

2025 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 2025, the DeKalb County Medical Examiner's Office (DCMEO) caseload decreased slightly and there were 2,287 deaths reported, 40% of which were examined by medical staff. The national workforce shortage among forensic pathologists continued to impact offices across the country, and in 2025, the DCMEO obtained accreditation from the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education, which allows 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. There are fewer than 40 new forensic pathologists trained annually, so the office's contribution to the field is significant. Fortunately, the DCMEO remained fully staffed and maintained caseloads within the standards set forth by the National Association of Medical Examiners despite the workforce shortage. In addition to the cadre of physicians, the DCMEO is the only office in the state utilizing specially trained Pathologists' Assistants, three of whom work in the office and assist physicians with postmortem examinations. Effective June 1, 2025, scene response criteria was amended, resulting in a 31% increase in scene investigations from 2024 to 2025. Not only did the investigative staff meet this challenge, death investigators continued to seek specialized training and two staff members passed the Registry Certification examination with the American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators (ABMDI). There are now seven ABMDI Registry Certified staff members at the DCMEO, and one staff member is Board Certified by the ABMDI.

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 local law enforcement agencies. This collaboration, funded by Bureau of Justice grant funds acquired by the District Attorney's Office, began in 2022. In 2025, three individuals were identified. Though 14 individuals have been identified since the Task Force initiated its efforts in 2022, 17 unidentified individuals remain at the DCMEO, and staff continue to work diligently to identify those people and bring closure to their families.

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

The 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 2025, the office hosted medical students, pathology residents, public health master's program students, interns in forensic science, forensic anthropology, and criminal justice, and the United States Marine Corps Processing and Retrieval Unit. The office increased the number of formal agreements with our educational partners and can now host students from Chattahoochee Technical College and The University of Georgia, in addition to the programs already in place prior to 2025.

While the DCMEO is committed to the education of students and future forensics personnel, the office also understands the importance of educating the public and maintaining excellent relationships with the community it serves. The Public Education Specialist (PES) significantly increased activities in 2025; the number of community outreach events doubled from the prior year, the number of career day/school events doubled from the prior year, and the office's social media reach increased by 40%. The Public Education Specialist is an innovative position within a medical examiner's office, and the PES presented at the National Association of Medical Examiner's conference in October 2025 to encourage other offices around the country to increase efforts to engage their communities and generate interest in the field.

The DCMEO remains a dedicated civic partner as well as a leader in the national Medical Examiner community, and we thank the Board of Commissioners and CEO Lorraine Cochran-Johnson for their continued support of our efforts!



Director Beoncia Loveless

DEKALB COUNTY MEDICAL EXAMINER CASES AT A GLANCE

Deaths in Jurisdiction		5,345
Number of Deaths Reported		2,287
Deaths Investigated: (certified)		1,250
Accident	361	
Homicide	123	
Natural	632	
Suicide	86	
Undetermined	32	
Scenes Investigated by ME/C Staff:		972
Bodies brought to the facility:		956
Bodies transported to the facility which were paid for or transported by the ME/C		956
Full autopsies performed:		367
Limited Examinations:		211
External Examinations:		332
Microscopic Studies:		443
Formal Neuropathologic Studies:		32
Formal Cardiac Pathologic Studies:		7
Motor Vehicle Accident Deaths Certified		112
Motor Vehicle Accidents Autopsied		103
Drug-related Accidental Deaths Certified		136
Drug-related Accidental Deaths Autopsied		129
Non-MVA, Non-drug related Accidental Deaths Certified		113
Non-MVA, Non-drug related Accidental Deaths Autopsied		50
Opioid and Opioid-Related Analyte Deaths		94
Gun-Related Homicides		111
Asian	0	
Black	102	
Hispanic	5	
White	3	
Other	1	

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 2025, 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 Facility is located on-site

Histology Facilities are contracted out to Chestatee Pathology

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

Forensic Dentistry: Dr. Thomas David

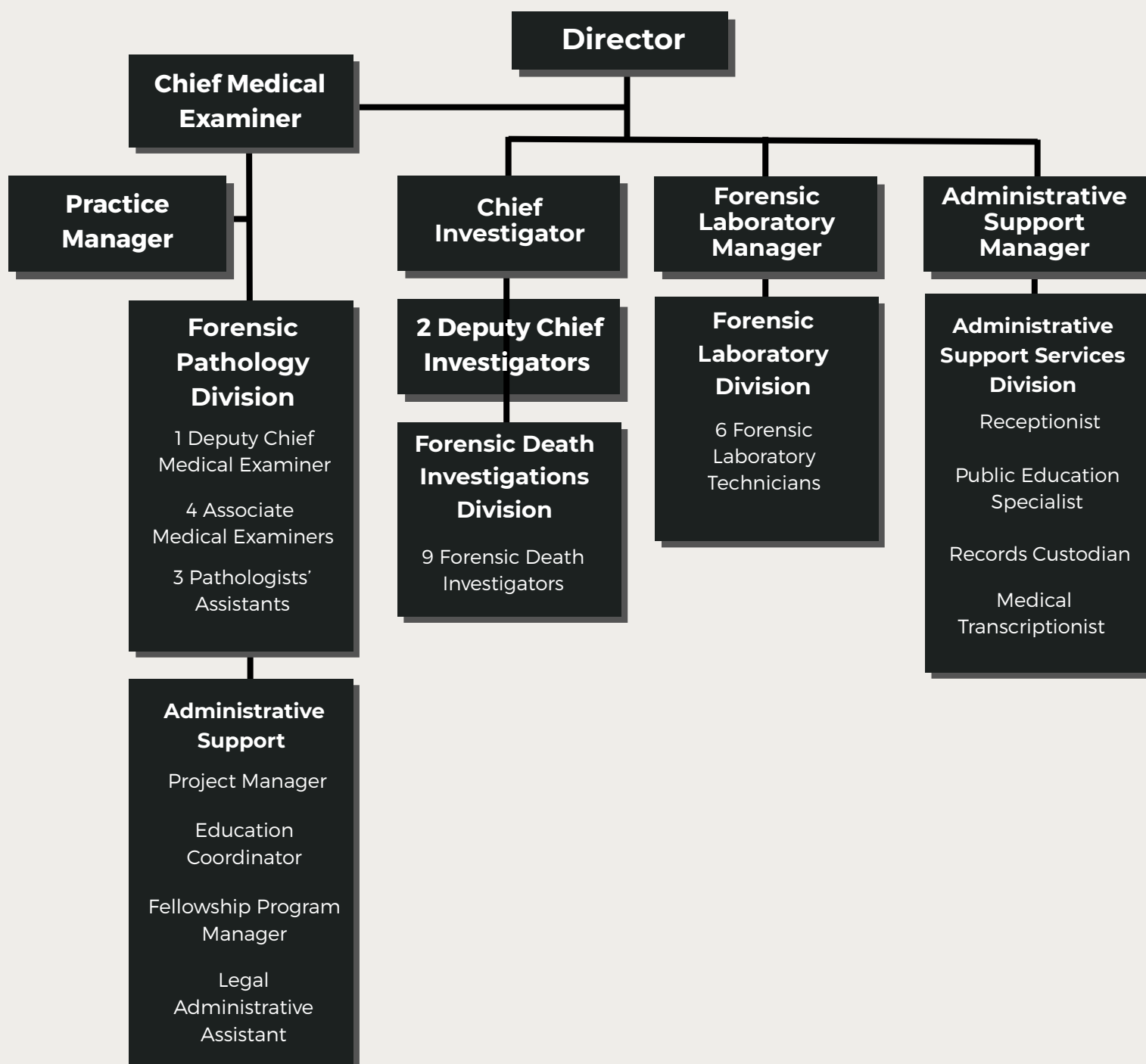
Forensic Anthropology: Dr. Meredith L. Tise

FACILITY TOTALS

- Total GBI Blood Alcohol Concentration: **590**
- Total GBI Toxicology: **590**
- Total NMS Toxicology: **249**
- Total Number of Bodies of Transported to Facility: **956**
- Total Number of Exhumations: **0**
- Total Number of Tissue Procurement with LifeLink of Georgia:
 - Tissue Referrals: **474**
 - Tissue Donors: **27**
 - Organ Donors: **13**
- Georgia Eye Bank:
 - Referrals: **405**
 - Donors: **9**
- Artivion (Cryolife) Totals: **16**
- Total Unidentified/Unclaimed Remains: **2**
- Indigent Burials (DCMEO cases): **49**
- Indigent Burials (DeKalb County Total): **221**

