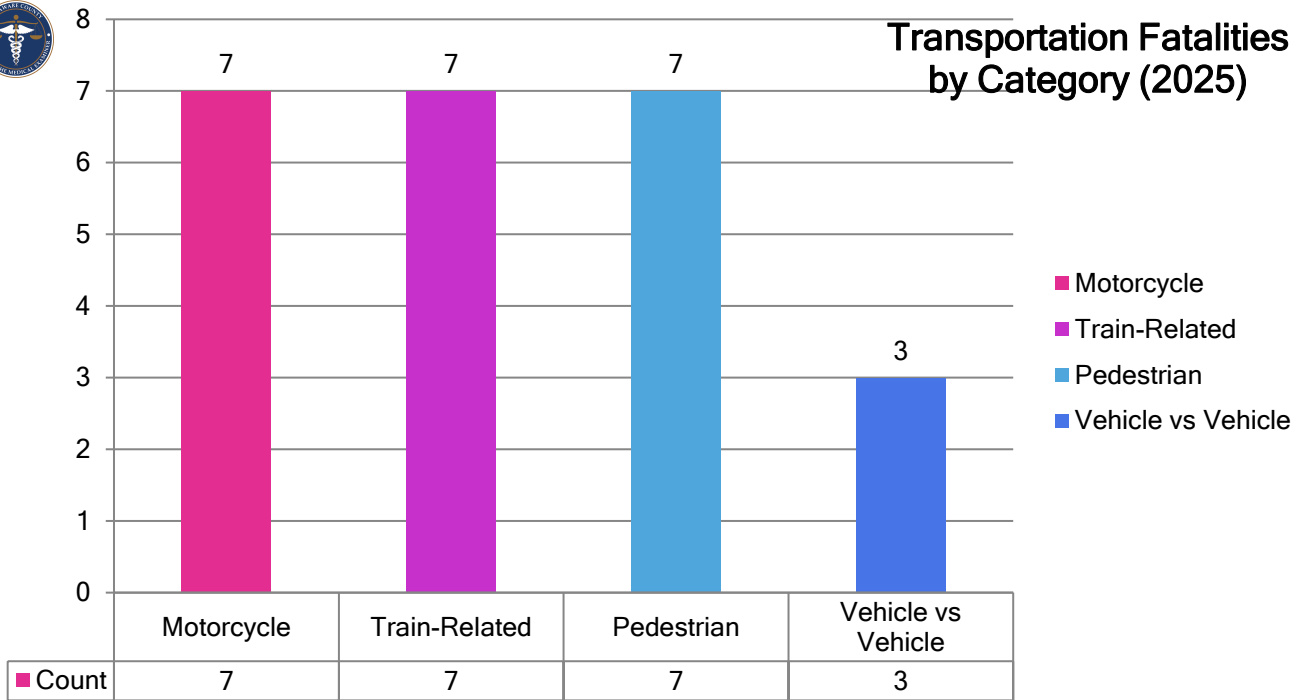
2025 DCOME Drug Related Deaths by Sex & Race



