

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE OFFICE OF CHIEF MEDICAL EXAMINER

Dr. Jason Graham, Chief Medical Examiner



WHAT WE DO

The Office of Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) serves public health and the criminal justice system through forensic science. OCME's impartial investigations of deaths and analysis of evidence provide answers to families and communities during times of profound need. OCME is responsible for investigating deaths that result from criminal violence, accident or suicide; that occur suddenly and when in apparent good health; when unattended by a physician; in a correctional facility or in custody of any criminal justice entity; or occurring in any suspicious or unusual manner or threat to public health. These types of cases are referred to as being under "Medical Examiner jurisdiction." The Office also reviews all applications for permits to cremate the body of a person who dies in New York City. The Office provides additional forensic services to support investigations through its DNA, forensic toxicology and molecular genetics laboratories. OCME also manages all functions of the City mortuary, including the retrieval and processing of unclaimed deceased bodies and facilitates final disposition. Finally, OCME maintains a specialized mass fatality management team ready to support the City in responding to mass fatalities and other disasters.

FOCUS ON EQUITY

To best serve all New Yorkers—regardless of economic ability—OCME operates Family Services Centers in all five boroughs so that all communities have equal service access. At these centers, staff interact with family members, medical practitioners, and other advisors to receive and verify information that will assist in determining the identity of deceased persons and aid in final disposition. Family services are also provided remotely in the interest of convenience and comfort. For families who may need or choose interment of their loved ones in the City cemetery, OCME provides an opportunity for a final viewing before burial. In addition, OCME also serves as the impartial pathologist for families by performing its own death investigations and autopsies, free from influence by legal or medical communities or law enforcement.

OCME develops and maintains a workplace culture in which employment and advancement decisions are made fairly and employees are treated equitably, regardless of race/ethnicity, age, gender, religion/creed, national origin, disability, or sexual orientation. This is accomplished through Agency wide training and continual engagement with managers to ensure familiarity with the City's Equal Employment Opportunity, diversity and inclusion policies, and through incorporating these policies into recruitment, selection, promotion, and workplace activities so that all employees feel welcome and inspired to succeed.

OUR SERVICES AND GOALS

SERVICE 1 Perform the processes necessary to certify deaths falling within the agency's jurisdiction.

- Goal 1a Respond promptly to scenes of reportable fatalities and conduct related investigations.
 - Goal 1b Perform autopsies and examinations necessary to determine cause and manner of death.
 - Goal 1c Provide diligent investigation for all cremation requests.
 - Goal 1d Certify death certificates in a timely manner.
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SERVICE 2 Provide mortuary services to the City.

- Goal 2a Recover and transport unclaimed and Medical Examiner decedents to City mortuary facilities in a timely manner.
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SERVICE 3 Respond to disasters and emergencies when fatalities are involved.

- Goal 3a Provide rapid response and safe fatality management services to the City.
 - Goal 3b Identify victims of disasters and return their remains to families in a timely manner.
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SERVICE 4 Provide services to the City for forensic purposes.

- Goal 4a Provide timely and accurate laboratory services for criminal justice purposes.

