



**PIMA COUNTY**

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OFFICE OF THE  
MEDICAL EXAMINER

# Annual Report 2023



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# INTRODUCTION

The mission of the Pima County Office of the Medical Examiner (PCOME) is to provide accurate, timely, compassionate, and professional death investigation services for the citizens of Pima County, Arizona. The PCOME investigates any death in Pima County that is sudden, unexpected, violent, and/or in which the cause of death is unknown. The PCOME also serves as the Medical Examiner (ME) for Cochise, Graham, La Paz, and Santa Cruz Counties. For Apache, Gila, Greenlee, Navajo, and Pinal Counties, the PCOME does not serve as the ME, but performs examinations as needed on a fee-for-service basis.

This annual report consists of four main sections. The first is an overview of PCOME operations, activities, and notable events of the office over the course of the report year. The second is a statistical review of all cases processed by the office, regardless of the county of death. The third is a breakdown of fatality data for the five counties in which the PCOME is the appointed medical examiner (Pima, Cochise, Graham, La Paz, and Santa Cruz Counties). The fourth is a breakdown of deaths reported to and certified by the PCOME for counties in which the PCOME is not the appointed medical examiner.

## Accreditation

The PCOME has maintained full accreditation by the National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME) following a two-day inspection in October 2011. This accreditation requires in-person inspection every five years and annual verification. NAME accredited offices represent the highest quality of death investigation systems. There are 77 fully accredited Medical Examiner's Offices across the United States.

## Jurisdiction

**Not all deaths that occur in a county are required to be reported to or investigated by the appointed Medical Examiner.** Arizona Revised Statute (ARS) [§11-593 B](#) delineates the following circumstances under which a death is required to be reported to the PCOME:

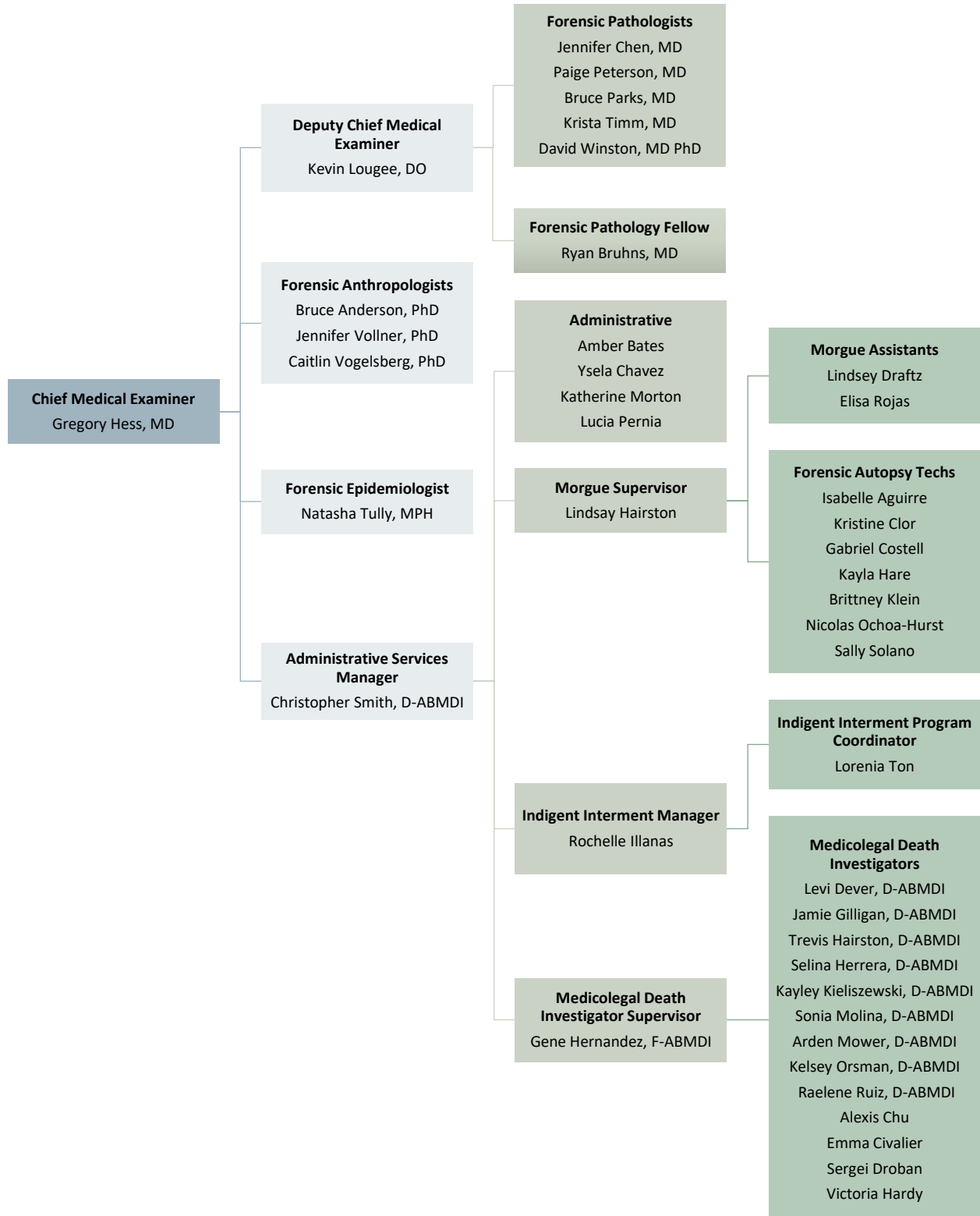
1. Death when not under the current care of a health care provider as defined pursuant to section 36-301.
2. Death resulting from violence.
3. Unexpected or unexplained death.
4. Death of a person in a custodial agency as defined in section 13-4401.
5. Unexpected or unexplained death of an infant or child.
6. Death occurring in a suspicious, unusual, or non-natural manner, including death from an accident believed to be related to the deceased's occupation or employment.
7. Death occurring as a result of anesthetic or surgical procedures.
8. Death suspected to be caused by a previously unreported or undiagnosed disease that constitutes a threat to public safety.
9. Death involving unidentifiable bodies.

## Data Definitions

- County/Death Location: Due to the nature of law enforcement and PCOME death investigation, all deaths presented in this report are based upon locality of occurrence (i.e., death location) and not a decedent's county of residence.
- Crude Death Rates: Death rates in this report are a ratio of the number of deaths that occurred in a county for each manner of death (MOD) or cause of death (COD) category, relative to the population size of the county of death that year. County population size is reported by [Arizona Department of Health Services \(ADHS\) Vital Statistics](#). At the time this report was written, ADHS had not yet released county population statistics for 2023. Therefore, 2023 death rates were calculated using 2022 population size and are subject to change.
- Natural Deaths: Natural death data in this report is limited to deaths certified by the PCOME and does not reflect the total number of natural deaths in a county each year. Most natural deaths that occur do not fall under the jurisdiction of a medical examiner and instead, are certified by a decedent's healthcare provider. The PCOME accepts jurisdiction of cases that appear to be natural deaths if the decedent is not in the care of a healthcare provider, dies while in custody, is unidentified, and/or a previously healthy individual dies suddenly/unexpectedly, as defined by the medical examiner.
- Overdose Deaths: Deaths in which an overdose of a single drug or a combination of drugs caused or contributed to death. These deaths do not include situations in which intoxication may have been a factor in an incident leading to death (e.g., motor vehicle crashes, environmental exposures) or deaths attributed to chronic drug/alcohol use. This report does not include data on drugs detected in toxicology screening that were not listed as contributing to or causing death.
- Subsumed Cases: A subsumed case represents a case of human remains later identified as remains of a previous case where a death certificate was already issued. The subsumed case information is absorbed into the previously certified case. Therefore, demographic information and cause and manner of death is recorded and reported on the primary case only.
- Race/Ethnicity: Race/ethnicity data is collected from death certificate data and medical records for counties in which the PCOME serves as the appointed medical examiner. Race/ethnicity designations used in this report follow ADHS definitions and include White non-Hispanic, Hispanic or Latino, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, and Asian or Pacific Islander. The PCOME uses ADHS race/ethnicity methodology in classifying decedents such that "individuals identified as Hispanic plus another race are included in the racial/ethnic category with the lowest population in the state. This approach to bridging is defined as the smallest group deterministic whole method" ([Arizona Health Status and Vital Statistics 2012](#)).
- Undetermined Deaths: A manner of death classification "used when information pointing to one manner of death is no more compelling than one or more other competing manners of death in consideration of all available information" ([A Guide For Manner of Death Classification, NAME](#)).
- Veterans: Veteran status is determined by the state death certificate data field "ever served in the U.S. armed forces," completed and verified by a funeral director.

# PCOME OPERATIONS & COLLABORATIONS

## Organizational Chart



## Medicolegal Death Investigators

The **American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators** (ABMDI) certifies individuals of their knowledge and skills in the field of medicolegal death investigation. In addition to the PCOME MDI Supervisor and Administrative Services Manager, 9 Medicolegal Death Investigators (MDIs) are ABMDI-certified. PCOME Forensic Pathologists lecture to MDIs on varying topics monthly. In accordance with our MDI quality assurance and performance improvement program, 10% of reports are reviewed by a pathologist monthly and 10% of reports are peer reviewed quarterly.

## Community Education and Presentations

The PCOME receives numerous requests from organizations, individuals, and schools for forensic and anthropologic presentations. Due to time and personnel constraints, not all requests can be honored, but PCOME staff offer as many educational activities as possible. Examples of such activities include but are not limited to, presentations at local primary and secondary schools, lectures at various institutions and departments at the University of Arizona, presentations and tours for humanitarian organizations, and university border studies courses.

## Data Sharing and Media Interviews

Our office regularly answers data requests from local, state, and national agencies and organizations. Over the calendar year, the Chief Medical Examiner recorded 113 contacts with media to respond to external data inquiries (i.e., interviews, emails, and phone calls). The Forensic Epidemiologist handled 151 data requests (i.e., monthly reports, quarterly reports, and ad hoc data requests) from media, outside agencies, and other county departments. The PCOME also partners with the Pima County Health Department to provide data and to support various public health projects related to overdose deaths, child fatalities, and more. In September 2022, the PCOME launched several online, interactive data dashboards, accessible at the **PCOME website**, for reporting data to the public regarding deaths occurring in the counties served by the PCOME. Data presented in this report is an end of year, point-in-time analysis of PCOME data and may differ slightly from data presented in our dashboards (updated monthly).

## Medical Education Agreements

Forensic Pathology Fellowship: The PCOME's Forensic Pathology training program began in 2016, funded by the University of Arizona's College of Medicine, Department of Pathology. The year-long program is certified by the **Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education** (ACGME) and prepares the fellow for board certification in pathology; it is the only such training program offered in Arizona.

Pathology Resident and Medical Student Rotations: Pathology residents and medical students from the University of Arizona's College of Medicine, **Department of Pathology**, elect to participate in a month-long rotation at the PCOME. In 2023, five pathology residents and seven medical students participated in rotations.

Forensic Anthropology Internship: A semester-long internship is offered to students from the University of Arizona's College of Social & Behavioral Sciences, **School of Anthropology**. Three anthropology students interned at the PCOME in 2023.

Clinical and Academic Appointments: PCOME Forensic Pathologists hold clinical appointments with the Department of Pathology at the University of Arizona, College of Medicine, where they are involved with pathology resident and medical student teaching. PCOME Forensic Anthropologists hold academic appointments at the University of Arizona's College of Social & Behavioral Sciences, School of Anthropology.

## Law Enforcement and Legal System

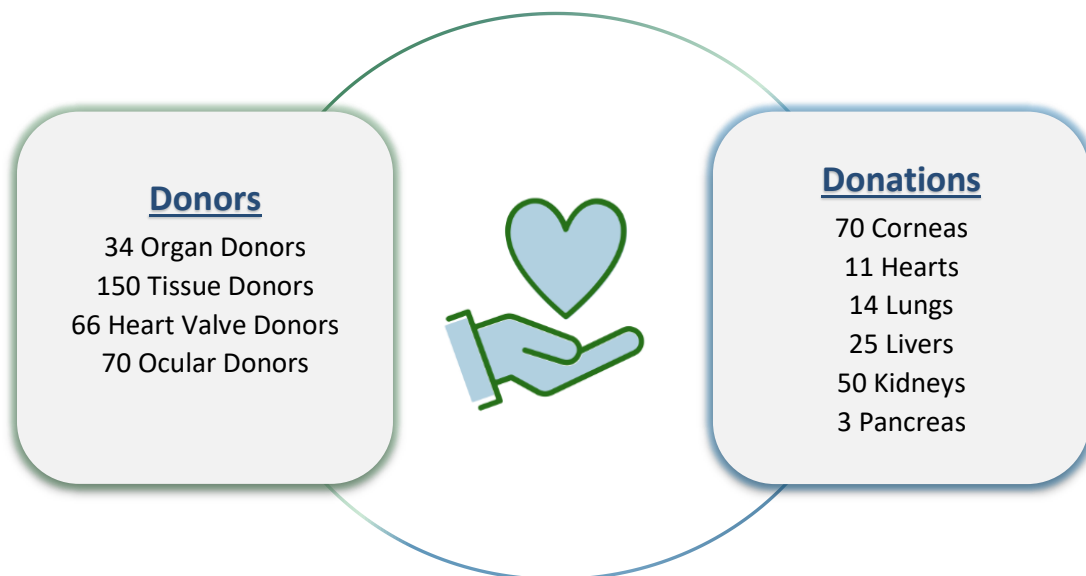
An important function of the PCOME is the availability of our pathologists to assist or advise law enforcement personnel in their investigations and the legal system in its proceedings. Involvement of the PCOME in the legal system generally consists of pretrial interviews, depositions, and courtroom testimony. In 2023, PCOME Forensic Pathologists and Forensic Anthropologists participated in several pretrial interviews, depositions, and jury trials for Pima County and out-of-county cases.

## Cremation Permit Authorizations

The PCOME reviews thousands of cremation permit requests each year. Forensic Pathologists review the death certificates to ensure that deaths that should have been reported to and investigated by our office, are in fact, properly investigated by the PCOME before cremation is authorized.

## Organ and Tissue Donation

Per [A.R.S §36-861](#), the PCOME refers death notifications to and partners with [Donor Network of Arizona](#) and other associated tissue research agencies for the coordination and procurement of anatomic gifts. The importance of supporting the efforts of organ and tissue transplant and research communities in Arizona cannot be understated. Anatomic gifts can be lifesaving for organ and tissue recipients, but these donations are always in short supply. In 2023, the PCOME authorized the procurement of organs for all donation requests: 34 organ donors and 150 tissue donors.



## 2023 MEDICAL EXAMINER CASES (ALL COUNTIES)



Deaths Reported  
to the PCOME

**4,649**



Medical Examiner  
Cases

**2,725**



Death Certificate  
Cremation  
Authorization Reviews

**9,885**



Decedents  
Transported to the  
PCOME

**2,315**



Postmortem Exams  
Performed

**2,278**



Anthropologic  
Examinations

**134**



Arizona Counties  
that Reported Deaths  
to the PCOME

**12 of 15**



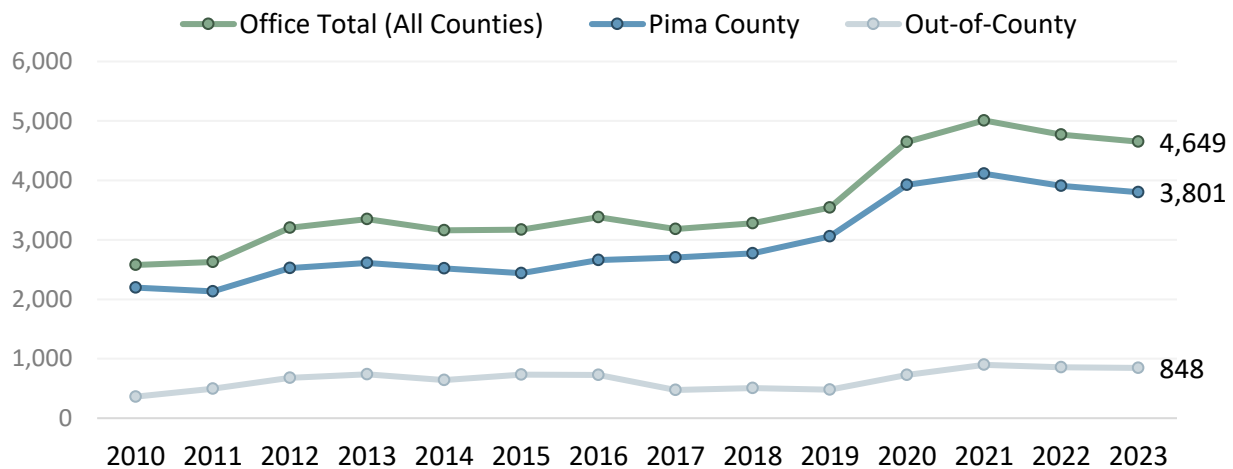
Undocumented  
Border Crosser  
Cases

**197**

## Reported Deaths

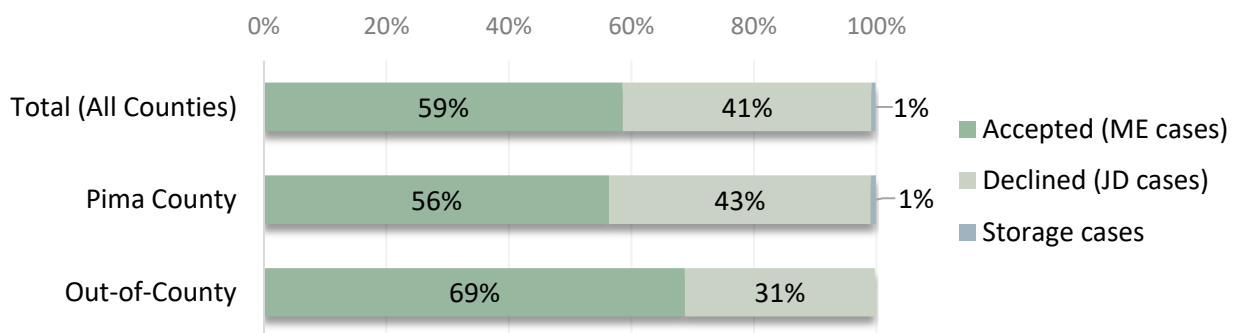
When a death is reported to the PCOME, a Medicolegal Death Investigator determines if the PCOME will accept jurisdiction of the case, decline jurisdiction, or provide storage, if needed. For cases in which jurisdiction is accepted (ME cases), the PCOME will formally investigate the death and certify the cause and manner of death by means of autopsy, external examination, or medical record review. Cases in which jurisdiction is declined (JD cases) are certified by the decedent's healthcare provider. Other cases may be reported to the PCOME and transported to our facility to temporarily hold until funeral arrangements are made (storage cases). A few cases each year are reported to the PCOME for an anthropologic exam only and are not included in ME case, JD case, or storage case counts. The total deaths reported to and handled by the PCOME each year are the sum of these case types. In 2023, a total of 4,649 deaths were reported to the PCOME (3,801 cases from Pima County and 848 cases from other counties). "Out-of-County" includes cases reported to the PCOME from Apache (30), Cochise (407), Coconino (1), Gila (22), Graham (69), Greenlee (9), La Paz (174), Navajo (35), Pinal (5), Santa Cruz (95), and Yuma (1) Counties.

### Deaths Reported to the PCOME



Of the 4,649 reported deaths, 2,725 cases (59%) were accepted under the jurisdiction of the PCOME; jurisdiction was declined for 1,887 cases (41%); and 32 deaths (1%) were reported to the PCOME for temporary storage at our facility. Five cases, excluded in the graph below, were reported to and transported to the PCOME for anthropologic or pathologic examination only, without certification of the death by the PCOME.

### Jurisdictional Disposition of Deaths Reported, 2023

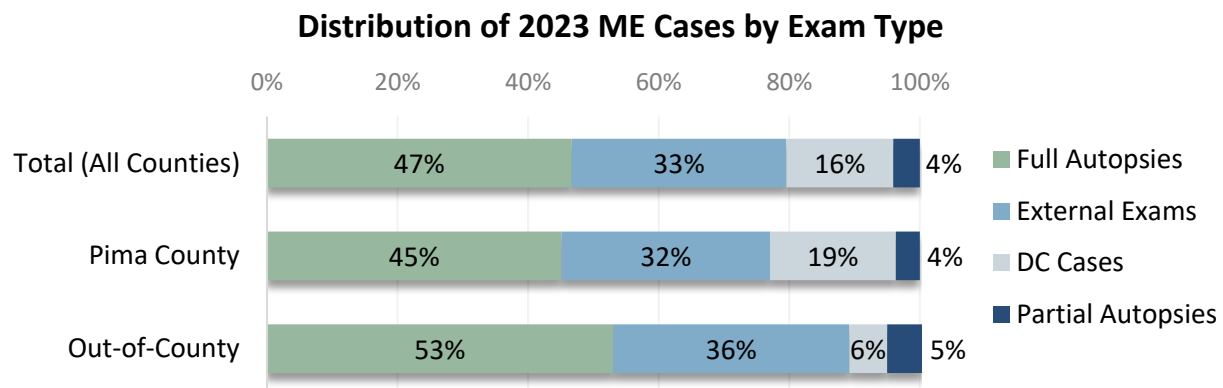
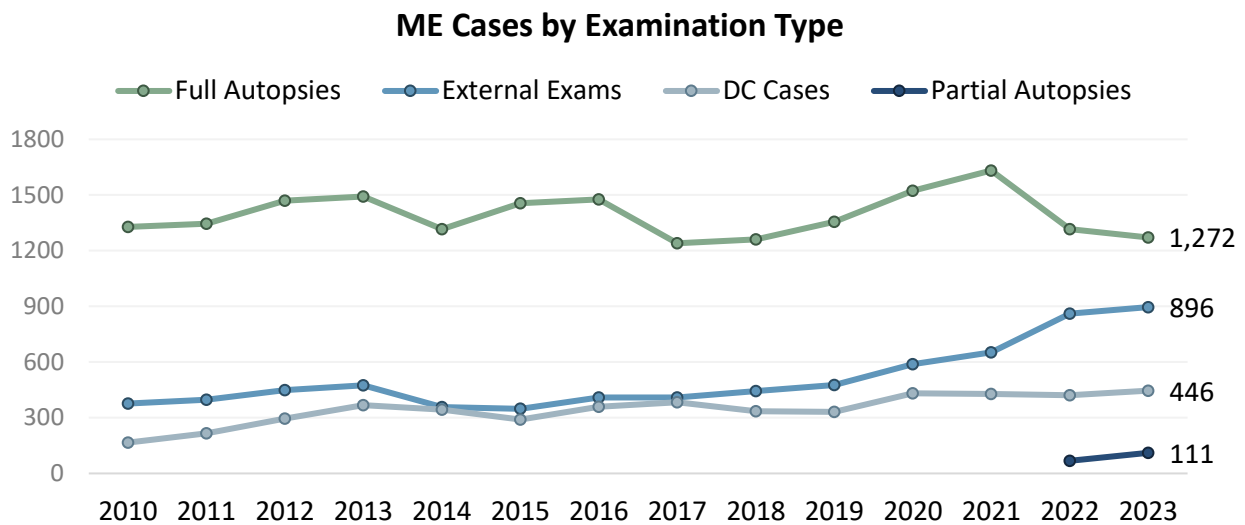


## Examination Type

Cases in which the PCOME accepts jurisdiction, conducts a death investigation, and certifies the cause and manner of death are considered “medical examiner cases” (ME cases). Depending on the needs of the investigation, a medical examiner case will undergo one of four types of examinations, as determined by a Forensic Pathologist:

1. **Full autopsy:** Examination of a decedent, both externally and internally, for evidence of injury or natural disease which may have caused or contributed to the individual’s death.
2. **Partial autopsy:** Examination of a decedent limited to a specific area or areas of the body, often to an internal examination of the head. The PCOME began performing partial autopsies mid-year in 2021. Counts of partial autopsies in 2021 were included in the count of full autopsies.
3. **External examination:** Examination of the external surfaces of the body only.
4. **Death certificate (DC) case:** Review of the medical records, law enforcement reports, and any other information that may be necessary to determine the cause and manner of death without physical examination of the decedent.

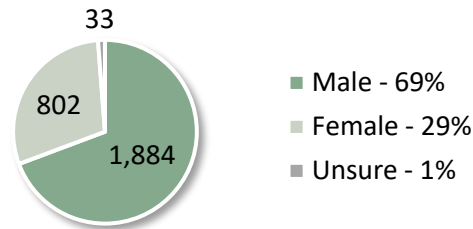
Out of the 2,725 cases accepted in 2023 (2,142 Pima County deaths and 583 out-of-county deaths), the PCOME performed 1,272 full autopsies, 111 partial autopsies, 896 external examinations, and certified 446 DC cases. Distribution of exam types are displayed in the bar chart below.



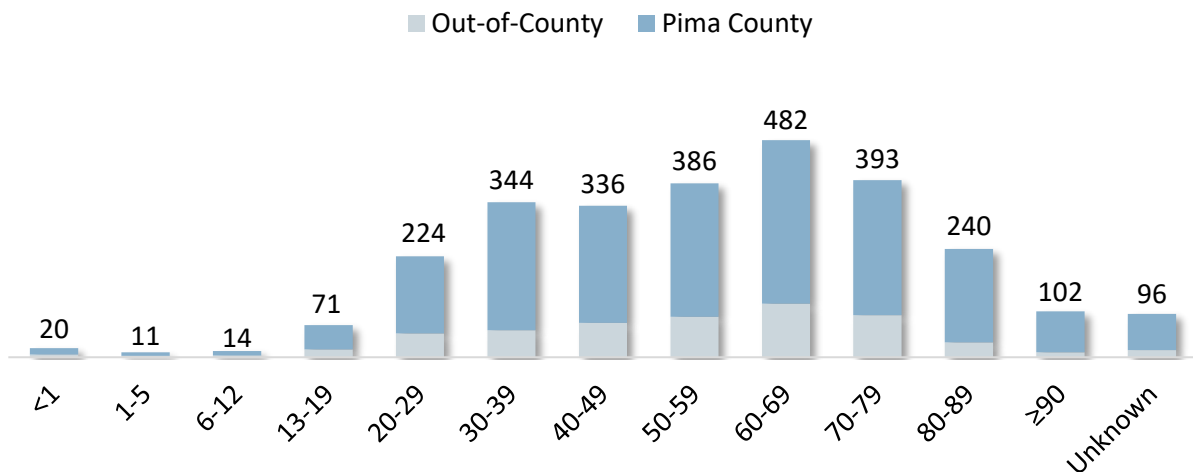
## Demographics

Decedent demographic information is detailed below for 2023 ME cases; **subsumed cases** are excluded. At the time this report was written, six 2023 cases were subsumed. Male decedents comprised the greatest proportion of ME cases (69%). Among all age groups, decedents in their sixties accounted for the largest percentage of ME cases (18%).