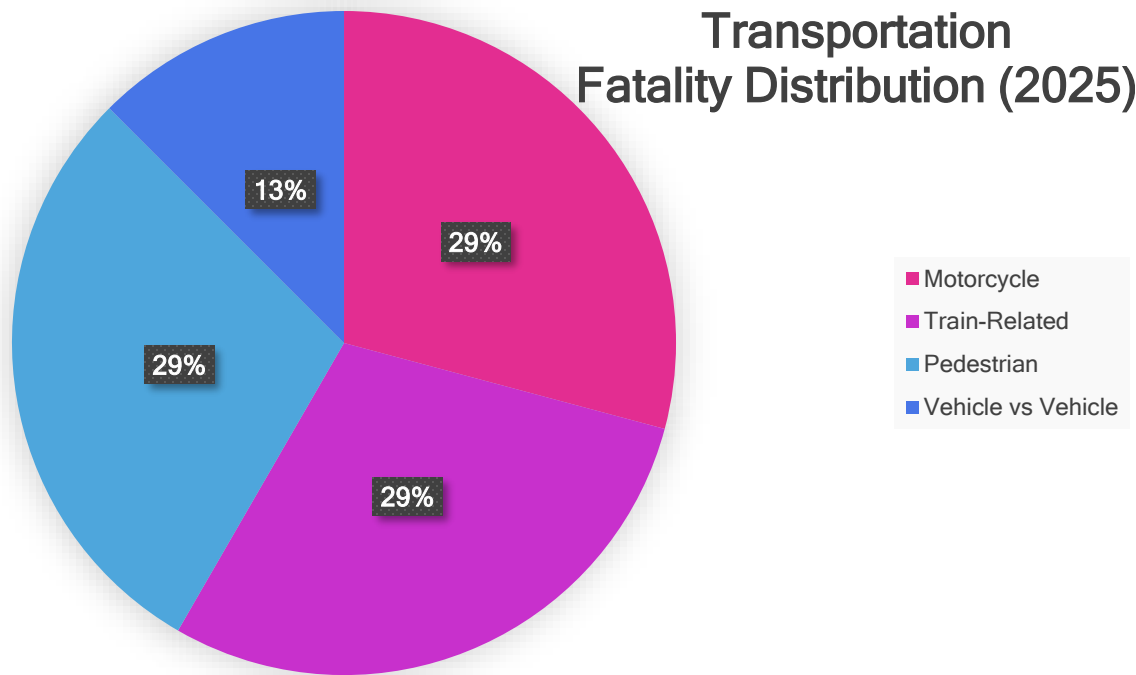
Race	Total Number & Sex
White	87; Male-51, Female- 36
Black	35; Male-15, Female- 10
Hispanic	Male-1
Other	Female-1



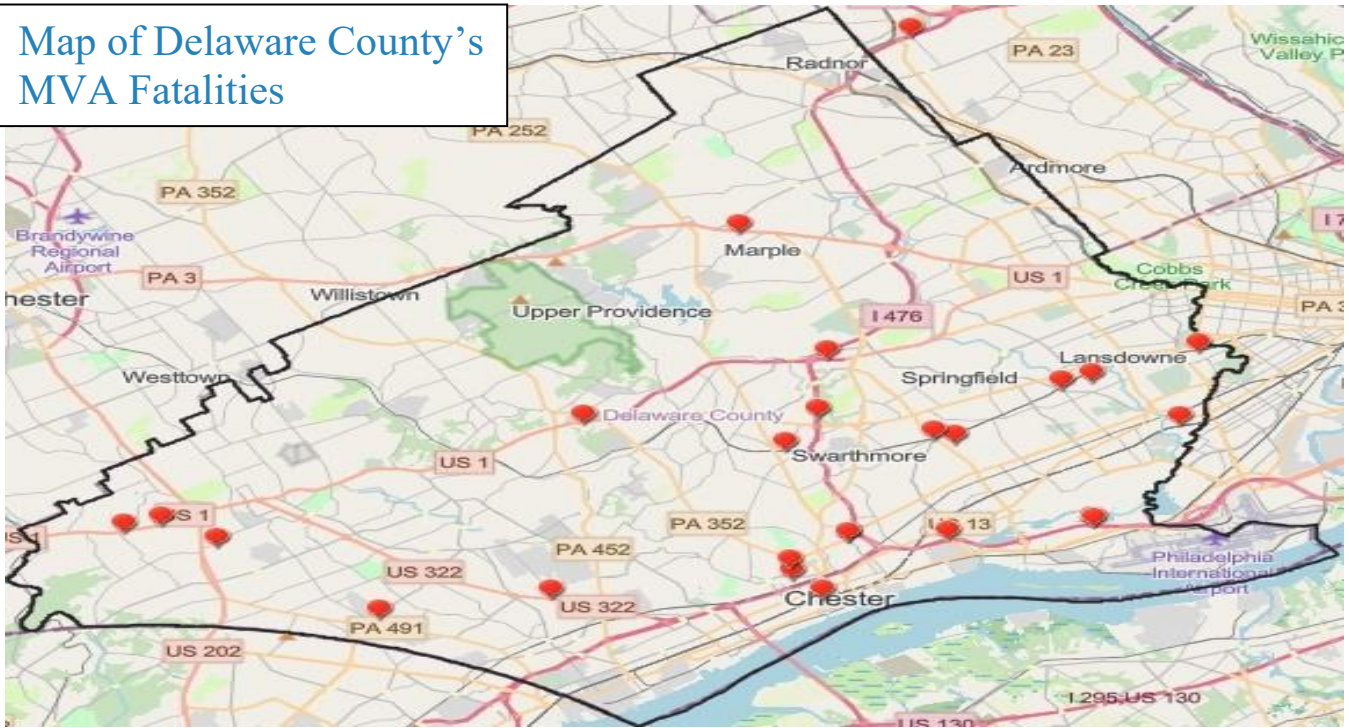
Transportation Fatalities by Category (2025)



