

2024 ANNUAL REPORT

**DeKalb County Medical
Examiner's Office**

**Gerald T. Gowitt, M.D.
Chief Medical Examiner**

**Beoncia Loveless
Director**

Prepared By: Claire Waliczek, MPH

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MESSAGE TO THE DEKALB COUNTY CEO AND THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

In 2024, the DeKalb County Medical Examiner's Office (DCMEO) continued to experience challenges associated with the impact of the opioid crisis and deaths due to traumatic injuries; the caseload remained stable from 2023 to 2024, but death rates have not returned to pre-pandemic levels. While overdose rates from Fentanyl significantly declined across many areas of the state and country, the rates in DeKalb County remained stagnant in 2024. In addition, deaths associated with methamphetamine use increased for the first time in many years. The DCMEO's caseload remained high amid the ongoing workforce shortage among forensic pathologists. In prior years, the DCMEO sought innovative solutions to this workforce shortage and is currently the only Medical Examiner's Office in the state utilizing Forensic Physician's Assistants; the office currently employs three individuals with this specialized training. The DCMEO also initiated the process to obtain accreditation from the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education, which will allow DCMEO to partner with Morehouse School of Medicine for a Forensic Pathology Fellowship Program to increase the number of forensic pathologists trained in the country.

DCMEO is very proud of its educational environment and hosts a variety of exceptional programs to generate interest in forensics across a wide range of disciplines in medicine, public health, and criminal justice. In 2024, the office hosted medical students, pathology residents, public health master's program students, internships in forensic science, forensic anthropology, and criminal justice, and the United States Marine Corps Processing and Retrieval Unit. In addition, the role of Public Education Specialist (PES) continued to expand, and the office participated in a multitude of educational and outreach activities at many DeKalb County schools and community events. Engagement on social media platforms to provide public health and medicolegal educational information was viewed by a wide-ranging audience. The PES also initiated and engaged in multiple prevention events to inform the public on the continuing concerns of overdose deaths, and the office developed a partnership with Claratel Behavioral Health to pinpoint areas of the county in which opioid abuse prevention, Narcan training, and outreach would be most beneficial.

MESSAGE TO THE DEKALB COUNTY CEO AND THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS (CONTINUED)

The DCMEO continued its participation on the Cold Case Task Force with the DeKalb County District Attorney's Office, the Georgia Bureau of Investigation, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and many local law enforcement agencies. This collaboration, funded by Bureau of Justice grant funds acquired by the District Attorney's Office, began in 2022 and has resulted in the positive identification of 11 previously unidentified individuals since its inception.

In 2024, the DCMEO's Director, Patrick Bailey, retired after 28 years of service to DeKalb County and Director Beoncia Loveless assumed the position. DeKalb County CEO Michael Thurmond also retired. The DCMEO extends sincere gratitude to Chief Executive Officer Michael Thurmond and Director Bailey for their years of service and looks forward to the continued support from the Board of Commissioners. The office is excited to partner with incoming CEO Lorraine Cochran-Johnson as she implements her vision for DeKalb County.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Beoncia Loveless", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Director Beoncia Loveless

DEKALB COUNTY MEDICAL EXAMINER

CASES AT A GLANCE

Number of Deaths Reported	2,313
Number of Cases by Manner of Death	1,260
Accident	394
Homicide	153
Natural	603
Suicide	83
Undetermined	25
Pending	0
Homicides Autopsied	152
Suicides Autopsied	82
Non-Motor Vehicle Accidents Autopsied	235
Non-Motor Vehicle Accident Deaths Certified	281
Motor Vehicle Accidents Autopsied	101
Motor Vehicle Accident Deaths Certified	115
Drug-related Accident Deaths Certified	191
Drug-related Accident Deaths Autopsied	181
Naturals Autopsied	359
Undetermined Autopsied	25
Opioid-Related	114
Gun-Related Homicides	142
Asian	0
Black	137
Hispanic	4
White	1
Other	0
Scene Visits	742

Department Description

The DeKalb County Medical Examiners Office performs investigations, post mortem examinations, and forensic scientific testing into deaths that are reported under the provisions of the Georgia Death Investigation Act.



The department promotes the following DeKalb County Strategic Priorities:

- Enhanced Public Safety
- Ensure Efficient Operations
- Invest in Employees
- Improve Internal Communication, Collaboration, and Implementation
- Promote Fiscal Integrity

Mission Statement

DeKalb County Medical Examiner's Office will provide comprehensive professional forensic death investigations and conduct thorough post mortem examinations within our jurisdiction, for it is not justice that we seek, but the truth in death so that justice may be served.

JURISDICTION

The DeKalb County Medical Examiner's Office (DCMEO) serves all incorporated and unincorporated areas within DeKalb County. In 2024, these areas included all, or parts of, the cities of Atlanta, Avondale, Brookhaven, Chamblee, Clarkston, Decatur, Doraville, Dunwoody, Lithonia, Pine Lake, Stone Mountain, Stone Crest, and Tucker. The DCMEO works with all city and county law enforcement entities as well as the Georgia Bureau of Investigation, Georgia State Patrol, MARTA, and post-secondary educational institutions campus police/law enforcements agencies.

As per State Law, deaths occurring on state-owned and/or state-leased property may be investigated by the State Medical Examiner's Office (Georgia Bureau of Investigation).

The DCMEO adheres to the provisions of the Georgia Death Investigation Act (§ 45-16-20).

GEORGIA DEATH INVESTIGATION ACT

The Georgia statute describing the duties of Medical Examiners in Georgia is detailed within the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, Title 45, Chapter 16, titled the "Georgia Death Investigations Act."

The type of death(s) required to be reported to the Medical Examiner include:

- All violent deaths, which includes all homicides, suicides, and accidents
- Sudden when in apparent good health
- When unattended by a physician
- Suspicious or unusual
- Children after live birth but before seven years of age if death is unexpected or unexplained
- Executions pursuant to the death penalty
- Patient of a state hospital, or inmate of a state, county, or city penal institution
- Admitted to hospital unconscious and dying within 24 hours without regaining consciousness
- As a result of an apparent drug overdose;
- Who is a pregnant female or a female who was pregnant within 365 days prior to such female's death; provided, however, that this paragraph shall not apply to a female whose death resulted from an incidental or accidental cause, including a motor vehicle accident, or from any other event or condition where it is apparent that the death was not causally related to the care of or physiology of pregnancy or its maintenance; or
- When unattended by a physician.

GEORGIA DEATH INVESTIGATION ACT (CONTINUED)

When a death is reported to DCMEO, jurisdiction is either accepted (AJ) or declined (DJ). If a case is accepted, the Medical Examiner will certify the cause and manner of death and sign the death certificate.

A death case is accepted if it meets the criteria specified in the Georgia Death Investigation Act, and:

- The agonal event(s) that caused and/or contributed to death occurred in DeKalb County, or
- If the place of incident or onset of fatal events is unknown, and the death occurred or the decedent was found in DeKalb County

A death case may be declined if:

- The event(s) that caused or contributed to death did not occur in DeKalb County
- The deceased was attended by a physician and/or was under hospice care at the time of death.

Decisions about performing autopsies that are not legally mandated are left to the discretion of the Medical Examiner.

FACILITIES

Age of Building: 29 years

Total Facility: 18,238 sq ft

Autopsy Suite: 1,200 sq ft, including separate suite for decomposed remains and infectious disease cases

Number of Autopsy Tables: 18

Cold Storage Capacity: 125



SPECIALIZED SERVICES

Toxicology Lab: Georgia Bureau of Investigation (GBI) Crime Lab & National Medical Services, Inc. (NMS)