**2023 ME Cases by Decedent Sex (All Counties)**



**2023 ME Cases by Decedent Age Group (All Counties)**

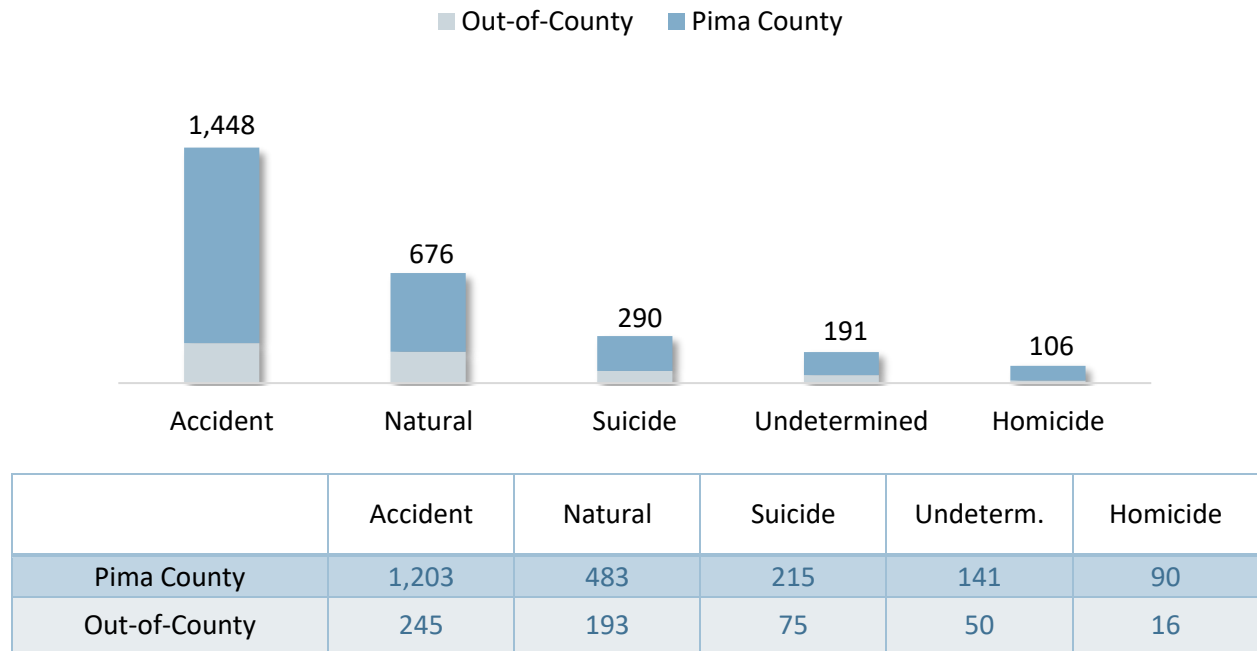


	<1	1-5	6-12	13-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	80-89	≥90	Unkn.
Pima County	14	8	10	54	171	284	260	296	363	300	207	91	80
Out-of-County	6	3	4	17	53	60	76	90	119	93	33	11	16

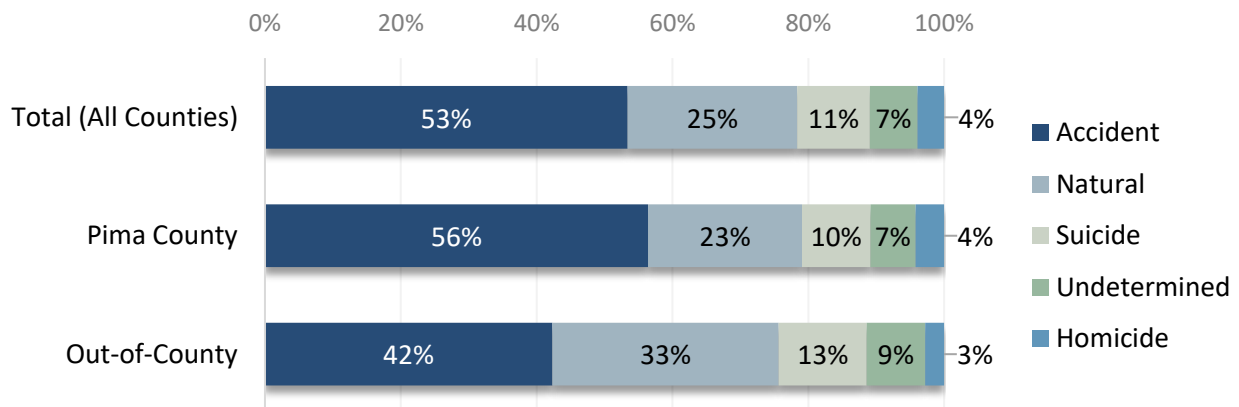
## Manner of Death

Manner of Death (MOD) is a medicolegal determination of death based on the circumstances surrounding a cause of death. MOD classifications include accident, homicide, natural, suicide, and undetermined. The certifier of death must report the MOD on a death certificate, except in the case of a fetal death. Subsumed cases and fetal death cases represent 0.4% of 2023 ME cases. These cases (6 subsumed cases and 8 fetal death cases) are excluded in the graphs and chart below. In 2023, a total of 2,711 cases were certified by the PCOME with a MOD. More deaths were certified as accidents than any other manner (1,448 cases, 53%).

### 2023 ME Cases by Manner of Death (All Counties)



### Distribution of 2023 ME Cases by Manner of Death

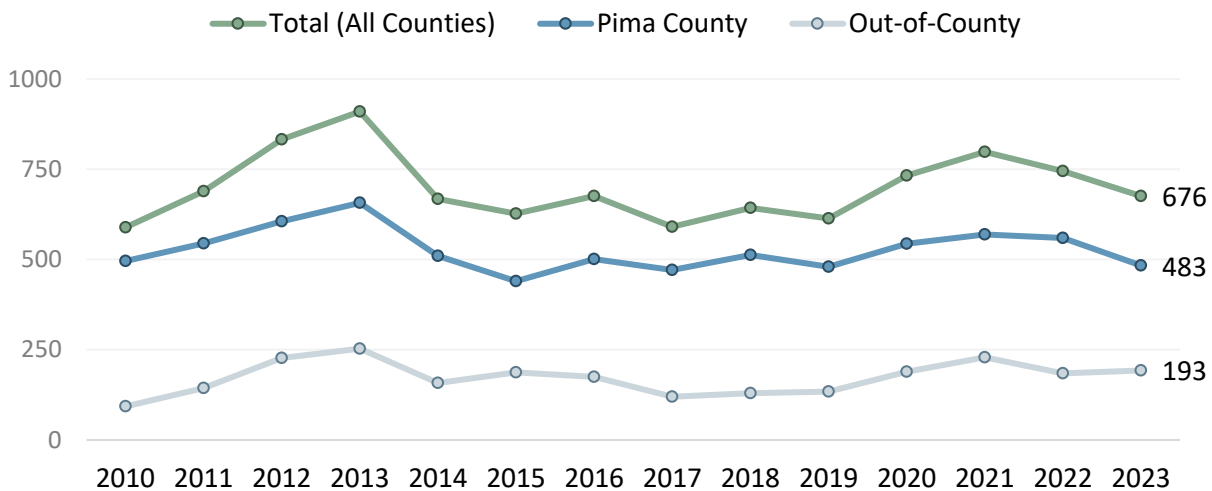


## Natural (All Counties)

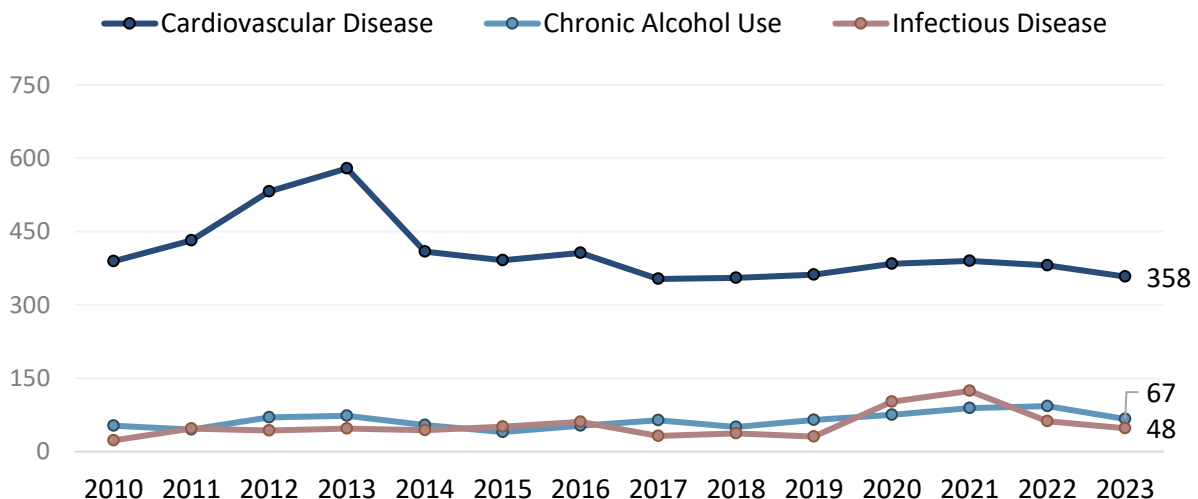
**Natural death data in this report is limited to deaths certified by the PCOME (ME cases) and does not reflect the total number of natural deaths in a county each year.** Most natural deaths that occur do not fall under the jurisdiction of a medical examiner and instead, are certified by a decedent's healthcare provider. The PCOME accepts jurisdiction of cases that appear to be natural deaths if the decedent is not in the care of a healthcare provider, dies while in custody, is unidentified, and/or a previously healthy individual dies suddenly/unexpectedly, as defined by the medical examiner. The PCOME is not aware of the number of natural deaths certified by physicians in the community, therefore natural death data presented in this report should be interpreted with caution.

A total of 676 natural deaths were certified by the PCOME in 2023 (25% of ME cases); 483 deaths in Pima County and 193 deaths in other counties. Cardiovascular disease remains the most frequent cause of natural deaths certified by the PCOME (358 in 2023).

### Natural Deaths Certified by the PCOME



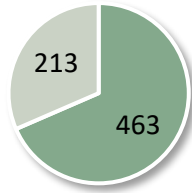
### Top Causes of Natural Deaths (ME Cases Only)



Male decedents comprised 68% of PCOME-certified natural deaths in 2023. Decedents aged 60-to-69 years old accounted for the largest portion of natural deaths of any age group (25%), followed closely by decedents in their seventies (24%). Cardiovascular disease was the most common cause of death (53%), followed by chronic alcohol use (10%), nonspecific natural causes (7%), and infection (7%).

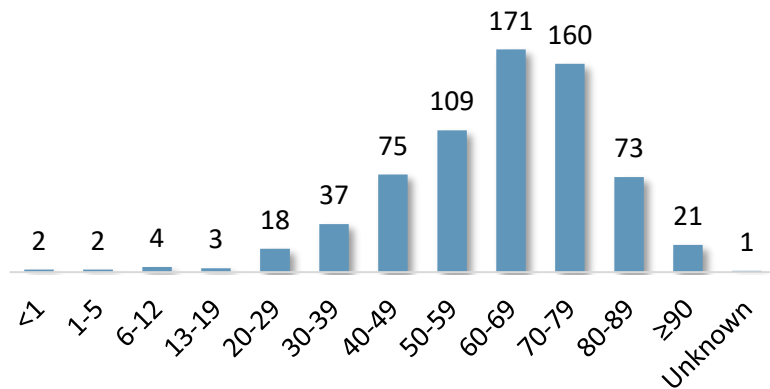
### 2023 Natural Deaths (All Counties)

**Decedent Sex**

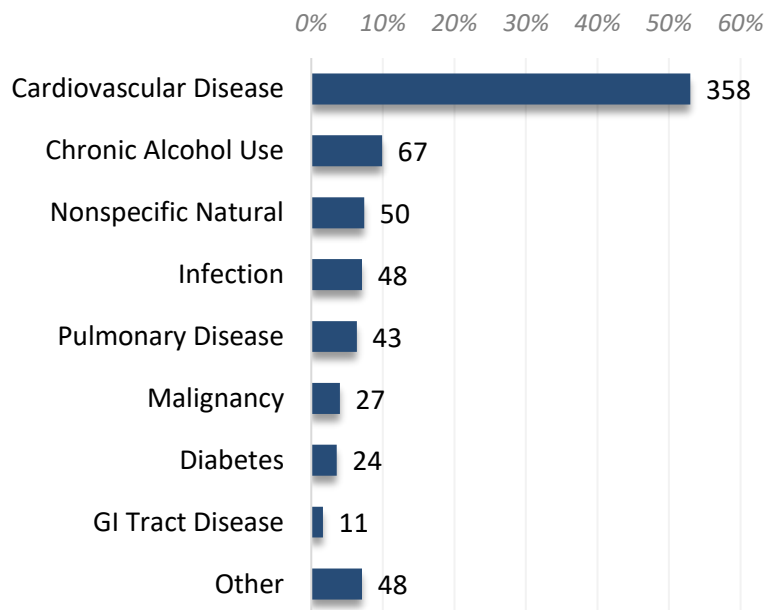


■ Male - 68%  
■ Female - 32%

**Decedent Age Group**



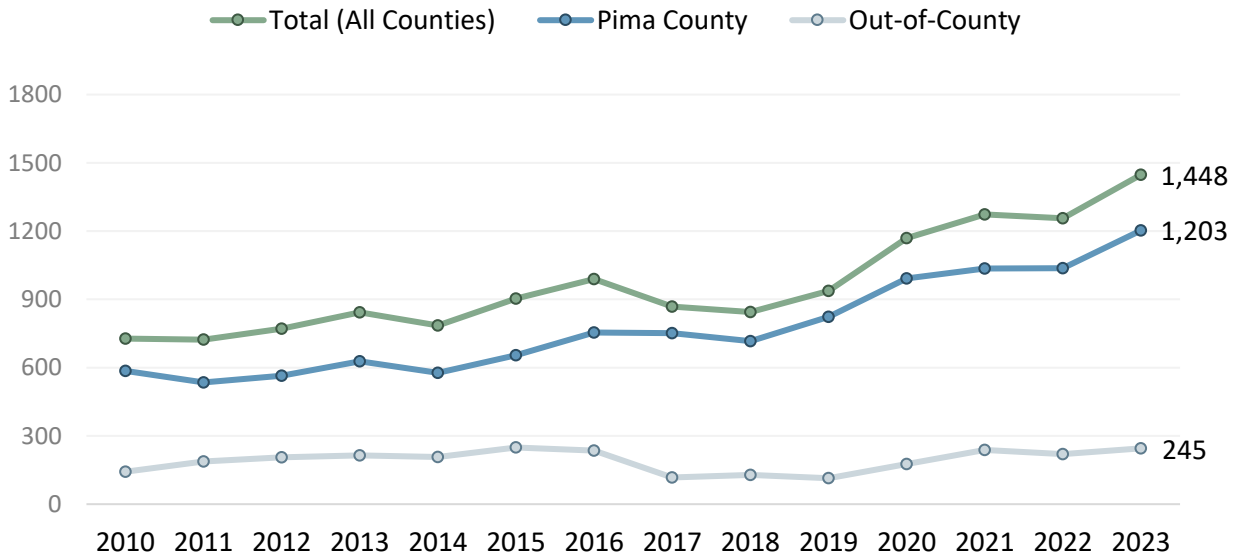
**Cause of Death**



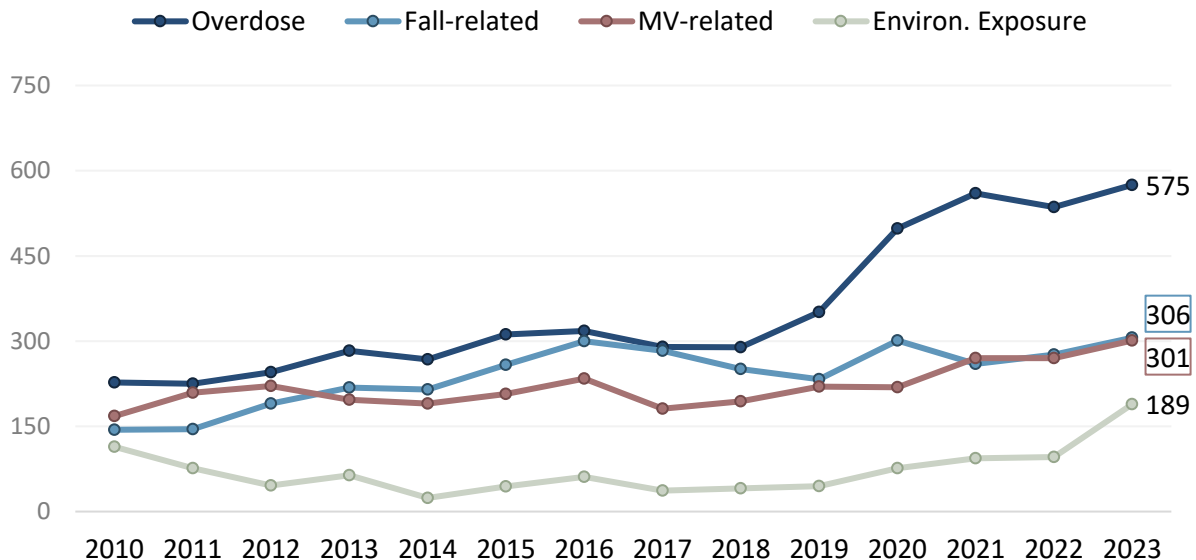
## Accident (All Counties)

Deaths certified as accidents totaled 1,448 in 2023 (53% of ME cases); 1,203 deaths in Pima County and 245 in other counties. For over a decade, overdose has been the most common cause of accident deaths certified by the PCOME. In 2023, the PCOME certified 575 accidental overdose deaths, a 7% increase from the year prior. Since 2013, fall-related injuries have been the second most common cause of accident deaths, excluding 2021 when more accidents were a result of motor vehicle-related (MV-related) fatalities than falls.

### Accident Deaths Certified by the PCOME



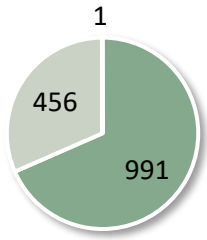
### Top Causes of Accident Deaths



Male decedents made up 68% of deaths certified as accidents in 2023. Decedents aged 60-to-69 years old accounted for 17% of accident deaths, the largest portion of any age group. Overdose was the most common cause of accidental deaths (40%), followed by fall-related injuries (21%), and injuries from MV-related accidents (21%). Deaths due to environmental exposure (175 hyperthermia and 14 hypothermia) represent 13% of accident deaths certified by the PCOME in 2023.

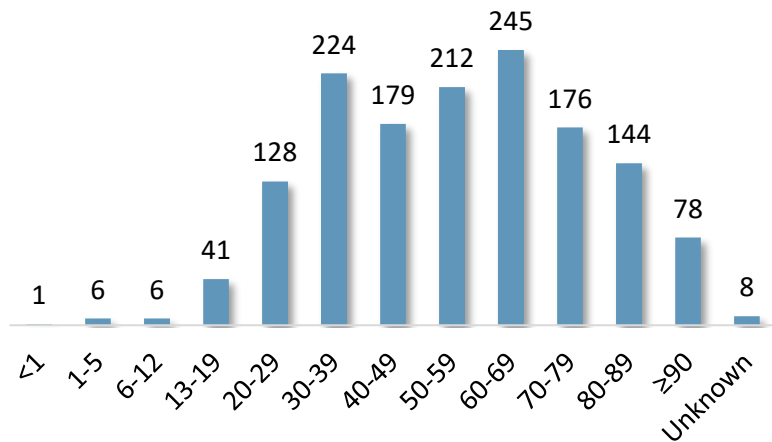
### **2023 Accident Deaths (All Counties)**

**Decedent Sex**

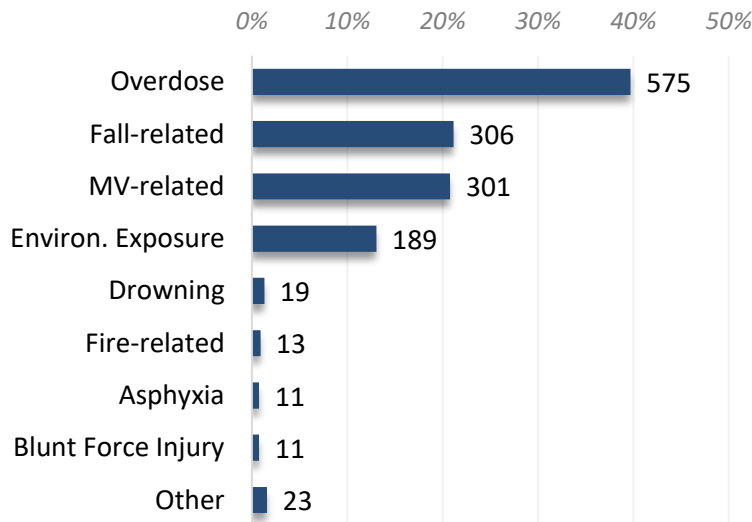


■ Male - 68%  
 ■ Female - 31%  
 ■ Unsure - <1%

**Decedent Age Group**



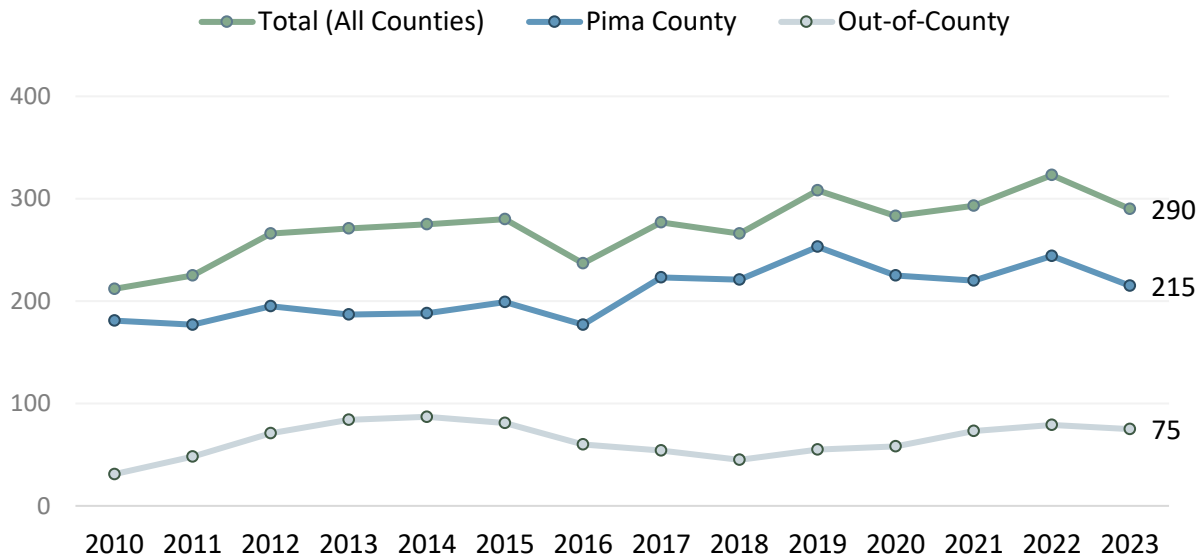
**Cause of Death**



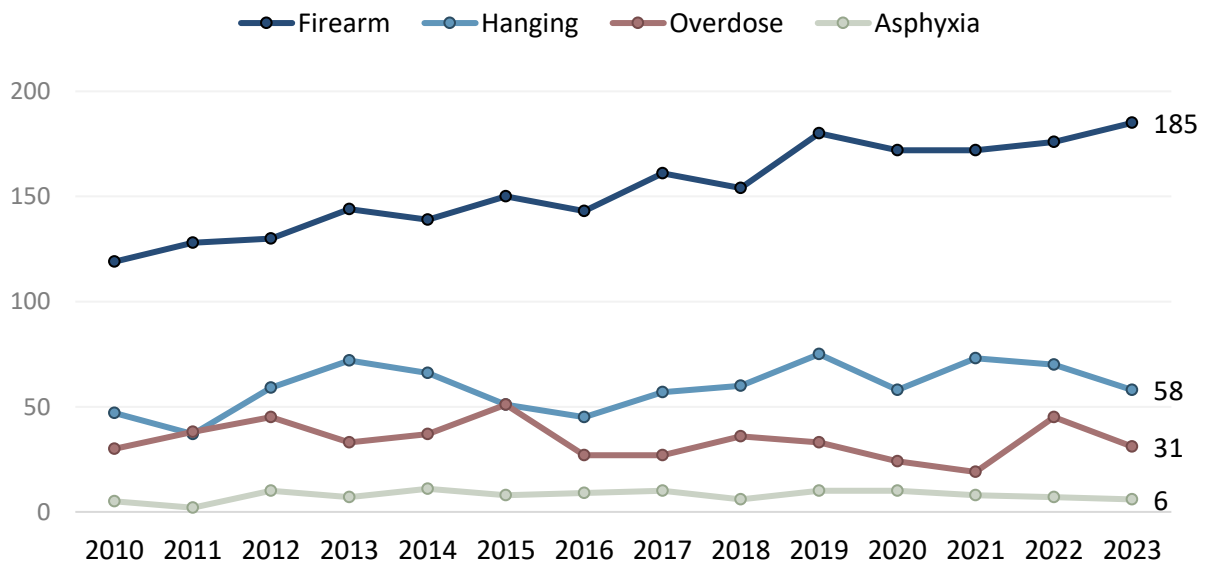
## Suicide (All Counties)

In 2023, 290 deaths were certified as suicides by the PCOME (11% of ME cases). Of these, 215 deaths were in Pima County, 75 were in other counties. There was a 10% decrease in suicides from 2022 to 2023, predominantly because of a decrease in suicides in Pima County during this time frame. Firearms continue to be the most common means of suicide deaths certified by the PCOME (185 in 2023).

### Suicides Certified by the PCOME



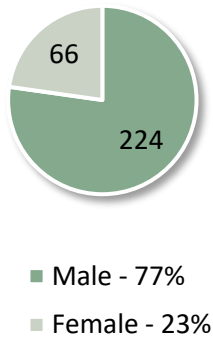
### Top Causes of Suicides



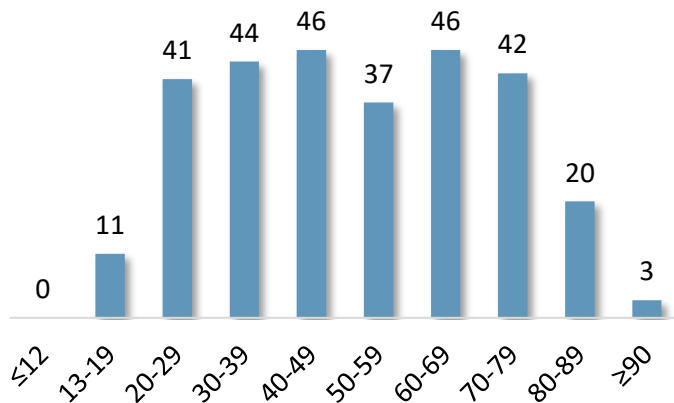
Males comprised 77% of suicides certified by the PCOME in 2023. Decedents of suicide were evenly distributed across age groups between 20 and 79 years old (13-16% per 10-year age group). Suicide by firearm was most common (n=185, 64%) and was more than 3 times that of the next leading means, hanging (n=58, 20%).

### 2023 Suicides (All Counties)

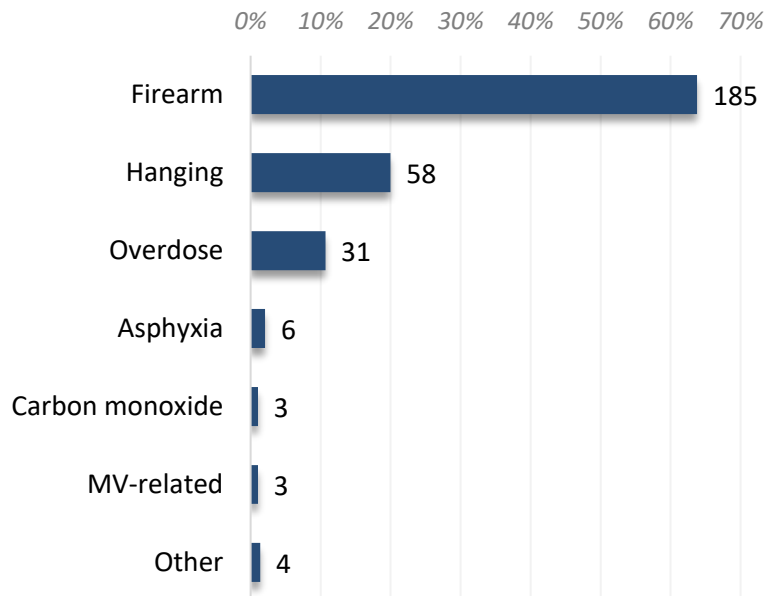
**Decedent Sex**



**Decedent Age Group**



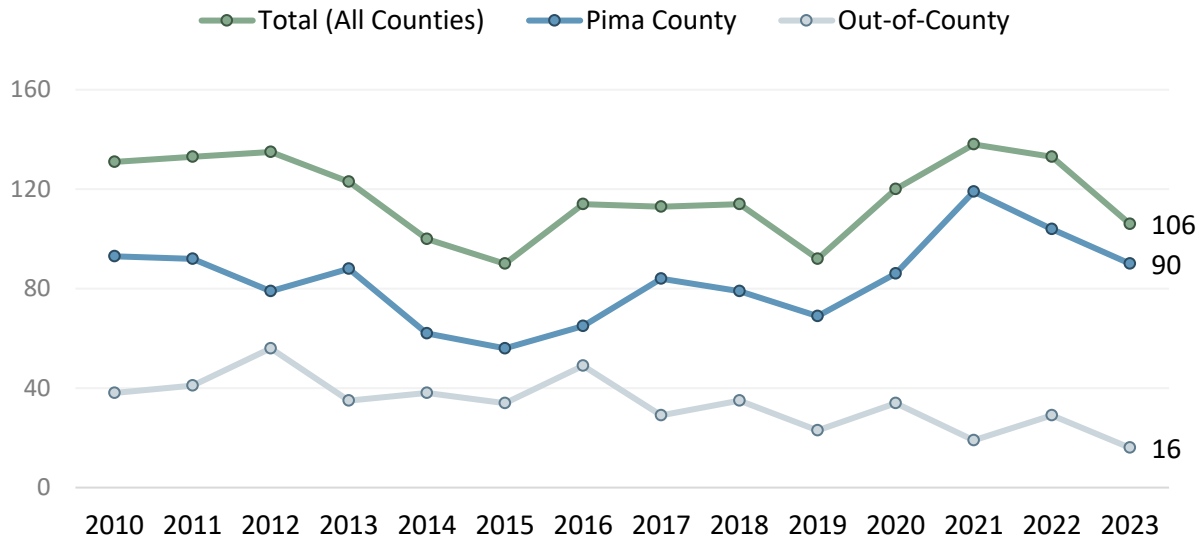
**Cause of Death**



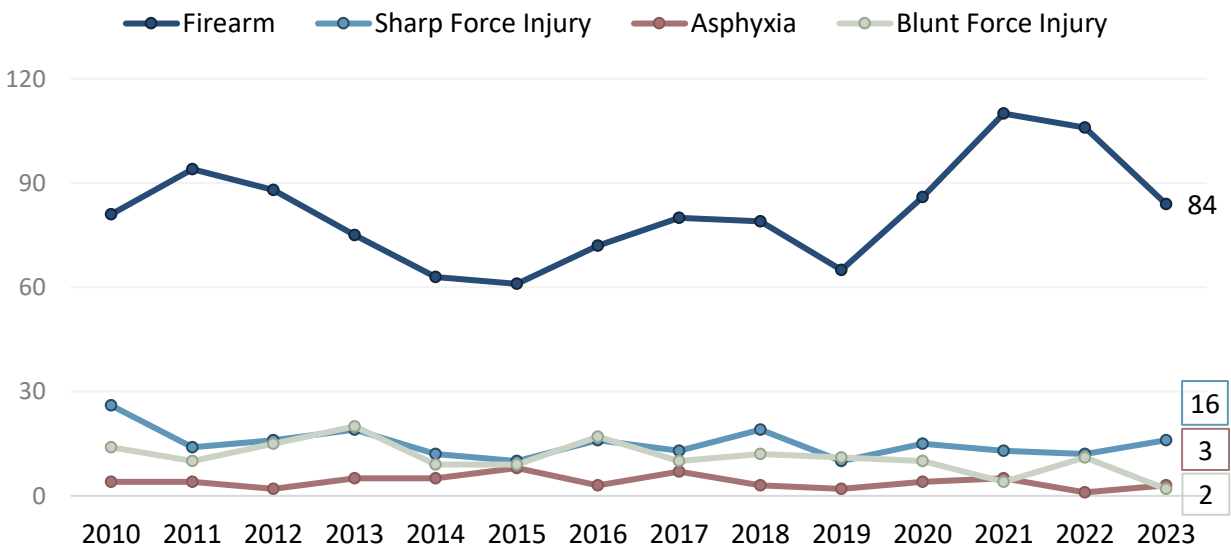
## Homicide (All Counties)

Homicide deaths accounted for the smallest portion of ME cases investigated by the PCOME in 2023 (4%). A total of 106 deaths were certified as homicides (90 in Pima County, 16 in other counties), a 20% decrease from the year prior. Most homicide deaths certified by the PCOME each year are a result of firearm injuries. In 2021, the PCOME recorded the highest number of firearm homicides to date (110). Since then, firearm homicides decreased 24%, totaling 84 in 2023.