DCMEO BUDGET & ORGANIZATIONAL CHART

FY25 Operating Budget: \$7.2 million
DCMEO staff consists of 42 full-time employees



MEDICAL EXAMINER STAFF

Beoncia Loveless
Director

Michael M. Heninger, M.D.
Associate Medical Examiner

Bruce H. Wainer, M.D., Ph.D.
Associate Medical Examiner

Kyle McGlamery
Deputy Chief Investigator

James King
Medical Examiner's Investigator

Lendarius Farley
Medical Examiner's Investigator

Lance Taylor
Medical Examiner's Investigator

Emily Edge-Biersdorf
Medical Examiner's Investigator

Marquel Johnson
Sr. Forensic Autopsy Technician

Keonna Plummer
Sr. Forensic Autopsy Technician

Dustin Grossman
Forensic Autopsy Technician

Alma Fuller
Fellowship Program Manager

Brittany Godfrey
Public Education Specialist

Desiree Benton
Office Assistant/Receptionist

Gerald Gowitt, M.D.
Chief Medical Examiner

Marcel Castor, M.D.
Associate Medical Examiner

Zuhha Ashraf, M.D.
Locums Medical Examiner

Jess Dillard
Deputy Chief Investigator

Craig Cannon
Medical Examiner's Investigator

Trakeveon Robinson
Medical Examiner's Investigator

Don Scully
Medical Examiner's Investigator

Jason Crawford
Forensic Laboratory Manager

Angelique Tighe
Forensic Autopsy Technician

Hunter Smith
Forensic Autopsy Technician

Gail Parker
Practice Manager

Lauren Bucci
Education Coordinator

Tashuna Littles
Records Custodian

Shirley Gleaton
Administrative Specialist

Maria Elisa Smith, M.D.
Deputy Chief Medical Examiner

Frederic N. Hellman, M.D., M.B.A.
Associate Medical Examiner

Amber Winslow
Chief Investigator

Kevin Hearst
Medical Examiner's Investigator

Ryan Gutierrez
Medical Examiner's Investigator