Radiologic and Histology Facilities are located on-site

Forensic Science Lab: Georgia Bureau of Investigation (GBI) Crime Lab

Forensic Dentistry: Dr. Thomas David

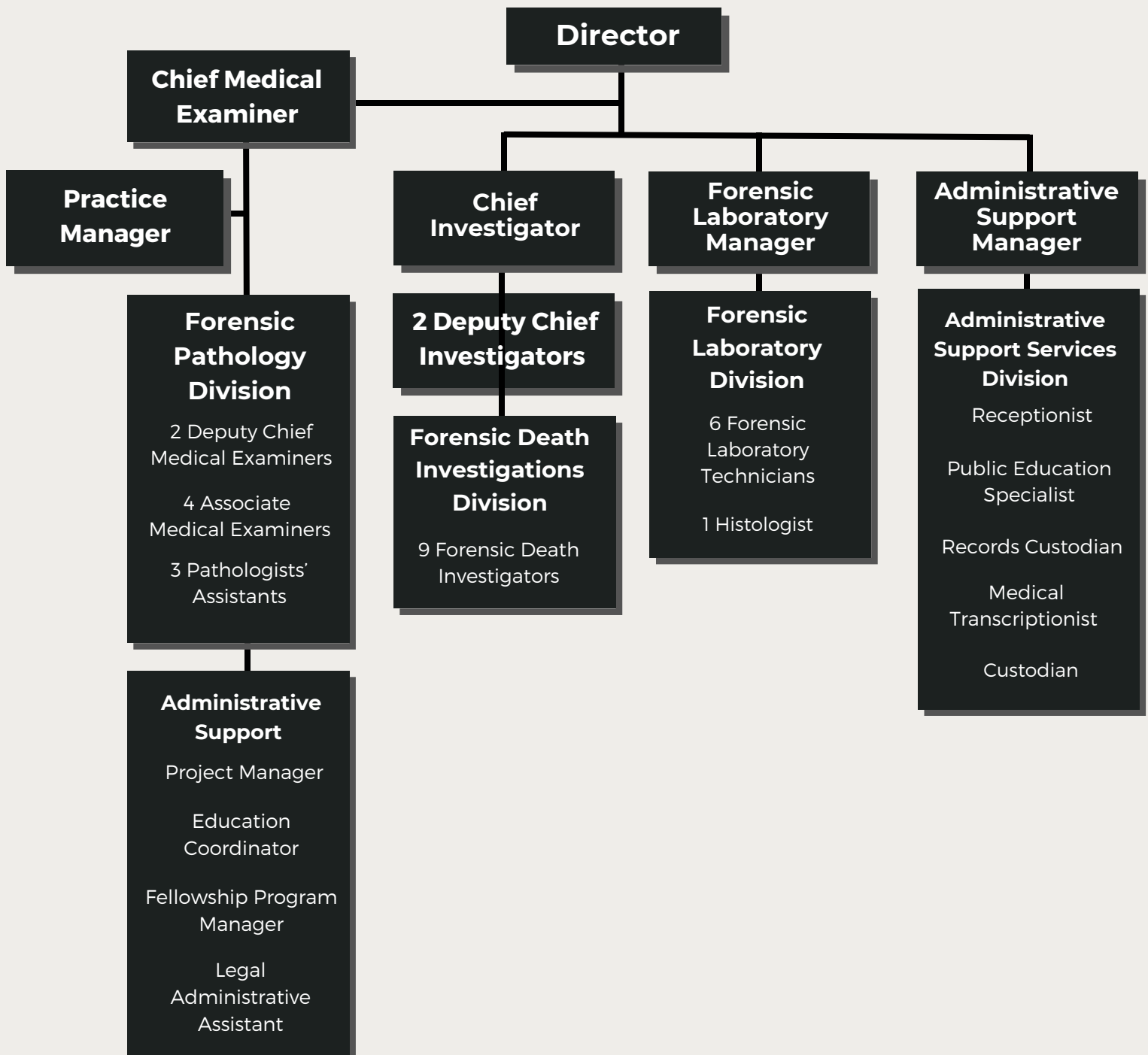
Forensic Anthropology: Dr. Meredith L. Tise

FACILITY TOTALS

- Total GBI Blood Alcohol Concentration: **609**
- Total GBI Toxicology: **609**
- Total NMS Toxicology: **352**
- Total Number of Bodies of Transported to Facility: **962**
- Total Number of Exhumations: **0**
- Total Number of Tissue Procurement with LifeLink of Georgia:
 - Tissue Referrals: **293**
 - Tissue Donors: **13**
 - Organ Donors: **8**
- Georgia Eye Bank:
 - Referrals: **254**
 - Donors: **10**
- Artivion (Cryolife) Totals: **16**
- Total Unidentified/Unclaimed Remains: **1**
- Indigent Burials (DCMEO cases): **90**
- Indigent Burials (DeKalb County Total): **228**

DCMEO BUDGET & ORGANIZATIONAL CHART

FY24 Operating Budget: \$6.8 million
DCMEO staff consists of 42 full-time employees



MEDICAL EXAMINER STAFF

Patrick Bailey

Director (Retired in 2024)

Michael M. Heninger, M.D.

Associate Medical Examiner

Bruce H. Wainer, M.D., Ph.D.

Associate Medical Examiner

Amber Winslow

Chief Investigator

Julio Alicea

Medical Examiner's Investigator

Lance Taylor

Medical Examiner's Investigator

Lendarius Farley

Medical Examiner's Investigator

Don Scully

Medical Examiner's Investigator

Keonna Jones

Sr. Forensic Autopsy Technician

Hunter Smith

Forensic Autopsy Technician

Gail Parker

Practice Manager

Alma Fuller

Fellowship Program Manager

Desiree Benton

Office Assistant/Receptionist

Brittany Godfrey

Public Education Specialist

Gerald Gowitt, M.D.

Chief Medical Examiner

Maria Elisa Smith, M.D.

Associate Medical Examiner

Marcel Castor, M.D.

Associate Medical Examiner

Kyle McGlamery

Deputy Chief Investigator

Kevin Hearst

Medical Examiner's Investigator

Craig Cannon

Medical Examiner's Investigator

Trakeveon Robinson

Medical Examiner's Investigator

Jason Crawford

Forensic Laboratory Manager

Dumonder Dawson

Administrative Support Manager

Sharon Lackwood

Forensic Autopsy Technician

Claire Waliczek

Project Manager

Lauren Bucci

Education Coordinator

Tashuna Littles

Records Custodian

Ke'Aira Rider

Histologist

Beoncia Loveless

Director (Started in 2024)

Steven F. Dunton, M.D.

Co-Deputy Chief Medical Examiner

Frederic N. Hellman, M.D., M.B.A.

Co-Deputy Chief Medical Examiner

Jess Dillard

Deputy Chief Investigator

Ryan Gutierrez

Medical Examiner's Investigator

Eric Minter

Medical Examiner's Investigator

Ashleigh Nelson

Medical Examiner's Investigator

Marquel Johnson

Sr. Forensic Autopsy Technician

Shana Wooldridge

Forensic Autopsy Technician

Rhiannon Webb

Forensic Autopsy Technician

Dustin Grossman

Forensic Autopsy Technician

Leslie Ayala-Garcia

Legal Administrative Assistant

Keisa Heath

Medical Legal Transcriptionist

Cali Dyke

Custodian

GENERAL RESPONSE

When a death is reported to DCMEO, the case is assigned a sequential case number.

Basic information is obtained on all reported cases. Medical Examiner's Investigators, in consultation with the Medical Examiner, make decisions about whether jurisdiction should be accepted or declined.

The Medical Examiner then makes decisions about the type of examination conducted and the extent of additional testing performed.

DEKALB COUNTY GEOGRAPHIC AND DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Area: 271 mi²

Age:

- <5: **12.6%**
- 6-20: **18.7%**
- 21-64: **60.1%**
- >65: **6.9%**

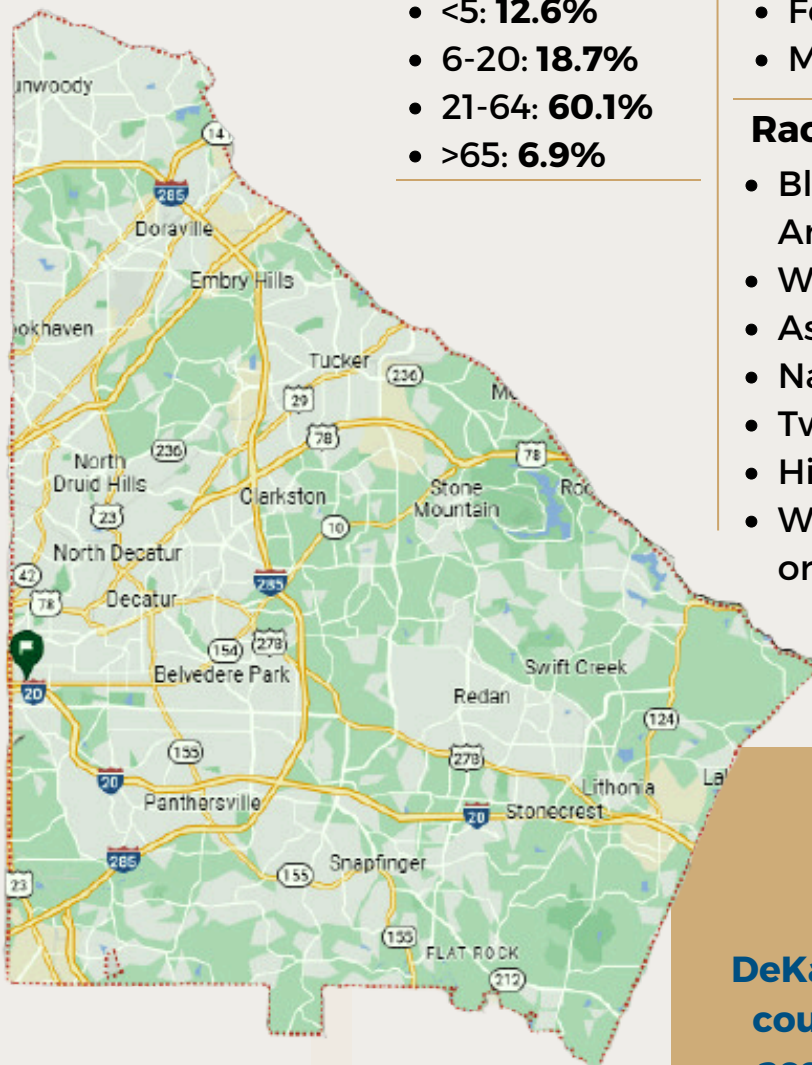
Population: 762,992

Sex:

