

Bay County
Medical Examiner's Office

Bay City, Michigan



Annual Report

2023

Dr. William Morrone MPH, MS

2023 Bay County Medical Examiner Annual Report

To the Bay County Board of Commissioners and to the citizens of Bay County:

In accordance with Public Act 181 of 1953 commonly referred to as the Medical Examiners Act, the Bay County Medical Examiner's Office is charged with determining the cause and manner of death in any violent, sudden, unexpected, suspicious, or otherwise unexplained death, inclusive of all child deaths, jail deaths and deaths in police custody occurring in Bay County. This doesn't guarantee autopsies.

The 2023 Bay County Medical Examiner's Office is performing at a new level and provides reasonable assurances that the office well serves its jurisdiction. For 5 years we have provided more scene investigations, more forensic support, more autopsy attendance and more medical chart review in the hospital.

I hope you find this report informative. It is my pleasure to present to you the 2023 Annual Report for the Bay County Medical Examiner's Office.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Dr. William R. Morrone". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "William" being particularly prominent.

William R. Morrone, D.O., M.P.H., M.S., FACOP, FASAM, FAOAAM, NBPAS
Chief Medical Examiner

**“Show me the manner in which a nation or a
community cares for its dead and I will measure
with mathematical exactness the tender mercies
of its people, their respect for the laws of the land
and their loyalty to high ideals”**

William E. Gladstone
1809-1898
British Statesman
Liberal Politician

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INTRODUCTION

This report includes statistical data from the Bay County Medical Examiner's Office (BCMEO) for 2023. The total number of cases reported in 2023 decreased from 1,502 to 1,474 while the number of autopsies and inspections also decreased (91). The BCMEO experienced a decrease in the number of homicides (1). The number of drug overdose cases increased by 6%, while the number of suicide cases increased 5%. The number of unclaimed decedents increased in 2023. Unclaimed bodies continue to remain at a moderately high level.

Every reported case requires preliminary screening by BCMEO. We determine if the case falls under BCMEO jurisdiction. Cases that are released occur when the circumstances of the death are known, there is documented medical history, or the primary care physician is willing and able to sign the death certificate. In 2023, this represented many of our cases. Cases that are accepted use one of two approaches to complete the death certificate. The **first** approach is a medical examiner certification case. The decedent is not transported to the BCMEO and the medical examiner reviews medical records and other pertinent reports to complete the death certificate. In 2023, there were 1474 EDRS medical examiner certifications. The **second** approach is when the medical examiner orders the decedent into the BCMEO morgue schedule for a physical examination. The physical examination can include a full autopsy, a partial autopsy (cranial only), or an inspection (external examination only). In addition to the 91 medical examiner cases, the BCMEO completed zero private autopsies.

Cremations in Bay County require the approval of the BCMEO. Cremation permits continue to rise in America and Michigan. Unexpectedly this year (2023) these decreased in Bay County 10%

The BCMEO engages several multi-jurisdictional meetings to discuss specific types of cases where deaths may have been preventable. A prime example is the Bay-Arenac Behavioral Health (BABH) death review meeting for BABH patients (persistent and severe mentally ill). Also, any death involving a child under the age of 18 may be reviewed by the forensic pathologists, Obstetricians, law enforcement, protective services, area pediatricians, State Department of Public Health, a Consumer Product Safety Commission representative, and any other appropriate specialty depending on the circumstances unique to that case. The Child Death Review Team restarted review of cases in 2023. BCMEO is a 24 hour - 7 day a week agency.

The Medical Examiner's Office continues to partner with educational as well as government organizations for instruction and training. Presentations on cause and manner of death are conducted for: EMT, medical and nursing students, basic police academies, advanced police crime scene training, detective schools, the Michigan State Police academy and high school students. BCMEO teaches ACCME residents how to complete death certificates.

Medical Examiner Annual Report 2023

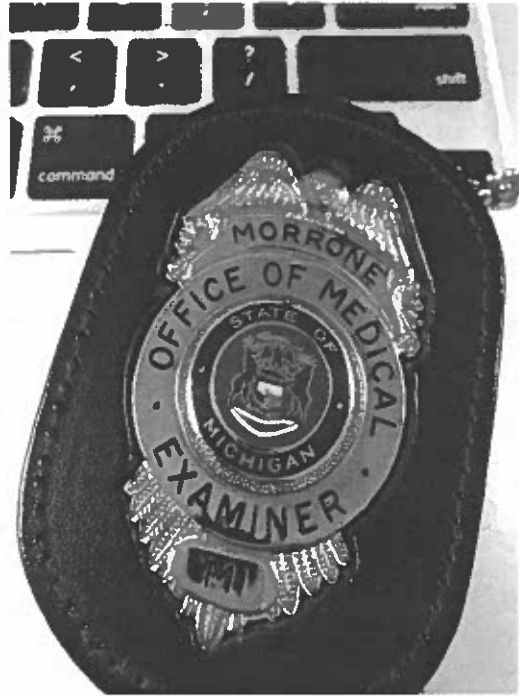
Dr. William Morrone

Chief Medical Examiner
Arenac, **Bay**, Iosco & Tuscola

National Association of Medical Examiners
(NAME)
member

*data is provisional & subject to change

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DISCLAIMER

Every attempt has been made to locate and verify information contained in this report. All information is subject to change. We are not responsible for errors or numbers and data may change. Provisional population statistics from the federal government is always updated and it is not unusual for government agencies to revise or change numbers next year in trending without any notice of update this year.

The CDC, MDHHS, The Detroit Free Press, CNN, our universities, local news services and USA TODAY should all be reporting the same numbers but they are not. Likewise our numbers may be different. This 2023 Annual Report from BCMEO is an accurate reflection of vibrant, evolving life and death in Bay County. We want to thank the Bay County Sheriff Department & Bay City Public Safety for the special role they play as partner and customer in BCMEO services. We could not do our job without them.

2023 Bay County Medical Examiner Annual Report

Chief Medical Examiner	William R. Morrone, D.O., MPH, MS
Forensic Pathologist	Patrick Cho, M.D.

Office of Medical Examiner Executive Administrator	Karen Mika
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Chief Medical Examiner Investigator Consulting Investigator MESI MESI MESI	William R. Morrone, DO, MPH, MS Kimber Debelak Joe Duncan Nate Dicks Cristina Pazak
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Sr. Autopsy Attendant Supervisor	Randy Mudd
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Pharmaceutical Toxicology	William R. Morrone, DO, MPH, MS
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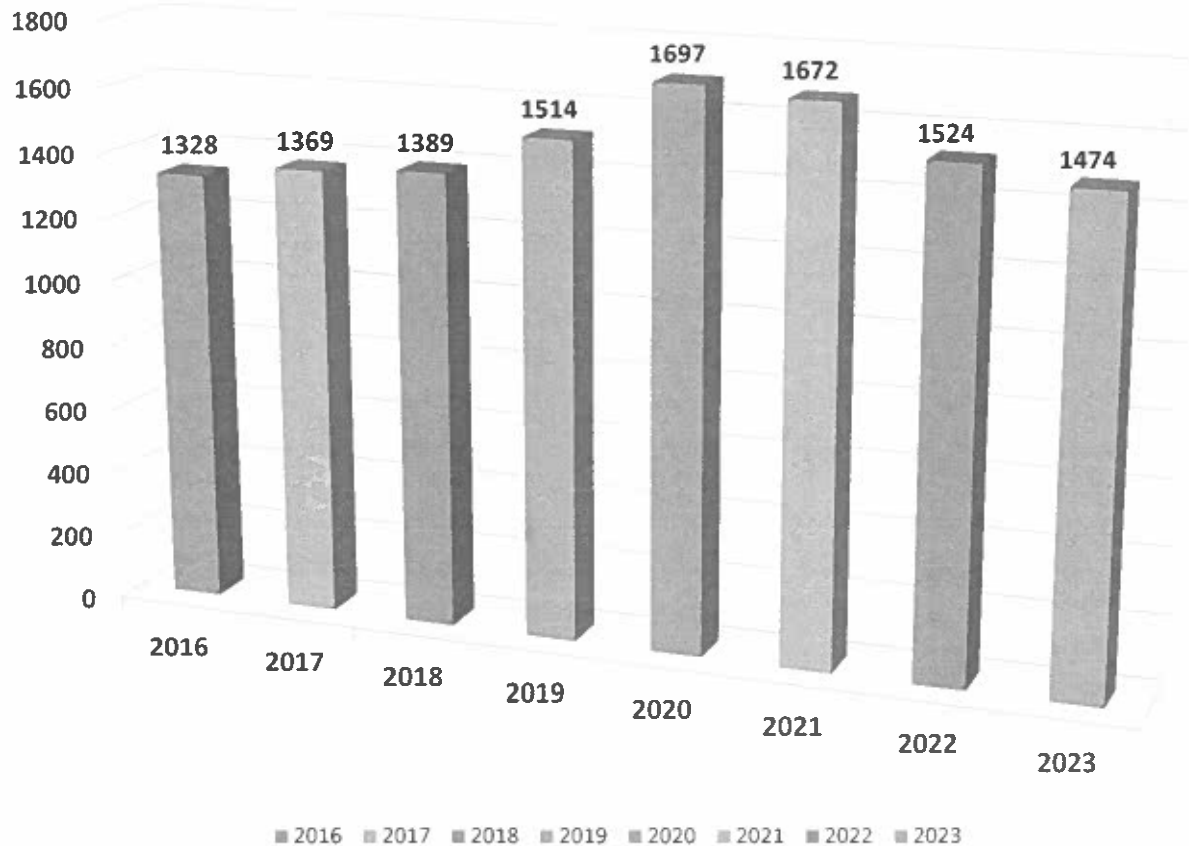
No information about COVID-19 infections, pneumonia or COVID-19 testing in the deceased will be discussed in this report. The