Eric Minter
Medical Examiner's Investigator

Ashleigh Nelson
Medical Examiner's Investigator

Dumonder Dawson
Administrative Support Manager

Erin Franchini
Forensic Autopsy Technician

Rhiannon Webb
Forensic Autopsy Technician

Claire Waliczek
Project Manager

Leslie Ayala-Garcia
Legal Administrative Assistant

Keisa Heath
Medical Legal Transcripitionist

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%**

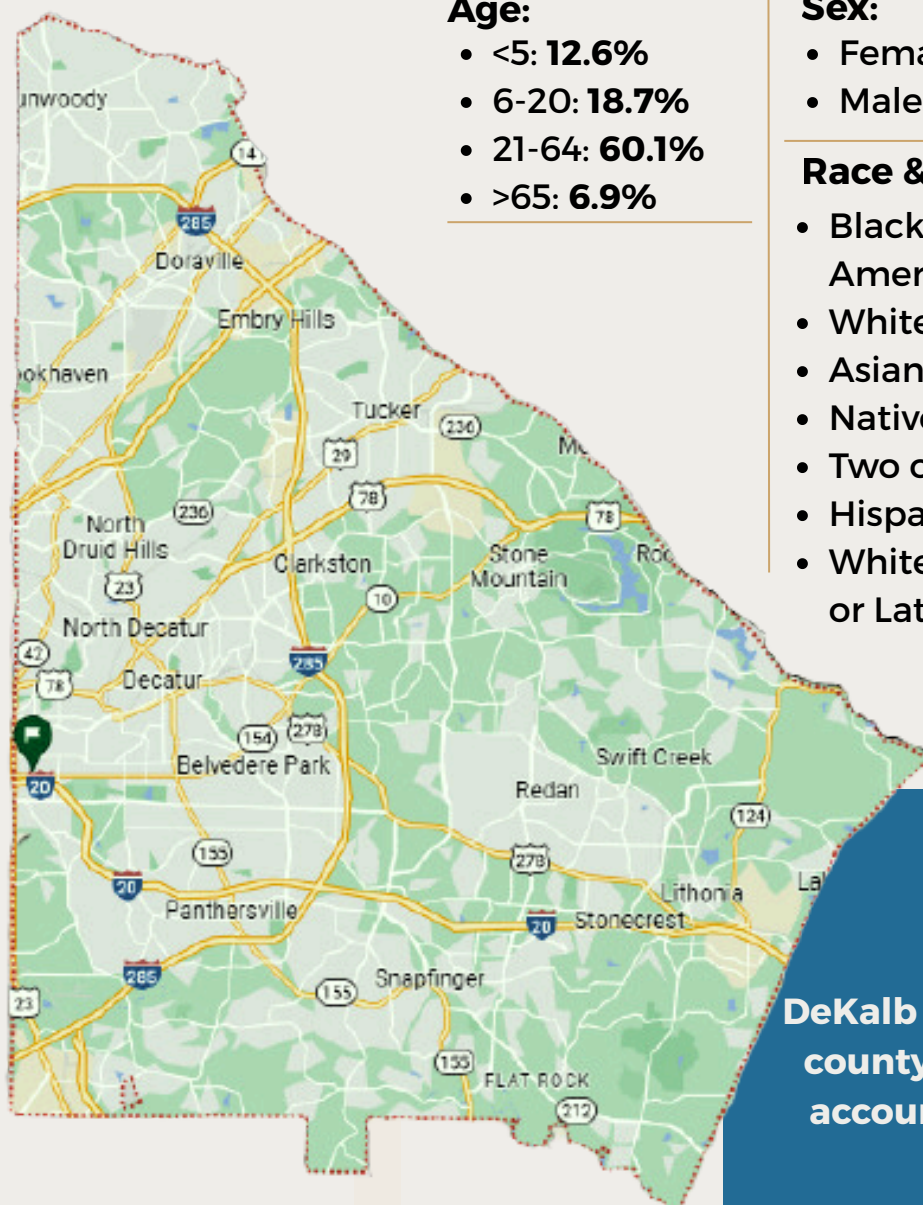
Population: 762,992

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%

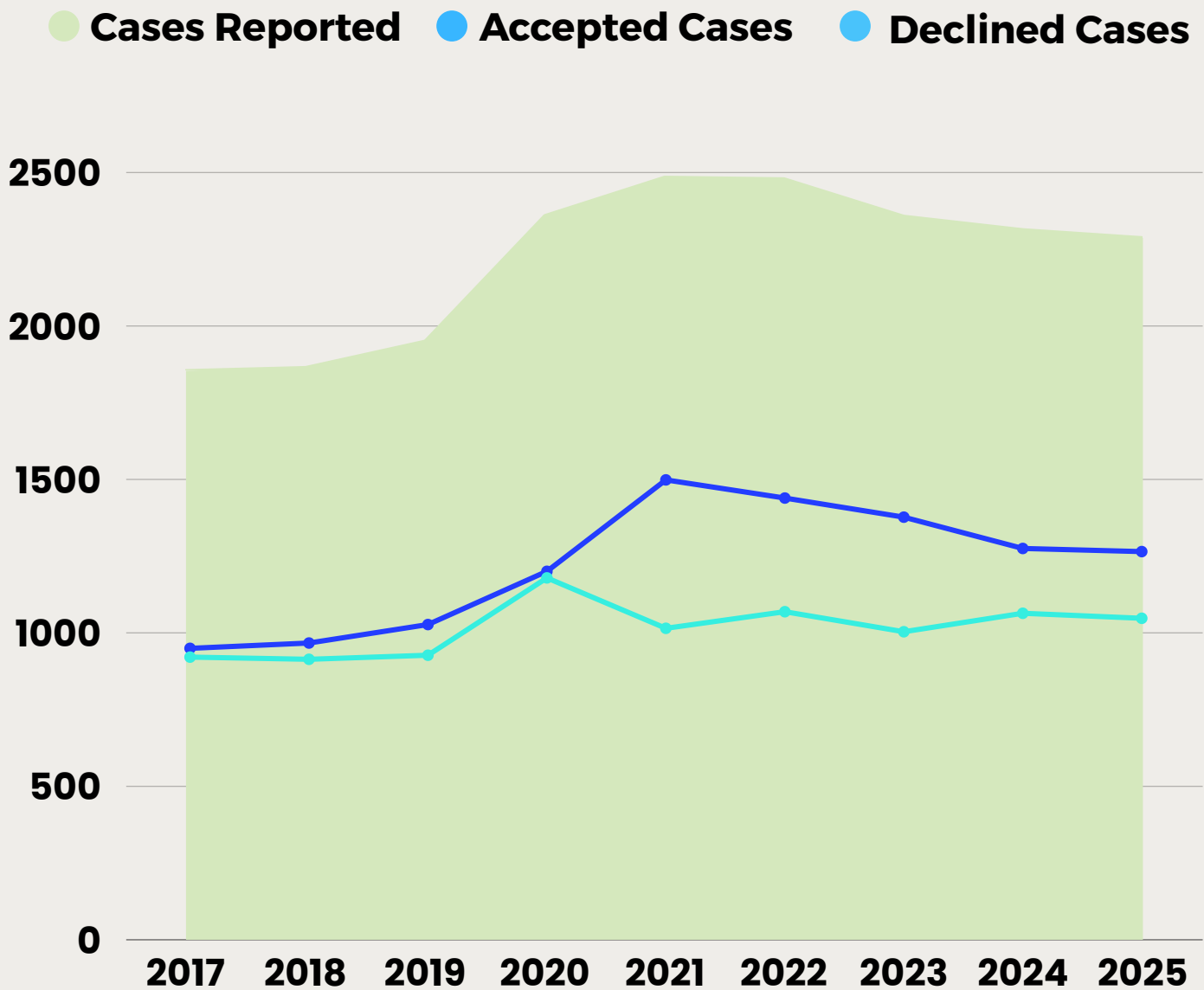
DeKalb County is the 4th largest county in the state of Georgia, accounting for over 7% of the total population

DEKALB COUNTY MEDICAL EXAMINER CASES

Deaths in Jurisdiction	5,345
Cases Reported to Medical Examiner	2,287
Accepted Jurisdiction	1250
Full Autopsy	367
Limited Dissection	211
External Examination	332
Number of deaths certified without postmortem examination (Sign-Out)	340
Declined Jurisdiction	1,037
Scene Investigations	972

CASELOAD

From 2017 to 2025, there has been a 25% increase in reported cases



DCMEO CASES AT A GLANCE

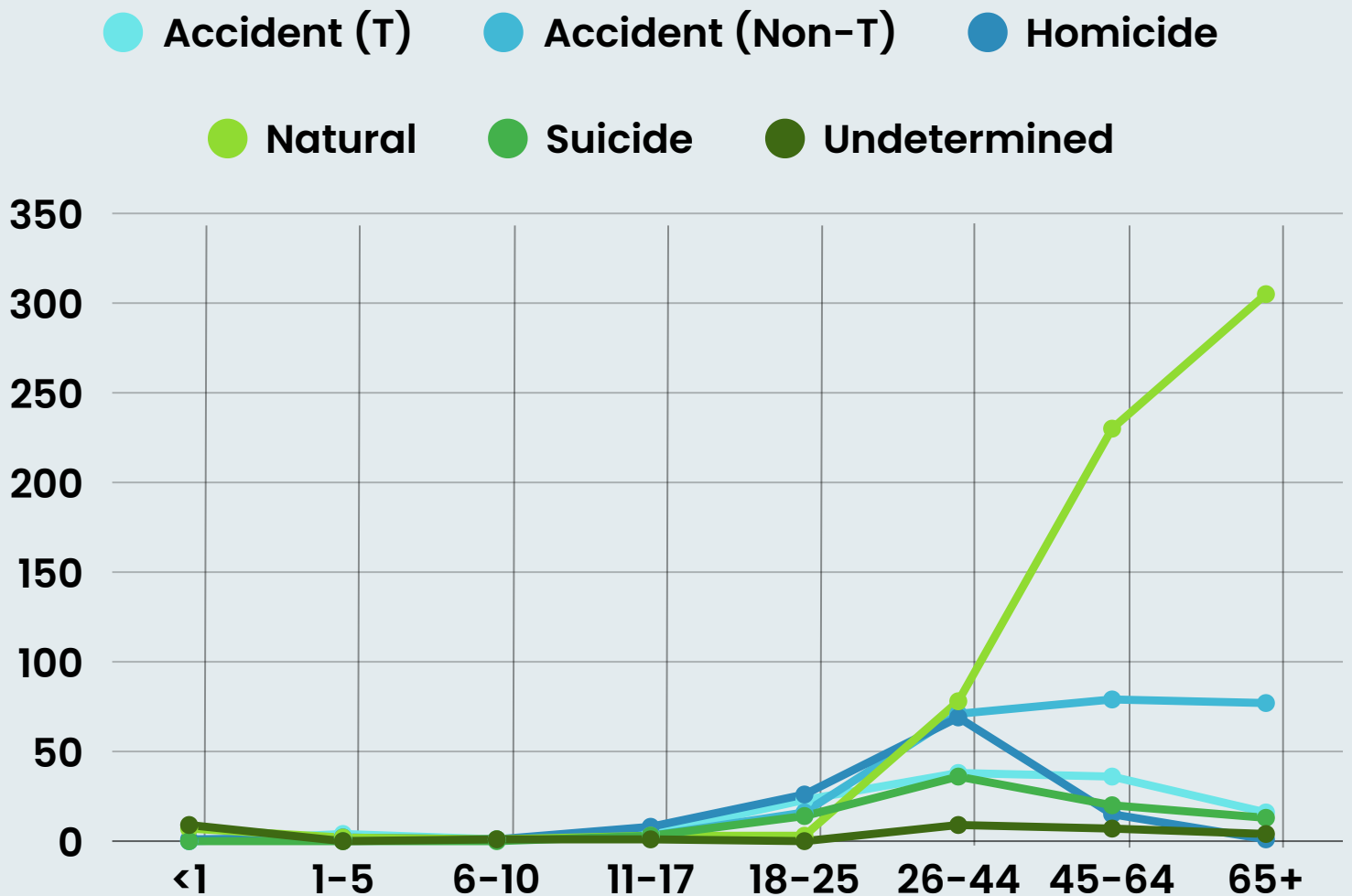
Number of Cases Examined by Manner of Death

Accident	361
Homicide	123
Natural	632
Suicide	86
Undetermined	32

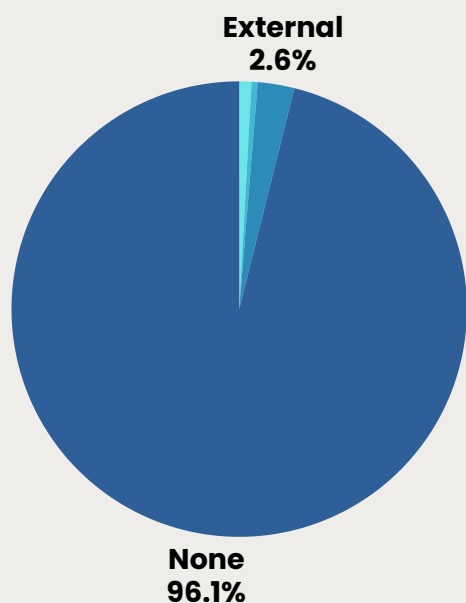
PROCEDURES ON ACCEPTED CASES

Manner	Autopsy	Limited Dissection	External Exam	Sign Out	Storage	Total
Accident (Non-Traffic)	60	35	84	70	0	249
Accident (Traffic)	26	28	49	9	0	112
Homicide	123	0	0	0	0	123
Natural	116	127	145	244	16	632
Suicide	19	19	47	1	0	86
Undetermined	23	2	7	0	0	32
Total	367	211	332	324	16	1250