- Females: **52.47%**
- Males: **47.53%**

Race & Ethnicity:

- Black or African American: **52.77%**
- White: **31.88%**
- Asian: **6.22%**
- Native American **0.67%**
- Two or more races: **5.84%**
- Hispanic or Latino: **2.91%**
- White alone, not Hispanic or Latino: **28.97%**



7.06%

DeKalb County is the 4th largest county in the state of Georgia, accounting for over 7% of the total population

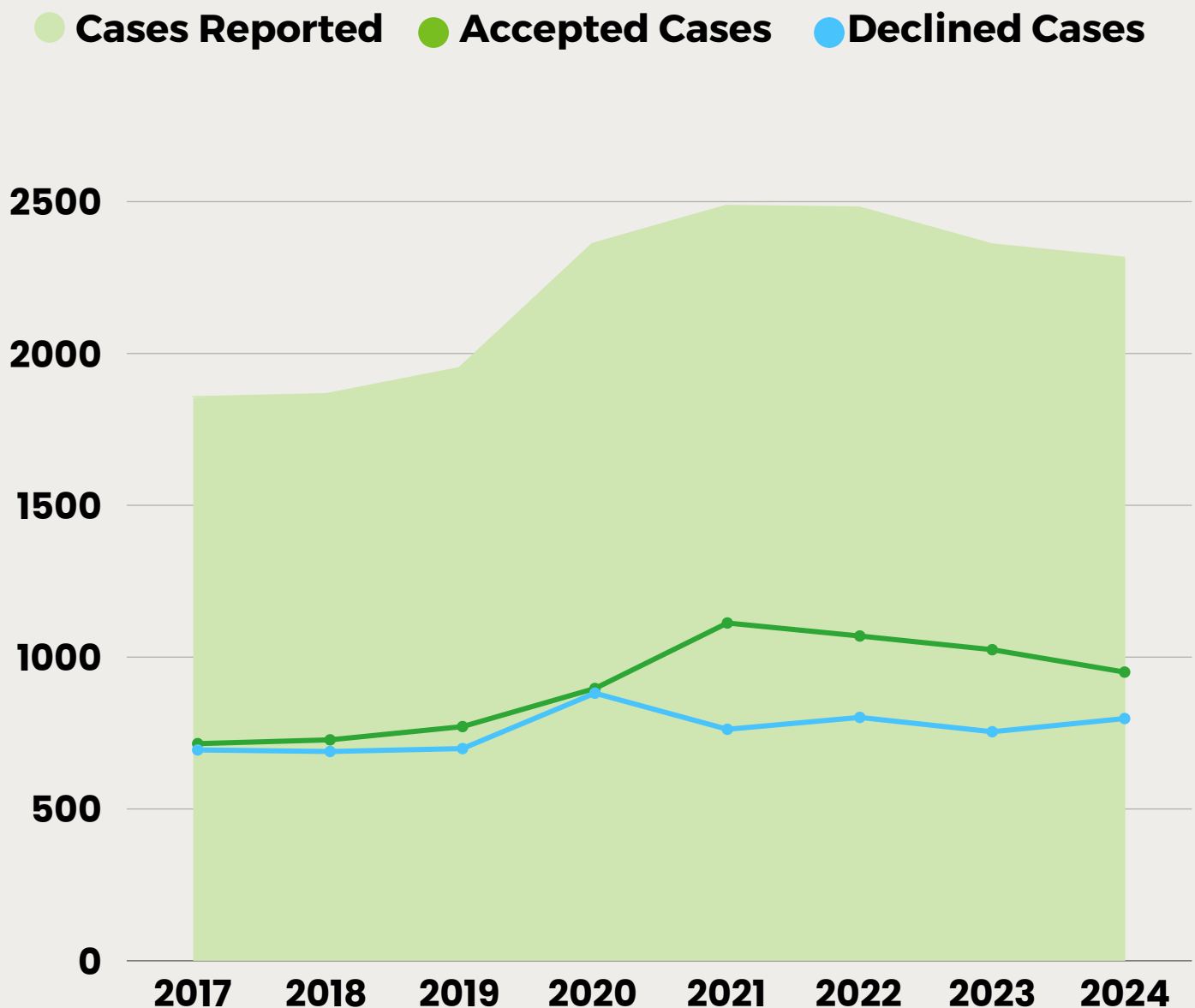
DEKALB COUNTY MEDICAL EXAMINER CASES

Deaths in Jurisdiction	5,363*
Cases Reported to Medical Examiner	2,313
Accepted Jurisdiction	1,260
Full Autopsy	417
Limited Dissection	195
External Examination	342
Number of deaths certified without postmortem examination (Sign-Out)	306
Declined Jurisdiction	1,053
Scene Investigations	742

At the time of this report, the 2024 deaths in jurisdiction data was not available.