### Homicides Certified by the PCOME



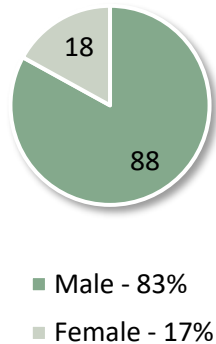
### Top Causes of Homicides



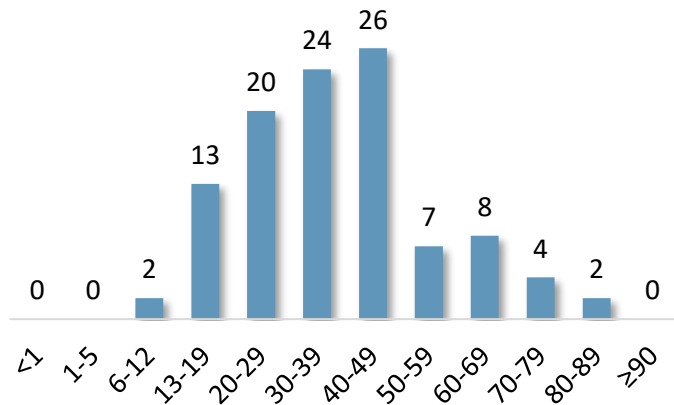
Males comprised 83% of homicide deaths certified by the PCOME in 2023. Of all age groups, decedents aged 40-to-49 years old represent the largest percentage of homicide deaths (25%). As mentioned previously, most homicides were a result of firearm injuries (79%). A smaller portion were caused by sharp force injuries (15%), asphyxia (3%), blunt force injuries (2%), and other causes (1%).

### **2023 Homicides (All Counties)**

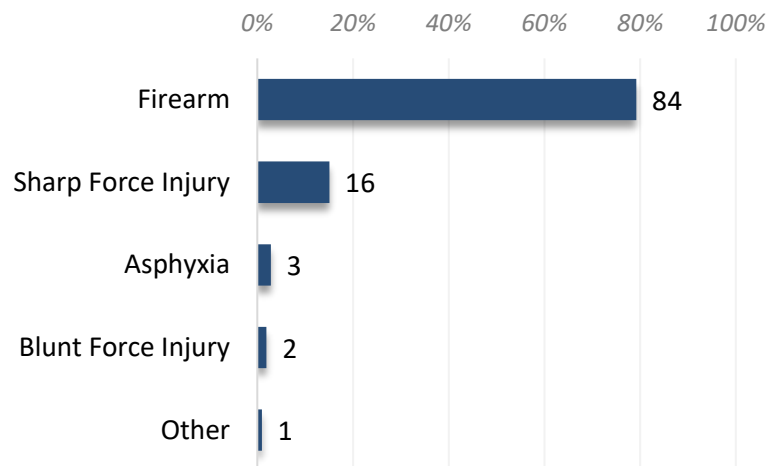
**Decedent Sex**



**Decedent Age Group**



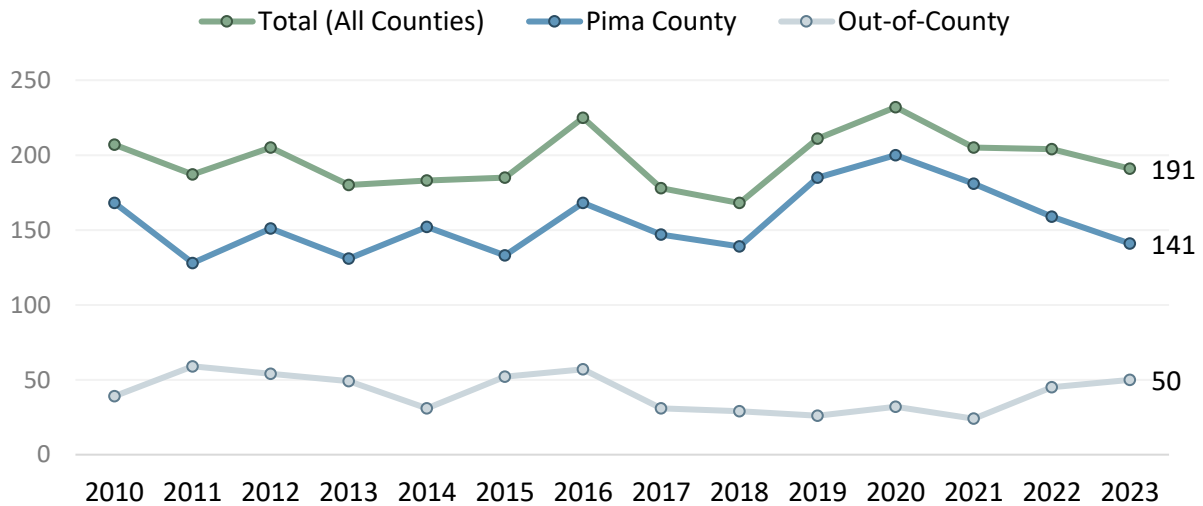
**Cause of Death**



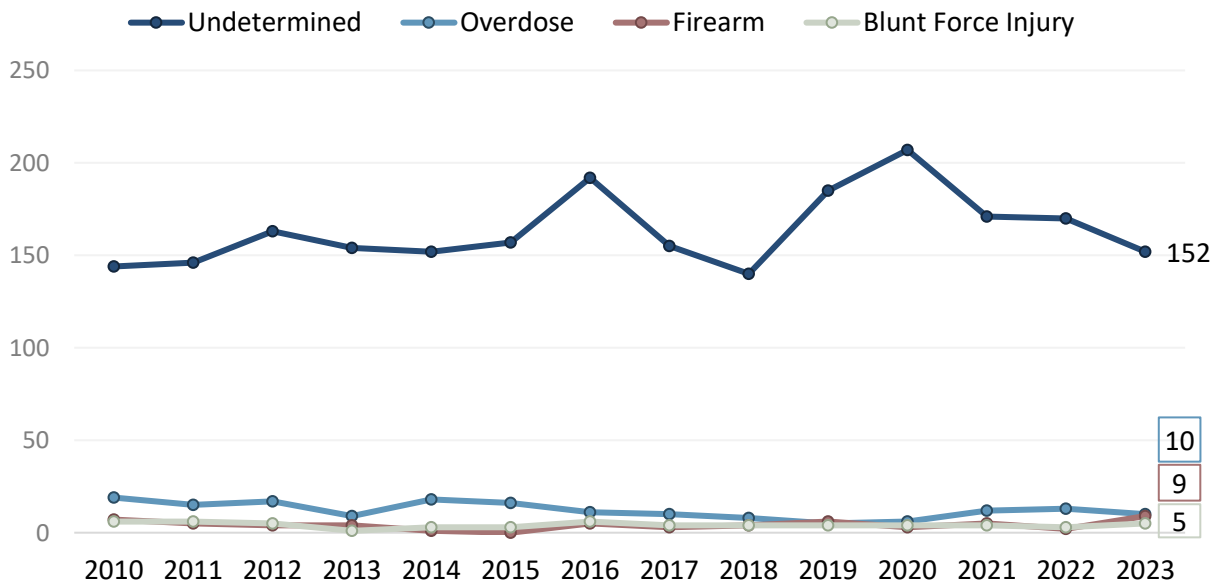
## Undetermined (All Counties)

For a small number of cases each year, the manner of death is certified as undetermined. Deaths certified by the PCOME with an undetermined manner totaled 191 in 2023 (7% of ME Cases); 141 deaths in Pima County and 50 in other counties. Undetermined manner deaths certified by the PCOME are most frequently certified with an undetermined cause, often due to exam limitations of decomposed/skeletal remains or sparse investigative information. Many of these deaths represent remains of undocumented border crossers (UBCs) who died in the deserts of southern Arizona. Of the 152 cases with an undetermined cause and manner in 2023, 119 (78%) were decomposed or skeletal remains.

### Undetermined MOD Cases Certified by the PCOME



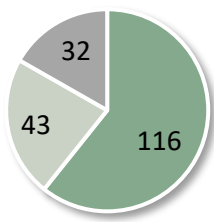
### Top Causes of Undetermined Manner Deaths



In 2023, males comprised 61% of deaths certified with an undetermined manner. Decedents of an unknown age made up 46% of undetermined MOD cases. The majority of cases were certified with an undetermined cause (80%). The remaining 20% of undetermined MOD cases were due to drug overdose (5%), firearms (5%), and other less common causes (e.g., blunt force injury, MV-related, etc., 10%).

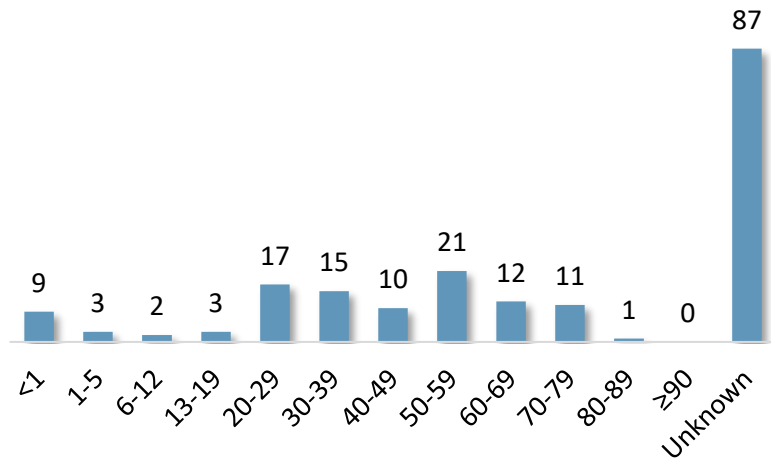
### 2023 Undetermined MOD Cases (All Counties)

**Decedent Sex**

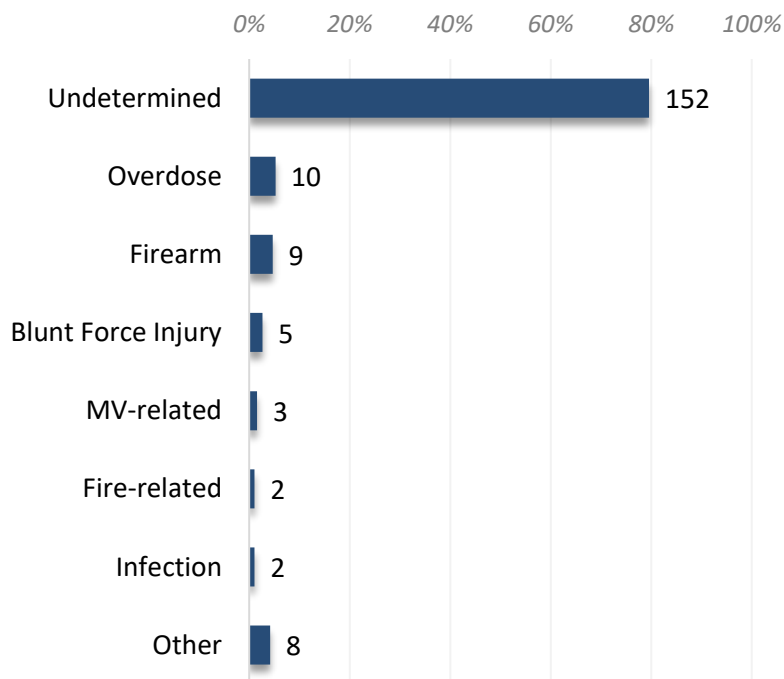


- Male - 61%
- Female - 23%
- Unsure - 17%

**Decedent Age Group**



**Cause of Death**

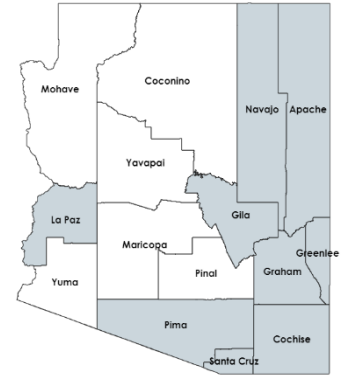


## Cause-Specific Deaths

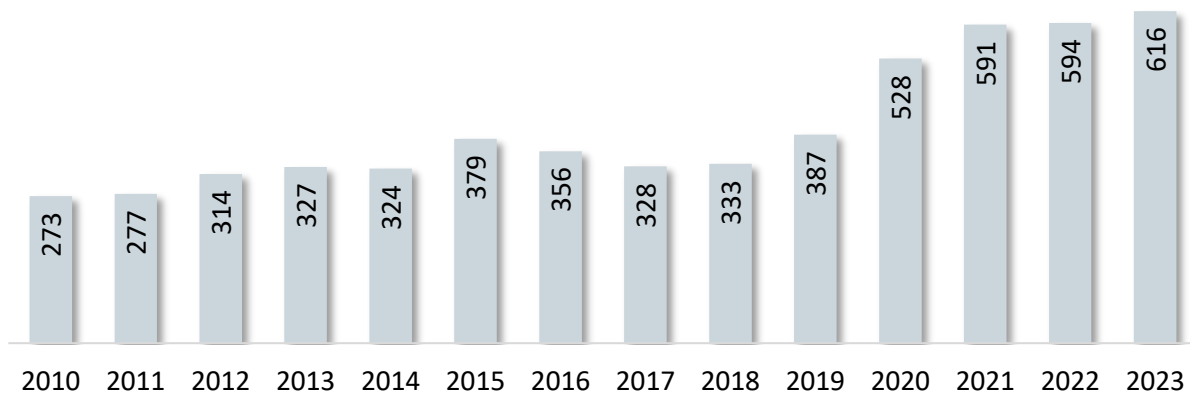
The leading causes of death for cases certified with a non-natural manner (i.e., accidents, homicides, suicides, and undetermined manner deaths) are presented in this section. In 2023, the PCOME certified 2,035 deaths with a non-natural manner. The most common causes of death were overdose (n=616, 30%), motor vehicle-related injuries (n=307, 15%), fall-related injuries (n=306, 15%), and firearms (n=279, 14%).

### Overdose (All Counties)

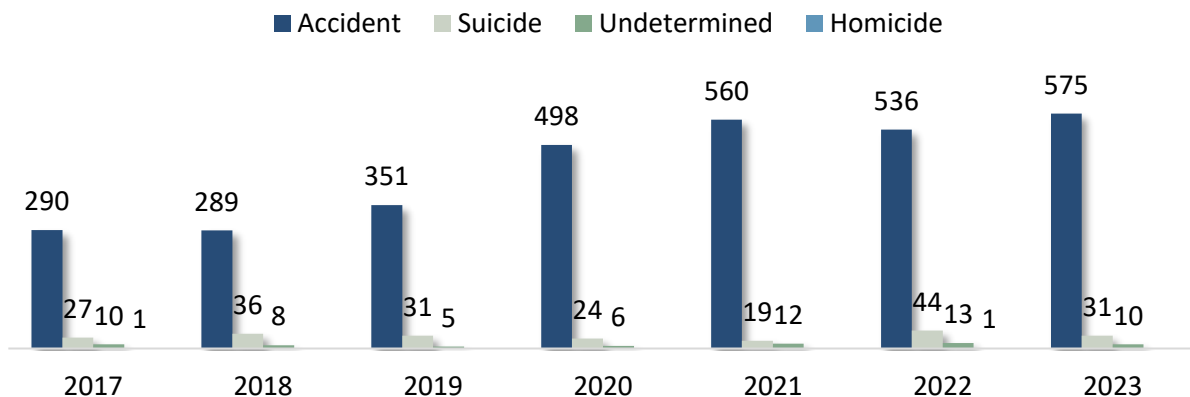
Since 2017, overdose deaths certified by the PCOME have increased annually; the largest change occurring between 2019 and 2020 (a 36% increase). Overdose deaths in 2023 increased slightly from the year prior, by 4%. The PCOME certified overdose deaths from 9 counties in 2023: Pima (532), Cochise (46), La Paz (11), Apache (7), Graham (7), Santa Cruz (7), Navajo (3), Gila (2), and Greenlee (1) County. Most overdose deaths certified each year are accidents. In 2023, 93% of overdose deaths were accidents and the other 7% were certified as suicides (5%) or undetermined manner deaths (2%).



### Overdose Deaths Certified by the PCOME (All Counties)



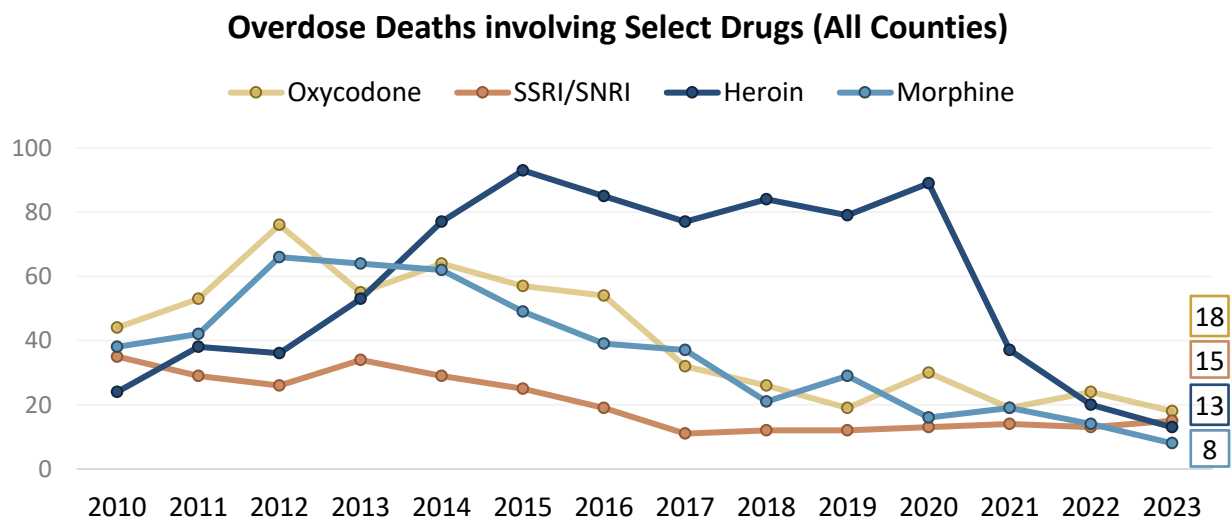
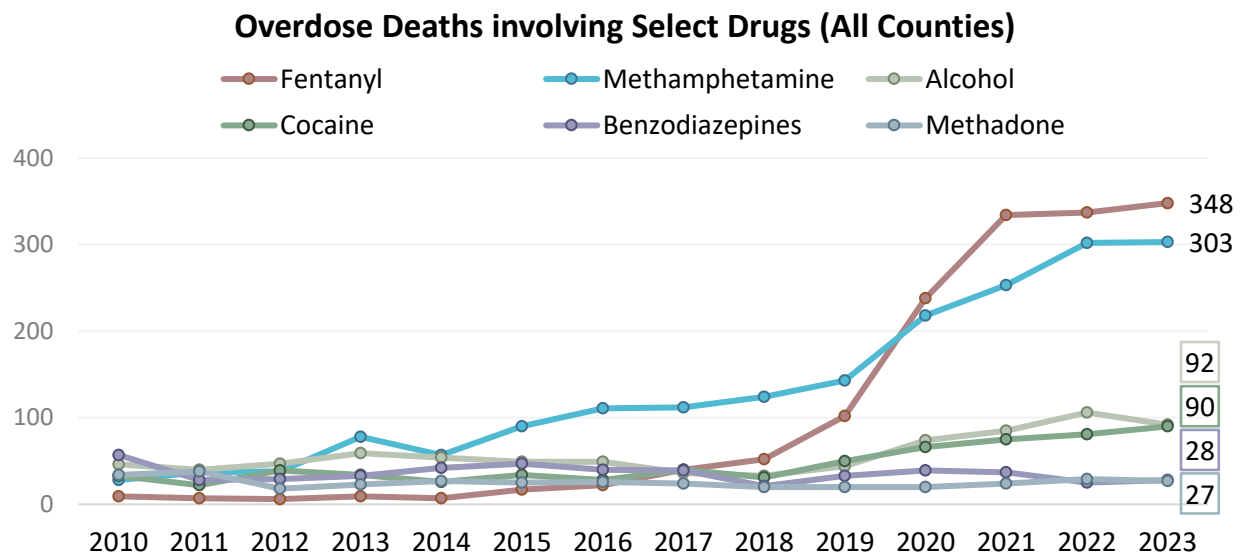
### Overdose Deaths by MOD (All Counties)



The two graphs below show overdose deaths involving select drugs over time. Since 2020, fentanyl has been the most frequently found drug in overdose deaths. Over the past three years, fentanyl deaths have remained stable, albeit elevated, averaging 340 deaths a year. Second to fentanyl is methamphetamine-involved deaths, which have increased annually over the past decade, plateauing in 2023 at 303.

Other notable trends can be seen in cocaine, alcohol, and methadone-involved overdose deaths. Between 2018 and 2023, cocaine-involved deaths have gradually increased, hitting a high of 90 deaths in 2023. Alcohol-involved fatalities followed a similar trend but peaked the year prior, in 2022, at 106. In that same year and for the first time, methadone contributed to more overdose deaths than heroin, morphine, and oxycodone; a trend that continued in 2023.

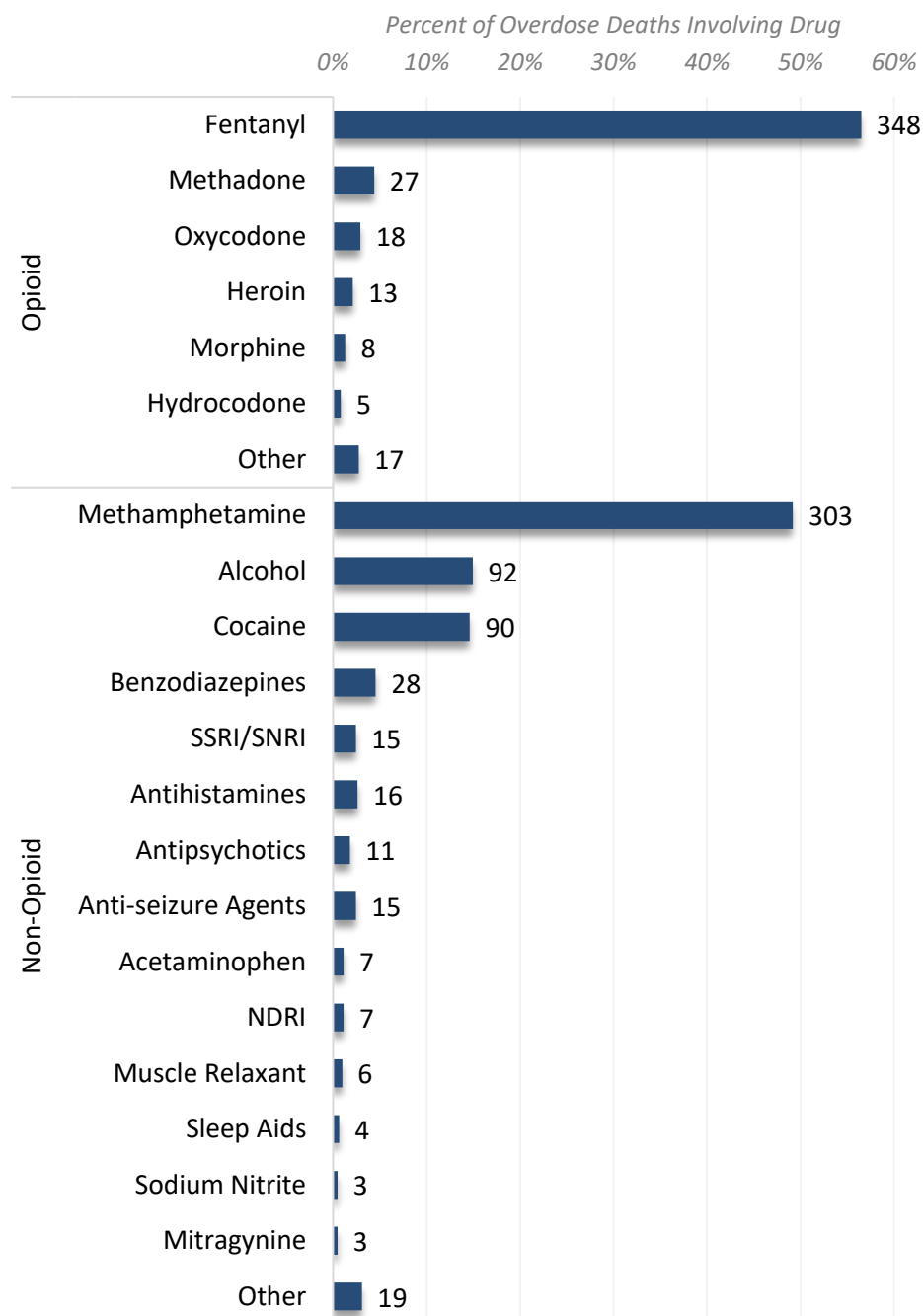
Heroin deaths are likely underreported each year as heroin is rapidly metabolized to morphine by the body; if the metabolite indicative for heroin, 6-monoacetylmorphine, is not present on the toxicology report, the cause of death may be classified as morphine intoxication or opiate unspecified. Nonetheless, deaths involving morphine have been on a downward trend for the past decade and heroin deaths have decreased for three consecutive years (as seen in the second graph below).



A single drug contributed to an overdose death in 292 cases (47%) and a combination of drugs contributed to death in 324 cases (53%). An opioid contributed to death, either as a single drug or as a component of a polydrug overdose, in 393 overdose deaths (64%).

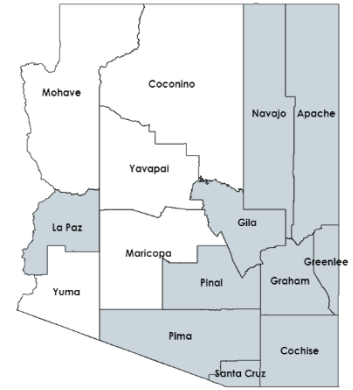
Fentanyl was the most frequently found drug in overdose deaths, contributing to 56% of 2023 overdoses, followed by methamphetamine (49%), alcohol (15%), and cocaine (15%). An overdose death may involve more than one drug, therefore the sum of drugs contributing exceeds the sum of total overdose deaths for the year.