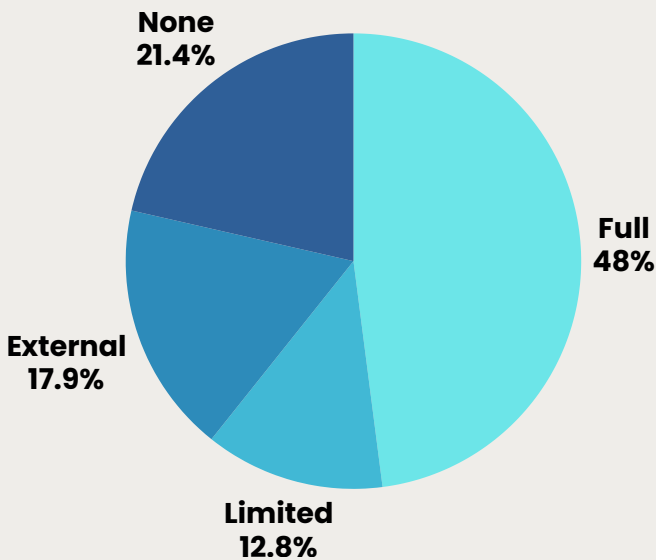
DEATHS BY AGE GROUP



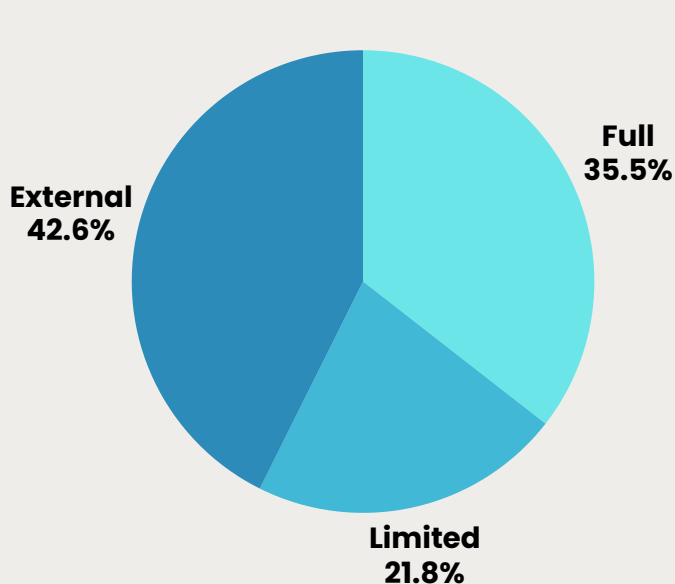
PROCEDURES PERFORMED BY MEDICAL EXAMINER



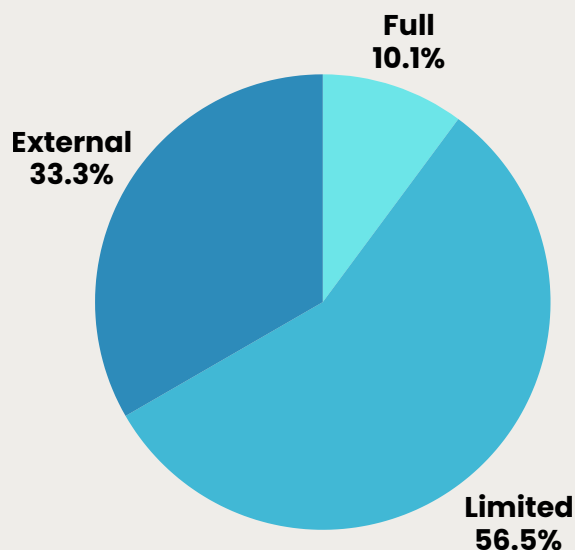
Gerald T. Gowitt, M.D.



Maria Elisa Smith, M.D.

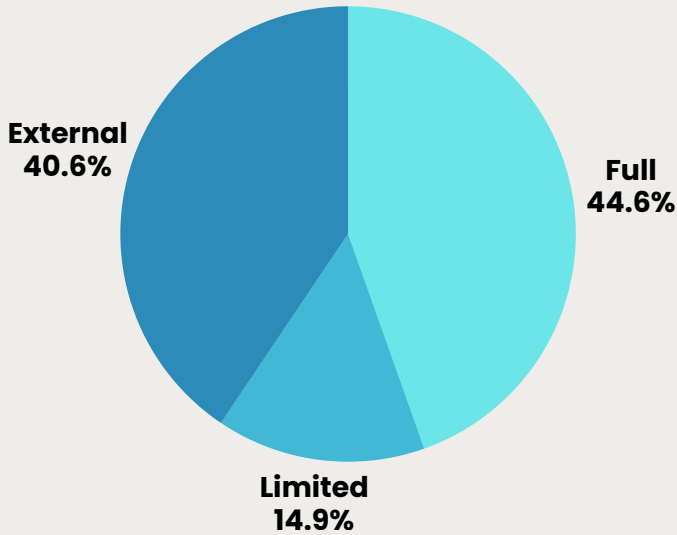


Frederic N. Hellman, M.D.

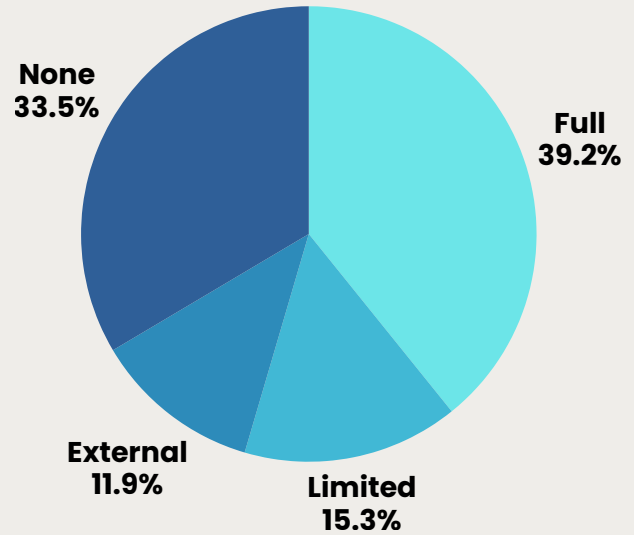


Bruce H. Wainer, M.D.

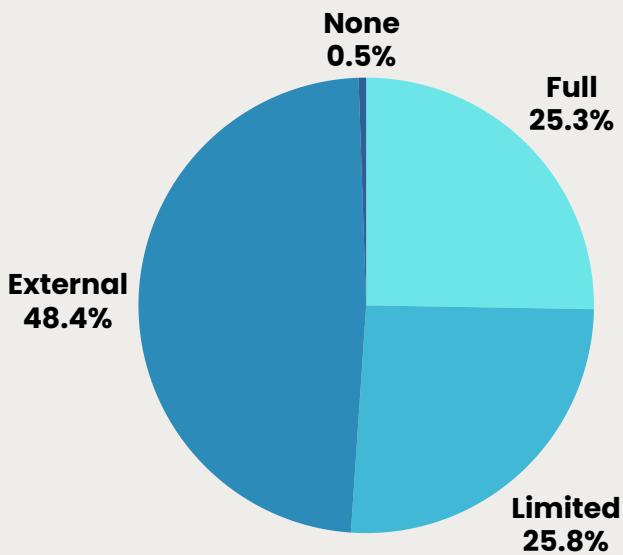
PROCEDURES PERFORMED BY MEDICAL EXAMINER



Michael M. Heninger, M.D.



Marcel Castor, M.D.



Zuhha Ashraf, M.D.

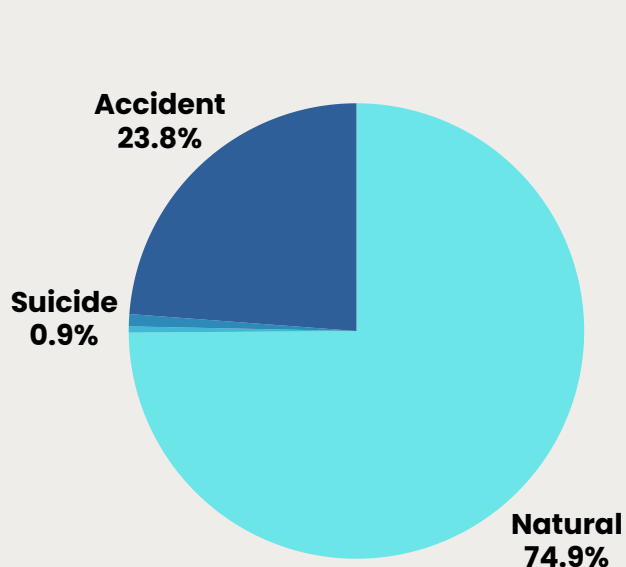


Erik Handberg, M.D.