CASELOAD

From 2017 to 2024, there has been a 25% increase in reported cases



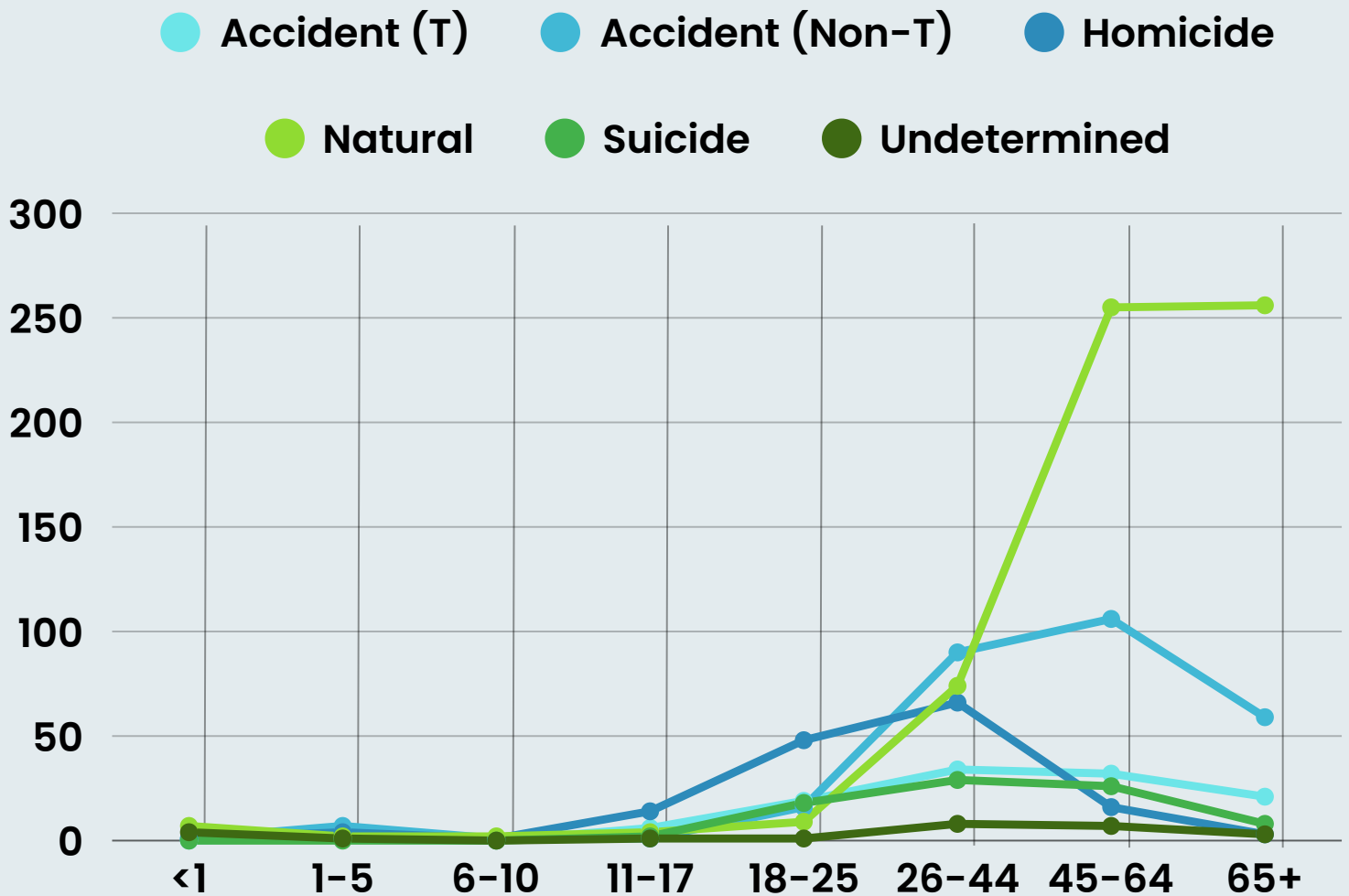
DCMEO CASES AT A GLANCE

Number of Cases Examined by Manner of Death	1,260
Accident	394
Homicide	153
Natural	603
Suicide	83
Undetermined	25

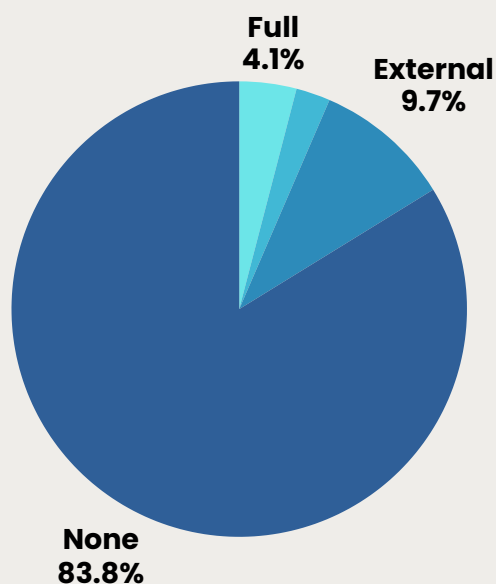
PROCEDURES ON ACCEPTED CASES

Manner	Autopsy	Limited Dissection	External Exam	Sign Out	Total
Accident (Non-Traffic)	69	34	132	46	281
Accident (Traffic)	26	21	54	14	115
Homicide	150	0	2	1	153
Natural	136	121	102	244	603
Suicide	15	18	49	1	83
Undetermined	21	1	3	0	25
Total	417	195	342	306	1,260

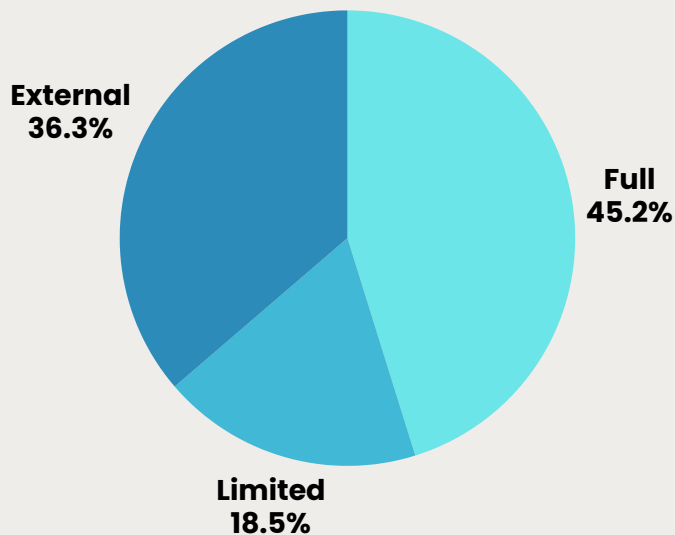
DEATHS BY AGE GROUP



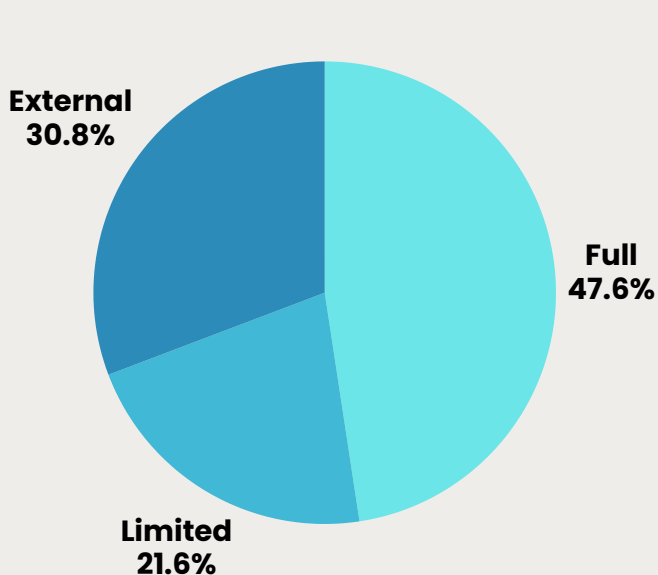
PROCEDURES PERFORMED BY MEDICAL EXAMINER



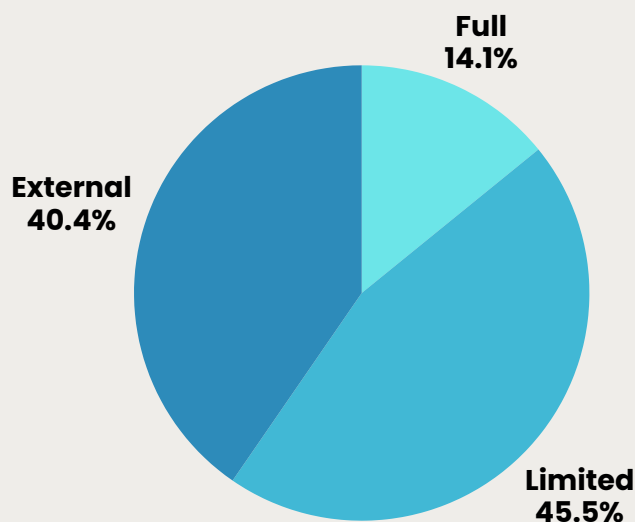
Gerald T. Gowitt, M.D.



Steven F. Dunton, M.D.

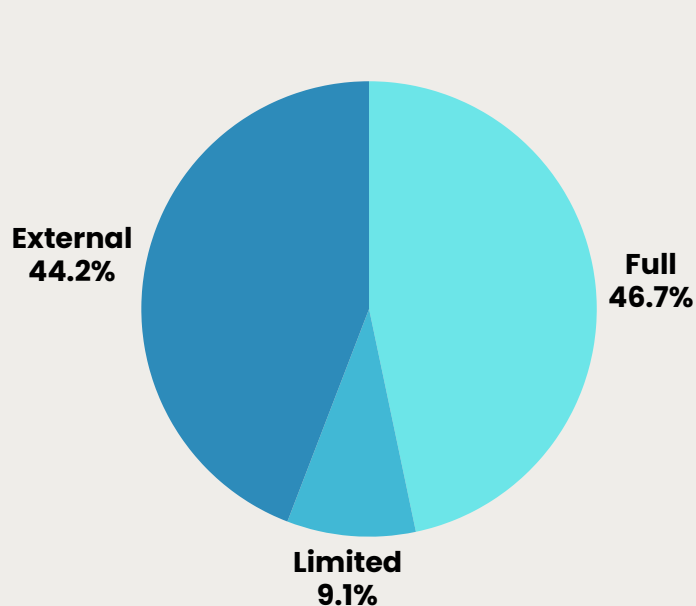


Frederic N. Hellman, M.D.

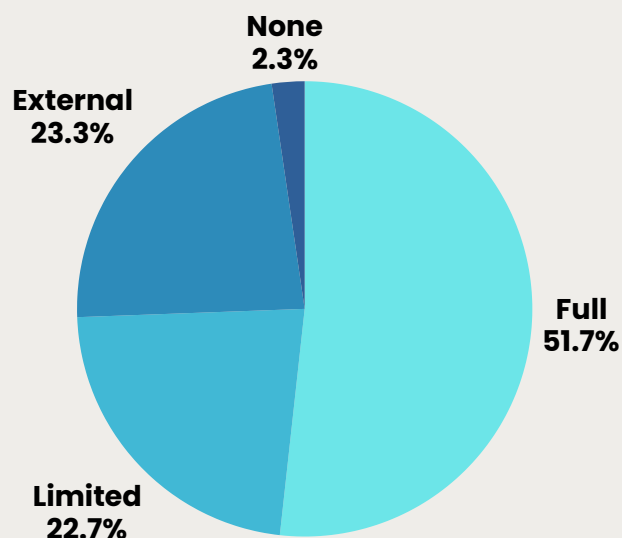


Bruce H. Wainer, M.D.