### Frequency of Drugs Contributing to Overdose Deaths (All Counties), 2023

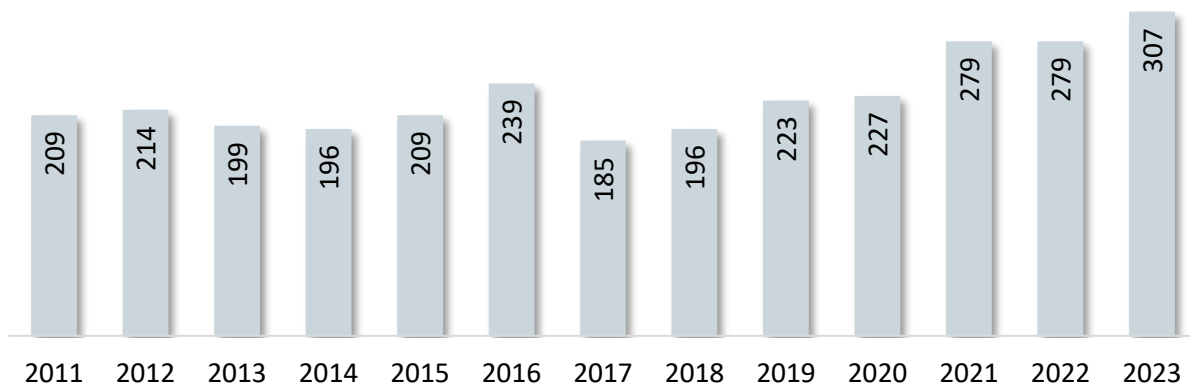


## Motor Vehicle-Related (All Counties)

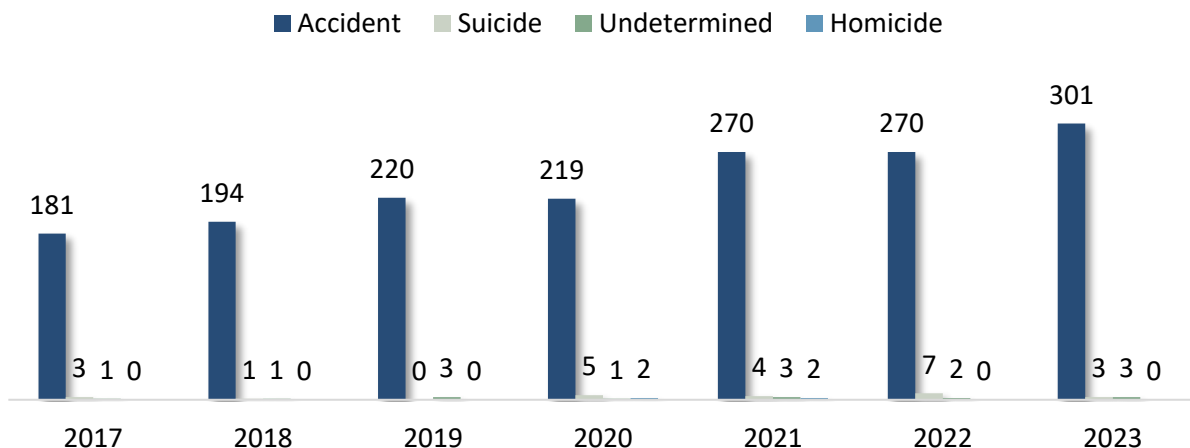
The second leading cause of non-natural manner deaths certified by the PCOME in 2023 were injuries from motor vehicle-related (MV-related) accidents. MV-related deaths consist of occupants of a motor vehicle (i.e., driver or passenger) involved in an accident (MVA), pedestrians struck by vehicles, motorcycle riders involved in an accident (MCA), bicyclists involved in an accident, occupants involved in all-terrain vehicle (ATV) accidents, and other types of drivers/riders (e.g., car surfing, horseback rider struck by vehicle, and vehicle struck by a train). The office certified MV-related deaths from 10 counties in 2023: Pima (226), Cochise (28), La Paz (21), Graham (13), Navajo (5), Santa Cruz (5), Gila (3), Apache (3), Greenlee (2), and Pinal (1) County. In total, 307 deaths were due to injuries from MV-related accidents, the highest number certified to date by our office. Of these fatalities, most were accidents (98%), and a small portion were suicides (1%) and undetermined manner deaths (1%).



### MV-Related Deaths Certified by the PCOME (All Counties)

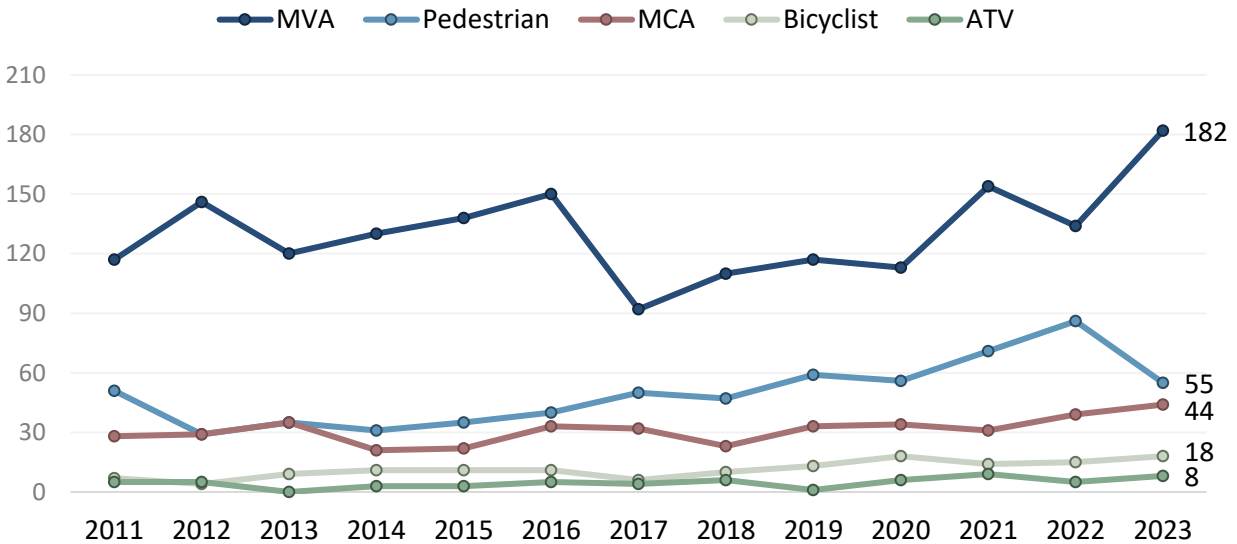


### MV-Related Deaths by MOD (All Counties)



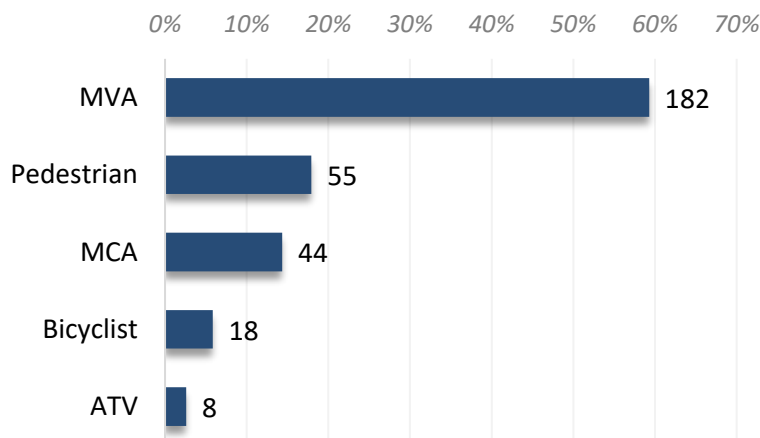
The line graph below shows trends in incident type over time. Please note that “other drivers/riders” have been removed from the graph due to low numbers (1 in 2011, 1 in 2012, and 1 in 2017). MVA deaths make up roughly 60% of MV-related deaths each year. Between 2022 and 2023, these fatalities increased 36%, reaching a high of 182 deaths. The second most common MV-related incident type is pedestrians struck by vehicles. Pedestrian deaths had increased steadily from 2020 to 2022, then in 2023 fell to 55 deaths, a 36% decrease from the prior year. While MCA, bicyclist, and ATV occupants make up a much smaller portion of MV-related deaths, fatalities of these types all increased from 2022 to 2023.

### MV-Related Deaths by Incident Type (All Counties)



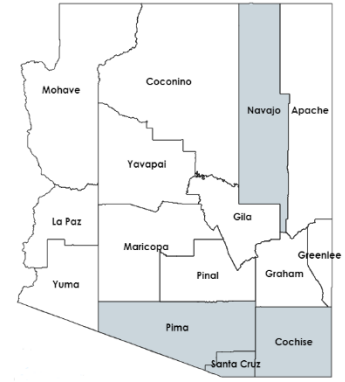
In 2023, 59% of decedents involved in MV-related fatalities were occupants of an MVA, 18% were pedestrians, 14% were motorcycle riders, 6% were bicyclists, and 3% were occupants of an ATV. Of the 182 MVA deaths, 112 were drivers (62%).

### 2023 MV-Related Deaths by Incident Type (All Counties)

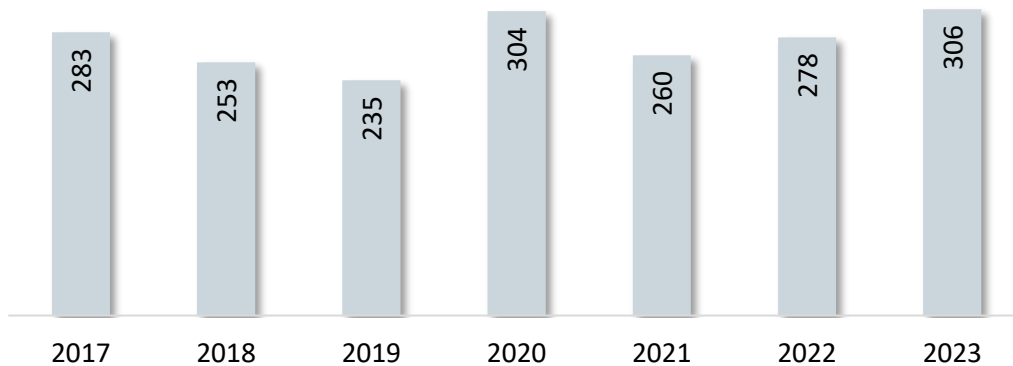


## Falls (All Counties)

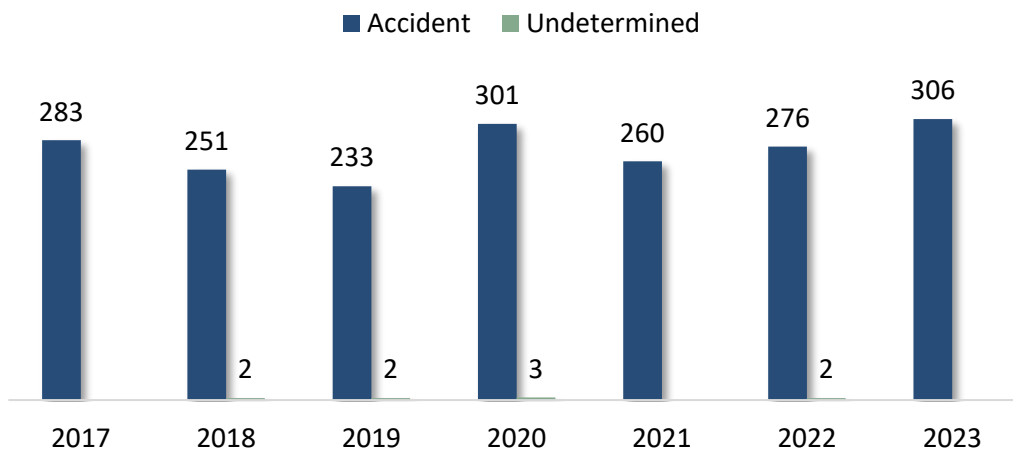
Injuries from falls were the third most common cause of non-natural manner deaths certified by the PCOME in 2023. The office investigated and certified fall-related deaths from 4 counties: Pima (288), Cochise (12), Santa Cruz (5), and Navajo (1) County. In total, 306 deaths were due to fall-related injuries in 2023, a 10% increase from the year prior. Nearly all (99.5%) fall-related fatalities since 2017 were certified as accidents.



### Fall-Related Deaths Certified by the PCOME (All Counties)

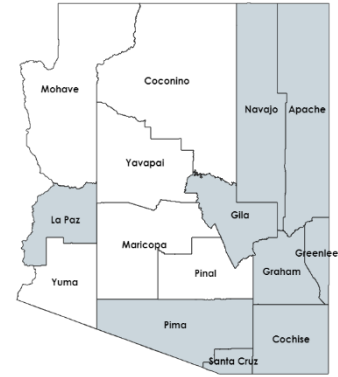


### Fall-Related Deaths by MOD (All Counties)

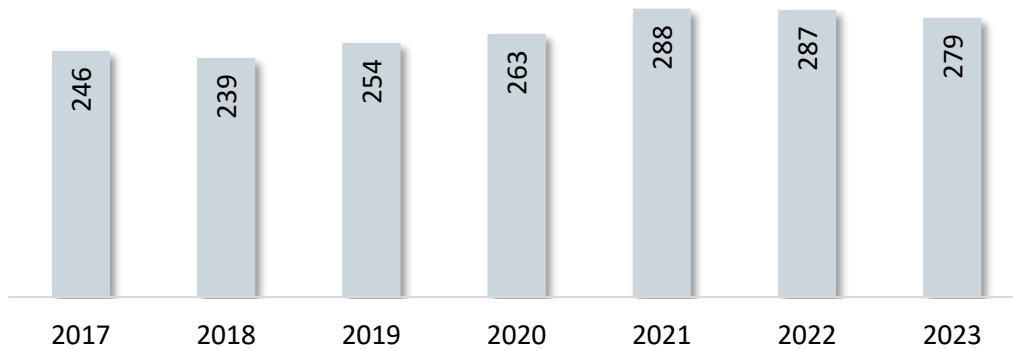


## Firearms (All Counties)

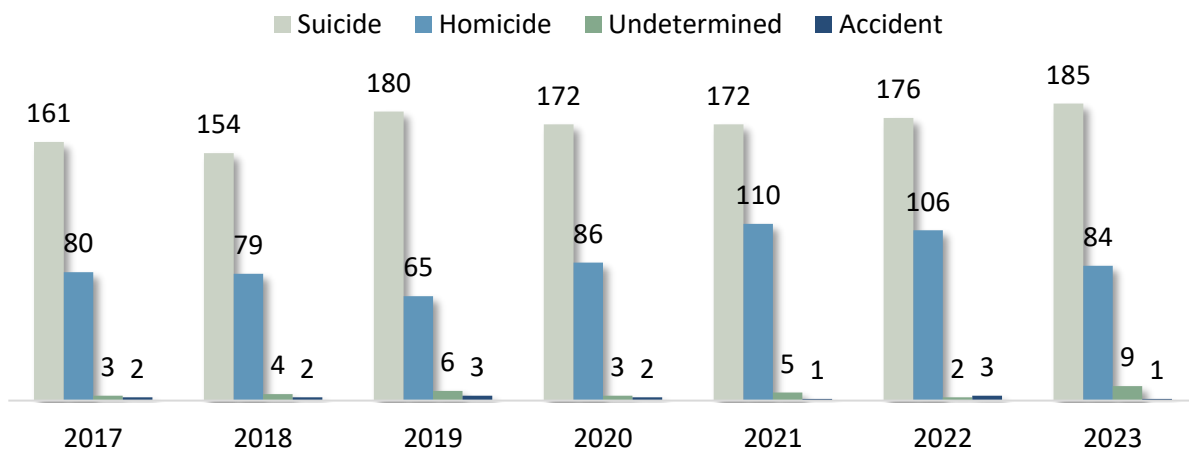
Firearm injuries were the fourth most common cause of non-natural manner deaths certified by the PCOME in 2023. The office investigated and certified firearm deaths from 9 counties: Pima (213), Cochise (29), Graham (10), Santa Cruz (9), La Paz (8), Navajo (4), Gila (3), Greenlee (2), and Apache (1) County. In total, 279 deaths were due to firearms in 2023, a 3% decrease from the recorded high in 2021 (288). More firearm deaths are certified as suicides than any other MOD. In 2023, 66% of the 279 firearm fatalities were suicides, 30% were homicides, 3% were undetermined manner deaths, and <1% were accidents.



### Firearm Deaths Certified by the PCOME (All Counties)



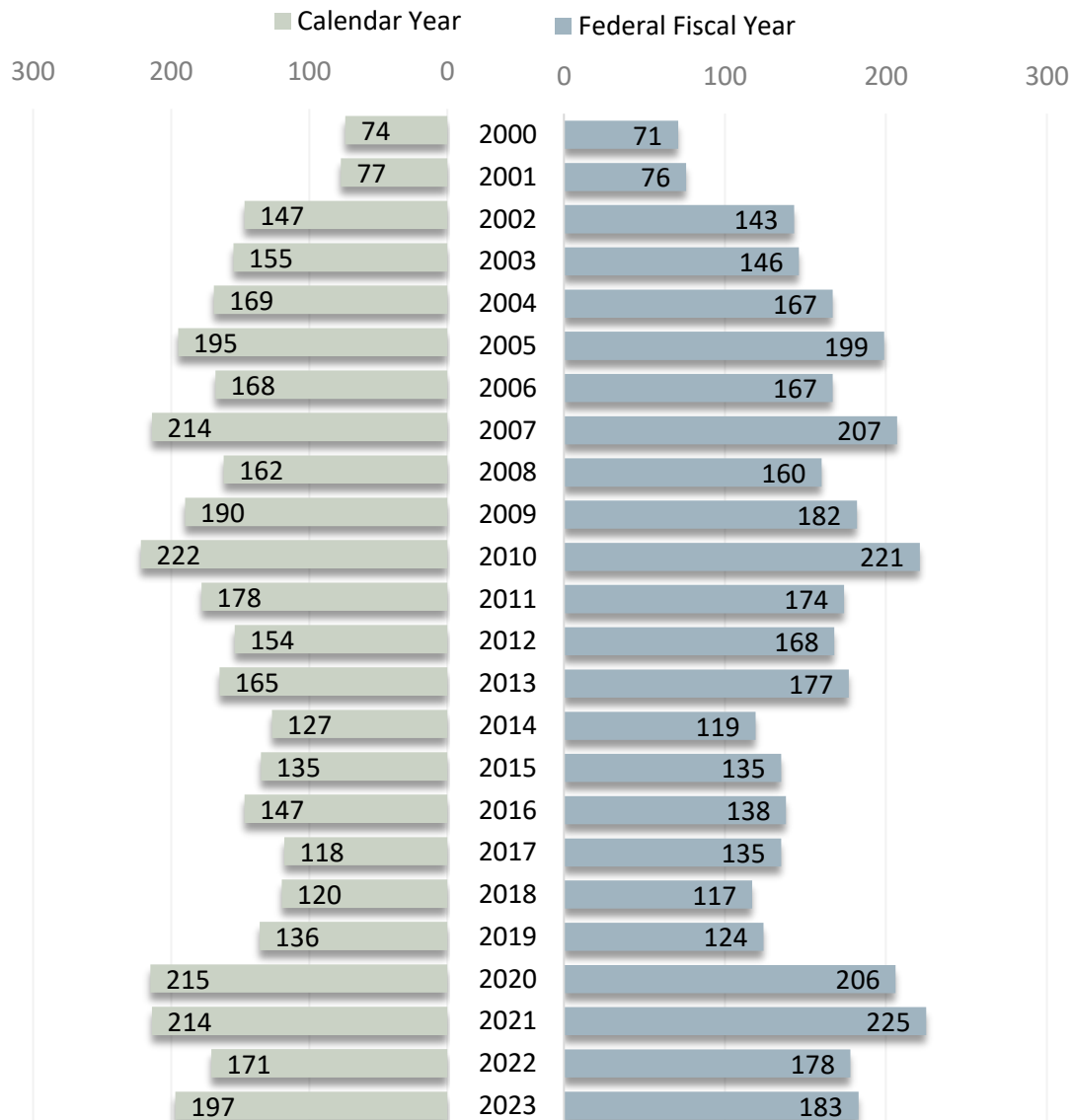
### Firearm Deaths by MOD (All Counties)



## Undocumented Border Crosser Remains

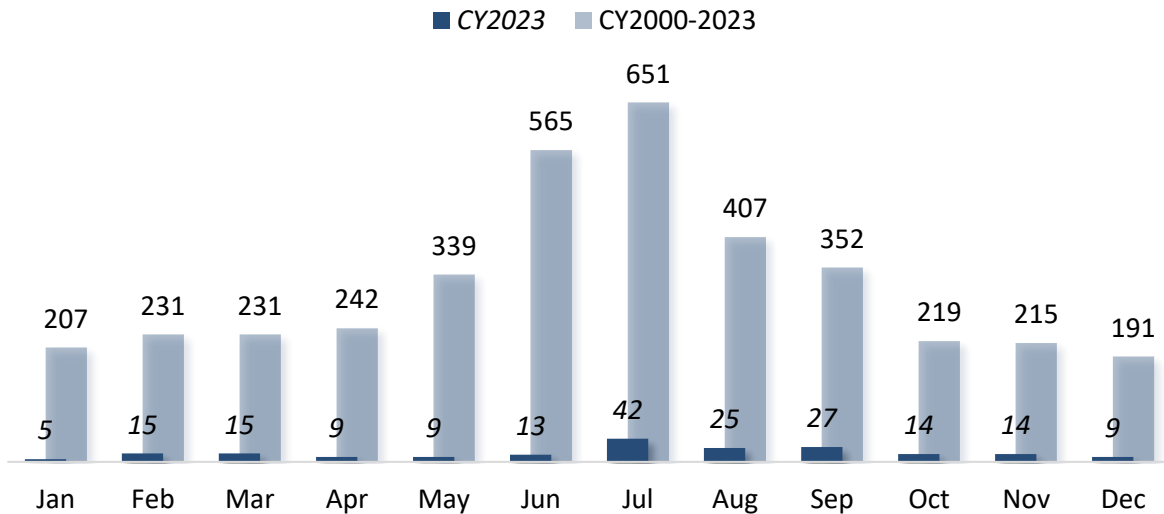
The term 'Undocumented Border Crosser' (UBC) refers to foreign nationals who die attempting to cross the southern Arizona desert without permission from the United States government. From January 1, 2000, to December 31, 2023, the PCOME has received 3,850 recovered remains of suspected UBCs, averaging 160 recoveries per calendar year (CY). In CY2023, 197 UBC recoveries were made. Please note that recovery year does not necessarily indicate year of death (see [Postmortem Body Condition](#) section for more details). To date, the highest number of UBC recoveries recorded in a CY was in 2010 (222). Data is also presented in Federal fiscal years (FY), which run from October 1<sup>st</sup> through September 30<sup>th</sup> and are identified by the calendar year in which it ends. FY2021 (Oct 1, 2020 – Sept 30, 2021) saw the highest number of UBC recoveries in a single year (225). **The number of UBC recoveries per year is adjusted annually to account for the association of remains found months or years apart, which are later discovered to be remains of the same individual (i.e., subsumed cases).**

**UBC Recoveries by Year  
2000 - 2023**



On average, the months of June and July record the highest number of UBC recoveries in a given calendar year. In CY2023, July had the highest number of recovered UBC remains in a one-month period (42), representing 21% of total UBC recoveries for the year and marking the fifth highest month of UBC recoveries since 2000. Historically, months with the highest number of UBC recoveries were: (1) July 2005, 69 recoveries, (2) July 2010, 57, (3) July 2007, 46, and (4) June 2021, 44.

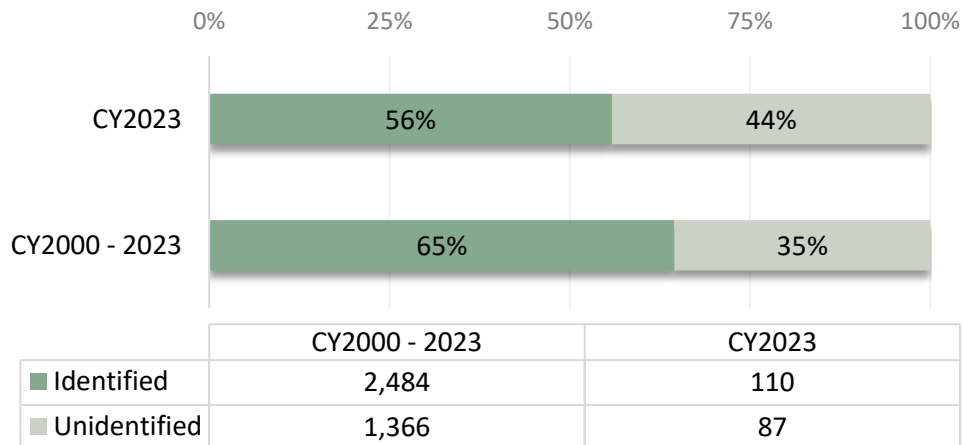
### UBC Recoveries by Month



### Identification Status

At the time of this report, 56 percent of recovered UBC remains in CY2023 were identified. Of the 3,850 decedents recovered since CY2000, two-thirds have been identified. A total of 1,366 decedents (35%) remain unidentified as of December 31, 2023.

### UBC Recoveries by Identification Status



The table below displays the identification status of UBC recoveries by calendar year and the primary method used for identification. The majority of identified UBCs recovered in CY2023 were confirmed through fingerprint analysis (69%). Since 2000, 30% of identifications were made through fingerprint analysis, 30% by visual identification, 23% through DNA analysis, 16% through circumstantial methods (i.e., scars/marks/tattoos, personal effects, etc.), 1% through dental radiographic comparison and <1% through medical radiographic comparison.

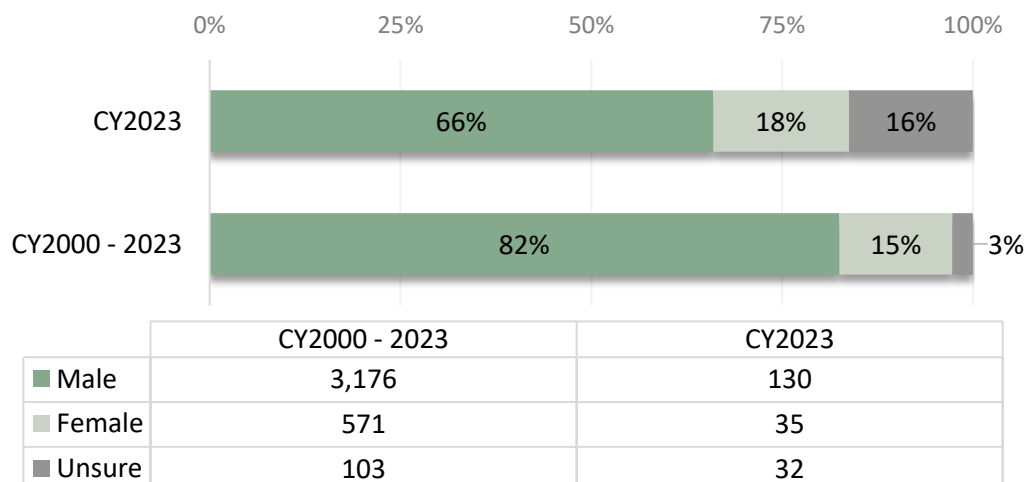
UBC Recoveries by Identification Status and Primary Method of Identification CY2000 – 2023										
Calendar Year	ID Status				Primary ID Method					
	Total UBCs	Unidentified	Identified	% Identified	Visual	Circumst.	Fingerprint	DNA	Dental	Radiographic
2000	74	13	61	82%	20	28	12	1	0	0
2001	77	18	59	77%	22	30	4	3	0	0
2002	147	26	121	82%	68	29	19	3	2	0
2003	155	34	121	78%	46	36	22	16	0	1
2004	169	36	133	79%	51	37	25	16	2	2
2005	195	44	151	77%	56	34	42	18	1	0
2006	168	53	115	68%	51	23	25	16	0	0
2007	214	56	158	74%	71	31	31	20	2	3
2008	162	44	118	73%	57	20	16	24	0	1
2009	190	58	132	69%	68	14	22	27	1	0
2010	222	69	153	69%	63	14	19	55	1	1
2011	178	73	105	59%	21	17	28	39	0	0
2012	154	59	95	62%	21	10	29	32	3	0
2013	165	60	105	64%	31	8	14	49	2	1
2014	127	65	62	49%	12	5	8	37	0	0
2015	135	54	81	60%	13	9	20	38	0	1
2016	147	64	83	56%	12	3	44	24	0	0
2017	118	61	57	48%	5	0	22	29	1	0
2018	120	50	70	58%	7	3	33	27	0	0
2019	136	60	76	56%	4	5	34	33	0	0
2020	215	114	101	47%	10	15	47	28	1	0
2021	214	94	120	56%	6	6	90	15	1	2
2022	171	74	97	57%	5	7	65	18	1	1
2023	197	87	110	56%	16	13	76	0	4	1

## Demographics

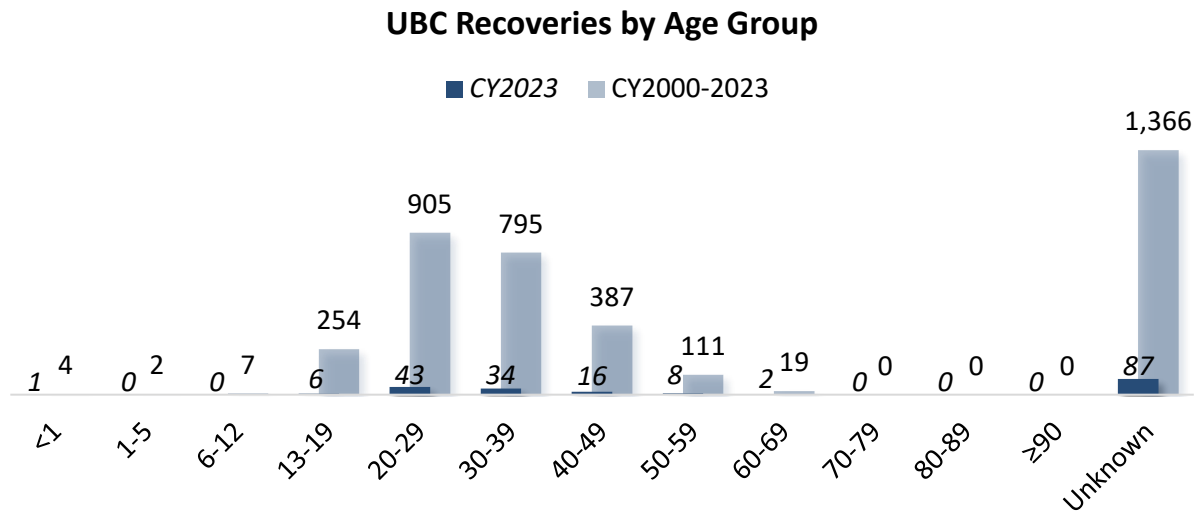
The table below displays the age and sex of recovered UBC remains in CY2023 by identification status. Eighty-seven decedents remain unidentified and decedent sex was not yet determined in 32 cases. Over three quarters of the 110 identified decedents in CY2023 were male (77%). The largest proportion of identified decedents were 20-29 years old (39%), followed by 30-39 years old (31%). For all recovered UBC remains in CY2023, regardless of identification status, males outnumbered females at a ratio of nearly 4:1.