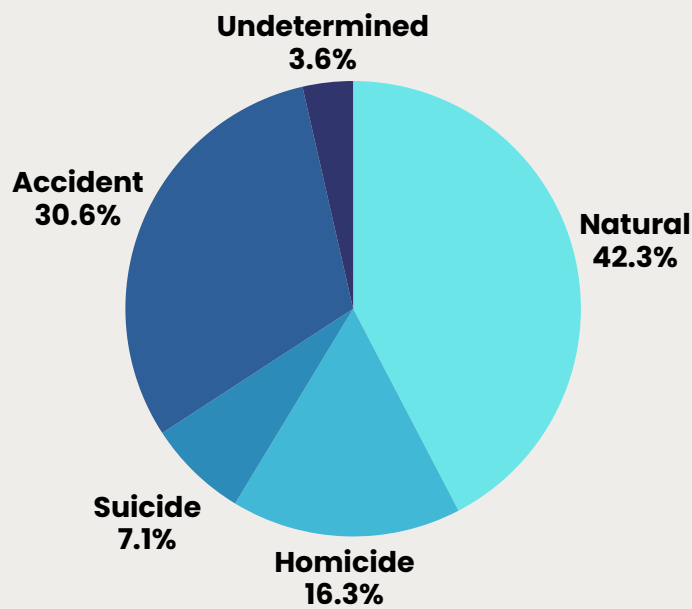
PROCEDURES PERFORMED BY MEDICAL EXAMINER

Pathologist	Full	Limited	External	Total
Dr. Gowitt	2	1	6	9
Dr. Smith	94	25	35	154
Dr. Castor	69	27	21	117
Dr. Hellman	70	43	84	197
Dr. Heninger	78	26	71	175
Dr. Ashraf	47	48	90	185
Dr. Handberg	0	2	2	4
Dr. Wainer	7	39	23	69
Total	367	211	332	910

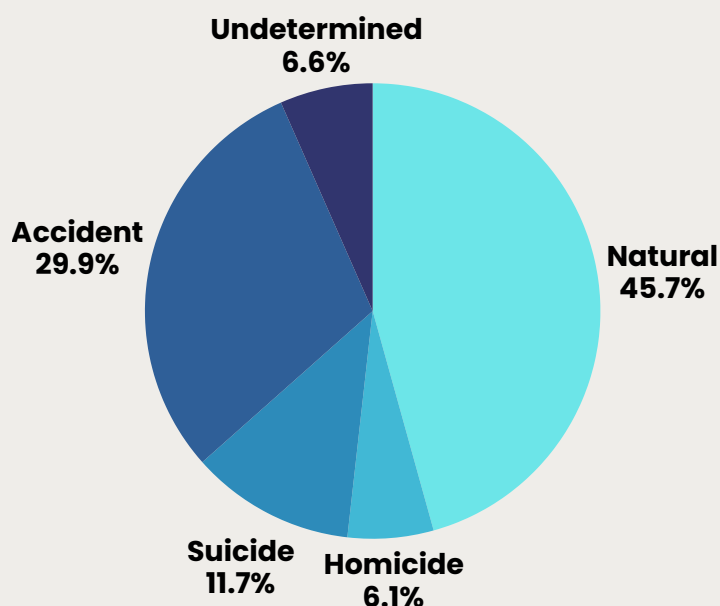
MANNER OF DEATH BY MEDICAL EXAMINER



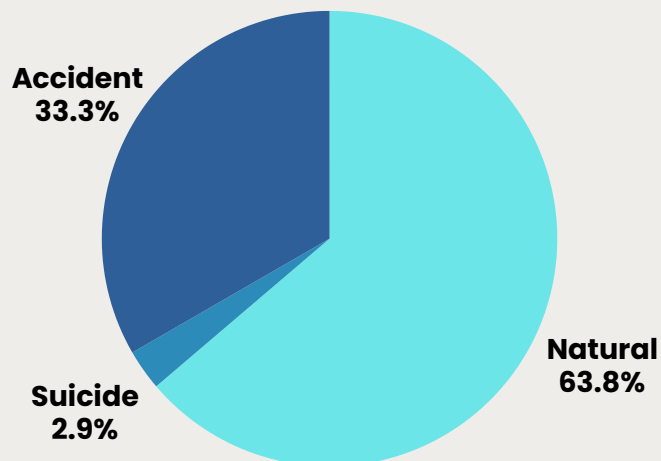
Gerald T. Gowitt, M.D.



Maria Elisa Smith, M.D.

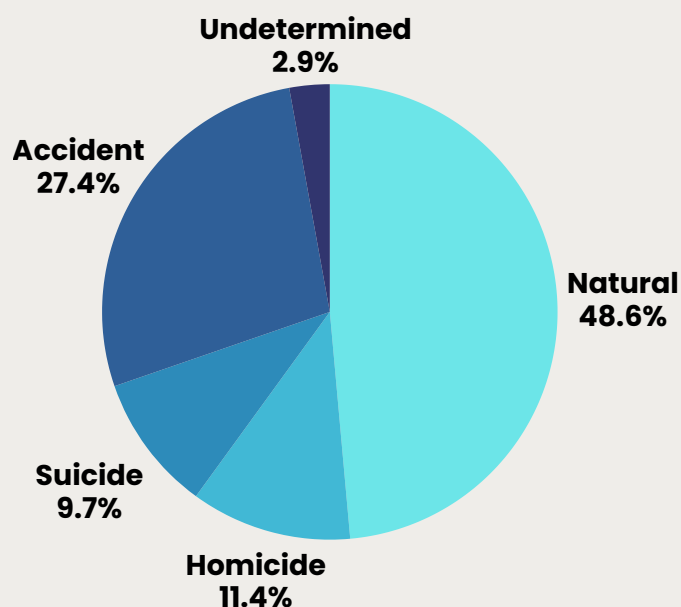


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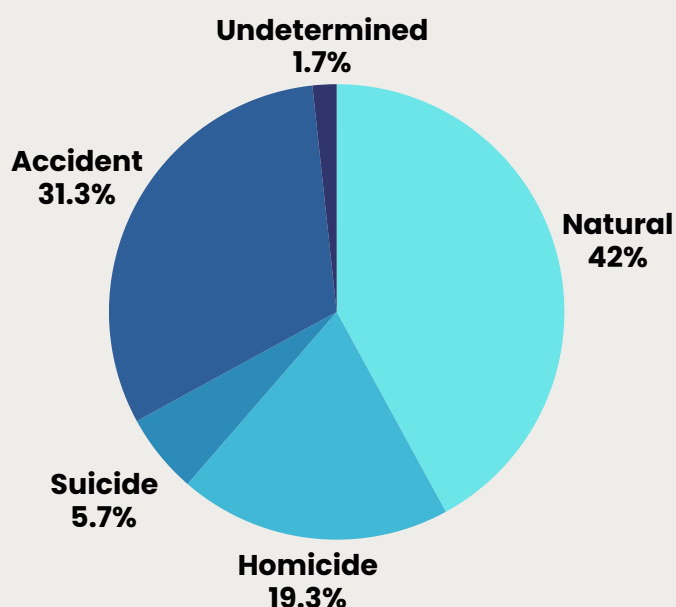


Bruce H. Wainer, M.D.