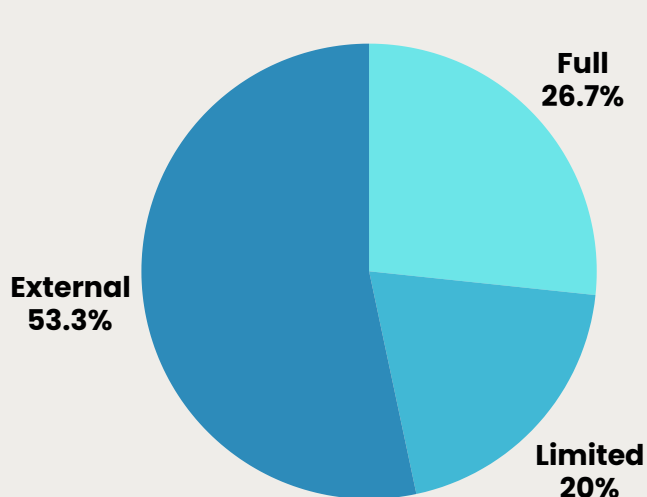
PROCEDURES PERFORMED BY MEDICAL EXAMINER



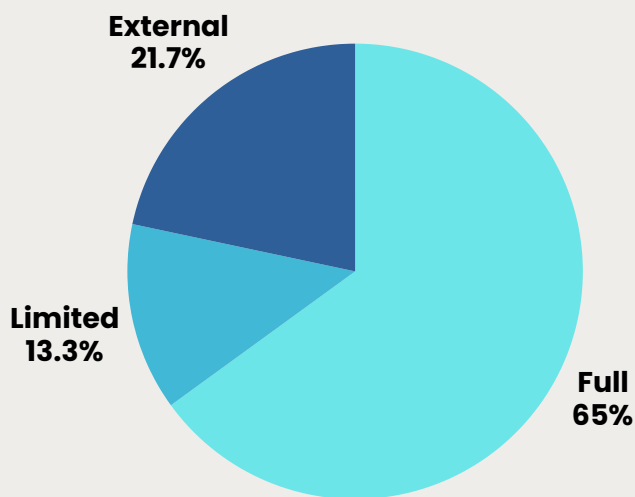
Michael M. Heninger, M.D.



Marcel Castor, M.D.

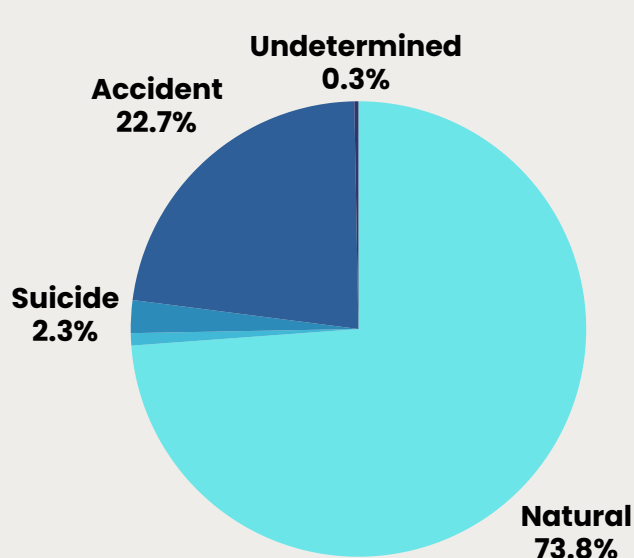


Zuhha Ashraf, M.D.

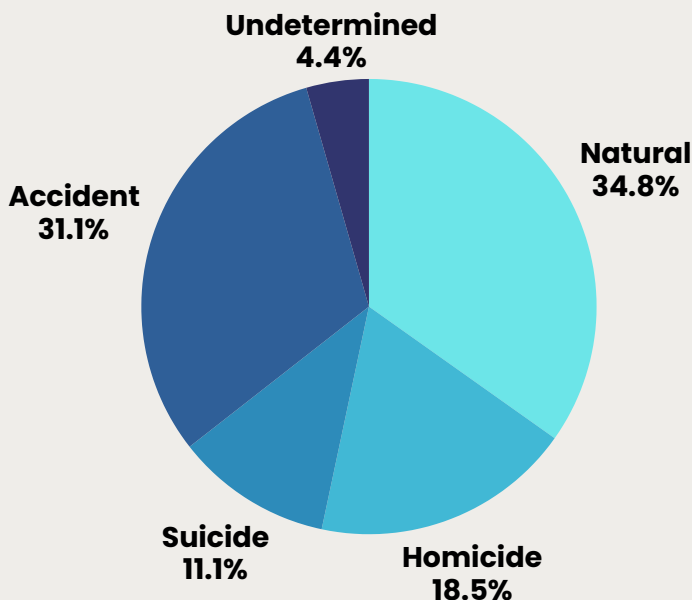


Maria Elisa Smith, M.D.

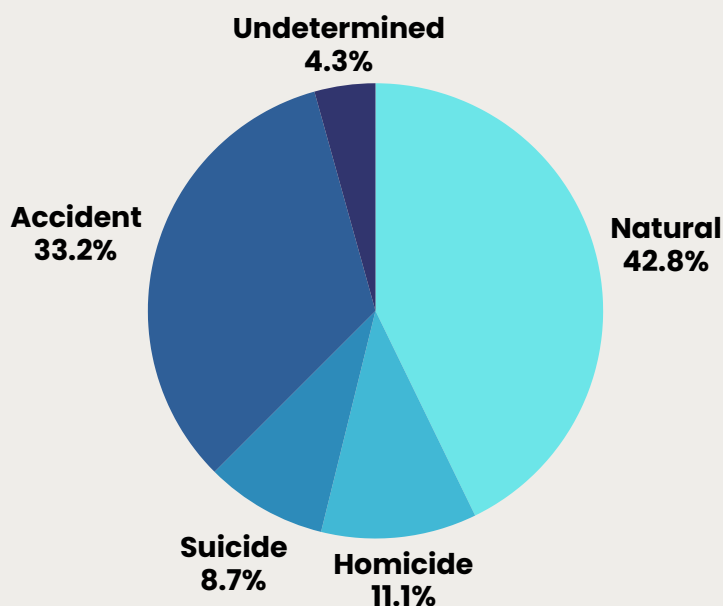
MANNER OF DEATH BY MEDICAL EXAMINER



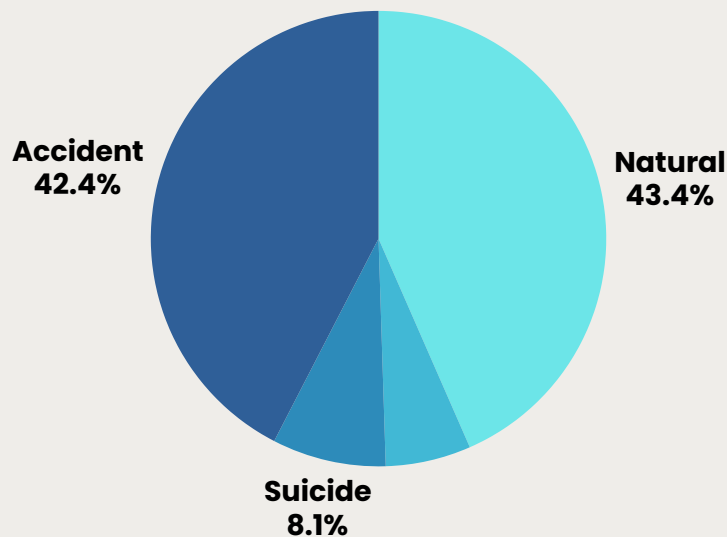
Gerald T. Gowitt, M.D.



Steven F. Dunton, M.D.