Transportation Fatality Distribution (2025)



Map of Delaware County's MVA Fatalities



Twenty-four fatalities that occurred in 2025 and are applicable to present year's conditions were reviewed by the Delaware County Office of the Medical Examiner as transportation-related fatalities.

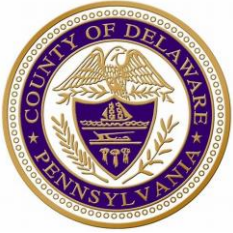
Highlights:

- 12.5% of these fatalities were traditional roadway crashes between vehicles
- 87.5% of fatalities involved vulnerable road users or uncommon circumstances
- 25% of fatalities were ruled suicides with involvement of a train
- 58% of fatalities included pedestrians or motorcycles

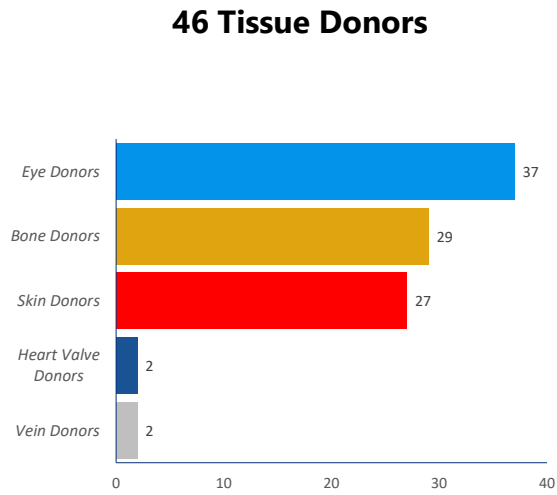
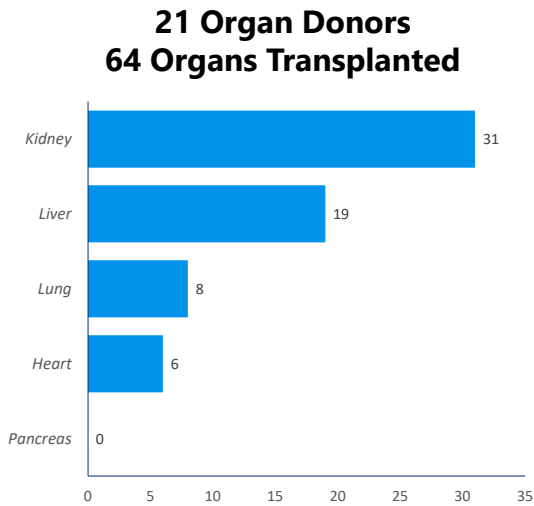
It is clear that Delaware County is experiencing transportation fatalities that are less about how our roads operate and more about people, exposure, and behavioral health issues.

Suicide continues to be a key conversation as it relates to fatality data within our transportation systems. This data underscores the importance of continuing to analyze certain categories of fatalities, specifically those involving trains, through behavioral health and prevention lens.

2025 Gift of Life Collaboration



Delaware County, PA Impact on Transplantation 2025



Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jeffrey E. Lange".

Jeffrey E. Lange, MPA, CPA, CCEP
Administrator
Delaware County Office of the Medical Examiner