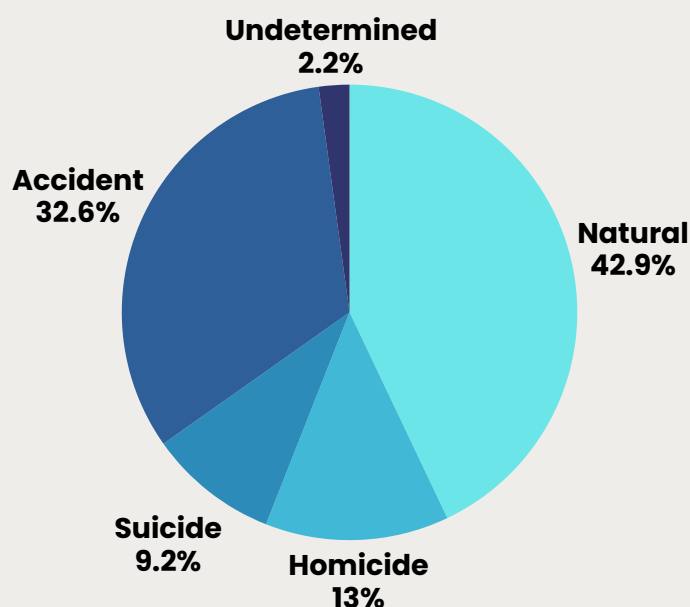
MANNER OF DEATH BY MEDICAL EXAMINER



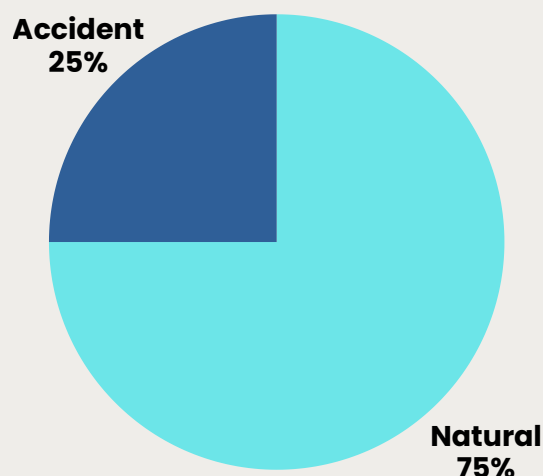
Michael M. Heninger, M.D.



Marcel Castor, M.D.



Zuhha Ashraf, M.D.



Erik Handberg, M.D.

CASES BY INVESTIGATOR

Investigator	Scenes/Cases
Amber Winslow	15/29
Kyle McGlamery	16/28
Jess Dillard	15/64
Kevin Hearst	88/247
Ashleigh Nelson	120/288
Lance Taylor	144/297
Ryan Gutierrez	138/300
James King	28/45
Trey Robinson	106/270
Craig Cannon	135/286
Emily Edge-Biersdorf	31/65
Sabrina Escobar	38/89
Lendarious Farley	7/41
Don Scully	69/146
Eric Minter	22/90
Total	972/2,285

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	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
BF	2	1	6	4	5	0	0	0	18
BM	2	13	35	29	13	3	1	0	96
HF	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
HM	0	1	2	1	1	0	0	0	5
WF	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
WM	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	3
Other Female	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other male	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total	4	16	45	35	19	3	1	0	123

HOMICIDE DEATHS

(BY CAUSE/WEAPON)

Cause	Number of Deaths
Asphyxia	2
Blunt Force	3
Fire Death	2
Gun-Handgun	28
Gun- Not Specified	55
Gun-Pistol	19
Gun-Rifle	7
Gun - Other	2
Sharp Instrument	4
MVCrash- Pedestrian	1
Total	123

SUICIDES 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	2	1	0	0	0	0	3
BF	0	1	5	0	2	1	1	0	10
BM	0	7	9	8	2	1	3	2	32
HF	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	2
HM	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	3
WF	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	5
WM	0	0	7	5	4	6	2	7	31
Other Female	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other male	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	8	27	16	10	8	7	10	86

SUICIDE DEATHS (BY CAUSE/WEAPON)

Cause	Number of Deaths
Asphyxia-Hanging	14
Asphyxia	2
Drug Death - Poisoning	3
Jump From Height	6
Fire Death	2
Gun - Handgun	12
Gun - Not Specified	2
Gun - Pistol	31
Gun - Revolver	5
Gun - Rifle	1
Gun - Shotgun	5
Other	3

ACCIDENTS (NON-TRAFFIC RELATED) 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	1	1
AM	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	2	6
BF	1	0	5	9	13	7	6	17	58
BM	1	2	9	13	7	23	15	11	81
HF	0	2	3	2	1	0	0	0	8
HM	0	1	1	3	2	1	0	1	9
WF	1	3	3	7	4	0	3	19	40
WM	0	0	3	6	7	6	11	12	45
Other Female	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other male	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Total	3	8	24	41	35	38	36	64	249

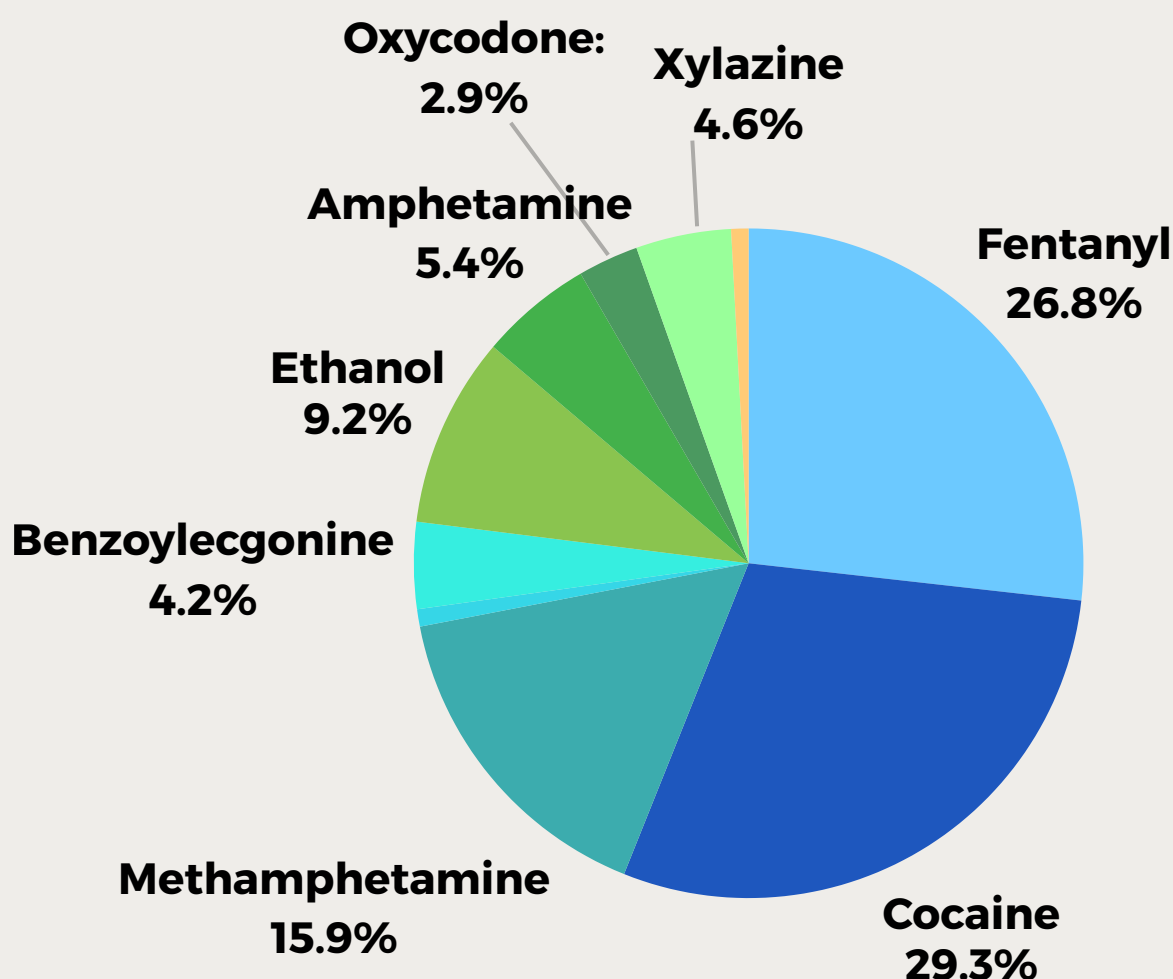
ACCIDENTS (NON-TRAFFIC RELATED) BY TYPE

Cause	Number of Deaths
Asphyxia- Drowning	8
Asphyxia-Mechanical-Positional	5
Carbon Monoxide - Structural Fire	1
Drug Death-Acute Intoxication	53
Drug Death-Mixed Drug Toxicity	77
Drug Death - Other	6
Fall	58
Fall - From Height	4
Fall - Down Steps	12
Fire Death	3
Gun - Pistol	1
Animal Attack/Injury	1
Hypothermia-Exogenous	4
Hyperthermia-Exogenous	1
Other	15