HOW WE PERFORMED

- While cases where the Medical Examiner takes jurisdiction and certifies a death at an OCME facility slightly increased and cases certified at a scene or health facility slightly decreased in the first four months of Fiscal 2024 compared to the same period in Fiscal 2023, the overall caseload remains elevated across all OCME Forensic Operational areas compared to pre-pandemic levels. This ongoing increased caseload, driven significantly by unintentional opioid deaths, and the associated increase in Forensic Toxicology lab report turnaround times upon which autopsy reports often rely, has contributed to the overall increase in autopsy report completion time. Median time to complete autopsy reports increased 21 percent from 110 days in the first four months of Fiscal 2023 to 133 days in the same period in Fiscal 2024, exceeding the target time of 90 days.
- OCME reviews applications from funeral homes in New York City for a permit to cremate a body. If it is found that a cause of death falls within the Medical Examiner jurisdiction, the application is rejected and OCME investigates accordingly. There were 69 cremation requests rejected in the first four months of Fiscal 2024, an increase from the 54 rejected applications during the same period in Fiscal 2023.
- OCME's Department of Forensic Biology Laboratory continues its work to identify the remains from the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in New York City. During the first four months of Fiscal 2024, OCME identified 27 remains of the 9/11 World Trade Center attacks, including the remains of two previously unidentified individuals.
- The Forensic Biology Laboratory metrics on median days to complete analysis of DNA cases, DNA homicide cases, and DNA sexual assault cases were all far better than their target limits of 90 days and improved by 49 percent, 39 percent, and 36 percent, respectively, in the first four months of Fiscal 2024 compared to the same period in Fiscal 2023. This improvement is because the Forensic Biology Lab has continued to onboard and train new analysts to fill past vacancies while also streamlining processes to increase efficiency. Median time to process DNA gun crime cases remained steady at 29 days in the first four months of Fiscal 2024. Median time to process DNA property crime cases increased to 575 days in the first four months of Fiscal 2024 compared to 243 days in the previous reporting period. This is in part due to a focus on completing older cases that were closed out in the early part of Fiscal 2024 resulting in an increased overall median turnaround time. It is also because OCME prioritizes cases involving crimes against persons. Any case can be prioritized and expedited as needed. When prioritized, property crime cases are generally turned around in under 30 days, and if there is a risk to public safety, can be turned around in three to five days.
- Compared to the first four months of Fiscal 2023, median days to complete toxicology cases increased 13 percent to 88 days in the first four months of Fiscal 2024, remaining just below the 90-day target. Median days to complete toxicology DUI cases increased 130 percent over the same reporting period to 101 days in the first four months of Fiscal 2024, exceeding the 90-day target. Similarly, median days to complete toxicology sexual assault cases increased 98 percent from 85 days in the first four months of Fiscal 2023 to 168 days in the same period in Fiscal 2024, also well exceeding the 90-day target. There are several factors contributing to these longer toxicology turnaround times. First, in the beginning of Fiscal 2024, the Department of Forensic Toxicology Laboratory (the Lab) focused on resolving some of the older more complicated cases. Once resolved, these cases were included in the calculation for overall median turnaround time, temporarily inflating the turnaround time metrics. Now that these cases are resolved, the Lab expects turnaround times to start decreasing. Second, record high numbers of suspected drug overdose deaths requiring comprehensive toxicology testing has negatively impacted report turnaround times. New York City, amid the current national opioid overdose crisis, has experienced unprecedented rising numbers of confirmed unintentional drug overdose deaths. Finally, the Lab experienced a temporary increased workload required to obtain and maintain a new advanced Laboratory accreditation to the international standard ISO/IEC 17025:2017. The Lab has been accredited for more than 20 years by the American Board of Forensic Toxicology (ABFT) who would annually inspect the Laboratory to ensure the national standards of practice in the field of forensic toxicology were achieved. The ABFT is transitioning only to accrediting individual scientists, rather than entire labs, and so going forward, accreditation based on the ISO/IEC standard is the new requirement for compliance with the State of New York Forensic Laboratory Accreditation Program.

SERVICE 1 Perform the processes necessary to certify deaths falling within the agency's jurisdiction.

Goal 1a Respond promptly to scenes of reportable fatalities and conduct related investigations.

Performance Indicators	Actual			Target		4-Month Actual	
	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25	FY23	FY24
Median time for scene arrivals by medicolegal investigators (hours)	1.6	1.6	1.6	*	*	1.7	1.8
Deaths reported	42,121	40,384	39,308	*	*	12,884	12,610
★ Cases where Medical Examiner takes jurisdiction and certifies death at an OCME facility	7,735	8,211	8,879	*	*	2,990	3,016
★ Cases where Medical Examiner investigates, takes jurisdiction and certifies death at scene or a health care facility	NA	NA	3,383	*	*	1,089	1,015
Cases where Medical Examiner declines jurisdiction	2,786	3,096	3,163	*	*	1,021	1,000
★ Critical Indicator ● Equity Indicator "NA" Not Available ⇅ Directional Target * None							

Goal 1b Perform autopsies and examinations necessary to determine cause and manner of death.