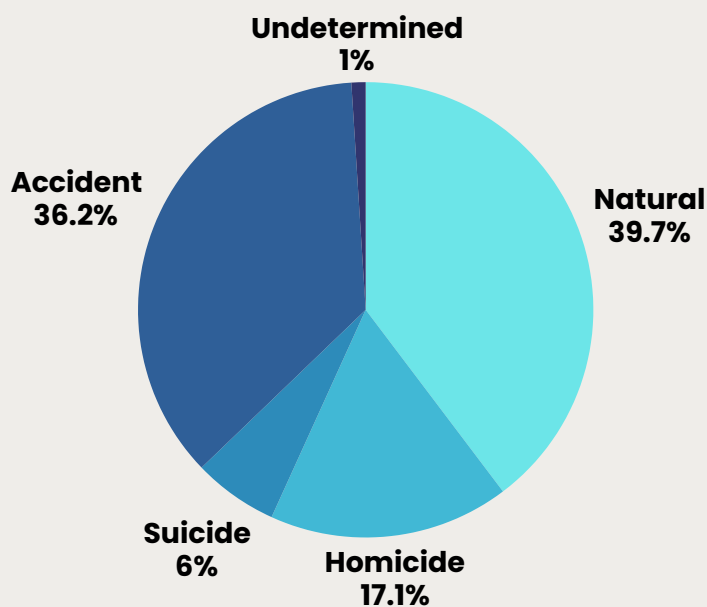


Frederic N. Hellman, M.D.

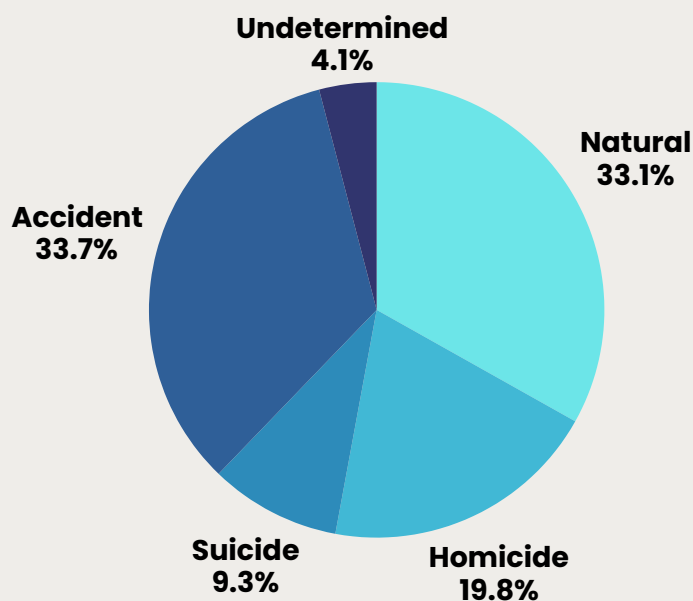


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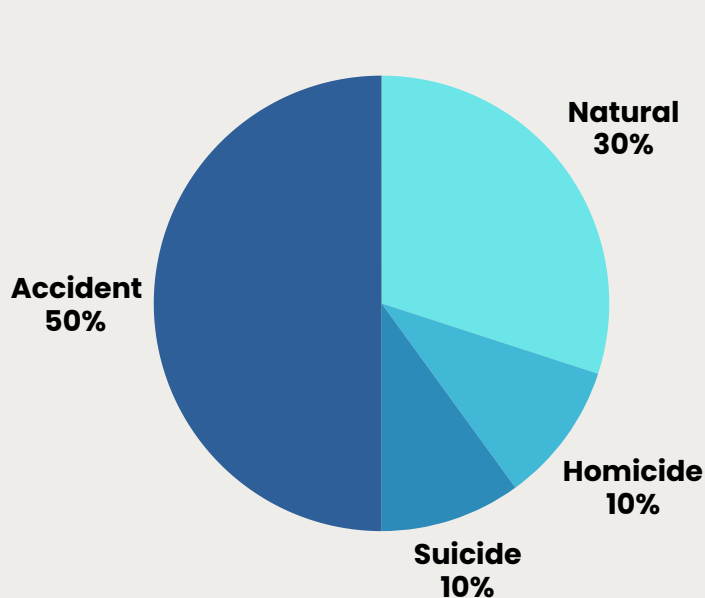
MANNER OF DEATH BY MEDICAL EXAMINER



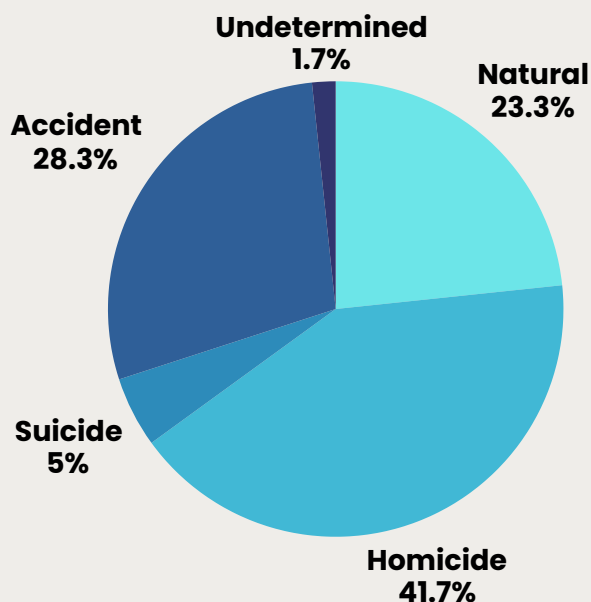
Michael M. Heninger, M.D.



Marcel Castor, M.D.



Zuhha Ashraf, M.D.



Maria Elisa Smith, M.D.

CASES BY INVESTIGATOR

Investigator	Scenes/Cases
Julio Alicea	13/33
Craig Cannon	108/327
Jess Dillard	27/142
Lendarius Farley	35/137
Ryan Gutierrez	123/329
Kevin Hearst	65/235
Kyle McGlamery	17/39
Eric Minter	42/173
Ashleigh Nelson	94/277
Trey Robinson	106/287
Don Scully	17/49
Lance Taylor	89/261
Amber Winslow	6/24
Total	742/2,052

HOMICIDES BY AGE, RACE & GENDER

	≤ 10	11-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61-70	71+	Total
AF	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
AM	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	2
BF	1	3	7	4	4	1	0	0	20
BM	5	22	42	32	13	7	3	0	124
HF	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
HM	0	1	2	0	1	1	0	0	5
WF	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
WM	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Other Female	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other male	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total	6	26	54	36	18	10	3	0	153

HOMICIDE DEATHS BY CAUSE/WEAPON

Cause	Number of Deaths
Gun-Not Specified	54
Handgun	84
Rifle	3
Blunt Force	4
Sharp Instrument	3
Neglect	2
Asphyxia-Drowning	1
Other	2

SUICIDES BY AGE, RACE & GENDER

	≤ 10	11-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61-70	71+	Total
AF	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	2
AM	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	3
BF	0	0	5	1	0	1	1	1	9
BM	0	3	11	7	8	2	1	0	32
HF	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
HM	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	3
WF	0	0	1	1	0	0	3	0	5
WM	0	0	3	4	5	8	4	3	27
Other Female	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other male	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2
Total	0	5	22	16	16	11	9	4	83

SUICIDE DEATHS BY CAUSE/WEAPON

Cause	Number of Deaths
Asphyxia-Hanging	16
Drug Death-Mixed Drug Toxicity	4
Drug Death-Acute Intoxication	2
Gun-Handgun	48
Gun-Not Specified	2
Fall from Height	3
Transportation-Train	1
Other	7

ACCIDENTS (NON-TRAFFIC RELATED) BY AGE, RACE & GENDER

	≤10	11-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61-70	71+	Total
AF	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
AM	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	3
BF	4	0	8	7	5	7	0	4	35
BM	4	3	12	23	18	29	33	7	129
HF	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
HM	0	0	5	4	0	3	2	0	14
WF	0	1	5	8	6	3	3	16	42
WM	0	1	3	11	9	10	6	15	55
Other Female	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other male	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Total	9	6	34	54	38	52	44	44	281