Demographics of CY2023 UBC Recoveries by Identification Status <i>n (%)</i>		
Characteristic	Identified N=110	Unidentified N=87
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	85 (77%)	45 (52%)
Female	25 (23%)	10 (11%)
Unsure	-	32 (37%)
<b>Age Group</b>		
<1	1 (1%)	-
1 – 5	-	-
6 – 12	-	-
13 – 19	6 (5%)	-
20 – 29	43 (39%)	-
30 – 39	34 (31%)	-
40 – 49	16 (15%)	-
50 – 59	8 (7%)	-
60 – 69	2 (2%)	-
Unknown	-	87 (100%)

### UBC Recoveries by Sex

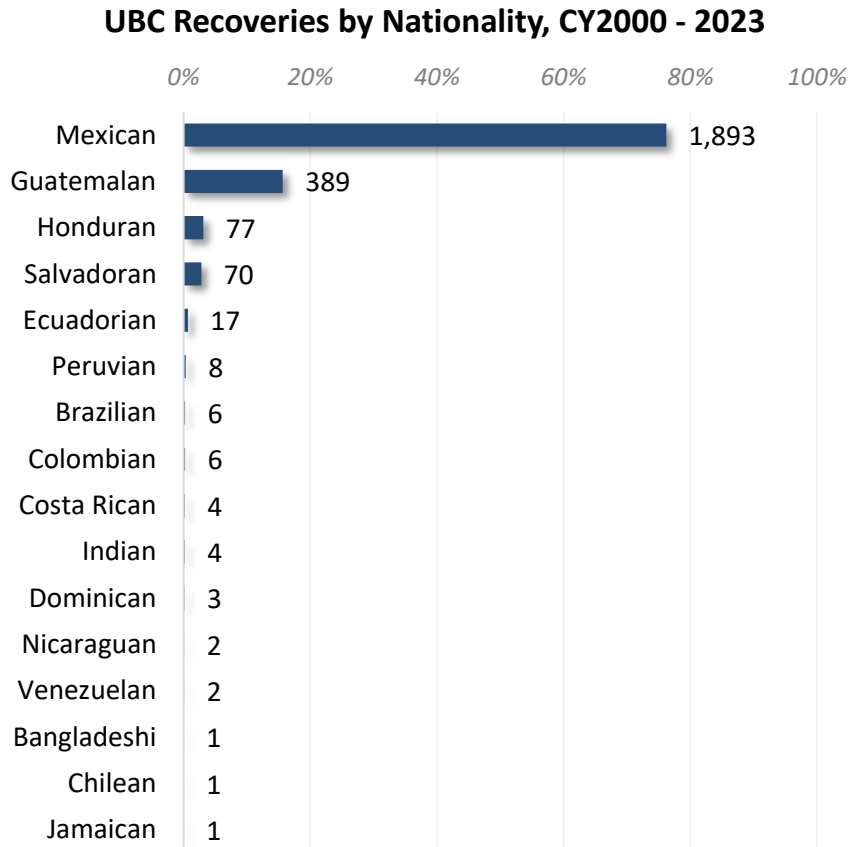


Since CY2000, unidentified decedents (i.e., of unknown age) represent the largest portion of all age groups (36%). For those who have been identified (n=2,484), decedents in their twenties and thirties make up two-thirds of cases (68%).



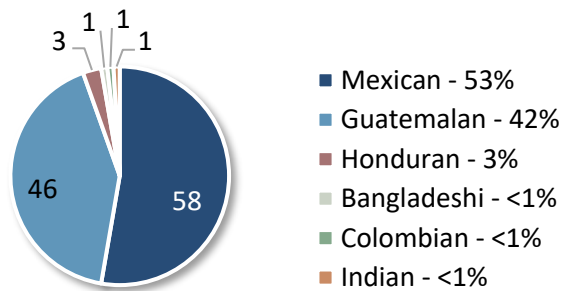
## Nationality of Identified UBCs

Seventy-six percent of decedents identified since CY2000 were of Mexican nationality (1,893). Decedents of 15 other nationalities, displayed in the chart below, comprise the other 24% (591).



In CY2023, identified UBCs were largely of Mexican nationality (53%) and Guatemalan nationality (42%).

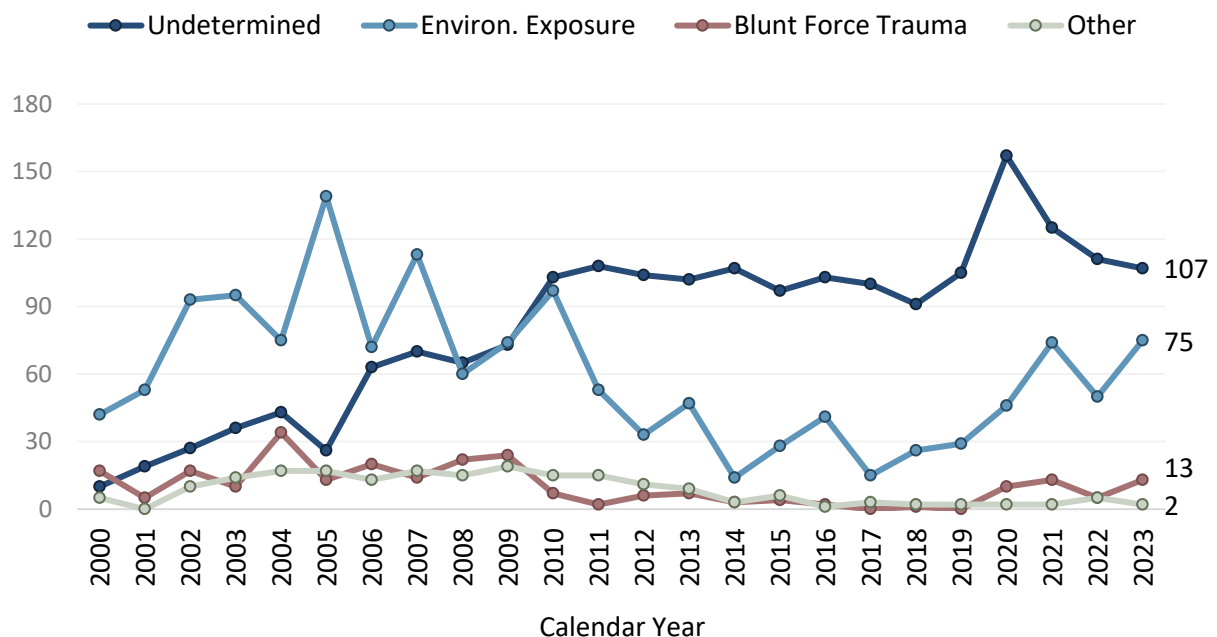
### CY2023 Identified UBC Recoveries by Nationality



### Manner and Cause of Death

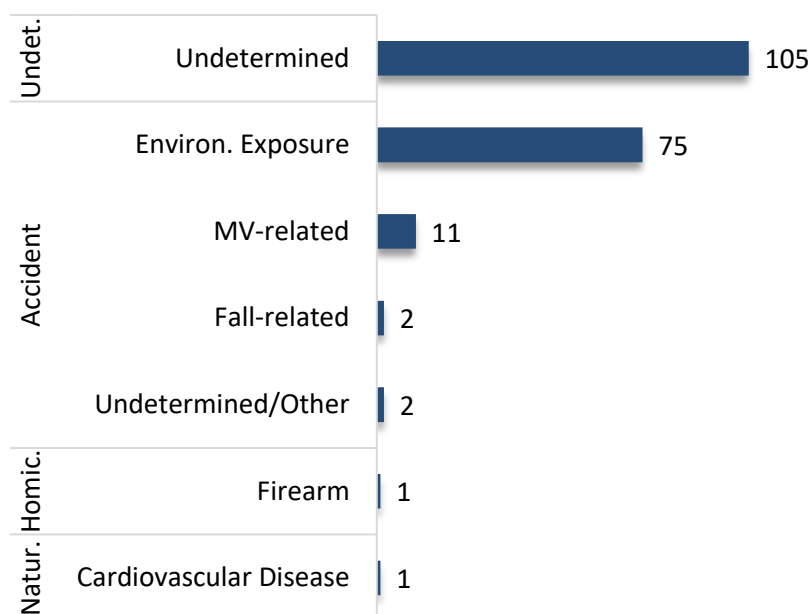
The graph below illustrates changes in causes of death in UBC recoveries between 2000 and 2023. Since CY2010, the most frequent cause of death in UBC cases has been undetermined. An undetermined cause is primarily due to limitations of the examination of decomposed and skeletal remains. Second to undetermined causes are environmental exposure deaths. Environmental exposure includes deaths related to extreme heat, cold, or dehydration. In CY2023, blunt force trauma deaths were the third leading cause of UBC deaths; these involve blunt force injuries from falls, motor vehicle accidents, and other transportation-related accidents. The category of 'other' is a combination of other causes of death outside of those previously mentioned (e.g., overdose, natural causes, firearm, hanging, and drowning).

### UBC Recoveries by Cause of Death



In CY2023, 105 UBC deaths were certified with an undetermined manner and cause (53%), 90 deaths were accidents (46%), one death was a homicide (<1%), and one death was certified as natural (<1%). Of accidental deaths, environmental exposure was the predominant cause (n=75, 83%). Sixty-nine deaths were heat-related (i.e., heat was the primary cause or a contributing factor to death) and six deaths were due to hypothermia. For more data on UBC heat-related deaths, please visit our [heat-related deaths dashboard](#).

### CY2023 UBC Recoveries by Manner and Cause of Death



## Postmortem Body Condition

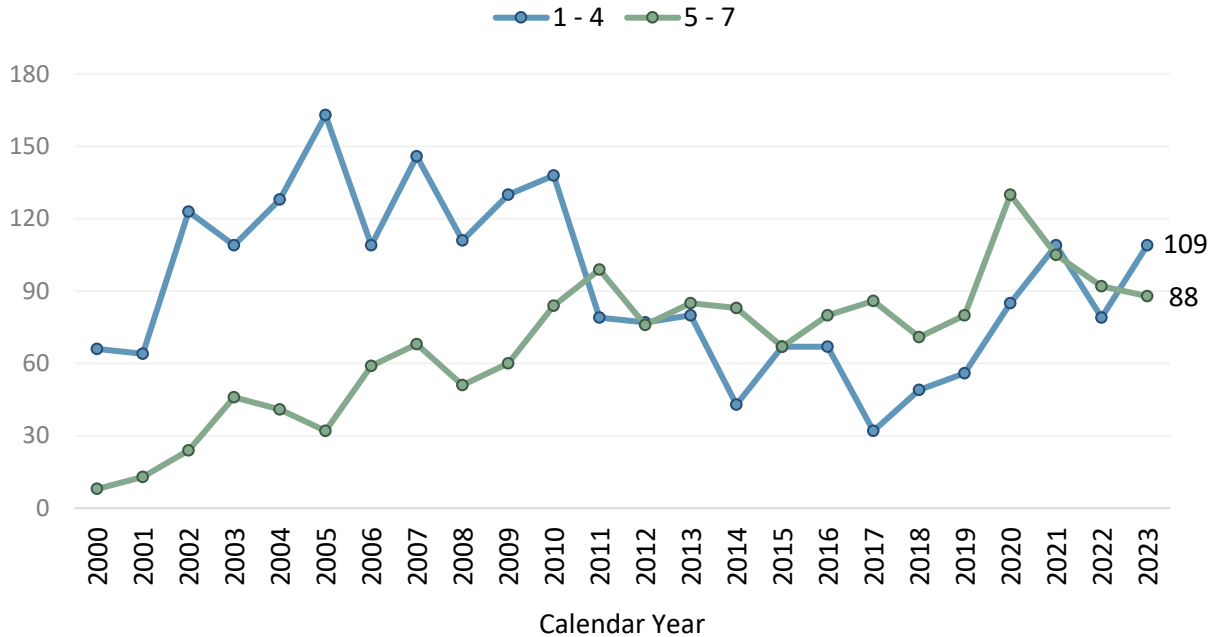
In forensic investigation, a postmortem interval (PMI) is the estimated time between death and when a decedent or set of remains was found/recovered. When the exact date and time of death is unknown, as is often the case with UBC deaths, the PMI is a useful tool for discerning between more recently deceased individuals and remains that are being found months to years from death. Postmortem body condition is one of several indicators used to assess PMI. In 2013, the PCOME developed a body condition scale comprised of eight categories to provide a more objective measure of the PMI. *Please note, the PMI is an estimate and is subject to error.*

The 1-8 body condition scores with respective PMIs are:

1. Fully fleshed (PMI < 1 day)
2. Decomposed (PMI < week)
3. Decomposition with focal skeletonization (PMI < 3 weeks)
4. Mummification with skeletonization (PMI < 5 weeks)
5. Skeletonization with articulation/ligamentous attachments (PMI < 3 months)
6. Complete skeletonization with disarticulation (PMI < 6-8 months)
7. Complete skeletonization with bone degradation (PMI > 6-8 months)
8. Other

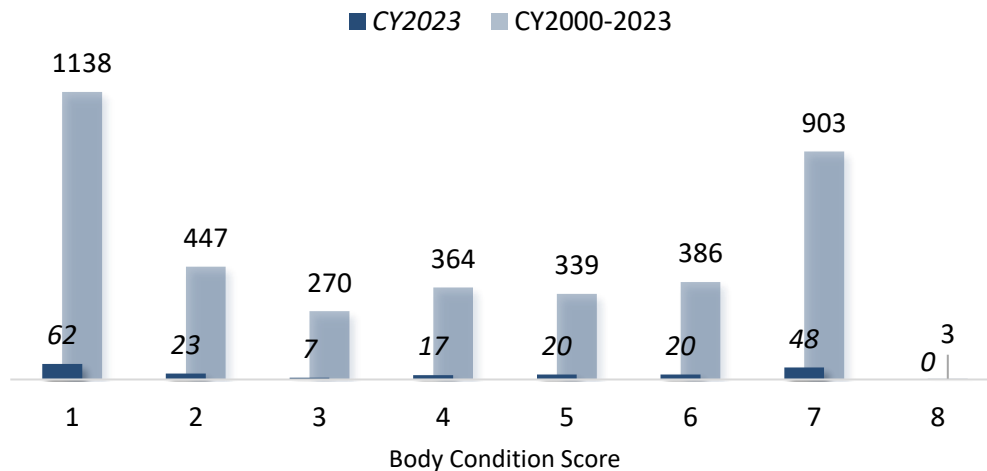
Body condition scores 1-4 represent not fully skeletal remains with a likely PMI < 3 months. Scores 5-7 represent skeletonized remains with a likely PMI ≥ 3 months. The graph below shows changes in body condition scores of recovered UBC remains over time. In CY2023, 55% of recovered remains had an estimated PMI < 3 months (scores 1-4) and 45% had an estimated PMI ≥ 3 months (scores 5-7).

### Pooled Body Conditions of Recovered UBC Remains



Recovered UBC remains are most frequently estimated to be found within one day of death (body condition score 1) or to have been found over six to eight months from day of death (body condition score 7). In CY2023, remains with those scores represent 31% and 24% of total recoveries for the year, respectively.

### Recovered UBC Remains by Body Condition

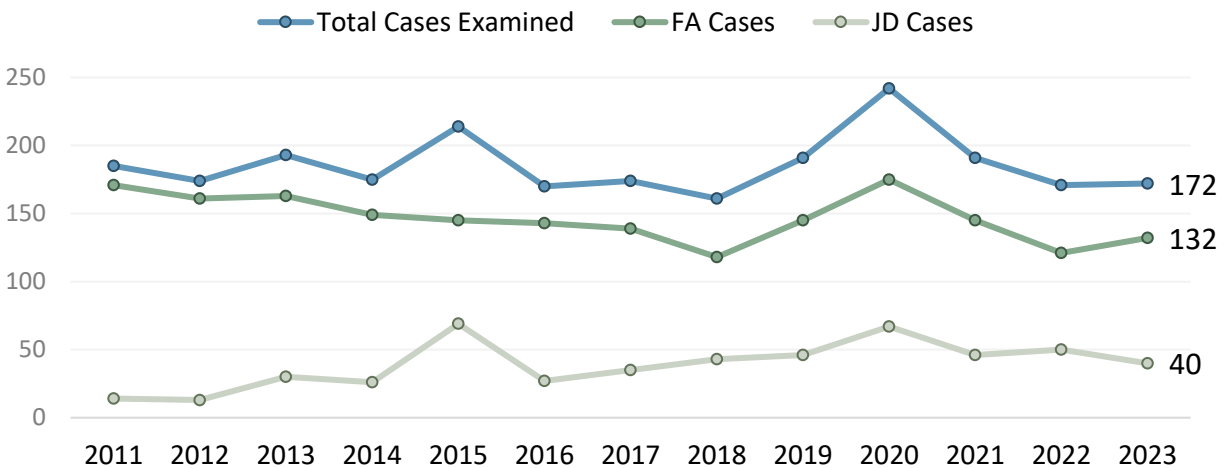


## W.H. Birkby Forensic Anthropology Laboratory

The Walter H. Birkby Forensic Anthropology Laboratory, located within the PCOME, conducts forensic anthropological analyses to determine human versus non-human remains, the medicolegal significance of human remains, and positive identifications. In 2023, a total of 172 cases were reported to and examined by PCOME Forensic Anthropologists. Of those, 134 cases were determined to be human remains of forensic significance, classified as Forensic Anthropology (FA) cases. The other 38 cases were deemed non-human, historic, prehistoric, or otherwise not forensically significant (35 non-human and 3 cases of no modern medicolegal significance); jurisdiction of the remains was declined for those cases (JD cases).

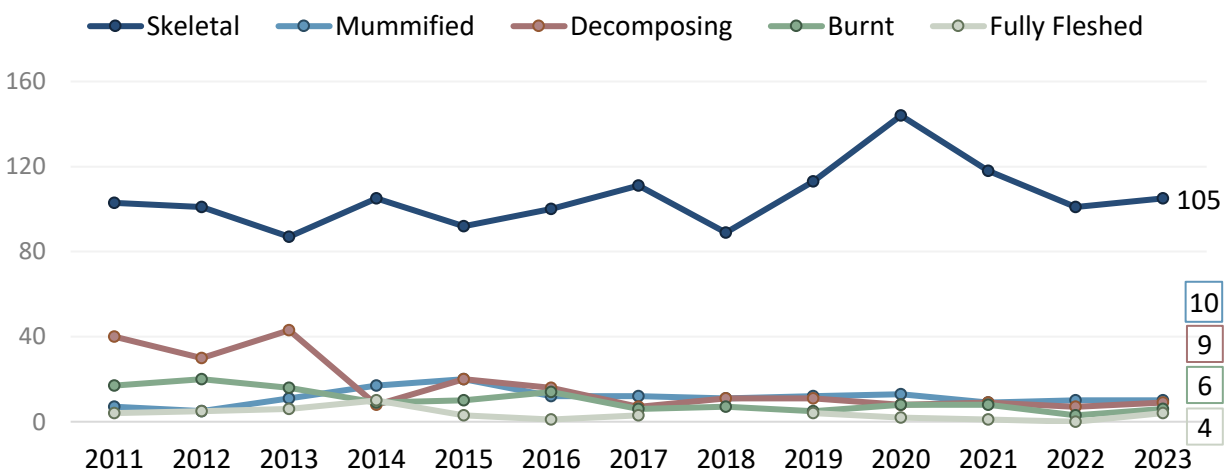


### Jurisdictional Disposition of Forensic Anthropology Examinations

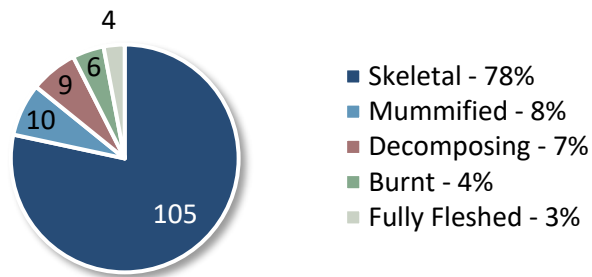


When performing an examination on an FA case, Forensic Anthropologists will describe the extent of postmortem decomposition of a particular set of remains as they were found (“condition of remains”) and if necessary, will clean and prepare the remains for examination. The condition of remains are categorized as skeletal, mummified, decomposing, fully fleshed/minimal decomposition, or burnt. Most FA cases each year are skeletal remains. In 2023, skeletal remains comprised 78% of FA cases.

### FA Cases by Condition of Remains



### 2023 FA Cases by Condition of Remains

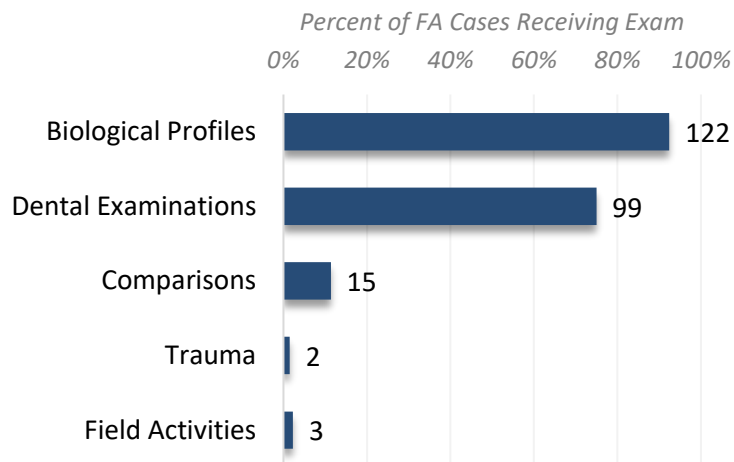


Five main types of forensic anthropological exams are performed on FA cases:

1. **Biological Profile:** Exam to estimate biological information including sex, age, ancestry, stature, and postmortem interval of a set of remains.
2. **Dental Examination:** Entails charting, descriptions, radiographs, and photographs to preserve dental information.
3. **Trauma Evaluation:** Exam to characterize the nature of an injury, implement(s) used to cause injury to the bone, age of injury, etc.
4. **Comparisons to Antemortem Information:** Evaluation of postmortem distinctive skeletal characteristics and/or dental information to antemortem information for purposes of identification.
5. **Field Activities:** Exhumations or other excursions from the office to assist local law enforcement with the recovery of remains.

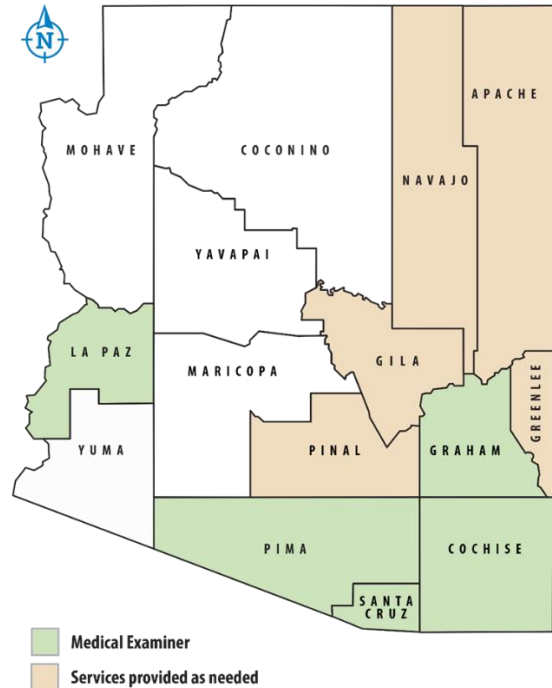
It is common for a set of remains to receive more than one type of examination, therefore the sum of exam types in a calendar year does not equal the sum of FA cases. The graph below displays the number of FA exam types performed in 2023 and the percentage of FA cases receiving each type of exam.

### 2023 FA Cases by Exam Type



## DEATHS BY COUNTY: MEDICAL EXAMINER COUNTIES

Medical Examiner Counties are those counties in which the PCOME serves as the appointed Medical Examiner (i.e., Pima, Cochise, Graham, La Paz, and Santa Cruz County).

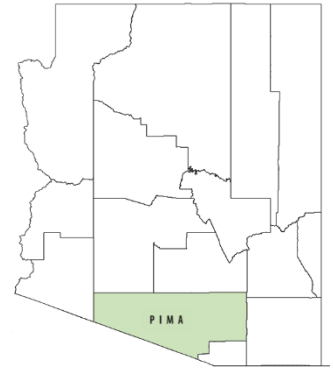


Cochise, Graham, and La Paz Counties contract with the PCOME to certify deaths that fall under the jurisdiction of the medical examiner in their respective County. They do not maintain an in-county Medical Examiner's office to conduct death scene investigations, transport remains, or triage deaths reportable to the medical examiner. These Counties provide third party transportation services, local law enforcement death scene investigation, and archival support for examinations that occurred prior to their contract date. The PCOME works closely with each County's law enforcement agencies, public fiduciary office, and funeral homes to facilitate investigations, disposition of remains, and transportation, respectively. The PCOME is available as needed with mass fatality planning, fatality review panels, or other medical examiner related issues in these Counties.