Performance Indicators	Actual			Target		4-Month Actual	
	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25	FY23	FY24
★ Median time to complete autopsy reports (days)	144.0	140.0	110.0	90.0	90.0	110.0	133.0
Autopsies performed	6,225	6,085	6,544	*	*	2,189	2,156
External examinations performed	1,510	2,124	2,335	*	*	799	850
★ Critical Indicator ● Equity Indicator "NA" Not Available ⇅ Directional Target * None							

Goal 1c Provide diligent investigation for all cremation requests.

Performance Indicators	Actual			Target		4-Month Actual	
	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25	FY23	FY24
Total cremation requests received and investigated as requirement of processing	20,636	19,592	18,904	*	*	6,211	5,948
★ Cremation requests rejected after investigation and turned over to Medical Examiner jurisdiction	115	175	170	*	*	54	69
★ Critical Indicator ● Equity Indicator "NA" Not Available ⇅ Directional Target * None							

Goal 1d Certify death certificates in a timely manner.

Performance Indicators	Actual			Target		4-Month Actual	
	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25	FY23	FY24
★ Median time to certify death certificates after initial receipt of decedents' remains (hours)	15.8	15.0	15.1	72.0	72.0	15.3	15.3
★ Critical Indicator ● Equity Indicator "NA" Not Available ⇅ Directional Target * None							

SERVICE 2 Provide mortuary services to the City.

Goal 2a Recover and transport unclaimed and Medical Examiner decedents to City mortuary facilities in a timely manner.

Performance Indicators	Actual			Target		4-Month Actual	
	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25	FY23	FY24
Decedents' remains transported and stored by OCME	14,079	13,931	14,067	*	*	4,614	4,678
★ Median time from OCME receipt of decedents' remains to "Ready to Release" status (hours)	6.54	7.88	9.75	*	*	10.44	9.95
Median time to release a decedent remains to a funeral director (minutes)	39.0	37.0	39.0	*	*	36.0	40.0
★ Critical Indicator ● Equity Indicator "NA" Not Available ⇅ Directional Target * None							

SERVICE 3 Respond to disasters and emergencies when fatalities are involved.

Goal 3a Provide rapid response and safe fatality management services to the City.

Performance Indicators	Actual			Target		4-Month Actual	
	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25	FY23	FY24
Fatalities handled by OCME following a mass fatality event	14,079	30	0	*	*	0	0
★ Critical Indicator ● Equity Indicator "NA" Not Available ⇅ Directional Target * None							

Goal 3b Identify victims of disasters and return their remains to families in a timely manner.

Performance Indicators	Actual			Target		4-Month Actual	
	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25	FY23	FY24
Remains identified following the September 11, 2001 attacks (cumulative)	14,701	14,771	14,867	*	*	14,832	14,894
★ Critical Indicator ● Equity Indicator "NA" Not Available ⇅ Directional Target * None							

SERVICE 4 Provide services to the City for forensic purposes.

Goal 4a Provide timely and accurate laboratory services for criminal justice purposes.

Performance Indicators	Actual			Target		4-Month Actual	
	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25	FY23	FY24
Median time to complete analysis of a DNA case (days)	63.0	71.0	54.0	90.0	90.0	78.0	40.0
★ Median time to complete DNA homicide cases from evidence submission to report (days)	49.0	69.0	69.0	90.0	90.0	79.0	48.0
★ Median time to complete DNA sexual assault cases from evidence submission to report (days)	43.0	50.0	51.0	90.0	90.0	64.5	41.0
Median time to complete DNA property crime cases from evidence submission to report (days)	128.0	216.0	176.0	*	*	243.0	575.0
★ Median time to complete DNA gun crime cases from evidence submission to report (days)	NA	65.0	24.0	⇓	⇓	NA	29.0
DNA gun crime samples received	NA	21,714	19,961	*	*	NA	6,781
DNA matches with profiles in database	6,241	4,760	4,781	*	*	1,766	2,039
Median time to complete toxicology cases (days)	115.0	111.0	73.0	90.0	90.0	78.0	88.0
Median time to complete toxicology DUI cases (days)	46.0	56.0	49.0	90.0	90.0	44.0	101.0
★ Median time to complete toxicology sexual assault cases (days)	80.0	116.0	94.0	90.0	90.0	85.0	168.0
★ Critical Indicator ● Equity Indicator "NA" Not Available ⇅ Directional Target * None							