National Association of Medical Examiners and the Center for Disease Control (CDC) do not support autopsy in the diagnosis

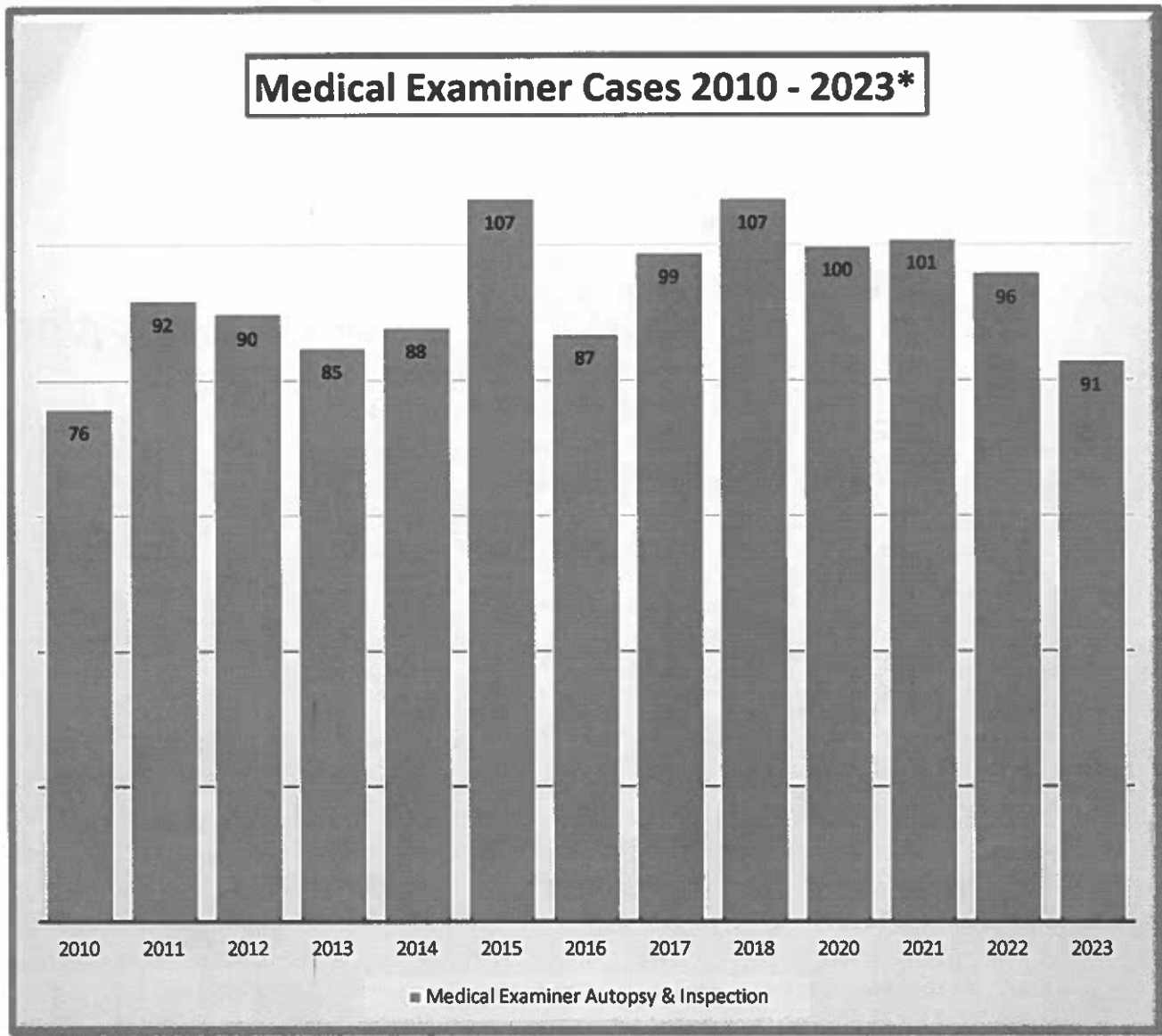
GENERAL STATISTICS

GENERAL STATISTICS – 2023	
Total number of cases reported (in the county)	1,474
Cases Accepted for autopsy	91
Death Scenes Investigated and Autopsy Scheduled	91
BAY COUNTY CASE REFERRALS	
	1,428
ME Certifications Signed (Death Certificate Only no autopsy)	210
Examinations	
Full Autopsy	91
Partial Autopsy	0
External Only	0
MISC INFORMATION	
Unidentified Bodies (after case completion)	0
Exhumations	0
Bodies Transported to Morgue	91
Toxicology Cases	91
Cremation Permits Approved	1,030
Microscopic Slides Created	91