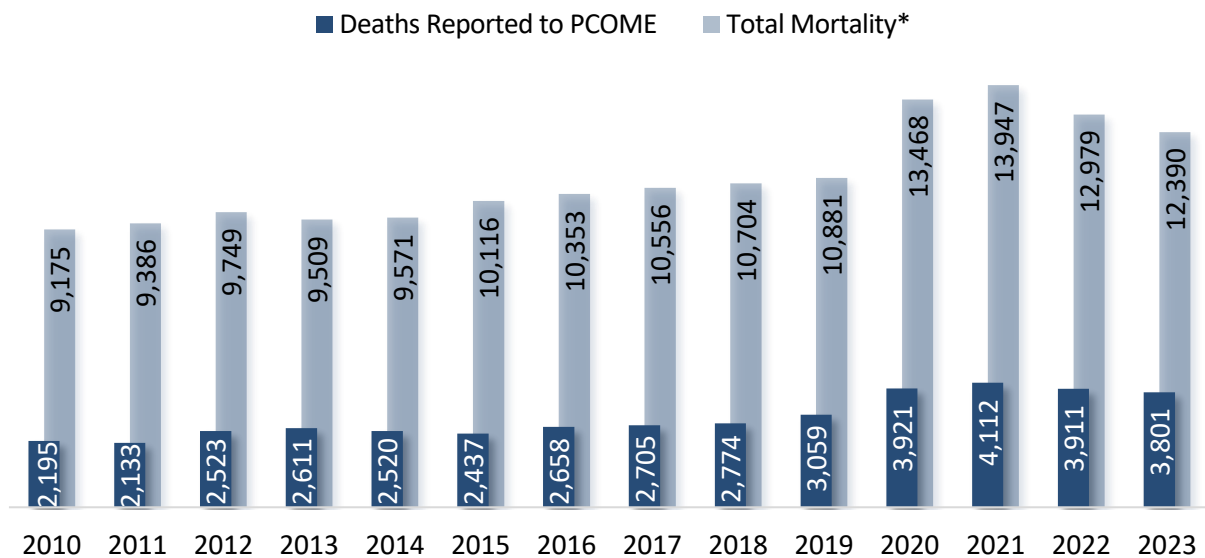
Santa Cruz County does not maintain an in-county Medical Examiner's office to conduct death scene investigations, transport or examine remains, or certify deaths reportable to the medical examiner. Nor does Santa Cruz County appoint or contract with an Alternate Medical Examiner (AME). The PCOME acts as the de-facto appointed ME for Santa Cruz County. When deaths occur in Santa Cruz County pursuant to A.R.S. §11-593, Santa Cruz County law enforcement agencies investigate the circumstances of the death and notify the PCOME as necessary.

## Pima County

In 2023, there were 12,390 total registered deaths in Pima County (residents and non-residents); of these, 3,801 deaths (31%) were reported to the office for investigation. The PCOME accepted jurisdiction of 56% of deaths reported (2,142 cases), representing 17% of Pima County total mortality. Three cases were reported to the PCOME for anthropologic or pathologic examination only, without certification of the death by the PCOME (these are not included in the jurisdictional disposition graph below). Additionally, four subsumed cases and six fetal death cases are excluded from manner and cause of death data in the proceeding sections.

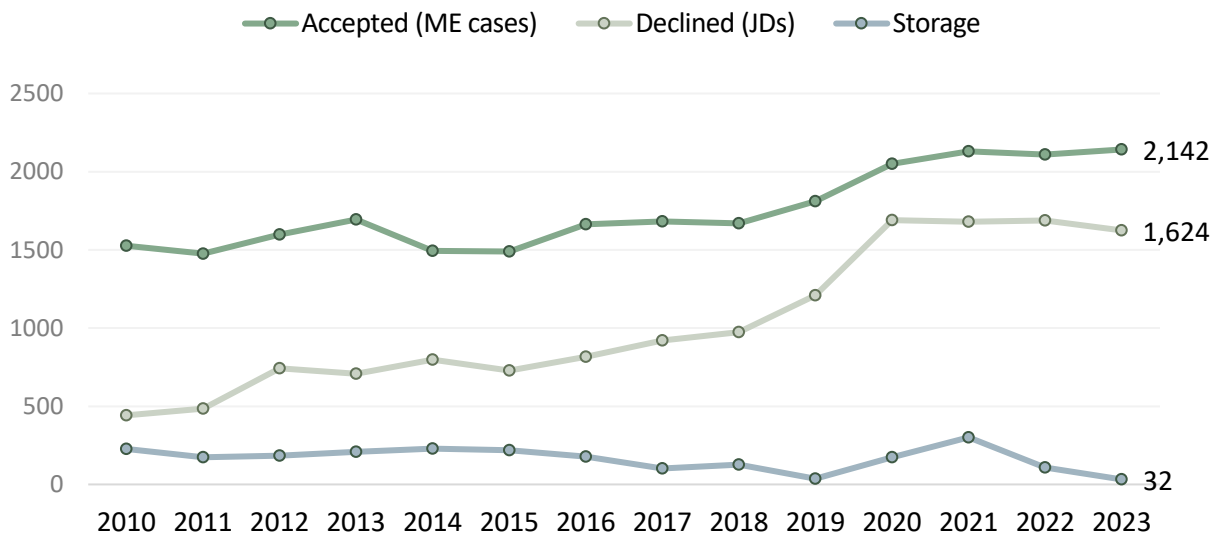


### Pima County Total Mortality and Reported Deaths



\*Pima County total mortality data from the Arizona Department of Health Services as of 3/11/2024

### Jurisdictional Disposition of Pima County Reported Deaths

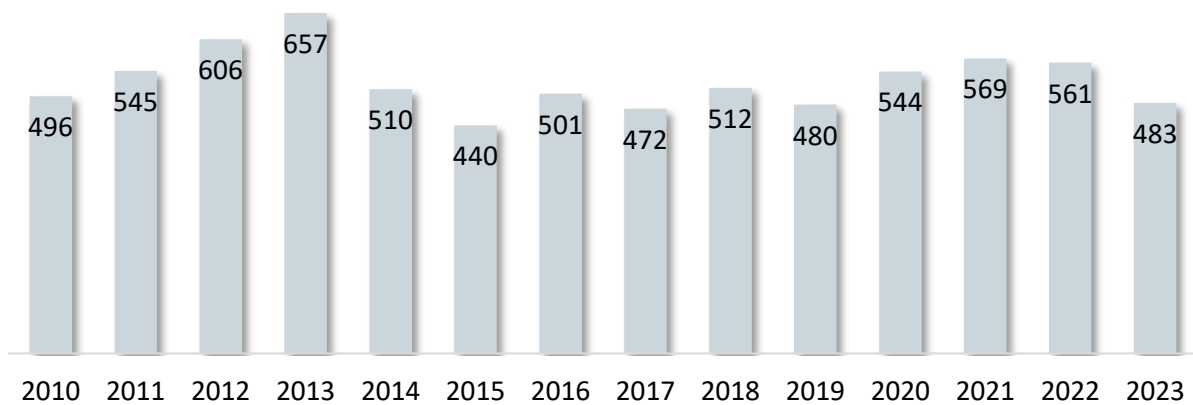


## Natural Deaths

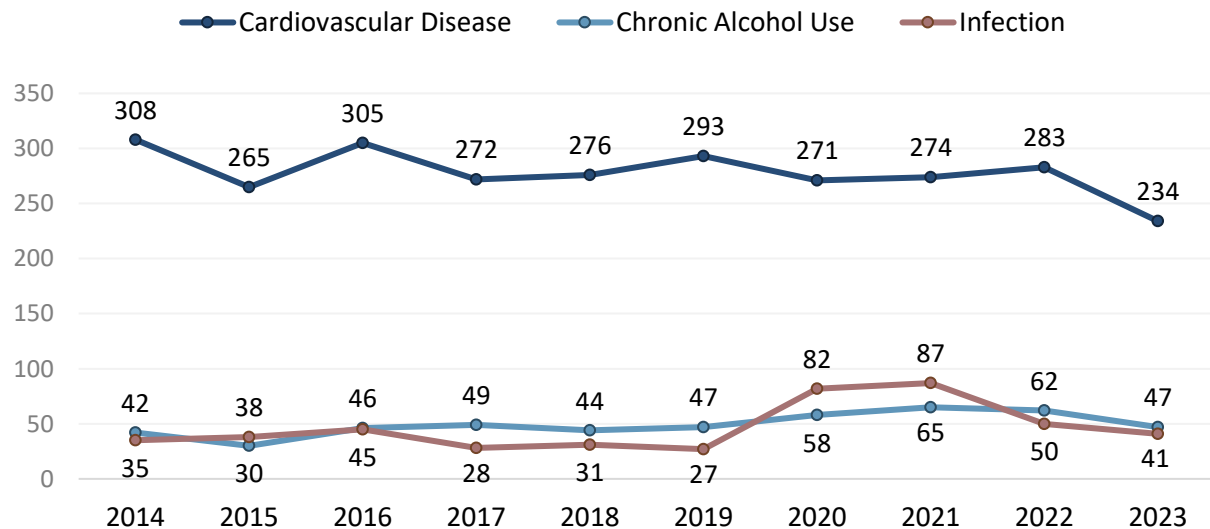
**Natural death data in this report is limited to deaths certified by the PCOME (ME cases) and does not reflect the total number of natural deaths in Pima County.** Most natural deaths that occur in a county do not fall under the jurisdiction of a medical examiner and instead, are certified by a decedent's healthcare provider. The PCOME accepts jurisdiction of cases that appear to be natural deaths if the decedent is not in the care of a healthcare provider, dies while in custody, is unidentified, and/or a previously healthy individual dies suddenly/unexpectedly, as determined by the PCOME. Natural death data should be interpreted with caution as the PCOME is not aware of the number of natural deaths certified by physicians in the community.

A total of 483 Pima County deaths were certified as natural by the PCOME in 2023 (23% of Pima County ME cases). On average, 55% of PCOME-certified natural deaths are due to cardiovascular disease.

### Pima County Natural Deaths Certified by the PCOME



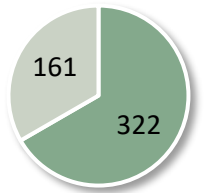
### Top Causes of Pima County Natural Deaths (ME Cases Only)



Male decedents comprised 67% of Pima County natural deaths certified by the PCOME in 2023. Decedents aged 60-to-69 years old accounted for the largest portion of natural deaths of any age group (24%), followed closely by decedents in their seventies (22%). Non-Hispanic Whites made up the largest percentage of deaths among all racial groups (63%). Cardiovascular disease was the most common cause of death (48%), followed by chronic alcohol use (10%), and infection (8%).

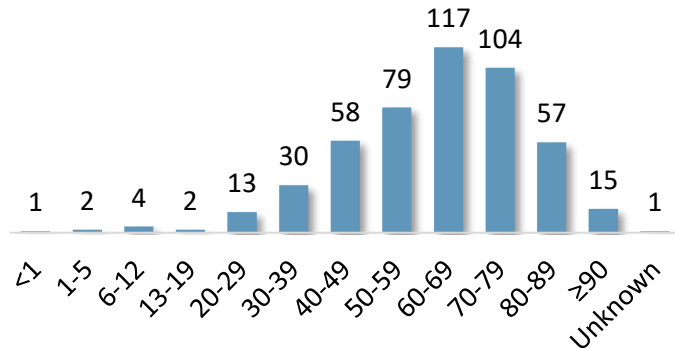
### **2023 Pima County Natural Deaths (ME Cases Only)**

**Decedent Sex**

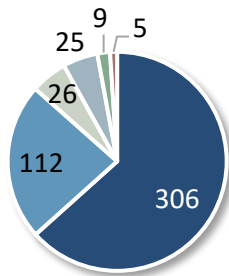


■ Male - 67%  
■ Female - 33%

**Decedent Age Group**

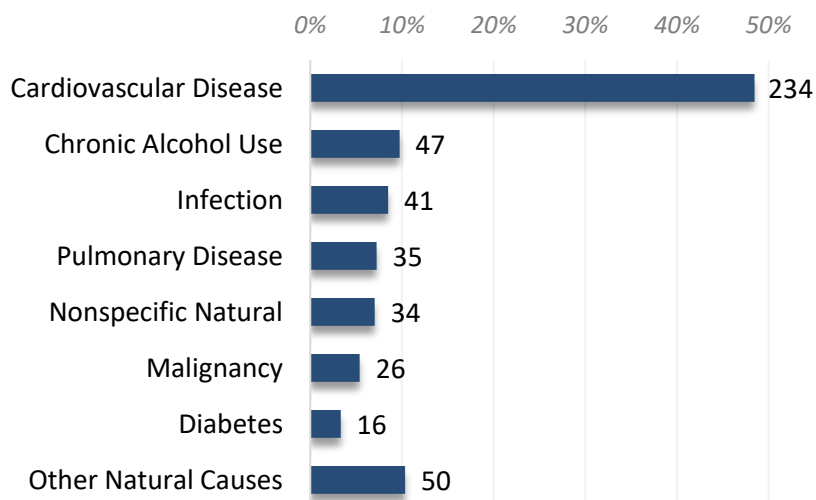


**Decedent Race/Ethnicity**



■ White - 63%  
■ Hispanic - 23%  
■ American Indian/Alaska Native - 5%  
■ Black/African American - 5%  
■ Asian/Pacific Islander - 2%  
■ Unknown - 1%

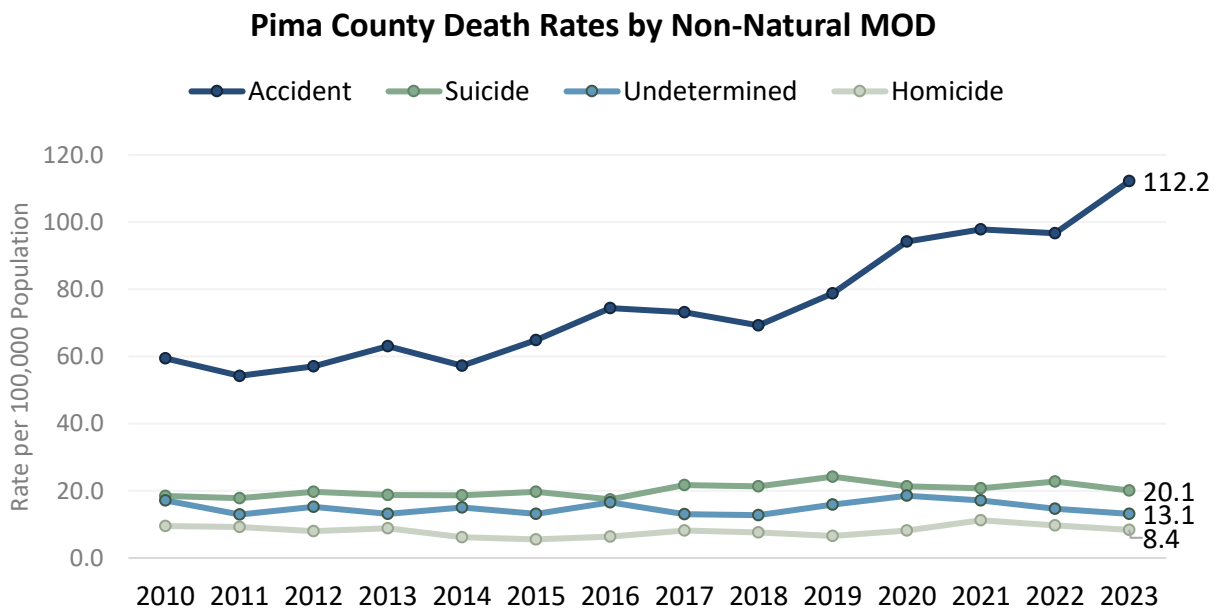
**Cause of Death**



## Non-Natural Manner Deaths

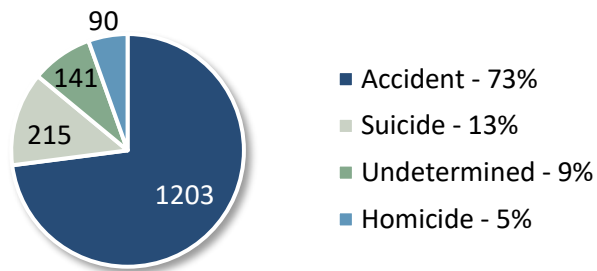
Non-natural manner of death (MOD) classifications include accident, homicide, suicide, and undetermined. The graph below displays Pima County crude death rates by non-natural MOD from 2010 to 2023. Pima County MOD rates presented below are a ratio of the number of deaths that occurred in Pima County for each MOD category regardless of the decedent's county of residence, relative to the population size of Pima County that year. At the time this report was written, Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS) had not yet released Pima County population statistics for 2023. Therefore, **2023 death rates were calculated using 2022 population size and are subject to change.**

Over the past decade, the accident death rate in Pima County has gradually risen, reaching a high of 112.2 deaths per 100,000 persons in 2023. The suicide death rate dropped from 22.8 per 100,000 persons in 2022 to 20.1 in 2023. Homicide and undetermined manner death rates both decreased for a second year in a row.



In total, the PCOME certified 1,649 deaths in Pima County with a non-natural manner in 2023. Accident deaths made up the largest proportion (73%). Data on each MOD is presented in greater detail in the next four sections.

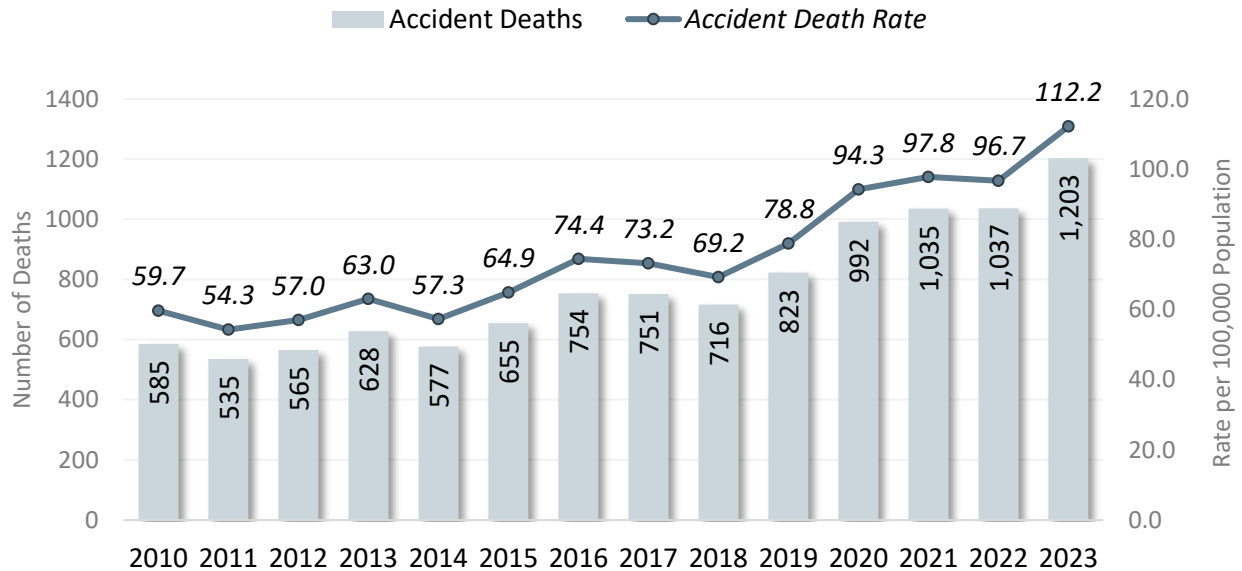
### 2023 Pima County Non-Natural Manner Deaths



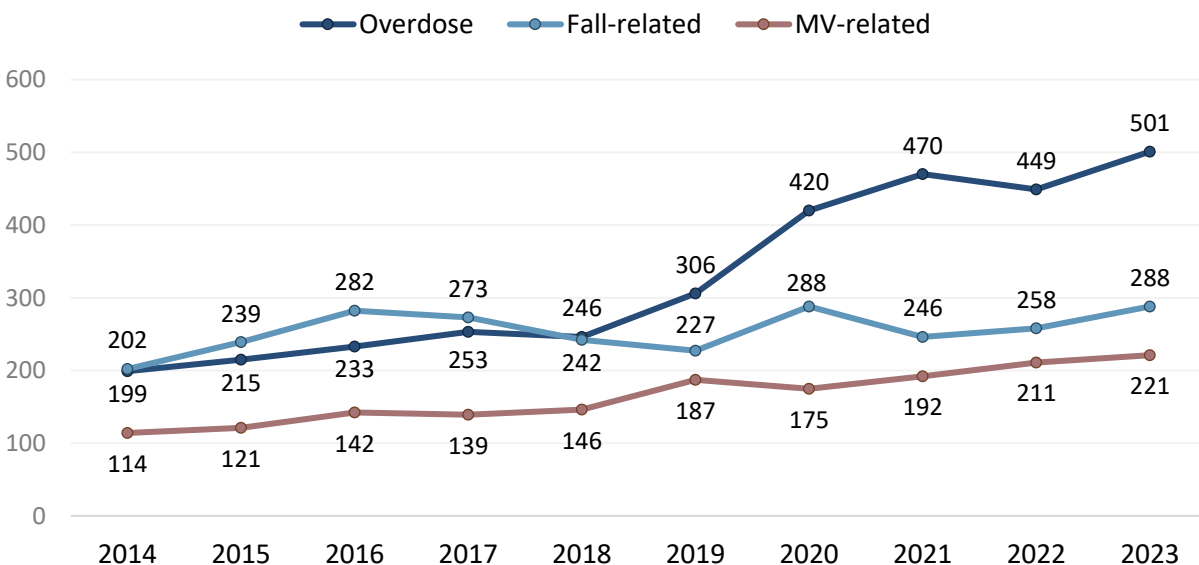
## Accident

Pima County deaths certified as accidents totaled 1,203 in 2023, a 16% increase from the year before, and the highest recorded by the PCOME to date. For the sixth year in a row, overdose is the leading cause of accident deaths in Pima County, representing 42% of accident deaths in 2023. Since 2018, fall-related injuries have been the second most frequent cause of accident deaths in Pima County. Injuries from motor vehicle-related (MV-related) accidents are the third most common cause of Pima County accident deaths and have been increasing annually since 2020.

### Number and Rate of Accident Deaths in Pima County



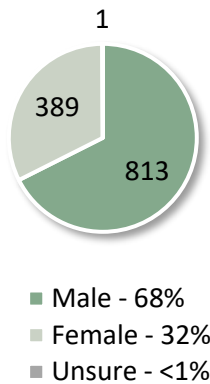
### Top Causes of Pima County Accident Deaths



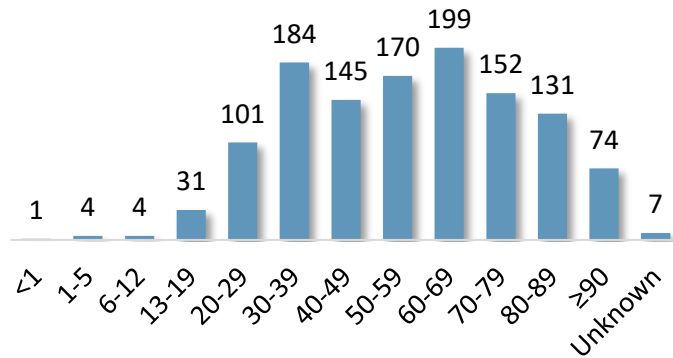
Male decedents comprised 68% of Pima County accident deaths in 2023. Decedents aged 60-to-69 years old accounted for the largest portion of accident deaths of any age group (17%), followed by decedents in their 30s (15%). Non-Hispanic Whites made up the largest percentage of deaths among all racial groups (55%). Overdose was the most common cause of death (42%), followed by fall-related injuries (24%), and injuries from MV-related accidents (18%).

### 2023 Pima County Accident Deaths

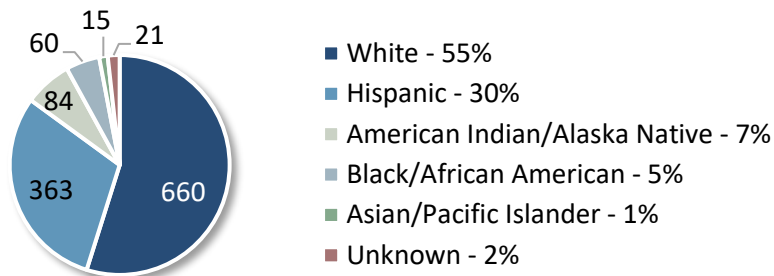
**Decedent Sex**



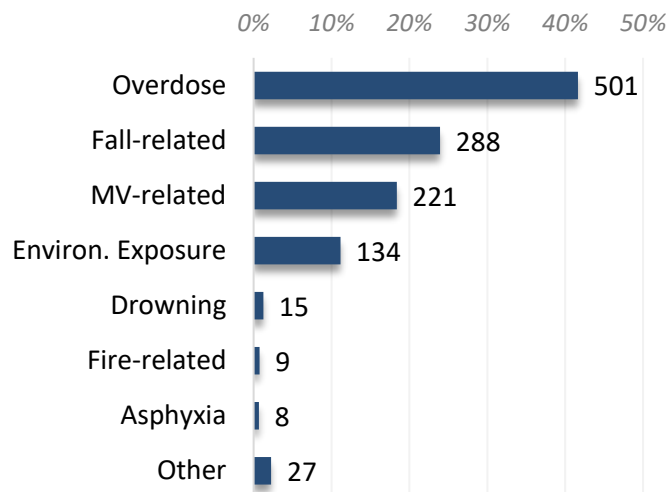
**Decedent Age Group**



**Decedent Race/Ethnicity**



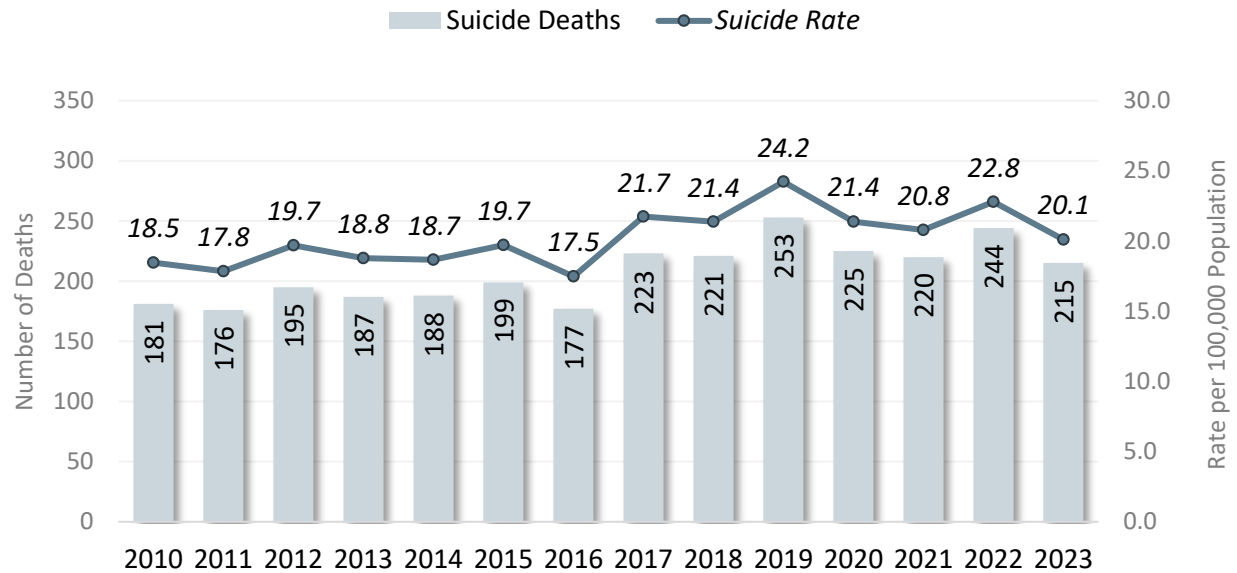
**Cause of Death**



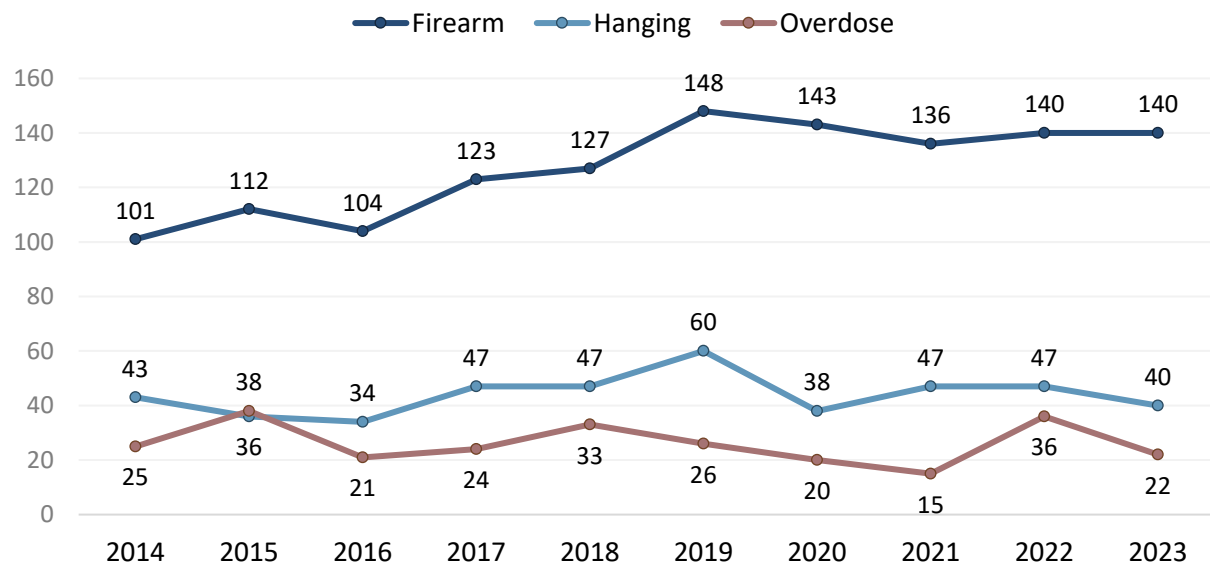
## Suicide

Pima County deaths certified as suicides totaled 215 in 2023, a 12% decrease from the year prior. The suicide rate in 2023 was 20.1 per 100,000 population. Over the past decade, firearms have remained the most common means of suicide. On average, firearms are used in 60% of the completed suicides in Pima County each year. Second to firearms are suicides by hanging, which average 20% of suicides per year.