AGENCY CUSTOMER SERVICE

Performance Indicators	Actual			Target		4-Month Actual	
	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25	FY23	FY24
Customer Experience							
Completed customer requests for interpretation	1,544	1,303	1,375	*	*	NA	359
Letters responded to in 14 days (%)	100%	100%	100%	*	*	100%	100%
E-mails responded to in 14 days (%)	89%	100%	100%	*	*	100%	100%
★ Critical Indicator ● Equity Indicator "NA" Not Available ⇅ Directional Target * None							

AGENCY RESOURCES

Resource Indicators	Actual			Sept. 2023 MMR Plan	Updated Plan	Plan	4-Month Actual	
	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY24 ¹	FY25 ¹	FY23	FY24
Expenditures (\$000,000) ²	\$109.7	\$108.0	\$99.5	\$97.1	\$105.6	\$100.1	\$34.1	\$36.6
Revenues (\$000)	\$35.0	\$84.0	\$38.3	\$50.0	\$50.0	\$50.0	\$22.1	\$0.0
Personnel	667	667	716	756	756	756	725	720
Overtime paid (\$000,000)	\$9.5	\$8.7	\$9.8	\$2.5	\$2.9	\$2.5	\$2.7	\$2.9

¹January 2024 Financial Plan.

²Expenditures include all funds

"NA" - Not Available

The figures shown in the table above are subtotals of the Department

of Health and Mental Hygiene totals that appear in the DOHMH chapter of this report.

SPENDING AND BUDGET INFORMATION

Unit of Appropriation	Expenditures FY23 ¹ (\$000,000)	January 2024 Financial Plan FY24 ² (\$000,000)	Applicable MMR Goals ³
106 - Office of Chief Medical Examiner (Personal Services)	\$77.2	\$77.0	All
116 - Office of Chief Medical Examiner (Other Than Personal Services)	\$22.3	\$28.6	All
Agency Total ¹	\$99.5	\$105.6	

¹OCME is contained within the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and appropriations are made through that agency. ²Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR) for the Fiscal Year ended June 30, 2023. Includes all funds. ³Refer to agency goals listed at front of chapter. "NA" Not Available * None

NOTEWORTHY CHANGES, ADDITIONS OR DELETIONS

- The following indicator names in Goal 1a were updated to clarify the scope of work these indicators measure. This does not change the definition of the indicator. 'Cases where Medical Examiner takes jurisdiction and certifies at an OCME facility' was renamed 'Cases where Medical Examiner takes jurisdiction and certifies death at an OCME facility' and 'Cases where Medical Examiner takes jurisdiction and certifies at scene or a health care facility' was renamed 'Cases where Medical Examiner investigates, takes jurisdiction and certifies death at scene or a health care facility.'
- The indicator name 'Median time to clear and release to third party for final disposition, per case (minutes)' was revised to 'Median time to release a decedent remains to a funeral director (hours)' in Goal 2a for clarity.
- The target for 'Median time to complete DNA property crime cases from evidence submission to report (days)' in Goal 4a was removed because these are not crimes against a person and can be deprioritized. Upon request OCME can expedite any case if there is an urgent life safety matter.
- The indicator 'DNA samples received' was revised to 'DNA gun crime samples received' in Goal 4a for clarity.
- The indicators 'Median time to complete DNA gun crime cases, from evidence submission to report (days)' and 'DNA gun crime samples received' in Goal 4a were reordered to be next to the other DNA crime indicators in this goal.
- Preceding the Fiscal 2024 Preliminary Mayor's Management Report, the Mayor's Office of Operations implemented updated standards for indicator names. Minimal stylistic changes, such as the use of em-dashes, percent symbols and acronyms, were made to the names of previously published indicators here within. Substantive name changes for indicators that clarify what is being measured are otherwise noted above.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For more information on the agency, please visit: www.nyc.gov/ocme.