8 Years: Trend in Death Certificates

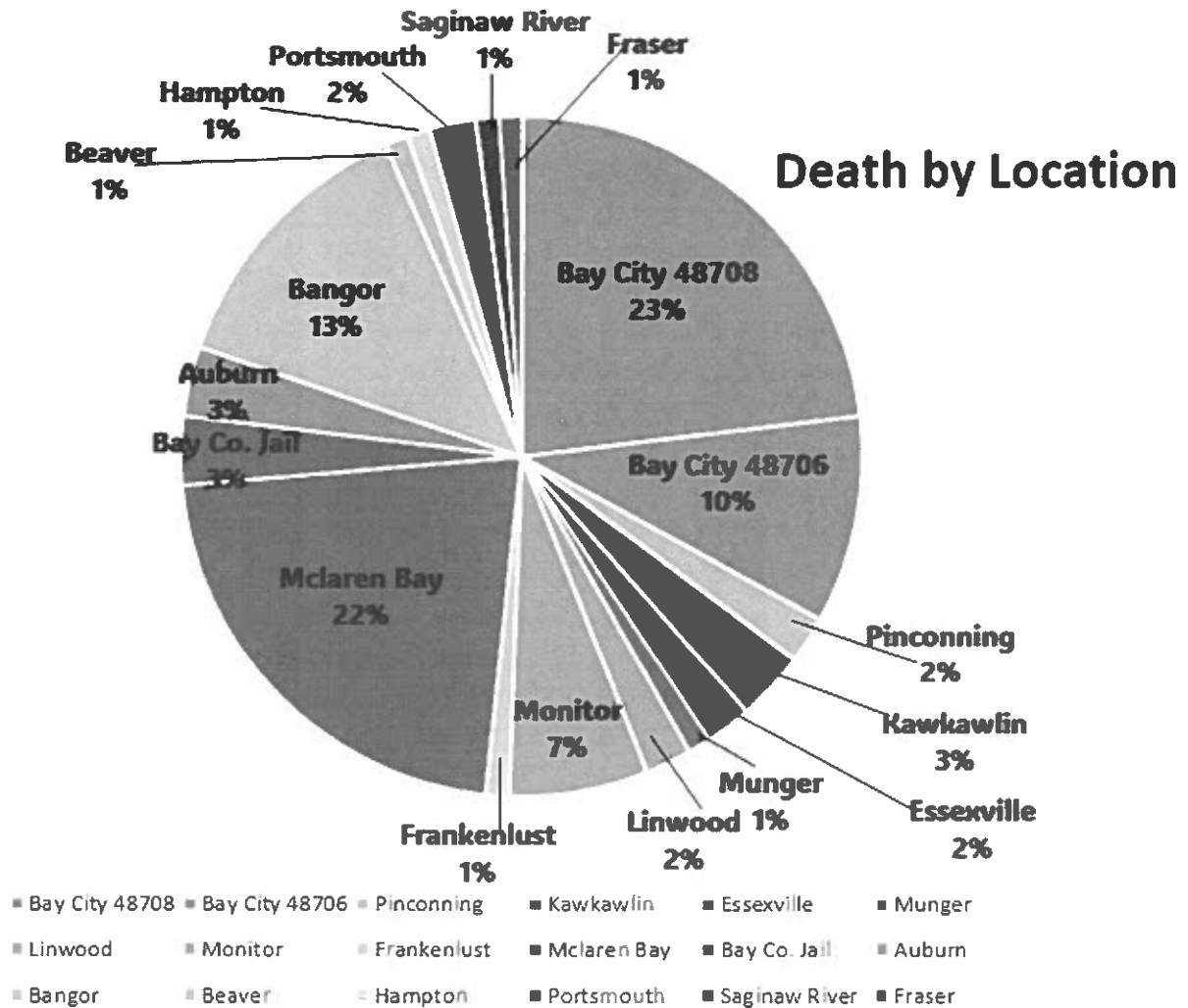


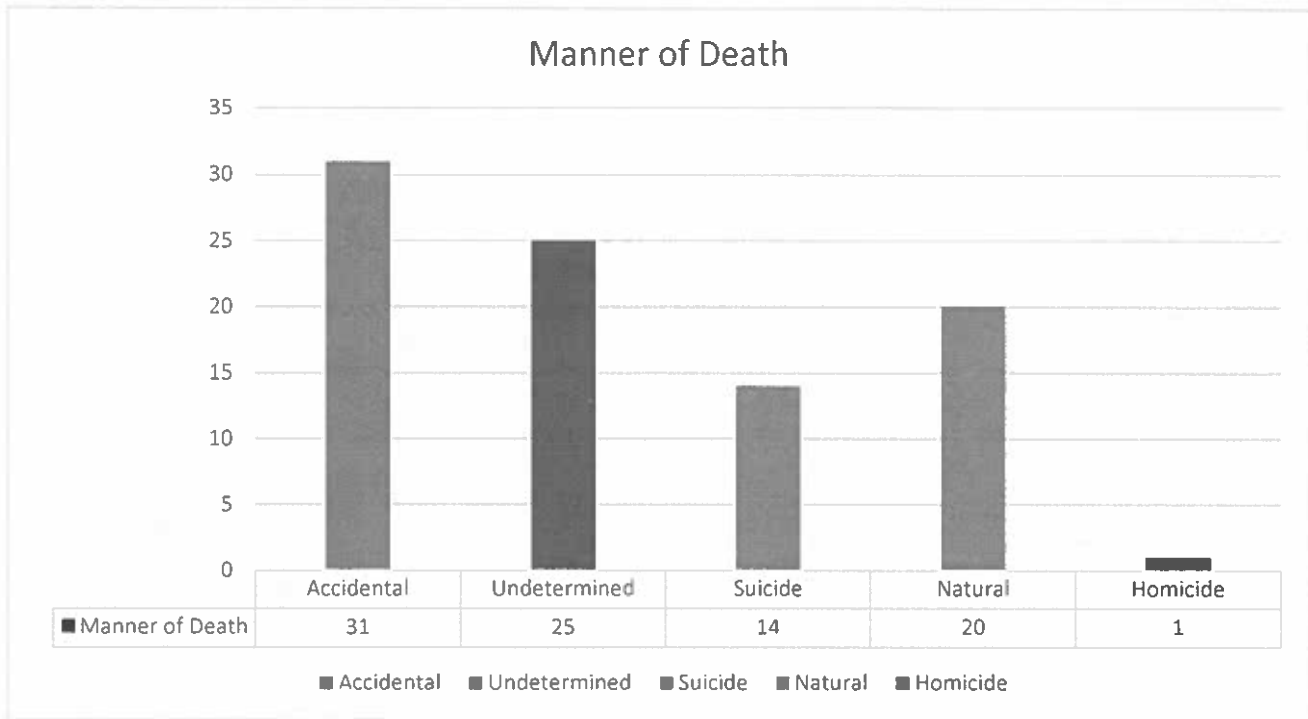
People Come to McLaren Bay Region hospital and die in Bay County from many different other counties. McLaren Bay region ICU and Emergency Room serve Isabella, Arenac Iosco, Ogemaw, Huron and Tuscola counties. Therefore, Bay County death certificates cannot always be directly linked to the death of Bay County resident as death certificates are created based on where the death occurs not where the person resides. With an aging population and a higher-than-average chronic medical disease index there are certain assumptions that we make. Over time death certificates commonly increased as we navigate the tail end of the baby boomers. 2023 Death Certificates in Bay County decreased to 1,474.



Medical Examiner cases and the BCMEO in general in 2023 are more likely to involve: face
to face BCMEO scene investigation,
2023* increased and improved record review at the hospital,
face to face BCMEO autopsy attendance and
real-time discussion with law-enforcement and first responders.

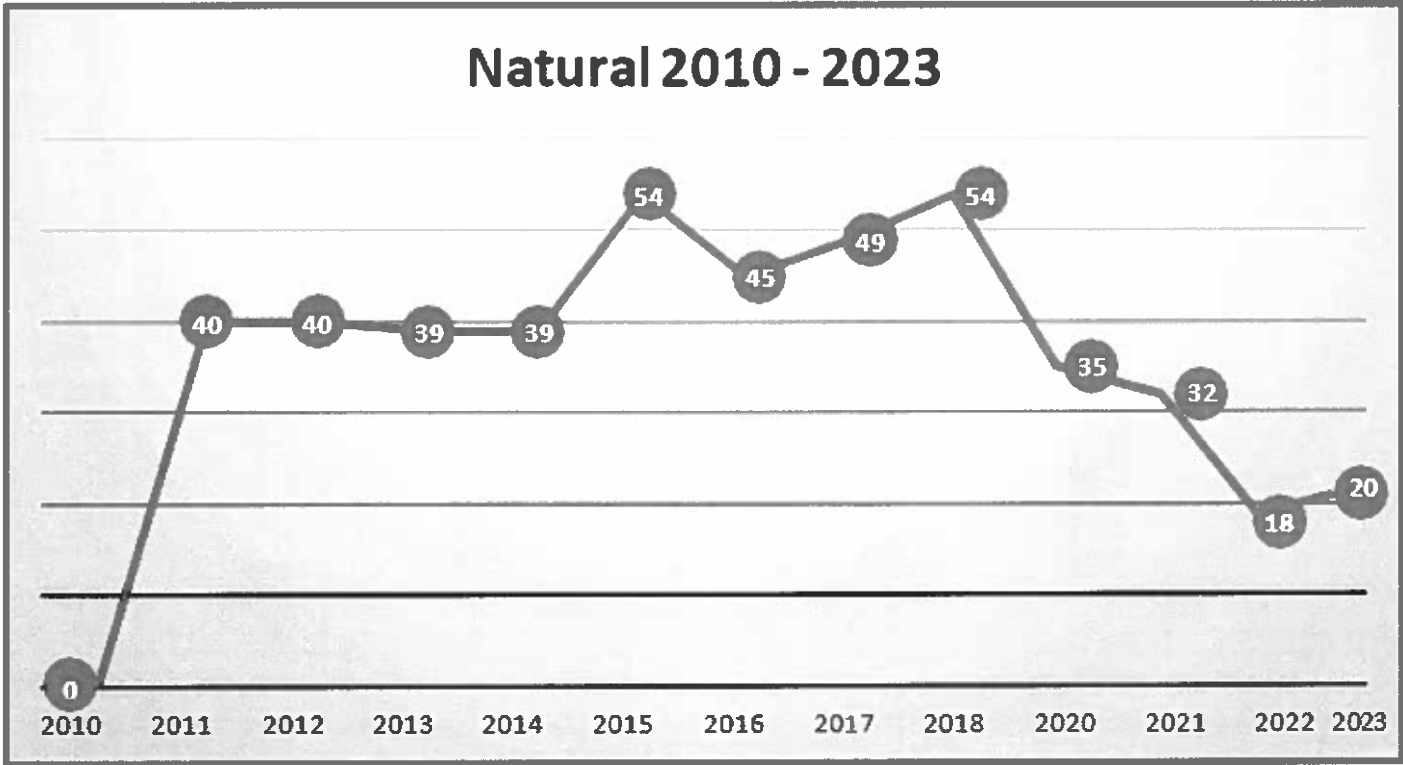
LOCATION OF DEATH MEDICAL EXAMINER CASES 2023





Natural deaths were 21.9%. Homicides were 1.09%. Suicides were 15.38%. Nondrug- Related Accident deaths 58.06% and all Drug overdose related deaths 41.93% are global accident deaths (as defined by the CDC). While drug overdose deaths **increased** by 6 % .