### Number and Rate of Suicides in Pima County



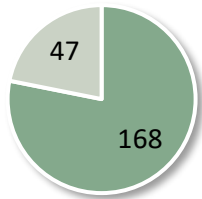
### Top Cause of Pima County Suicides



Individuals who died by suicide in Pima County in 2023 were most frequently male (78%). Decedents in their thirties, sixties, and seventies each represented 16% of suicides, the largest portion among age groups. Non-Hispanic Whites made up the largest percentage of suicides among all racial groups (70%). Lastly, the number of suicides by firearm (140) was three and a half times higher than the next leading means of suicide, hanging (40).

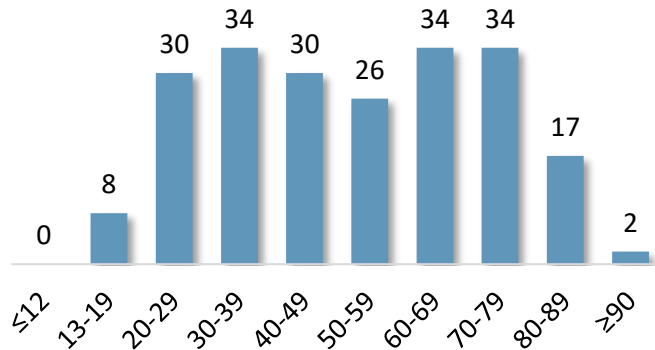
## **2023 Pima County Suicides**

**Decedent Sex**

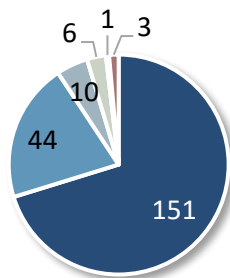


■ Male - 78%  
■ Female - 22%

**Decedent Age Group**

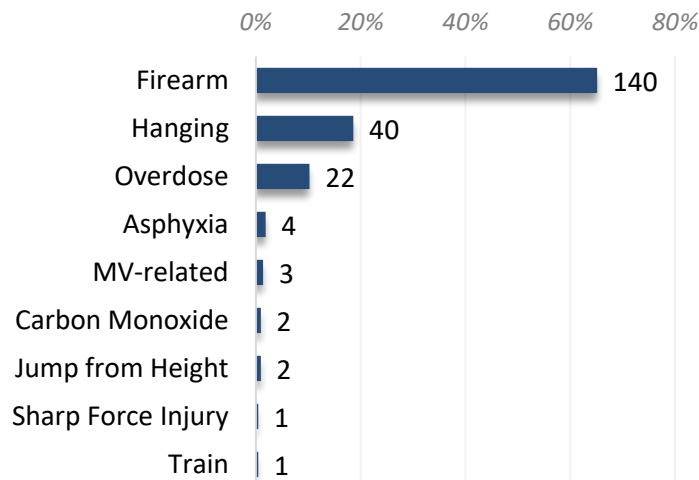


**Decedent Race/Ethnicity**



■ White - 70%  
■ Hispanic - 20%  
■ Black/African American - 5%  
■ American Indian/Alaska Native - 3%  
■ Asian/Pacific Islander - %  
■ Unknown - 1%

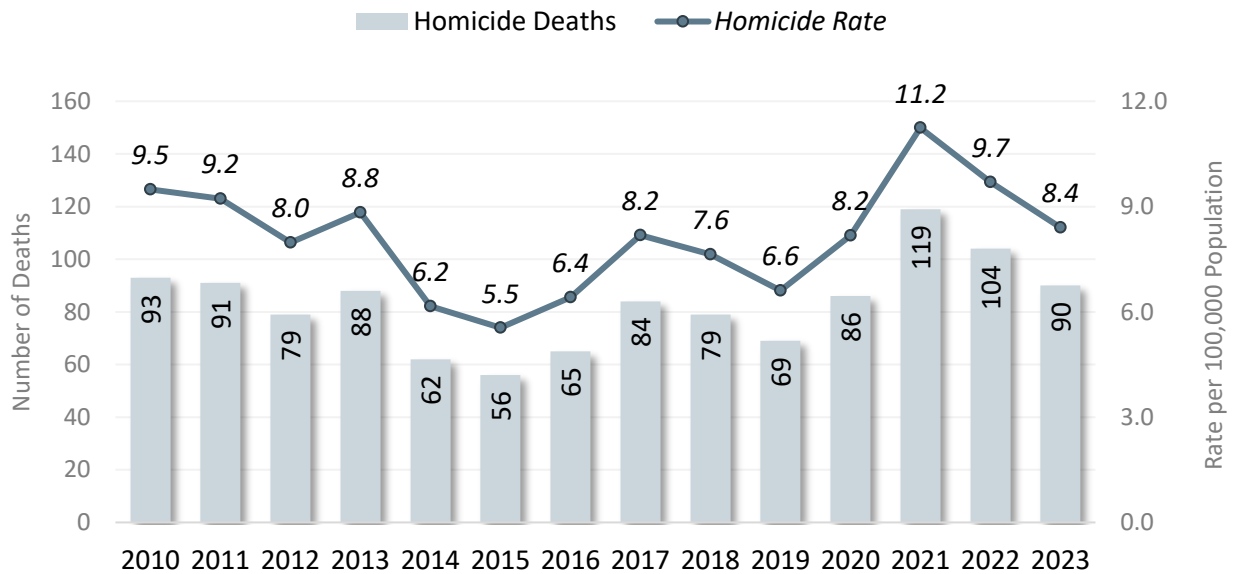
**Cause of Death**



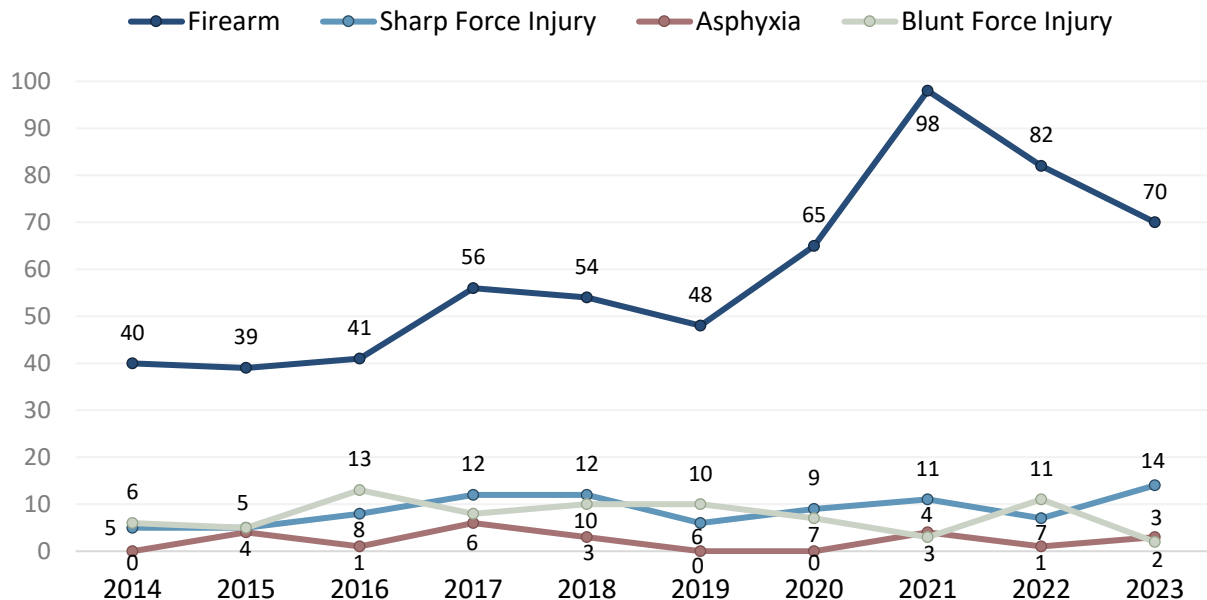
## Homicide

A total of 90 deaths from Pima County were certified as homicides in 2023, down 24% from the record high in 2021 (119). The homicide rate in 2023 was 8.4 per 100,000 population. Most homicides in Pima County each year are a result of firearms. Firearm homicides increased sharply between 2019 and 2021. Since then, firearm homicides have decreased approximately 15% each year. Meanwhile, other causes of homicide deaths remain relatively unchanged (e.g., sharp force injury and blunt force injury).

### Number and Rate of Homicides in Pima County



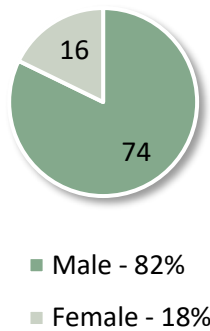
### Top Causes of Pima County Homicides



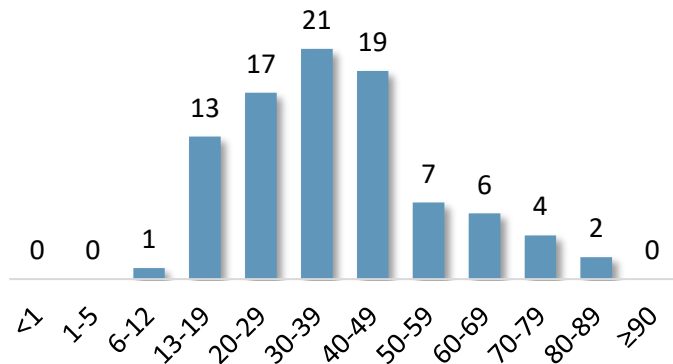
Individuals who died by homicide in Pima County in 2023 were most frequently male (82%). More decedents were between 30-39 years of age (23%) than any other age group. Hispanics made up the largest percentage of deaths among all racial groups (42%). Seventy-eight percent of homicide deaths were a result of firearms. The other 22% of deaths resulted from sharp force injuries (16%), strangulation (3%), blunt force injuries (2%), and fire-related causes (1%).

## 2023 Pima County Homicides

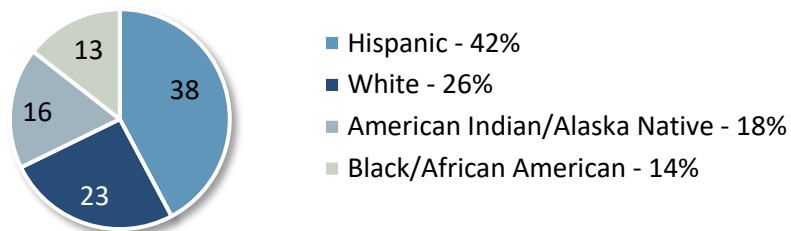
**Decedent Sex**



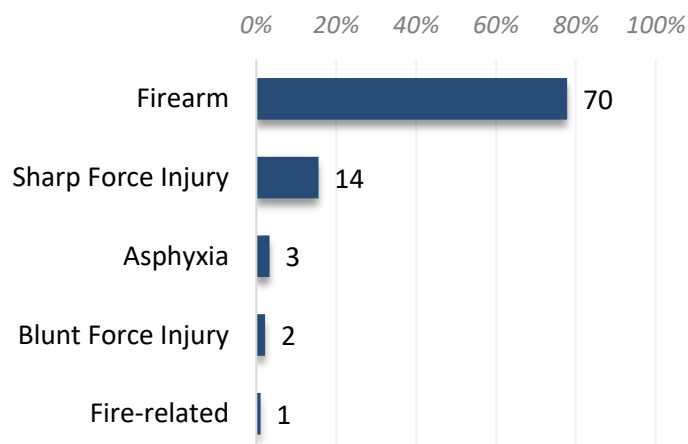
**Decedent Age Group**



**Decedent Race/Ethnicity**



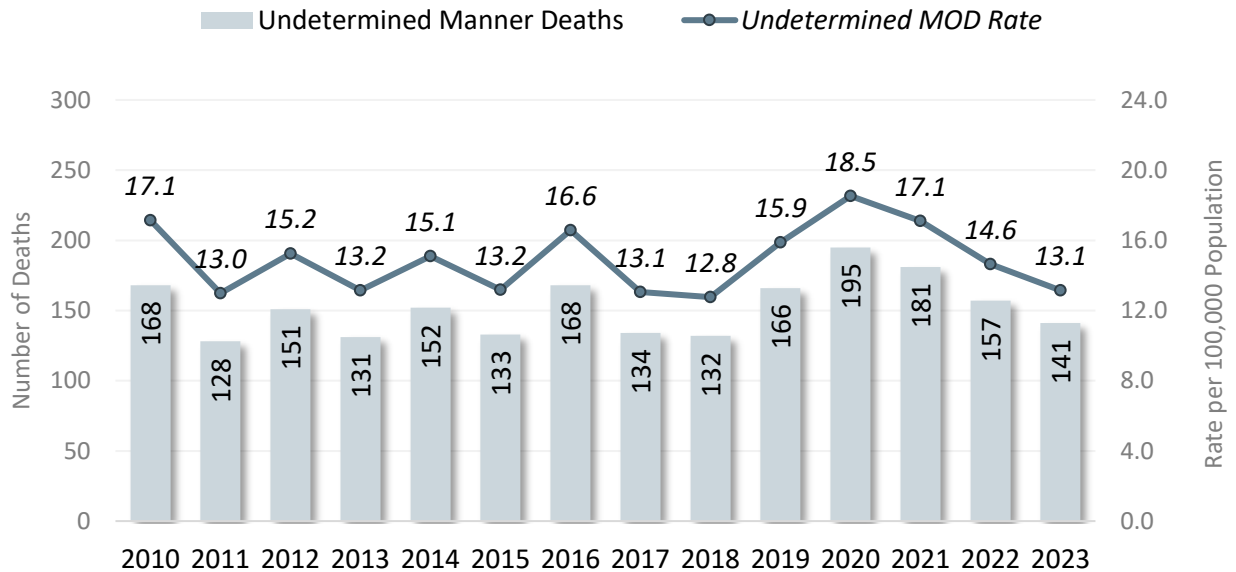
**Cause of Death**



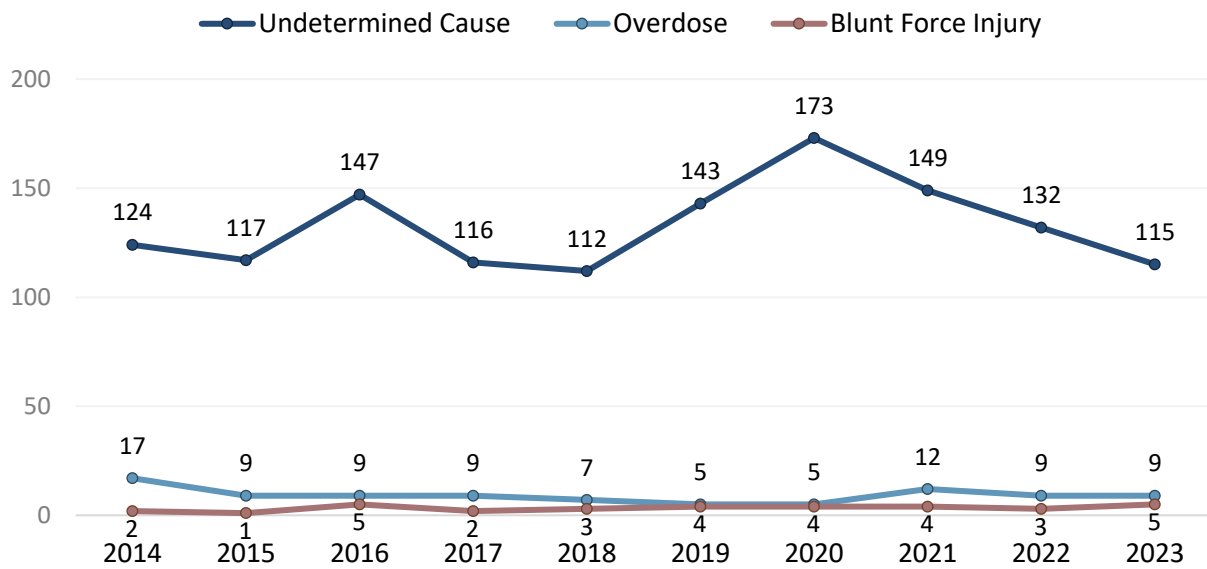
## Undetermined

In a small number of cases each year, the manner of death is certified as undetermined. Pima County deaths certified by the PCOME with an undetermined manner totaled 141 in 2023. Undetermined manner deaths certified by the PCOME are most frequently certified with an undetermined cause, mainly due to exam limitations of decomposed/skeletal remains. Of the 115 cases with an undetermined manner and cause in 2023, 93 (80%) had advanced decomposition or were skeletal remains.

### Number and Rate of Undetermined Manner Deaths in Pima County



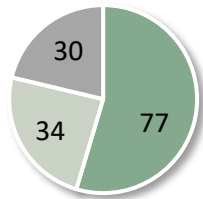
### Top Causes of Pima County Undetermined Manner Deaths



Male decedents comprised 55% of Pima County undetermined manner deaths in 2023. A total of 73 decedents with an undetermined MOD remain unidentified at the time of reporting. As a result, decedents of an unknown age represent the largest portion of undetermined manner deaths of any age group (52%). Similarly, decedents with an unknown race/ethnicity made up the largest percentage of deaths among racial groups (52%). An undetermined cause of death was most common (82%).

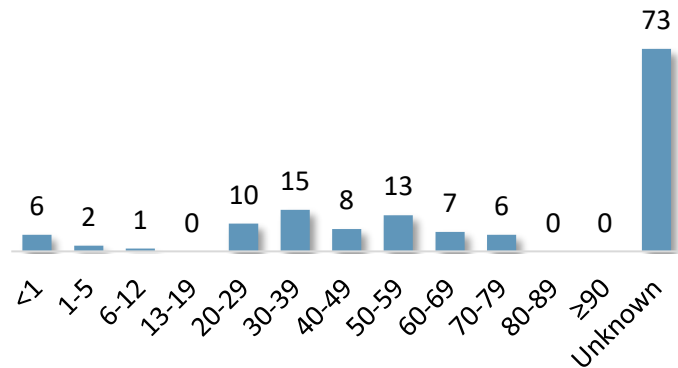
### **2023 Pima County Undetermined Manner Deaths**

**Decedent Sex**

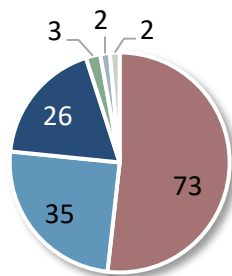


■ Male - 55%  
■ Female - 24%  
■ Unsure - 21%

**Decedent Age Group**

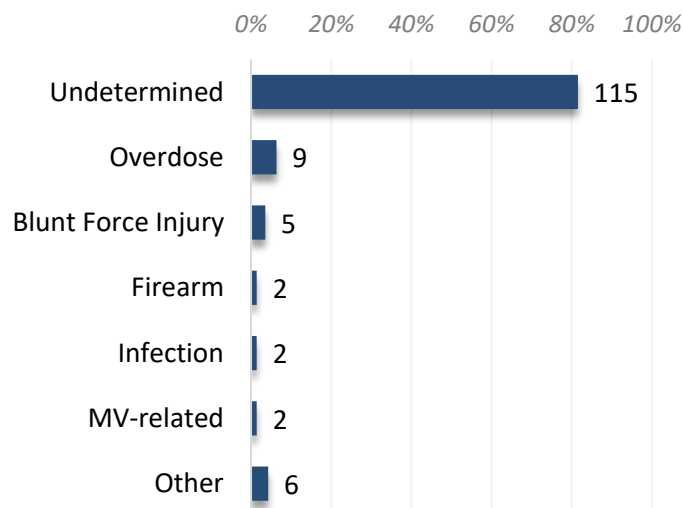


**Decedent Race/Ethnicity**



■ Unknown - 52%  
■ Hispanic - 25%  
■ White - 18%  
■ Asian/Pacific Islander - 2%  
■ Black/African American - 1%  
■ American Indian/Alaska Native - 1%

**Cause of Death**



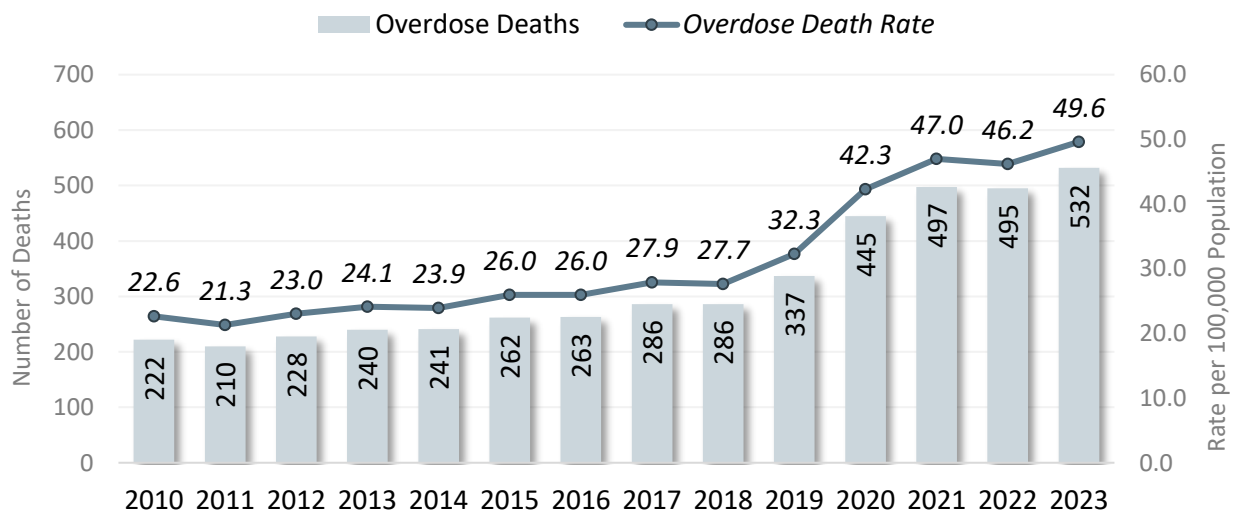
## Cause-Specific Deaths

The leading causes of death for Pima County cases certified with a non-natural manner (i.e., accident, homicide, suicide, and undetermined) are presented in this section. Other causes of interest (e.g., pedestrian deaths and heat-related deaths) are also included. In 2023, the PCOME certified 1,649 Pima County deaths with a non-natural manner. Of those, the most common causes of death were overdose (n=532, 32%), fall-related injuries (n=288, 17%), injuries from motor vehicle-related accidents (n=226, 14%), and firearms (n=213, 13%).

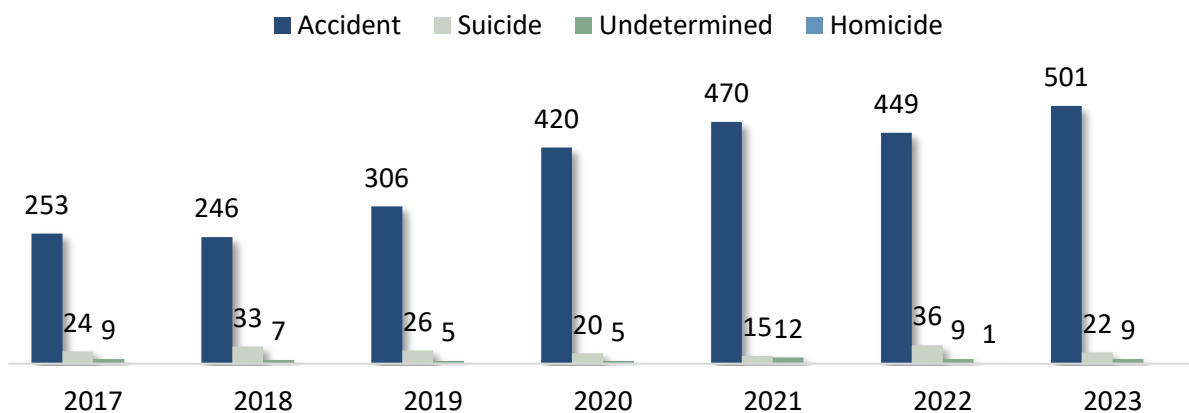
### Overdose

Prior to 2019, annual increases in overdose deaths in Pima County were relatively consistent, increasing an average of 3% per year from 2010 to 2018. In more recent years, overdose deaths have increased markedly, hitting record highs nearly every year; rises in accidental overdose deaths are largely responsible. From 2017 to 2023, overdose deaths certified as accidents doubled. Of the 532 overdose deaths in Pima County in 2023, 94% were accidents, 4% were suicides, and 2% were certified with an undetermined manner. The overdose death rate in 2023 was 49.6 per 100,000 population.

#### Number and Rate of Overdose Deaths in Pima County

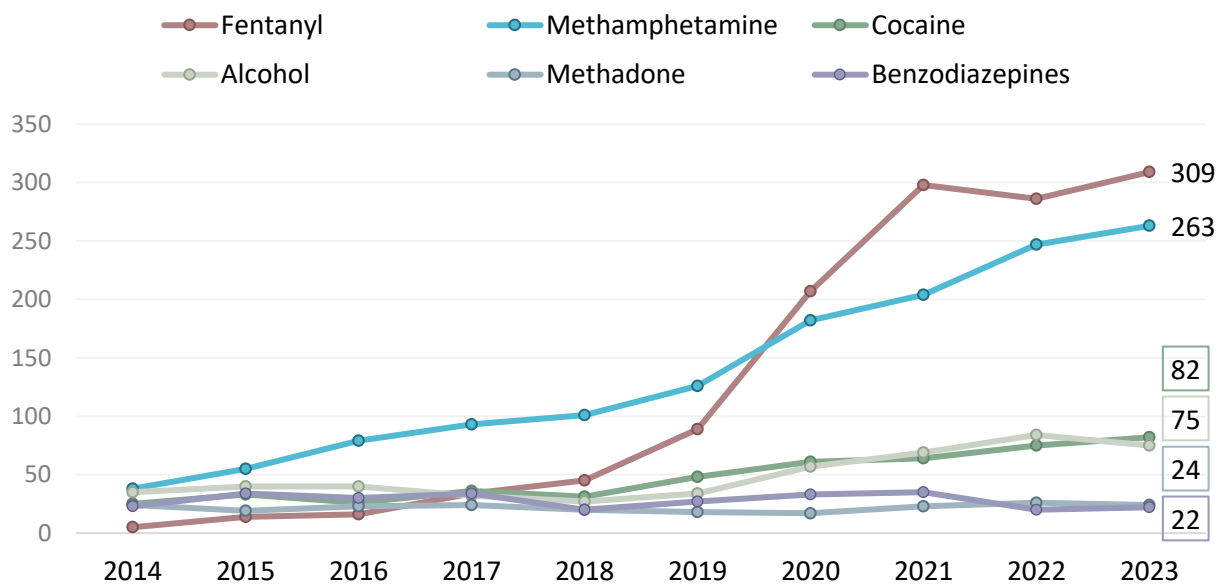


#### Pima County Overdose Deaths by MOD

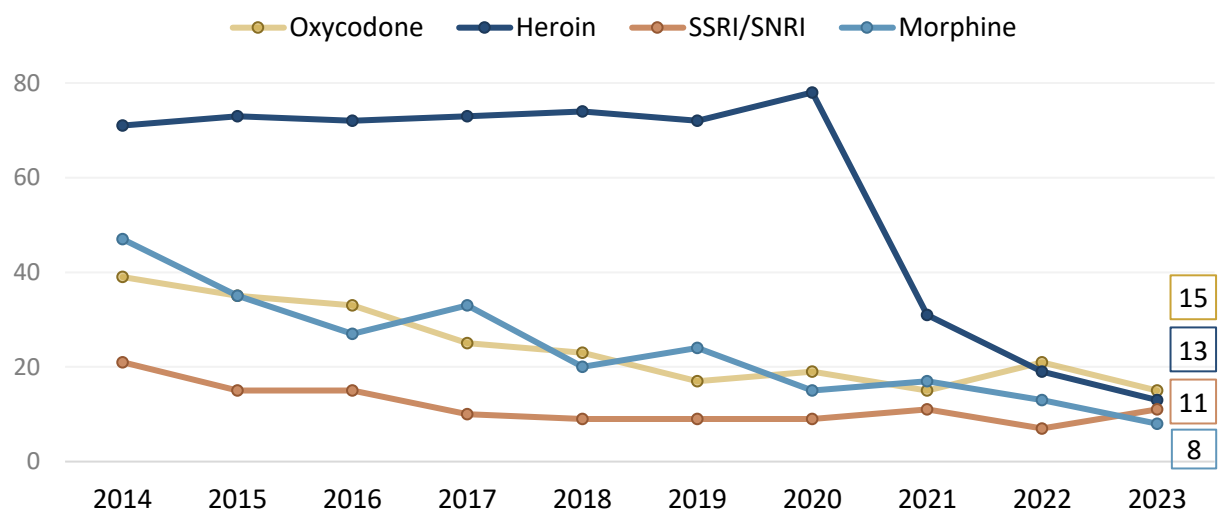


The two graphs below show overdose deaths involving select drugs over time. For the fourth year in a row, fentanyl and methamphetamine have contributed to the most and second-most overdose deaths in Pima County of any single drug, respectively. In 2023, cocaine-involved overdose deaths surpassed the number of deaths due to acute alcohol intoxication, both of which have increased over the past several years. For the second year in a row, methadone contributed to more overdose deaths than benzodiazepines, oxycodone, heroin, and morphine. Heroin deaths are likely underreported each year as heroin is rapidly metabolized to morphine by the body; if the metabolite indicative for heroin, 6-monoacetylmorphine, is not present on the toxicology report, the cause of death may be classified as morphine intoxication or opiate unspecified. Nonetheless, deaths involving either heroin or morphine are trending downwards, as seen in the second graph below, particularly since 2020.