DRUGS THAT CONTRIBUTED TO DEATH

Total Drug-Related Deaths: 143

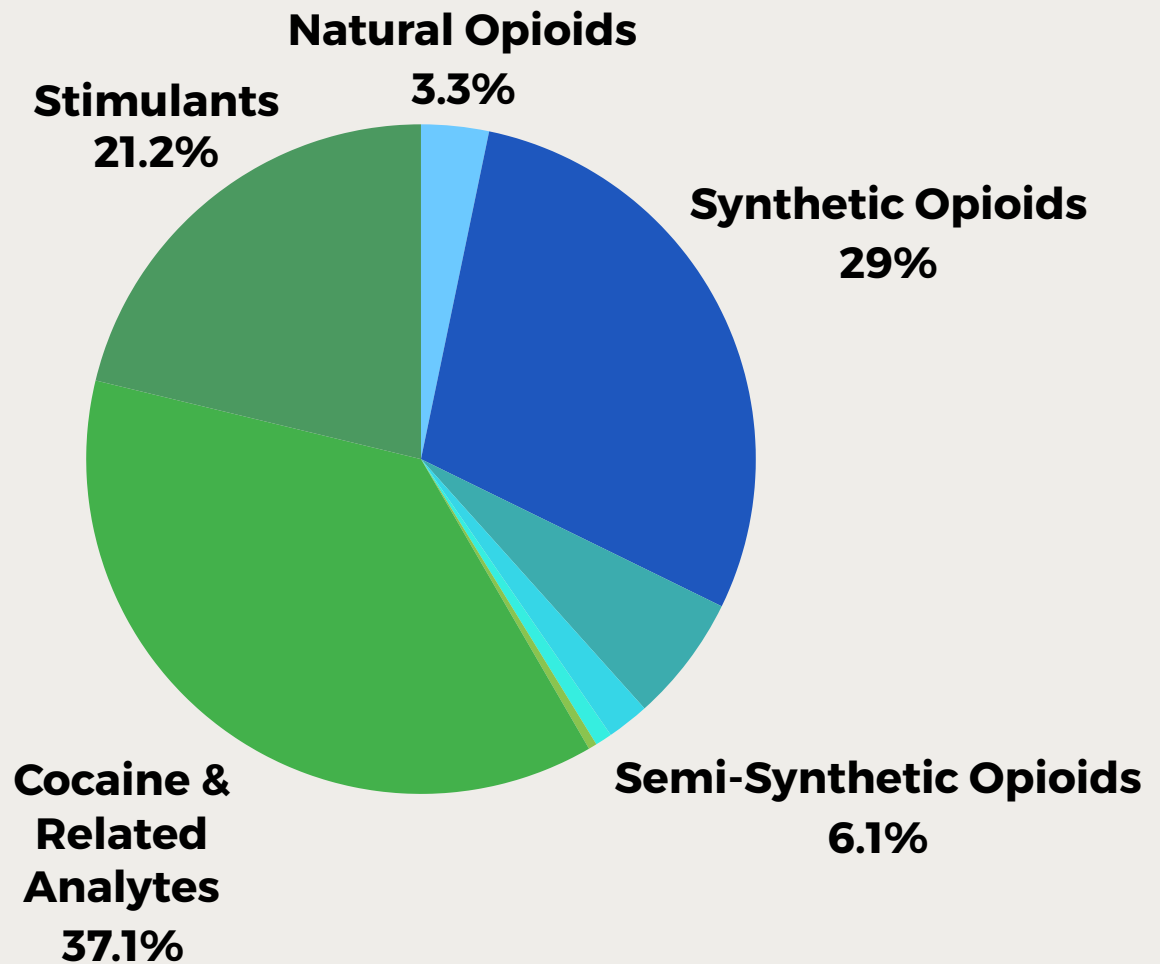
Out of 143 drug-related deaths, 94 were opioid-related and Fentanyl contributed to the death in 64 of those cases.