NATURAL



2023 Natural Deaths & Chronic Disease outcomes Bay County autopsies

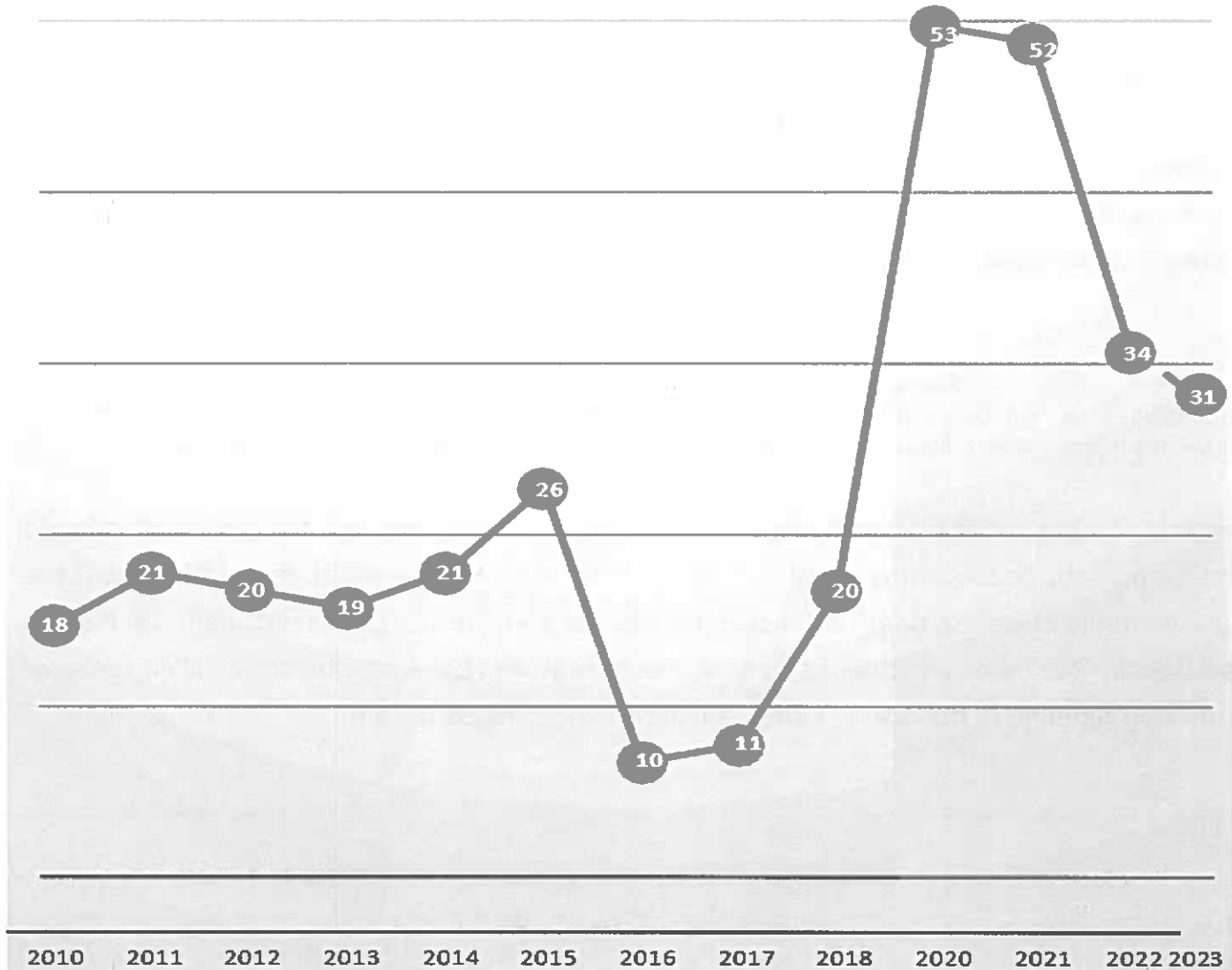
2023	Atherosclerotic heart disease	Lung Disease	Pancreatitis	Alcoholic liver disease	Stroke
	15	1	1	1	2
	75%	5%	5%	5 %	10%

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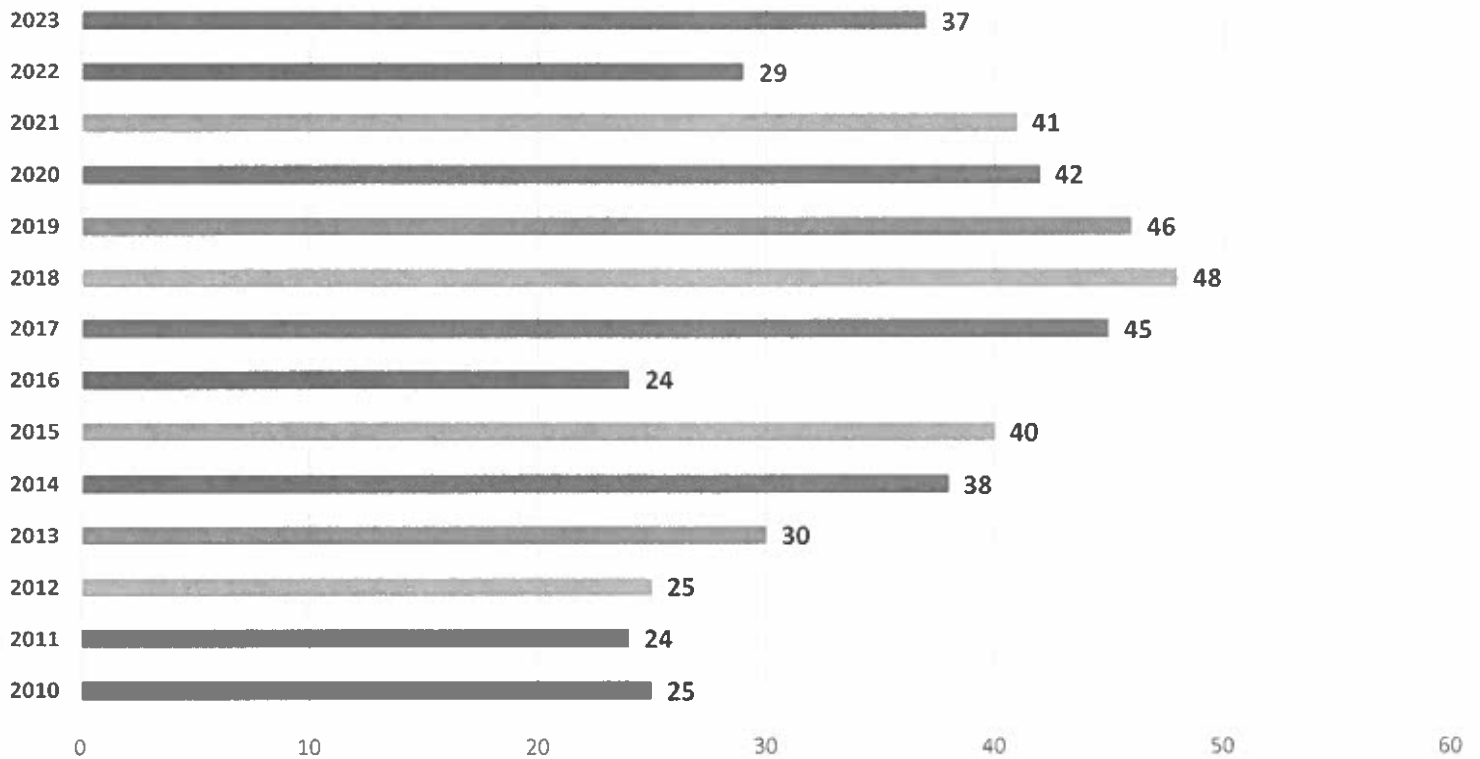
Accident:

The yellow box represents the new “classification” of drug overdose or intoxication death as an “accidental death” under CDC guidelines. Previously this was called “indeterminate” death. Less overdose deaths = less accidents.

