



Prosecuting Attorney - Coroner 00100.843.

Mission Statement

To accurately determine the cause, manner, and mechanism of death for all cases that fall under the jurisdiction of the coroner by conducting the highest level of professional medico legal death investigation services.

Function

The coroner is responsible for investigating and certifying the manner and cause of death for certain types of death occurring within the county. The coroner relies on assistance from law enforcement, doctors, medical staff, hospice workers, forensic pathologists, forensic anthropologists, forensic odontologists, regional medical examiners, investigators, family members, biohazard and crime scene clean up companies, and next of kin to accomplish this work.

Trends/Events

Trends

- As the county's population increases, and with changes in societal behaviors, there have been more calls for service on an annual basis. In 2013, there were 201 deaths reported to the coroner's office and there were 335 cases reported to the office in 2023.
- Overdose deaths have been trending upwards over the last 10 years but spiked sharply in 2021 with 34 total overdose deaths. This doubled the previous 10-year high set in 2016. Overdose deaths continue to increase with a new record set in 2023 with 45 overdose fatalities. Currently, Clallam County is ranked the 2nd highest county per 100,000 for fatal drug overdoses.
- Suicides deaths have remained steady the past several years with 19 occurring in 2023 and 10 between January and June 2024.
- Accidental deaths (excluding drug overdoses) are increasing and 2023 was a record year with 52 such deaths.
- Increasingly complex death scenes are requiring more time spent out of the office and on scene conducting with death investigations.

Events (first six months of 2024)

- Coordinated 32 autopsies - 29 of those autopsies with the Thurston County Coroner's Office, 2 with the Kitsap County Coroner's Office and 1 with Seattle Children's Hospital.
- Responded to an officer involved shooting fatality.
- Division manager resigned, leaving the Coroner's Office understaffed. A new division manager is anticipated to start October 1, 2024.

- Prioritized scene responses for more thorough death investigations.
- Continued to assist on autopsies, when possible, to alleviate the shortage of forensic autopsy technicians and maintain existing skill sets.
- Continued to investigate and process indigent remains claim packets from the Human Resources Department.
- Completed the Washington State Medicolegal Investigation Certification Course.

Goals

- Continue to increase our presence at death scenes for more thorough death investigations.
- Continue to assist on autopsies, when possible, to help with the shortage of forensic autopsy technicians and maintain existing skill sets.
- Maintain full staffing within the Coroner Division.
- Hire a third Deputy Coroner Death Investigator to provide higher level of care 24/7/365.
- Finalize outfitting and begin using the vehicle for body recovery and transportation to enhance service levels to the public, maximize employee safety, and reduce reliance on third party providers.
- Obtain a cooler unit for body storage to reduce our reliance on third party providers for body storage.
- Obtain/maintain certification for all Deputy Coroner's by attending the state Basic Death Investigation course.
- Collaborate with community stakeholders to identify and respond to issues and concerns related to death investigations.
- Continue the process for monitoring and reporting statistics to public health disciplines and the public using MDI-Log.
- Participate in all county Emergency Management Meetings that involve the work of the Coroner's Office.
- Continue preparing a mass casualty deployment plan for use in connection with a natural or man-made disaster.
- Develop and/or update policies and procedures, as necessary, to achieve accreditation.
- Obtain American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators (ABMDI) status as a pre-condition to applying for accreditation through the International Association of Coroner's and Medical Examiners (IACME).
- Re-evaluate compensation for all positions to ensure the office remains competitive in the labor market.

Challenges

- Limited availability of forensic pathologists and forensic autopsy technicians creates a challenge in scheduling autopsies and now necessitate autopsies to be hosted out-of-county.
- The lack of a coroner vehicle and body refrigeration unit requires the division to rely on third party providers for transportation and body storage at significant cost to the county.

- Relying on third party providers complicates scheduling autopsies as they must be coordinated between the Coroner's Office, the forensic pathologist, the autopsy facility, and other third party providers.

Workload Indicators

	2022 Actual	2023 Actual	6/30/24 Actual
Total Coroner Cases	331	335	164
Autopsies	52	77	32
No Autopsies	279	258	132

Grant Funding Sources

This fund does not receive any grant revenue. State reimburses 40% of pathologist costs for autopsies. The state reimburses 100% of costs relative to the death of a child under 3 years of age.

RCW 68.50.104 Cost of Autopsy - (1) The cost of autopsy shall be borne by the county in which the autopsy is performed, except when requested by the department of labor and industries, in which case, the department shall bear the cost of such autopsy.

(2)(a) Except as provided in (b) of this subsection, when the county bears the cost of an autopsy, it shall be reimbursed from the death investigations account, established by RCW 43.79.445, as follows:

(i) Up to forty percent of the cost of contracting for the services of a pathologist to perform an autopsy;

(ii) Up to 30 percent of the salary of pathologists who are primarily engaged in performing autopsies and are (A) county coroners or county medical examiners, or (B) employees of a county coroner or county medical examiner; and

(iii) One hundred percent of the cost of autopsies conducted under RCW 70.54.450. (iv) Up to 40 percent of the cost of transportation of remains to and from facilities accredited pursuant to RCW 36.24.210 for the purpose of autopsy services.

(b) When the county bears the cost of an autopsy of a child under the age of three whose death was sudden and unexplained, the county shall be reimbursed for the expenses of the autopsy when the death scene investigation and the autopsy have been conducted under RCW 43.103.100 (4) and (5), and the autopsy has been done at a facility designed for the performance of autopsies.

(3) Payments from the account shall be made pursuant to biennial appropriation: PROVIDED, That no county may reduce funds appropriated for this purpose below 1983 budgeted levels.

(4) Where the county coroner's office or county medical examiner's office is not accredited pursuant to RCW 36.24.210, or a coroner, medical examiner, or other medicolegal investigative employee is not certified as required by RCW 36.24.205 and 43.101.480, the state treasurer's office shall withhold 25 percent of autopsy reimbursement funds until accreditation under RCW 36.24.210 or compliance with RCW 36.24.205 and 43.101.480 is achieved.

Revenues

	2022 Actual	2023 Actual	6/30/24 Actual	2025 Budget
Taxes	0	0	0	0
Licenses and Permits	0	0	0	0
Intergovernmental Revenues	43,960	33,600	58,337	80,000
Charges for Goods and Services	0	0	0	0
Fines and Forfeits	0	0	0	0
Miscellaneous Revenues	1,441	4,310	0	1
Other Financing Sources	0	0	0	0
Transfers In	0	0	0	0
General Tax Support	224,318	374,878	178,007	324,319
Total	200,390	412,788	236,344	404,320

Expenditures

	2022 Actual	2023 Actual	6/30/24 Actual	2025 Budget
Salaries and Wages	33,361	111,844	64,707	163,938
Personnel Benefits	12,837	46,243	28,820	68,402
Supplies	15,206	9,656	598	10,000
Other Services and Charges	208,315	244,357	142,219	161,980
Intergovernmental Services	0	0	0	0
Capital Outlays	0	689	0	0
Interfund Payments for Services	0	0	0	0
Transfers Out	0	0	0	0
Total	269,719	412,788	236,344	404,320

Staffing

	2022 Actual	2023 Actual	6/30/24 Actual	2025 Budget
Full Time Equivalents	1.00	1.00	2.00	2.00