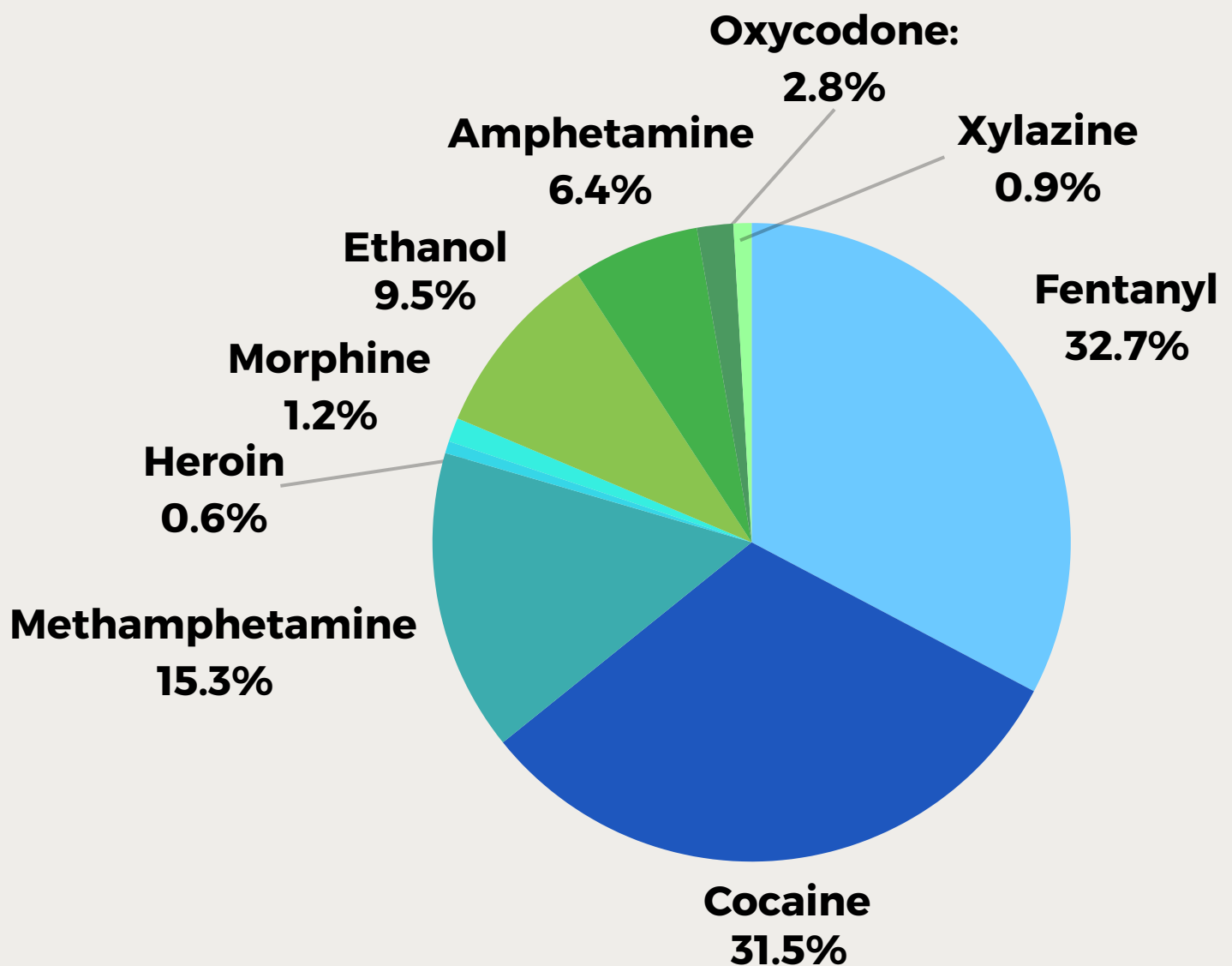
ACCIDENTS (NON-TRAFFIC RELATED) BY TYPE

Cause	Number of Deaths
Asphyxia- Drowning	5
Asphyxia-Mechanical-Positional	4
Asphyxia Suffocation-Choking	4
Drug Death-Acute Intoxication	92
Drug Death-Mixed Drug Toxicity	92
Carbon Monoxide - Structural Fire	3
Fall- Standing Height	31
Fall-From Height	4
Fall- Down Steps	7
Fall, Not Otherwise Specified	8
Hypothermia- Exogenous	5
Gun	5
Other	21
Total	281

DRUGS THAT CONTRIBUTED TO DEATH

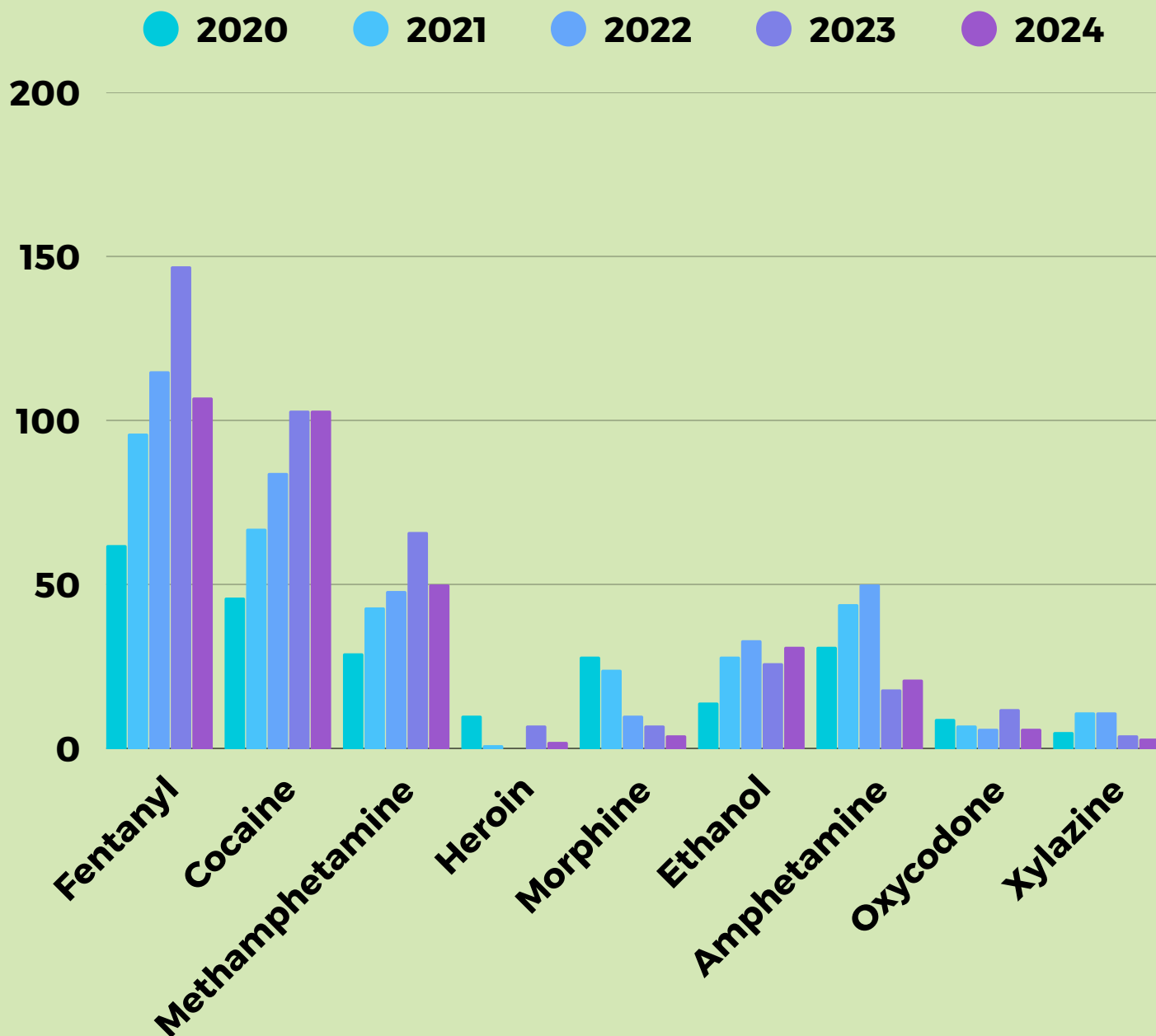
Total Drug-Related Deaths: 203

Out of 203 drug-related deaths, 114 were opioid-related and Fentanyl contributed to the death in 107 of those cases.