Accidents 2010 - 2023



Overdose by Year

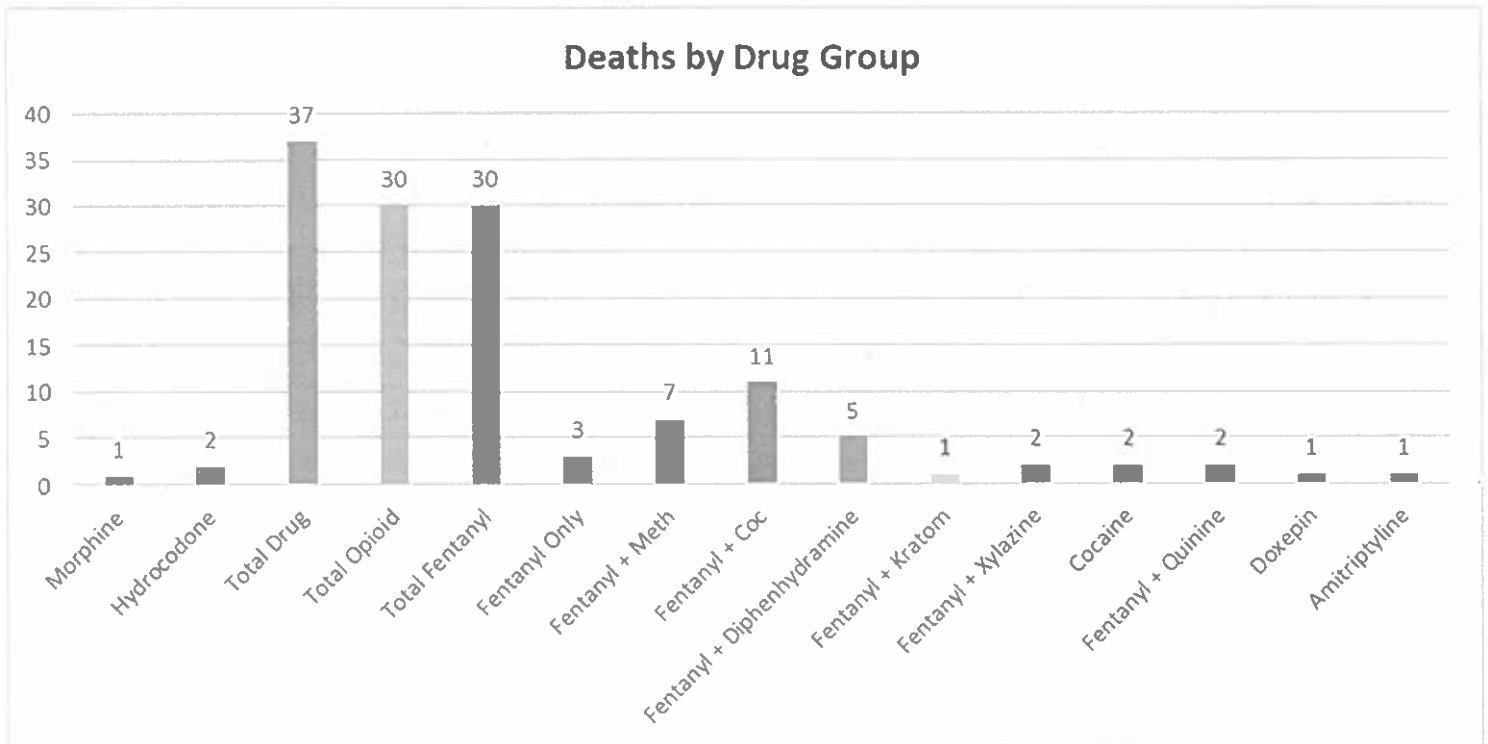


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2022 illustrates a 31 % decrease in overdose drug deaths. This may be due to increased treatment in Bay County. McLaren Bay Hospital, BCHD & Bay Arenac Behavioral Health do not offer evidence-based Addiction Treatment.

2016 was a notable year because during 2015, the previous year, an executive order introduced Narcan for prescription use into people’s homes. This Public Health initiative was to combat the increase in opioid overdose deaths. Police departments and Sheriffs began putting nasal Narcan in road patrol. 2017 was worthy of attention because it was the introduction of illicit fentanyl into the drug pipeline in our state. Eventually fentanyl replaced heroin.

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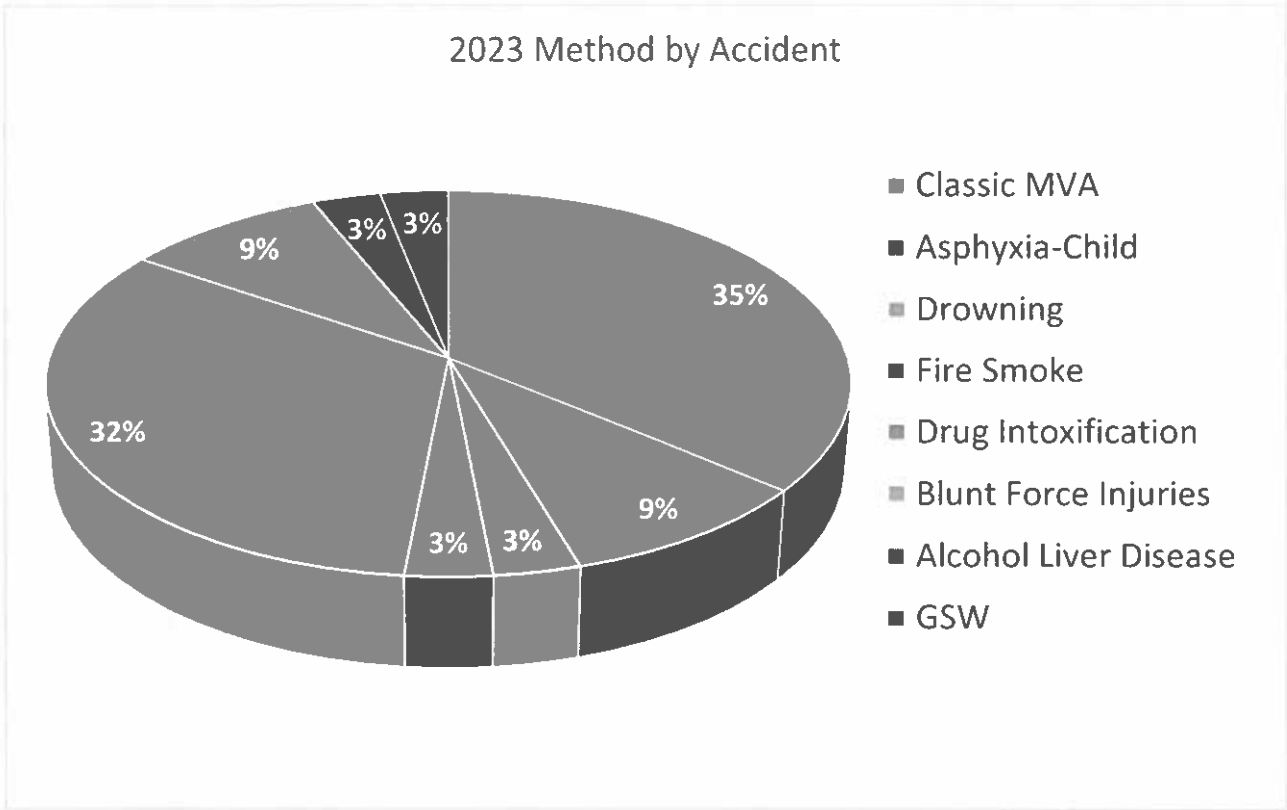
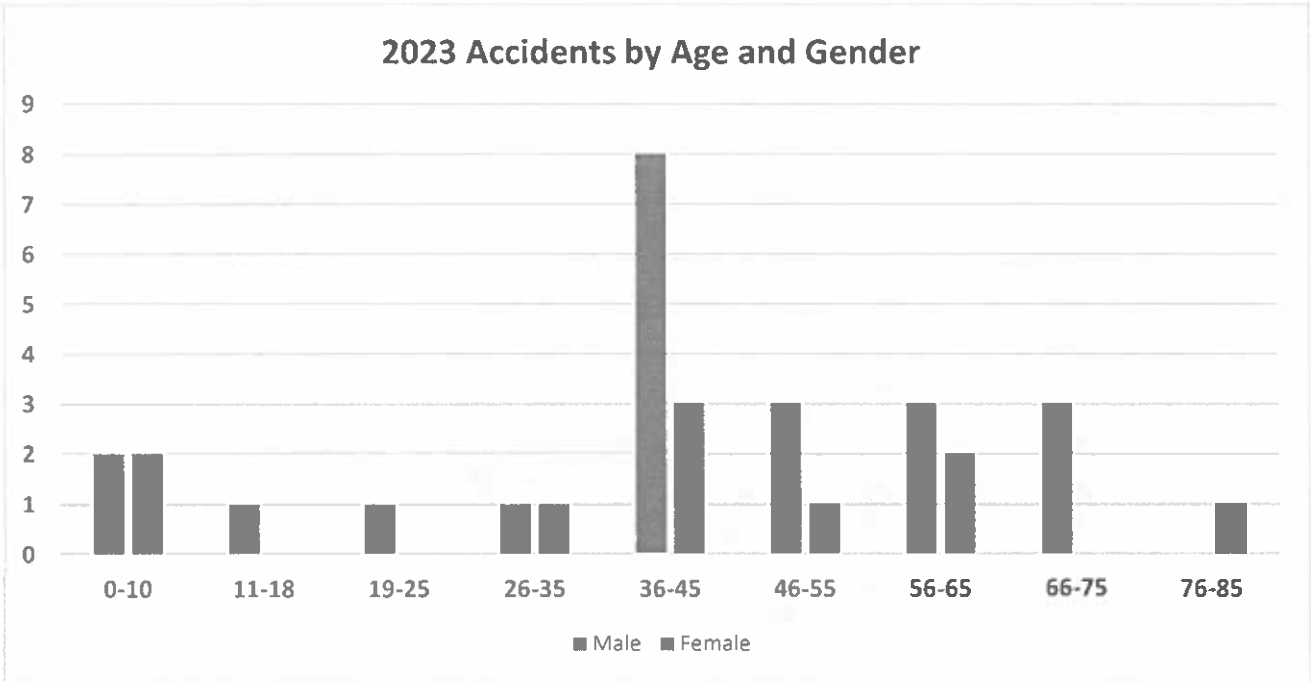