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

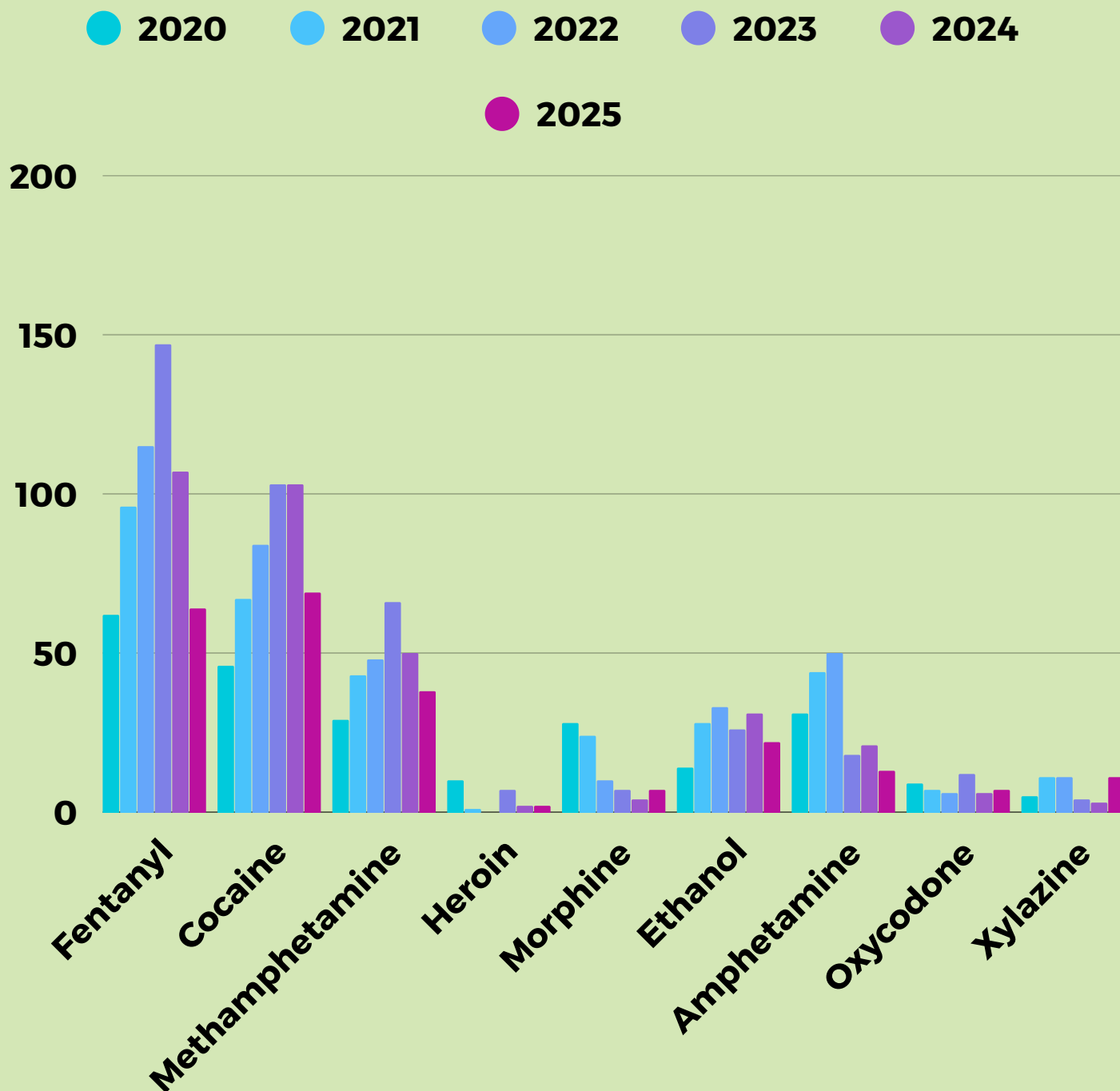
DRUG TYPE BREAKDOWN

Total Drug-Related Deaths: 143



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 - 2025



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

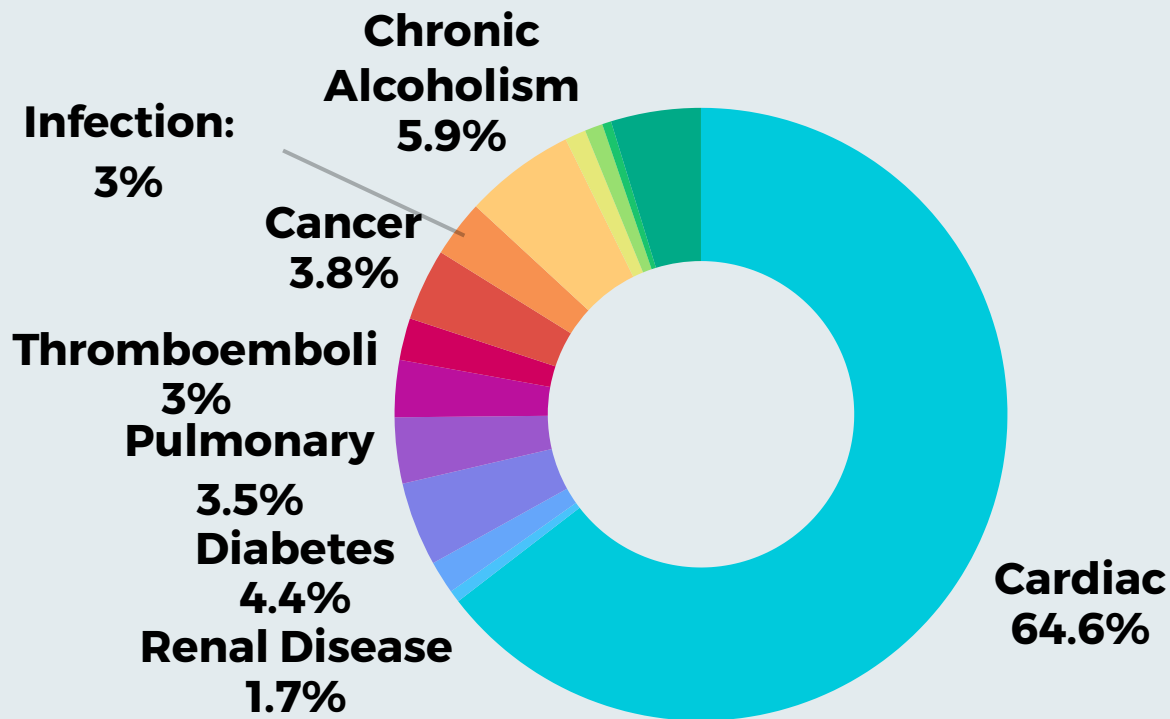
MOTOR VEHICLE ACCIDENTS BY AGE, RACE & GENDER

	≤10	11-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61-70	71+	Total
AF	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	2
AM	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	3
BF	1	1	9	5	2	4	1	2	25
BM	2	2	10	9	8	5	6	4	46
HF	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	3
HM	0	0	4	0	4	0	1	0	9
WF	0	1	0	3	0	2	1	1	8
WM	1	0	2	0	3	4	3	2	16
Other Female	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other male	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total	6	5	26	17	19	17	12	10	112

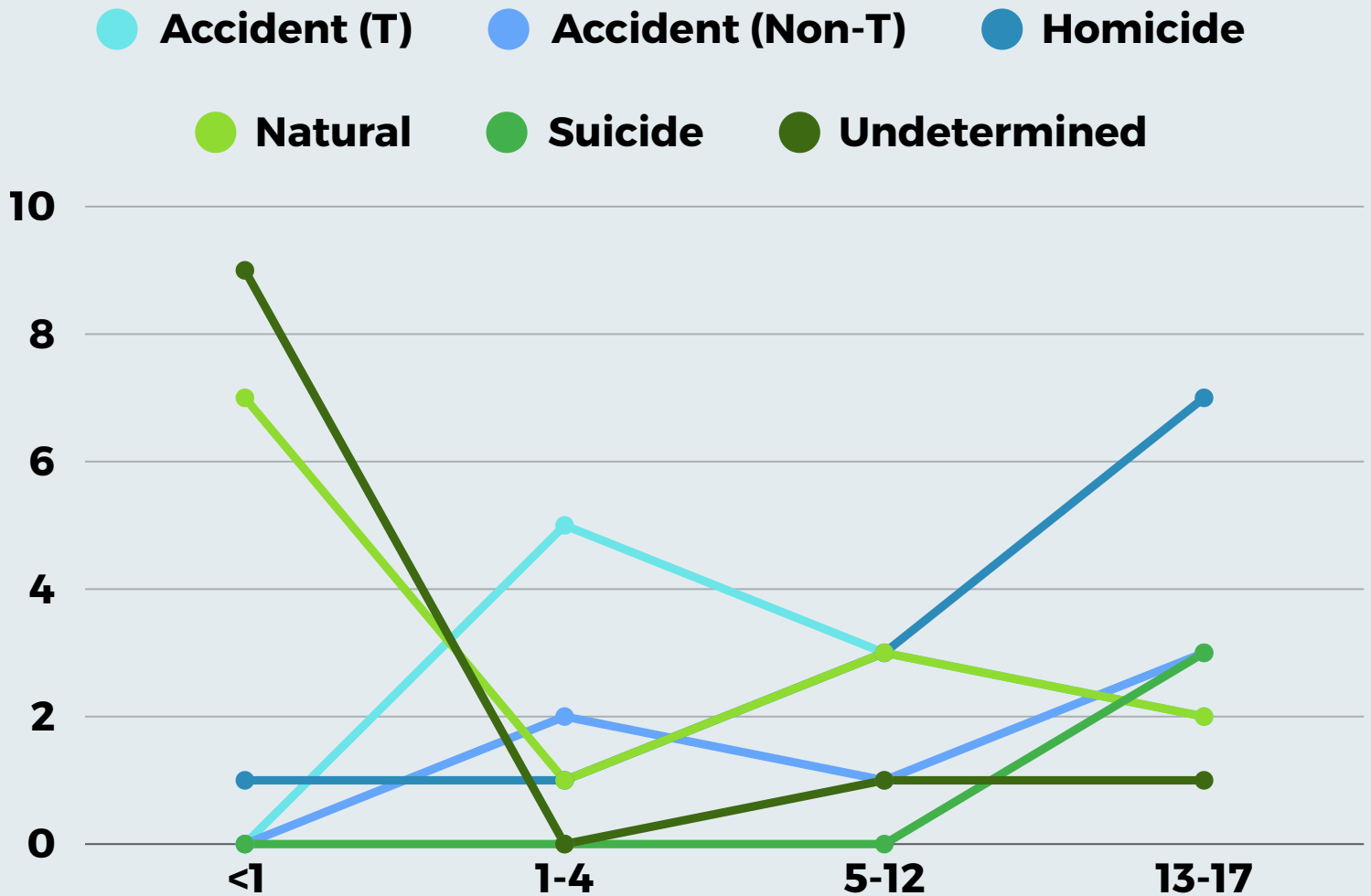
MOTOR VEHICLE ACCIDENTS (BY TYPE)

Cause	Number of Deaths
Bicyclist	6
Driver	40
Motorcyclist Driver	6
Motorcyclist Rider	1
Occupant	9
Pedestrian	47
Rider	3
Total	112

MOST COMMON CAUSES OF NATURAL DEATHS IN 2025



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: 19**
- **Number of infants autopsied: 19**
 - Full: 19
 - Limited: 0
 - External: 0
- **Causes of Deaths for Infants in DeKalb County 2025:**
 - Sudden Unexplained Infant Death (7)
 - Stillbirth (1)
 - Infection (4)
 - Blunt Force Injuries (1)
 - Genetic (2)
 - Other (4)
- **Manners:**
 - Undetermined (9)
 - Accident (1)
 - Natural (8)
 - Homicide (1)

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

THANK YOU!