Results provided by Georgia Bureau of Investigation's (GBI) Division of Forensic Sciences (DOFS) Toxicology Section & National Medical Services (NMS) Laboratory

COMPARISON OF DRUGS THAT CONTRIBUTED TO DEATH 2020 - 2024



*AN UNQUANTIFIABLE NUMBER OF MORPHINE DEATHS MAY BE ATTRIBUTED TO HEROIN USE

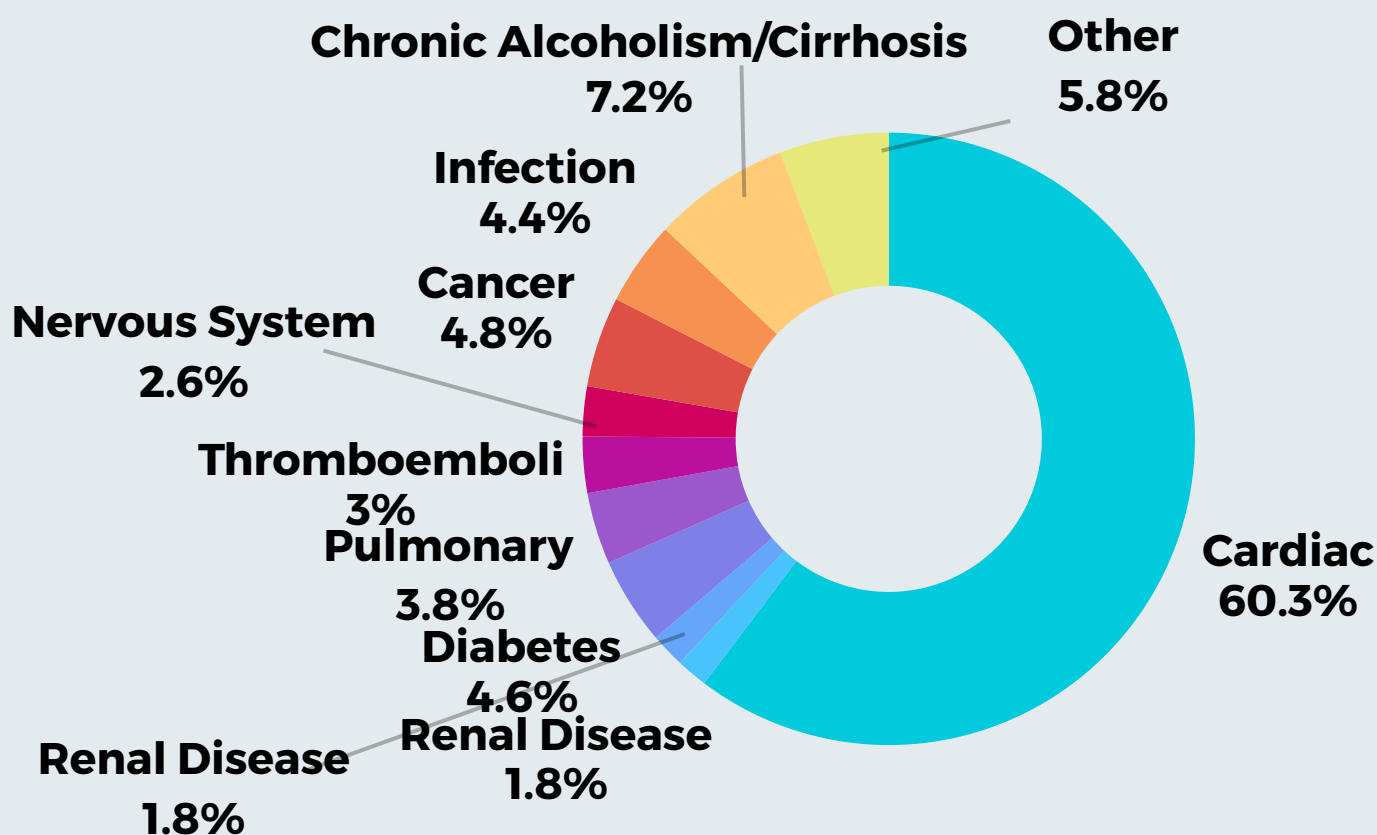
MOTOR VEHICLE CRASHES BY AGE, RACE & GENDER

	≤10	11-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61-70	71+	Total
AF	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
AM	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	3
BF	0	1	2	3	4	3	9	4	26
BM	1	9	7	7	11	7	6	5	53
HF	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	3
HM	0	4	9	2	0	1	0	0	16
WF	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	2	4
WM	0	0	3	0	1	1	2	1	8
Other Female	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other male	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total	1	16	23	14	17	13	17	13	115

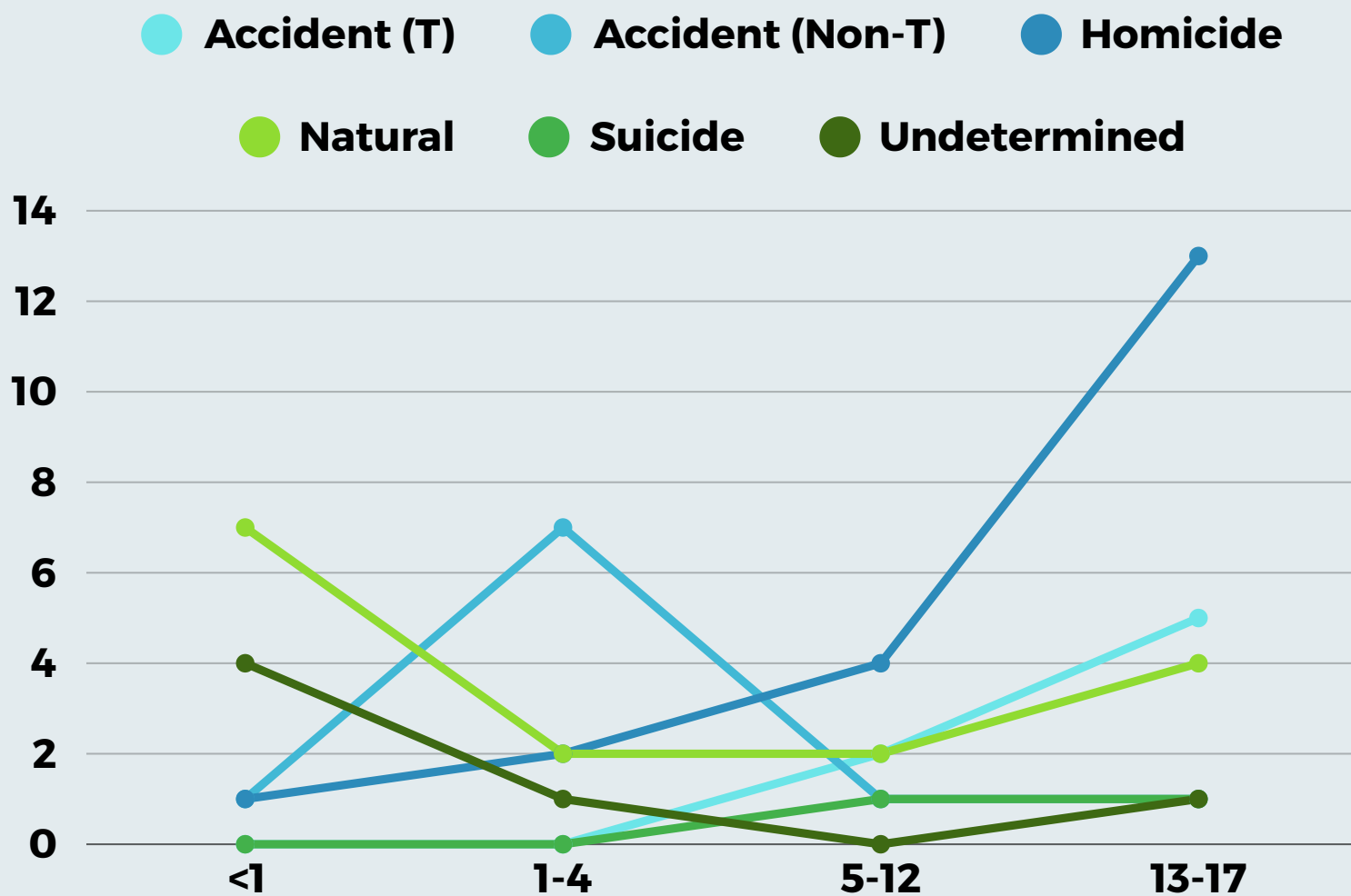
MOTOR VEHICLE ACCIDENTS

Cause	Number of Deaths
Pedestrian	46
Driver	45
Occupant	10
Motorcyclist - Driver	6
Motorcyclist- Rider	7
ATV	1
Total	115

MOST COMMON CAUSES OF NATURAL DEATHS IN 2024



DCMEO JUVENILE DEATHS



Juvenile deaths include decedents aged 17 and under

DCMEO INFANT DEATHS

Infant deaths include those between the ages of live birth and one year.

- **Number of Infant deaths certified: 13**
- **Number of infants autopsied: 12**
 - Full: 11
 - Limited: 1
 - External: 0
- **Causes of Deaths for Infants in DeKalb County 2024:**
 - Sudden Unexplained Infant Death (4)
 - Stillbirth (2)
 - Infection (2)
 - Asphyxia (1)
 - Neglect (1)
 - Other (3)
- **Manners:**
 - Undetermined (4)
 - Accident (1)
 - Natural (7)
 - Homicide (1)

**PLEASE CONTACT
THE DEKALB COUNTY MEDICAL
EXAMINER'S OFFICE AT
(404) 508-3500
IF YOU HAVE ANY
QUESTIONS.**

THANK YOU!