Bay County 2023: Cause of Death Overdose Autopsies by Age (y) & Gender (M/F)						
2023	11-20 y	21-30 y	31-40 y	41-50 y	51-60 y	61-70 Y
M	1	3	6	4	7	3
F	0	1	5	2	3	1
T	2.71%	11.17%	30.72%	16.21%	28.02%	11.17%

75% of all drug death were 31-50 years old and 88% Drug overdose deaths were male. 13% were younger than 31 years old. Fifteen years ago, it was punishing to find overdose deaths in the teens and 20's. We are in a Fentanyl epidemic. Rx opioid deaths are absent from germane toxicology. Opioid deaths are cumbersome due to naïve hospice and intensivist documentation.

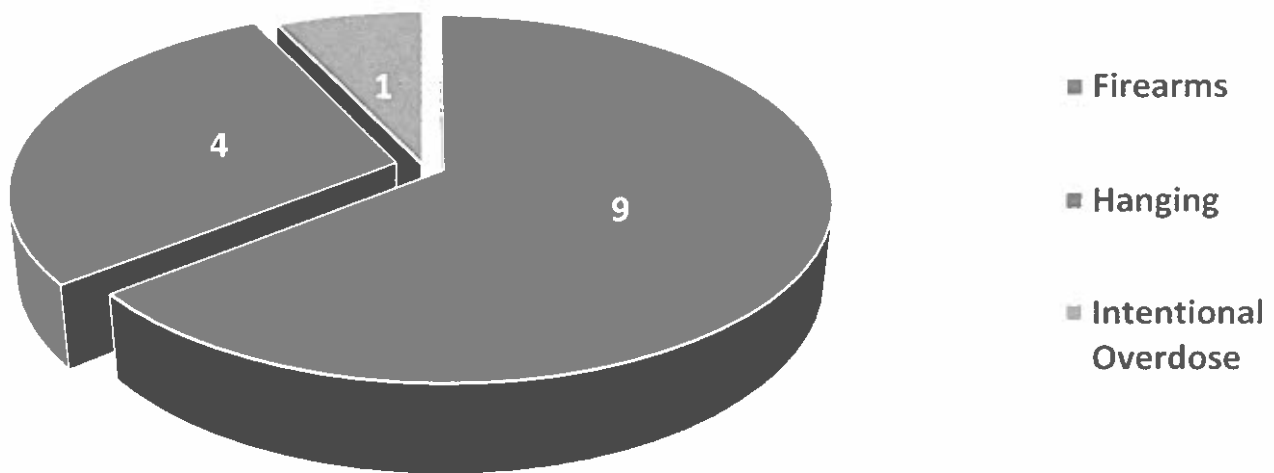
In 2023 Fentanyl, as cause of death, accounts for **81%** of all drug overdose deaths for Bay County in 2023. Previously fentanyl accounted for slightly less than half of overdose deaths in the composition of drugs causing death. There are more total overdose deaths with a greater percentage of them being fentanyl related deaths. There were 2 fentanyl deaths that included xylazine. There is no prescription opioids involved in 2023 deaths. There was no record of active substance use disorder treatment in the 2023 fentanyl deaths in Bay County. Alcohol related liver cirrhosis is found in natural disease data not, drug related overdose data.

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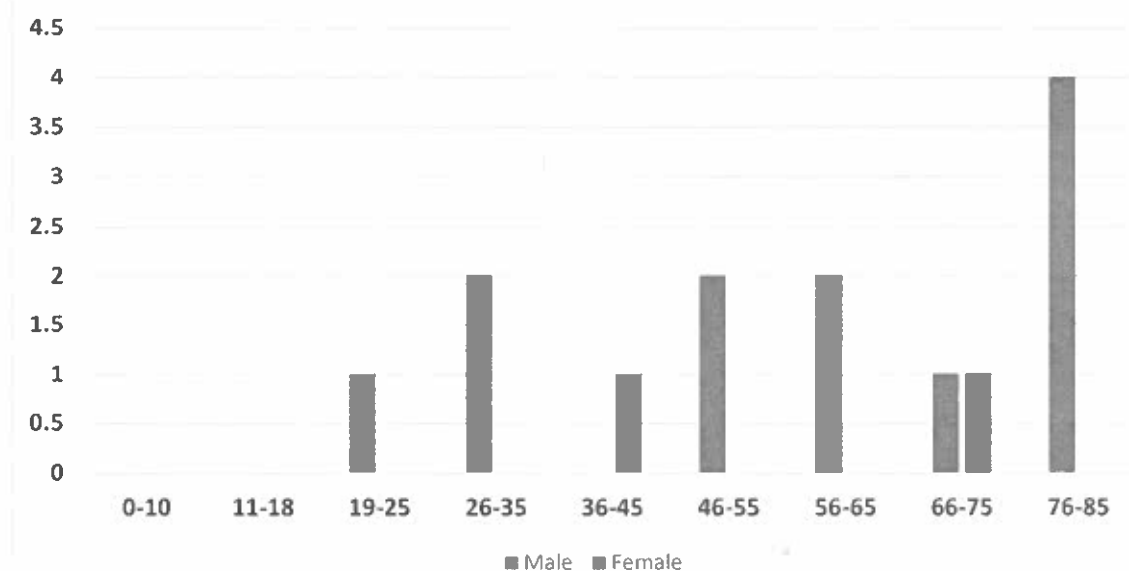
Suicide:

2023 Method of Suicide



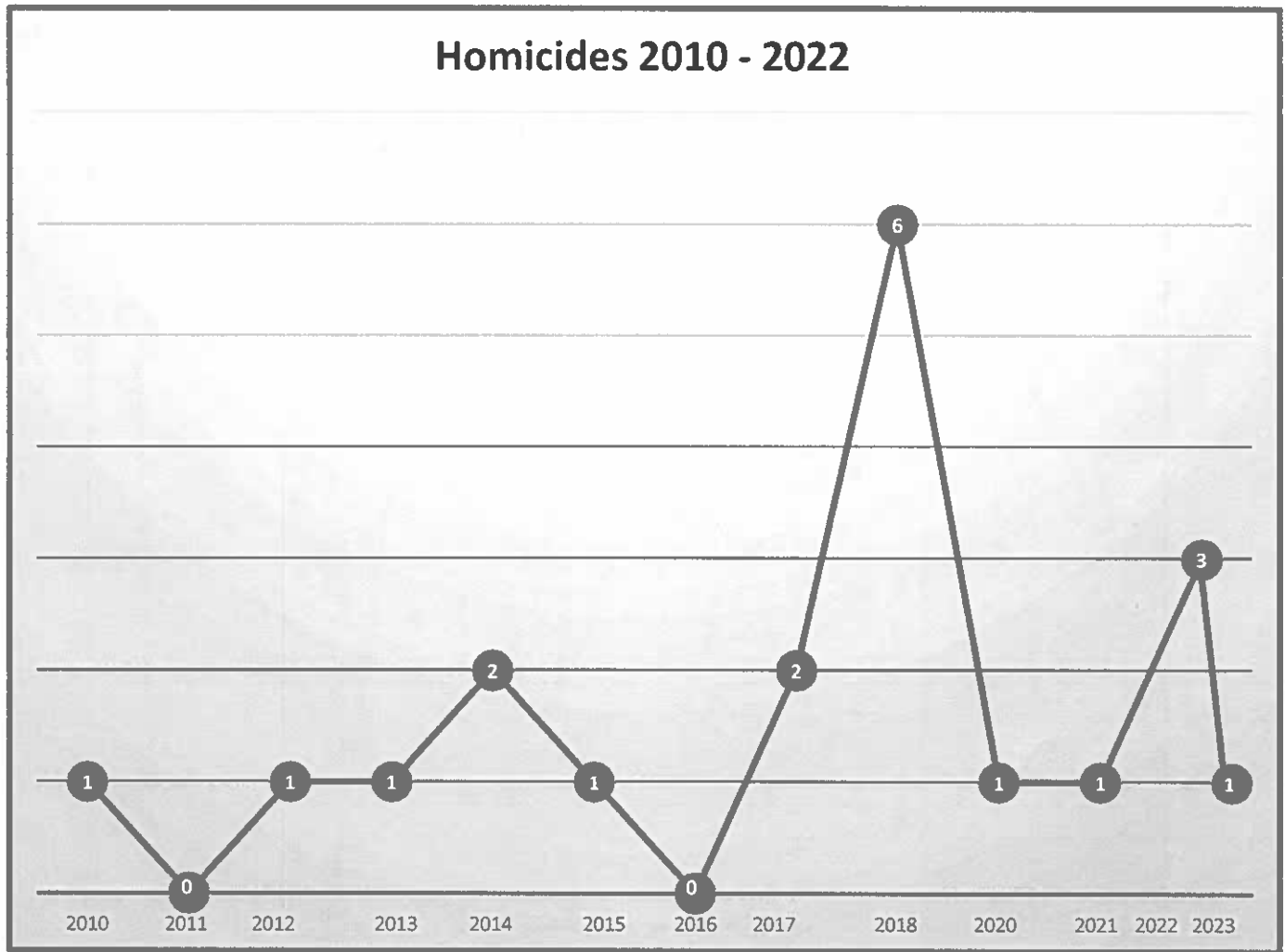
There was a significant increase in adult suicide asphyxia deaths in 2023 compared to previous years. There was one intentional drug overdose reported that was a 34-year-old male whose toxicology report indicates he had fentanyl, alcohol, and cocaine in his system. Suicides decreased from 22% to 15%.

2023 Suicide by Age and Gender



Homicides:

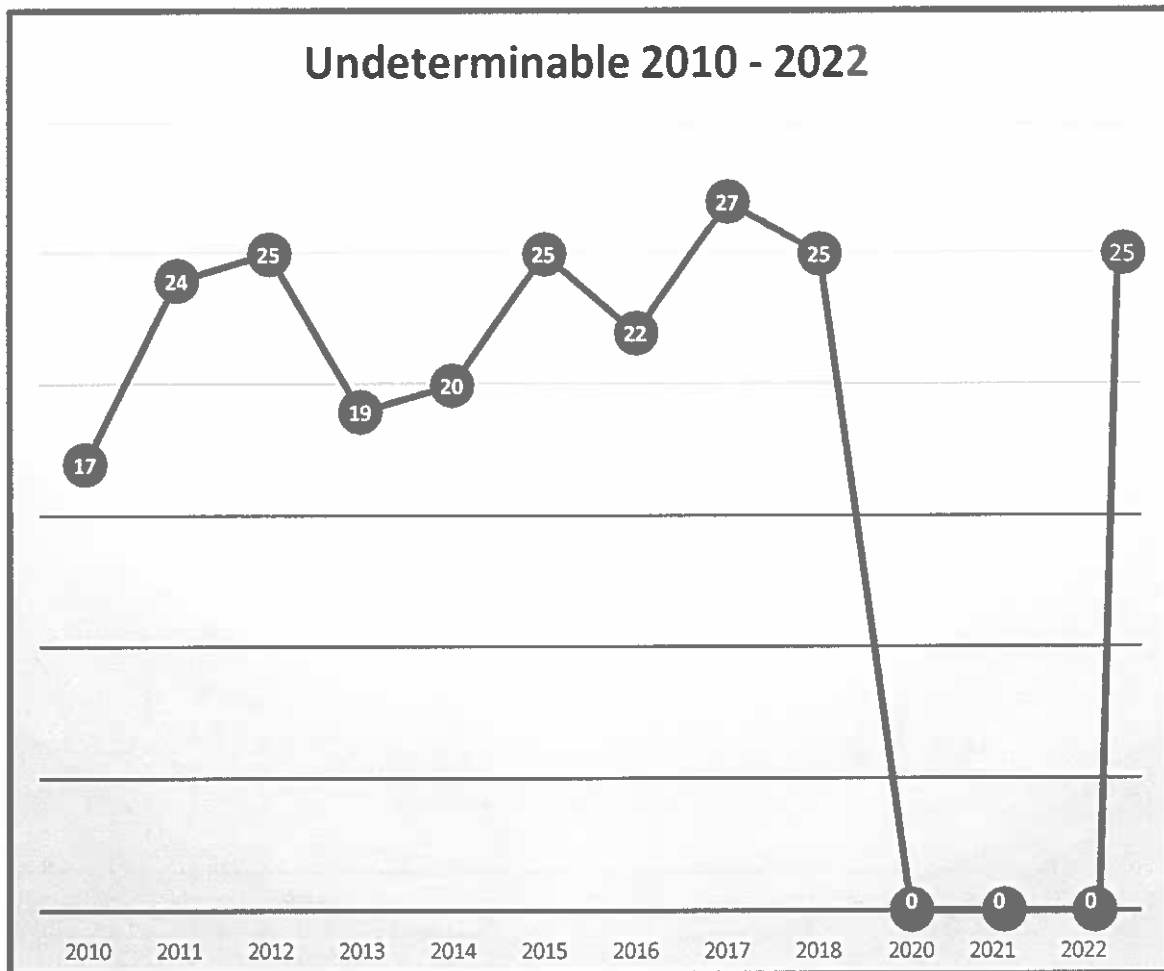
There was a decrease in rate of homicides from 2022 to 2023. The homicide victim was a male in 2023. In 2023 the method used was a firearm.



Undeterminable = Indeterminate

In 2020 the BCOME began to follow guidelines from the Center for Disease Control (CDC).

Drug overdose deaths and intoxications are more useful metrics when classified as accidents because we know there is an offending agent. Hence forth the BCOME and Medical Examiner data will classify drug overdose deaths and intoxication deaths as **accidents** unless they are accompanied by a suicide note, suicide evidence or previous documented suicide attempts.

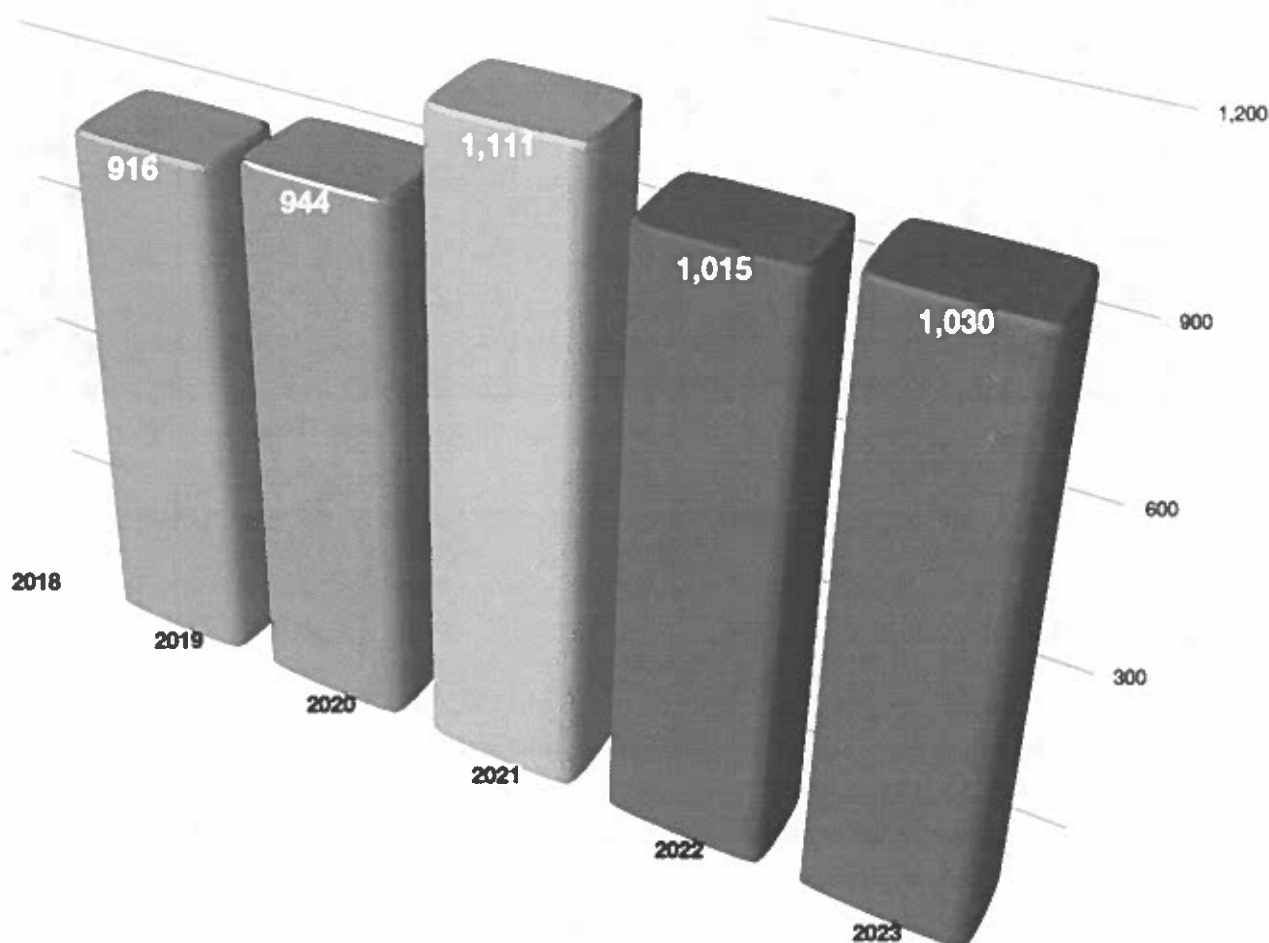


Undeterminable or Indeterminate deaths have been an ambiguous collection of data that leads to a lack of action and clouding issues. It is a designation that should be avoided and reserved for **“rare”** unresolved medical data that is multifaceted and academically frustrated. We feel it was used as a template too often. This re-enforced changing drug deaths to accident.

MISCELLANEOUS INFORMATION

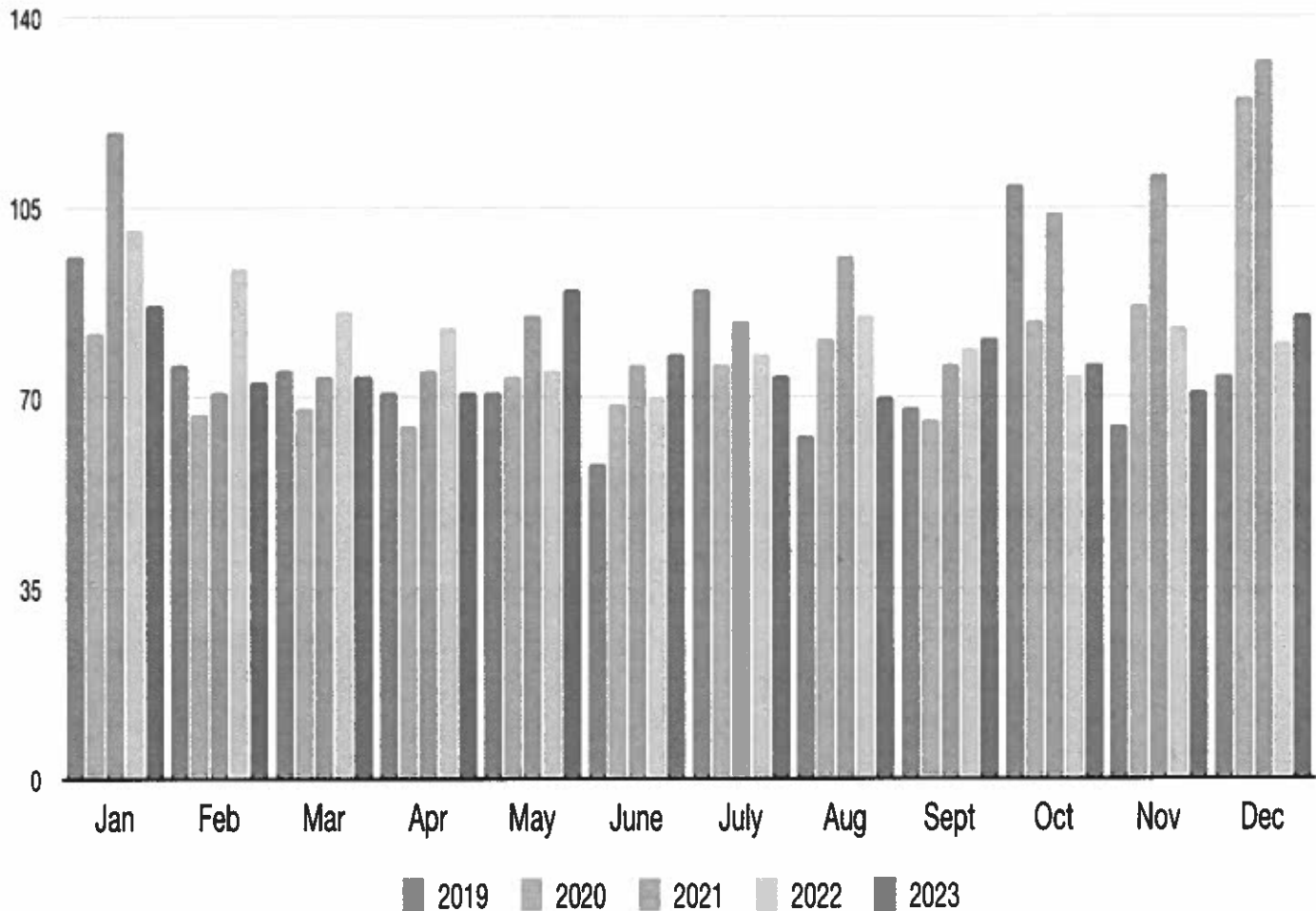
CREMATION AUTHORIZATION

Pursuant to Michigan Compiled Laws § 333.2848(3), if final disposition is by cremation, the medical examiner of the county in which death occurred shall sign the authorization for final disposition. The Bay County Medical Examiner's Office reviews each cremation permit and respective death certificate before authorizing cremation. Cremation permit requests remained steady for 2017-2019. There was an increase from 2019 to 2020 and increase from 2020 to 2021.



2016 – 2023 Bay Co. Cremation Permits (not measured before 2019)

Bay County Medical Examiner Cremation Permits 2019-2023



UNCLAIMED BODIES

The Estates and Protected Individuals Code, Public Act 386 of 1998, MCL 700.3206 establishes the rights and powers to make decisions about funeral arrangements and handling, disposition, or disinterment of a decedent's body.

When there is no next of kin or the next of kin refuses to handle the arrangements the Medical Examiner's Office applies for state assistance through the Department of Health and Human Services to fund the cremation of the decedent. Since 2018-2019 there has been a significant increase in the number of cases handled by the Bay County Medical Examiner's Office. In 2020-2023 BCMEO processed 61 unclaimed bodies and the MDHHS documentation is onerous and not user friendly. Based on current inflation & poverty index creepage unclaimed bodies will likely increase. The processing of unclaimed bodies is an unfunded mandate, time consuming, desolate and bothersome. Unclaimed bodies overfill the McLaren Bay morgue on a regular basis and make morgue management dismal. I am the medical examiner in Arenac, Bay, Iosco, Midland & Tuscola. Unclaimed bodies are only remarkably problematic in Bay County.