### Pima County Overdose Deaths Involving Select Drugs

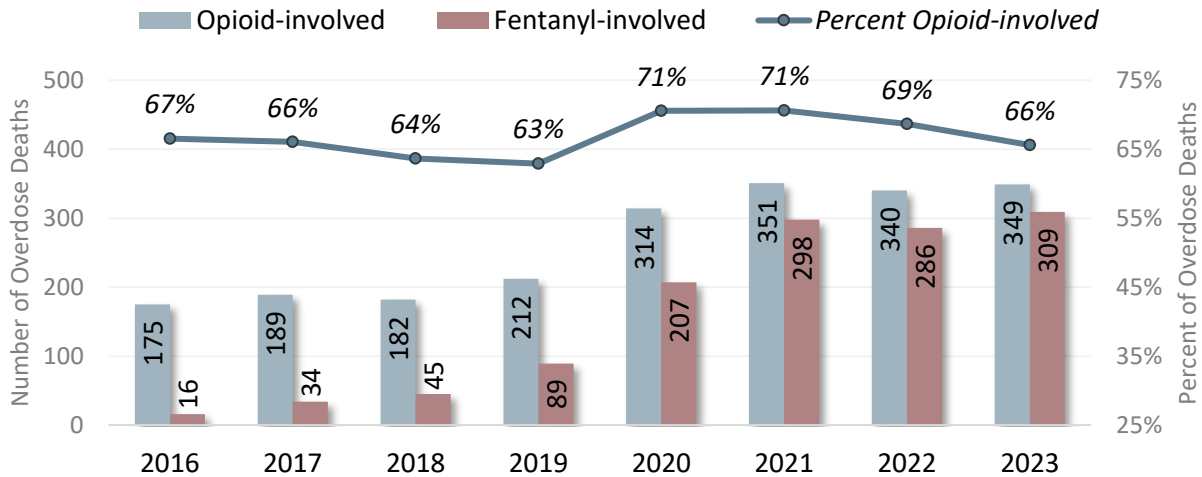


### Pima County Overdose Deaths Involving Select Drugs



The impact of opioids (e.g., oxycodone, heroin, fentanyl, etc.) on overdose deaths is of significant interest both locally and nationally. In 2023, an opioid contributed to death, either as a single drug or as a component of a polydrug overdose in two-thirds of Pima County overdose deaths (66%). Opioid-involved overdose death trends are displayed in the graph below. The largest single-year increase recorded was from 2019 to 2020 (48%). Since then, these deaths have remained elevated, largely due to fentanyl. In the past three years, fentanyl has on average contributed to 86% of opioid-involved overdose deaths.

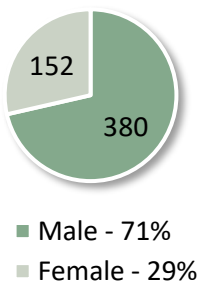
### Pima County Overdose Deaths Involving Opioids



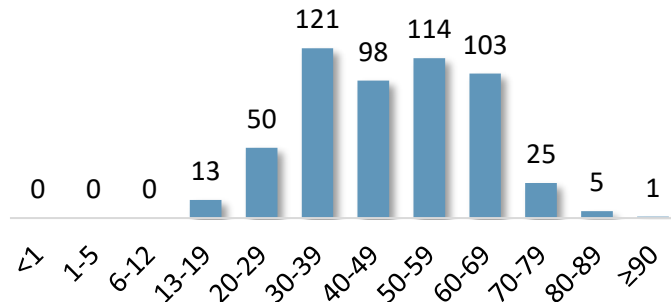
In 2023, two and half times more males than females died of an overdose. Decedents in their thirties accounted for the largest portion of overdose deaths of any age group (23%). Non-Hispanic Whites made up the largest percentage of overdose deaths among racial groups (50%).

### 2023 Pima County Overdose Deaths

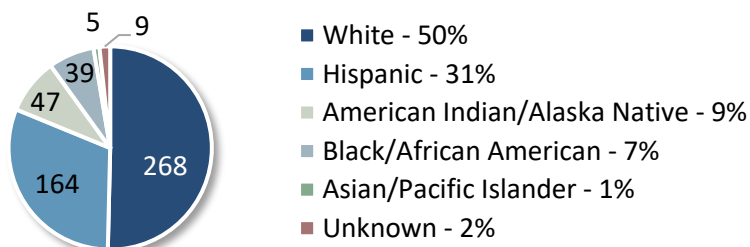
#### Decedent Sex



#### Decedent Age Group

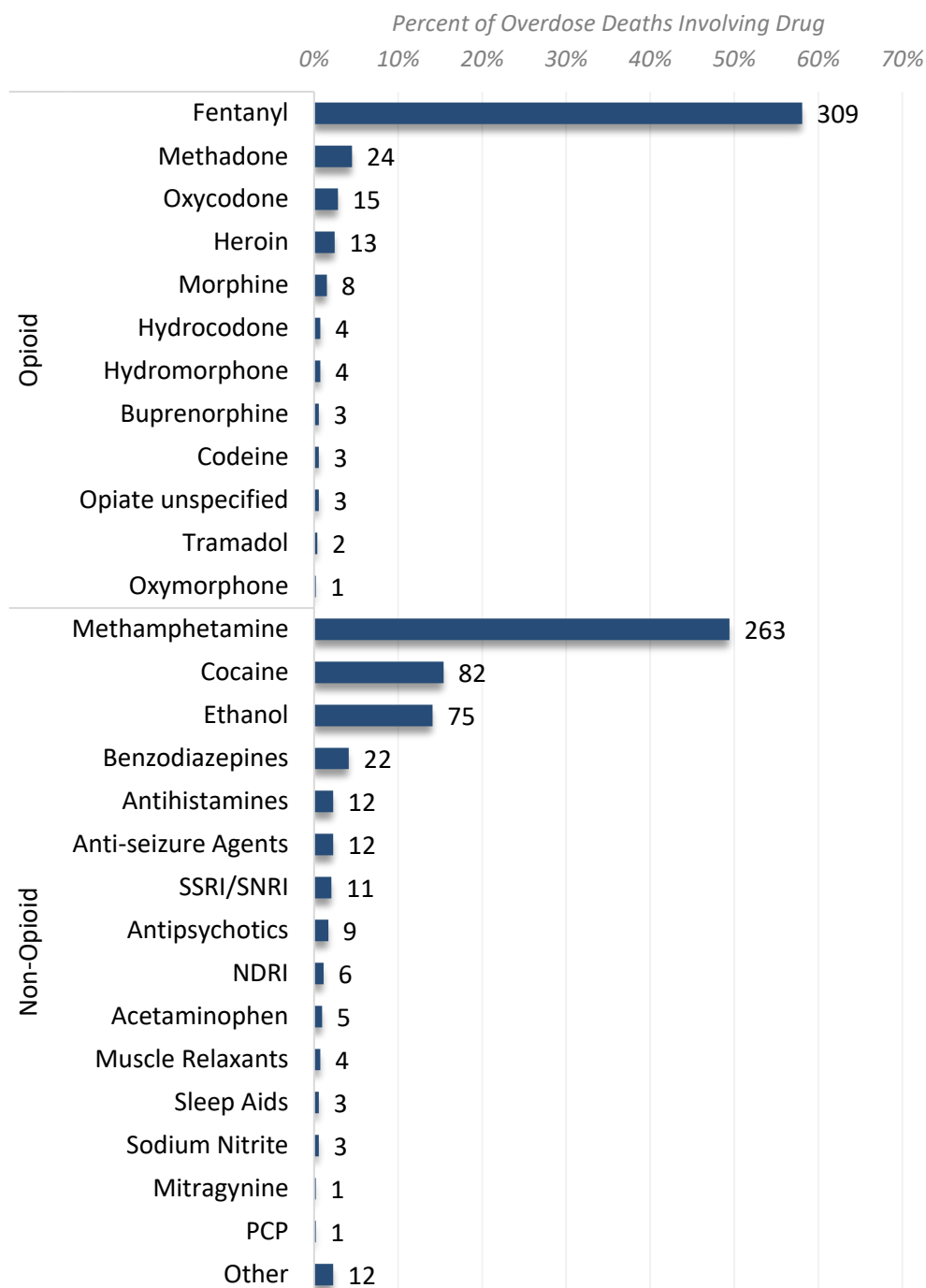


#### Decedent Race/Ethnicity



A single drug contributed to an overdose death in 252 Pima County cases (47%) and a combination of drugs contributed to death in 280 cases (53%). Fentanyl was the most frequently found drug in Pima County overdose deaths, contributing to 58% of 2023 overdoses. Second to fentanyl was methamphetamine (49%), then cocaine (15%), alcohol (14%), and methadone (5%). An overdose death may involve more than one drug, therefore the sum of drugs contributing exceeds the sum of total overdose deaths for the year.

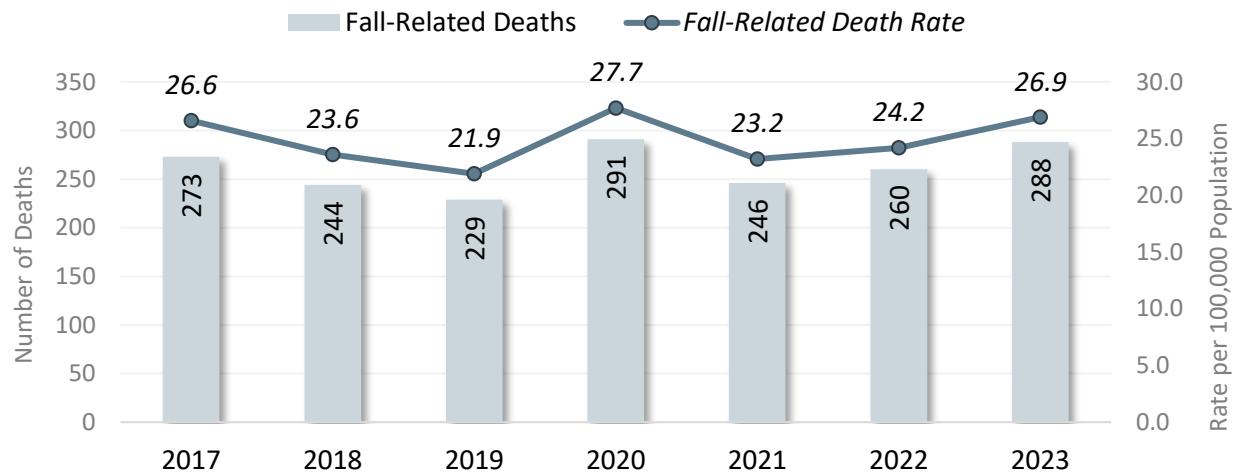
### Frequency of Drugs Contributing to Pima County Overdose Deaths, 2023



## Falls

Fall-related deaths in Pima County have increased annually since 2021, reaching 288 in 2023. Nearly all fall-related deaths are certified as accident deaths, but a small number of cases are certified with an undetermined manner. In 2023, all 288 fall-related deaths were certified with an accidental manner and the fall-related death rate was 26.9 per 100,000 population.

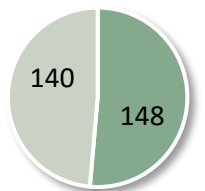
### Number and Rate of Fall-Related Deaths in Pima County



In 2023, the ratio of male to female decedents of fall-related deaths was nearly 1:1. Decedents aged 70 and older comprised most fall-related deaths (82%). Non-Hispanic Whites made up the largest percentage among all racial groups (77%).

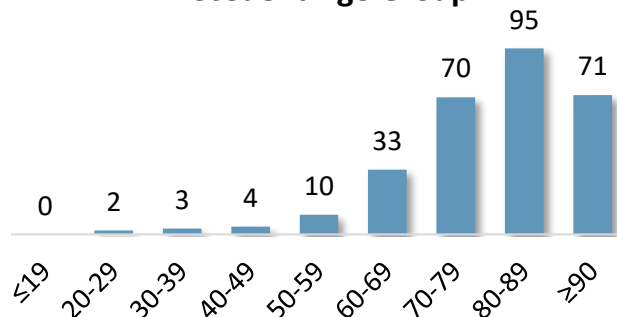
### 2023 Pima County Fall-Related Deaths

#### Decedent Sex

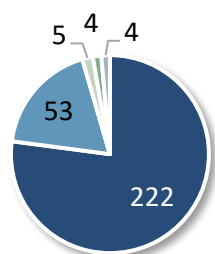


- Male - 51%
- Female - 49%

#### Decedent Age Group



#### Decedent Race/Ethnicity



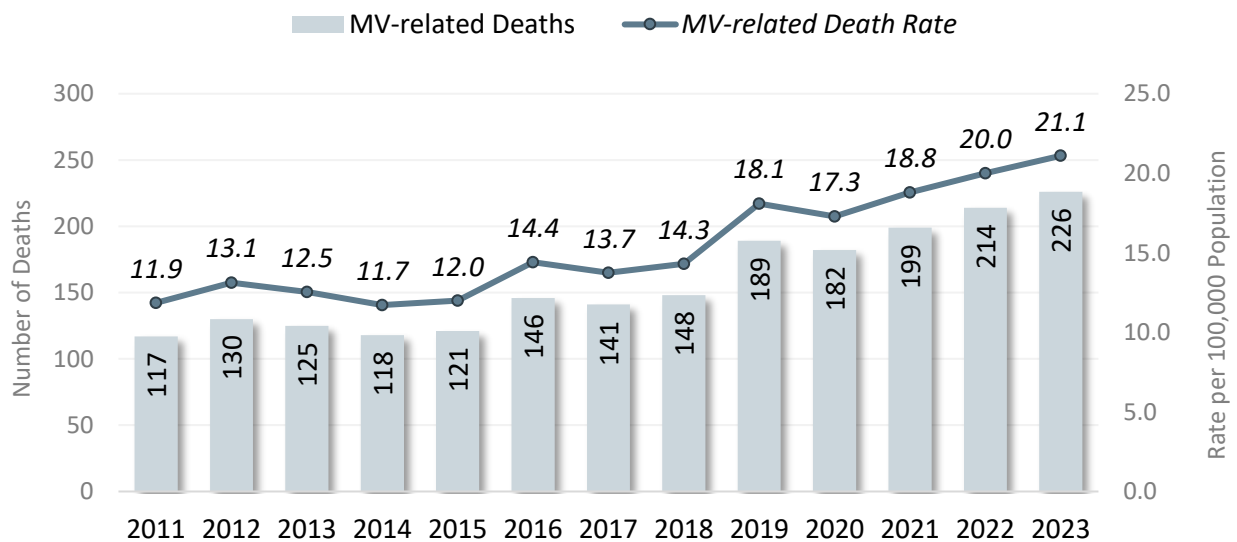
- White - 77%
- Hispanic - 18%
- American Indian/Alaska Native - 2%
- Asian/Pacific Islander - 1%
- Black/African American - 1%

## Motor Vehicle-Related

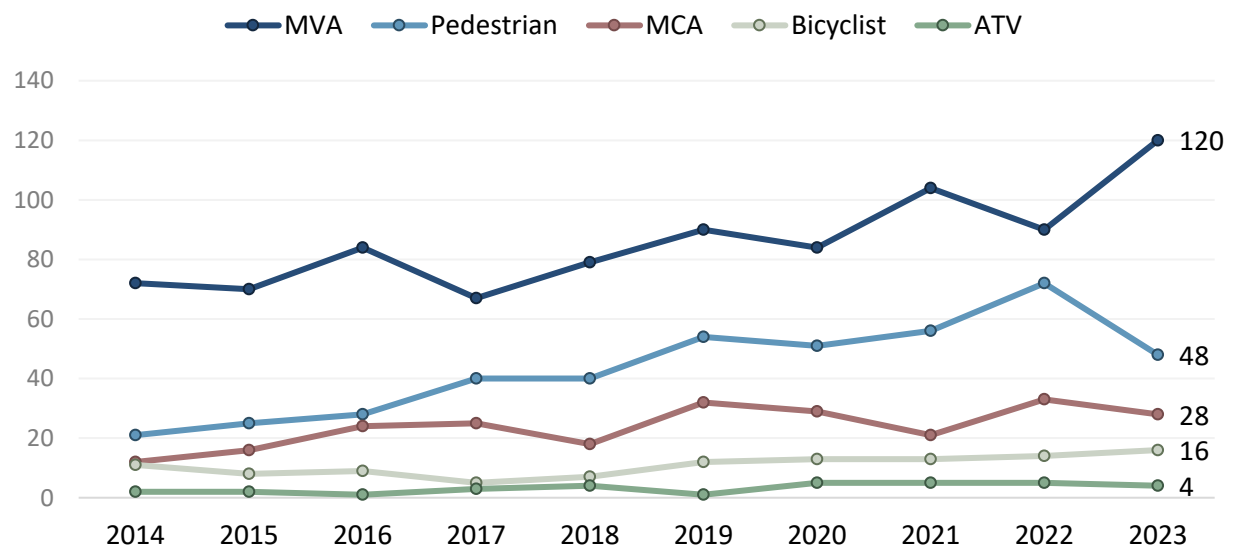
Motor vehicle-related (MV-related) deaths in Pima County have been trending upwards since 2015. In 2023, 226 deaths were due to injuries from MV-related accidents, the highest number certified by our office to date. The death rate was 21.1 per 100,000 population.

Roughly half of MV-related deaths in Pima County each year are occupants (i.e., driver or passenger) of a motor vehicle involved in an accident (MVA) and a quarter are pedestrians struck by vehicles. A smaller portion consists of motorcycle riders involved in an accident (MCA), bicyclists involved in an accident, occupants involved in all-terrain vehicle accidents (ATV), and others. In the line graph below, “other” has been removed due to low numbers (1 in 2017). From 2022 to 2023, MVA deaths increased 33% while pedestrian deaths, which peaked in 2022, decreased by 33%.

### Number and Rate of MV-Related Deaths in Pima County



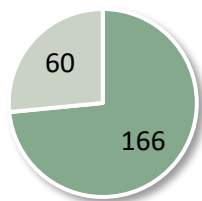
### Pima County MV-Related Deaths by Incident Type



Of 226 MV-related deaths in Pima County in 2023, 221 were certified as accidents (98%), 3 were suicides (1%), and 2 cases were certified with an undetermined manner (1%). At a ratio of nearly 8:3, more males than females died of MV-related injuries. Decedents aged 60-to-69 years old accounted for the largest portion of deaths of any age group (16%). Non-Hispanic Whites made up the largest percentage of MV-related deaths among racial groups (48%). Fifty-three percent of decedents involved in motor vehicle-related fatalities were occupants of an MVA (i.e., driver or passenger), 21% were pedestrians, 17% were motorcyclists, and the remaining 9% were either bicyclists or occupants of an ATV.

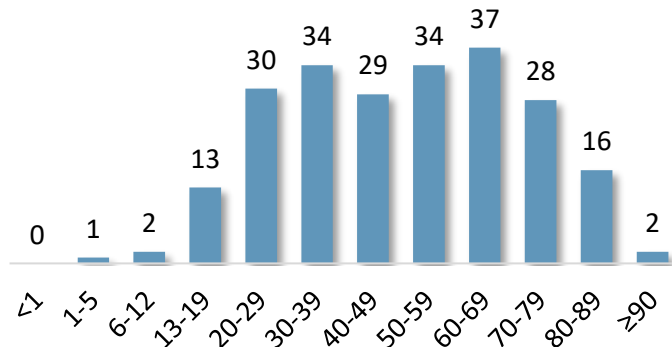
## 2023 Pima County Motor Vehicle-Related Deaths

**Decedent Sex**

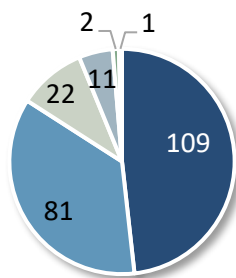


■ Male - 73%  
■ Female - 27%

**Decedent Age Group**

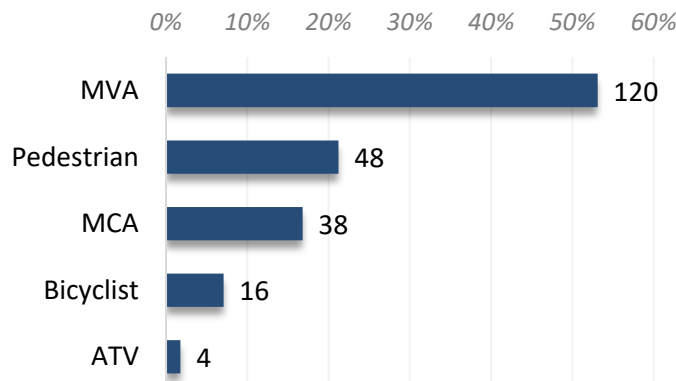


**Decedent Race/Ethnicity**



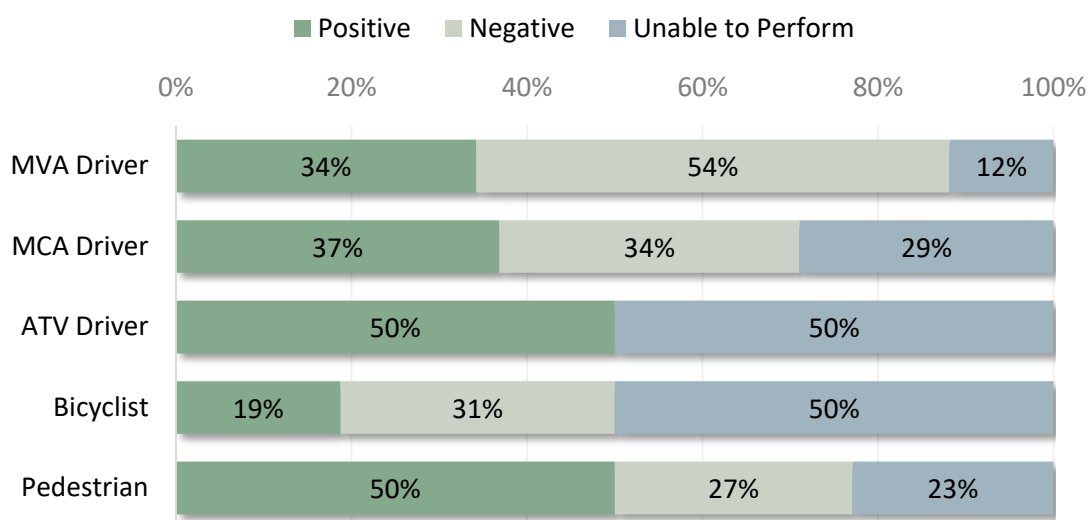
■ White - 48%  
■ Hispanic - 36%  
■ American Indian/Alaska Native - 10%  
■ Black/African American - 5%  
■ Asian/Pacific Islander - 1%  
■ Unknown - <1%

**Incident Type**



Toxicology data for MV-related deaths is limited to cases in which the PCOME was able to perform perimortem toxicology testing. In general, toxicology screening is performed when the decedent is a driver of a motor vehicle, motorcycle, or ATV, or the decedent is a bicyclist or pedestrian. A positive toxicology result indicates the decedent tested positive for ethanol ( $\geq 0.08\%$  blood alcohol content), fentanyl, methamphetamine, and/or another drug of significant interest. THC is excluded as a positive result. In 2023, 76 decedents were drivers of a motor vehicle, 38 were motorcycle drivers, 2 were drivers of an ATV, 16 were bicyclists, and 48 decedents were pedestrians. Presented below are the proportions of cases with positive and negative results and those in which toxicology was unable to be performed.

### Decedent Toxicology Screening (Drivers, Bicyclists, and Pedestrians)



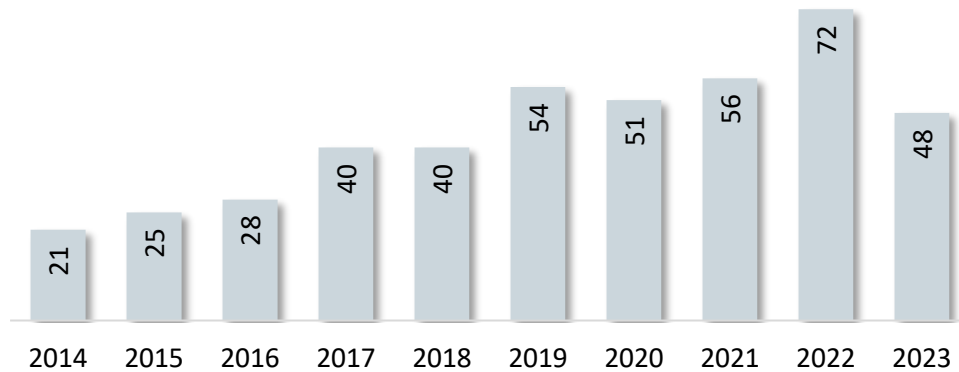
A full list of drugs detected in toxicology screenings is displayed in the following table. Please note, a death may involve multiple drugs. Ethanol was the most common drug detected among drivers (MVA, MCA, and ATV drivers). Of 3 bicyclists with positive toxicology, fentanyl and methamphetamine were the most common. In pedestrians, methamphetamine was present more than any other drug.

Frequency of Drugs Detected in Toxicology Screenings <i>n</i> (% of cases with drug detected)					
Drug Type	MVA Drivers N=76	MCA Drivers N=38	ATV Drivers N=2	Bicyclists N=16	Pedestrians N=48
Ethanol	16 (21%)	10 (26%)	1 (50%)	-	7 (15%)
Fentanyl	6 (8%)	1 (3%)	-	2 (13%)	9 (19%)
Methamphetamine	2 (3%)	2 (5%)	-	2 (13%)	17 (35%)
Cocaine	6 (8%)	1 (3%)	-	-	2 (4%)
Oxycodone	3 (4%)	1 (3%)	-	1 (6%)	-
Benzodiazepine	3 (4%)	-	-	-	-
Morphine	1 (1%)	-	-	-	-
Phenobarbital	1 (1%)	-	-	-	-
Amphetamine	-	1 (3%)	-	-	-
Methadone	-	-	-	1 (6%)	-

## Pedestrian Struck by Vehicle

In 2022, enhanced data on Pima County pedestrian deaths was included in the annual report because of a considerable increase in these types of deaths. Compared to the high of 72 deaths in 2022, there was a 33% decrease in 2023. Of 48 pedestrian deaths, 45 were certified as accidents (94%), two were certified with an undetermined manner (4%), and one was a suicide (2%).

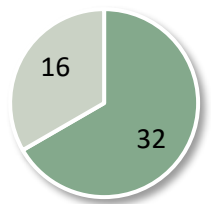
### Pedestrian Deaths in Pima County



Male decedents comprised 67% of Pima County pedestrian deaths in 2023. Decedents in their forties accounted for the largest portion of deaths of any age group (19%). Non-Hispanic Whites made up the largest percentage of pedestrian deaths among racial groups (42%).

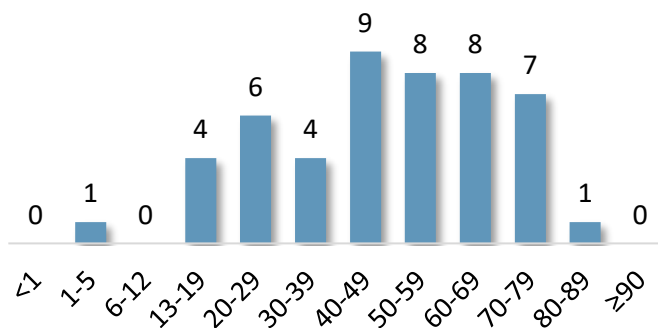
### 2023 Pima County Pedestrian Deaths

#### Decedent Sex

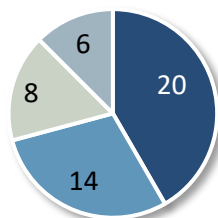


■ Male - 67%  
■ Female - 33%

#### Decedent Age Group



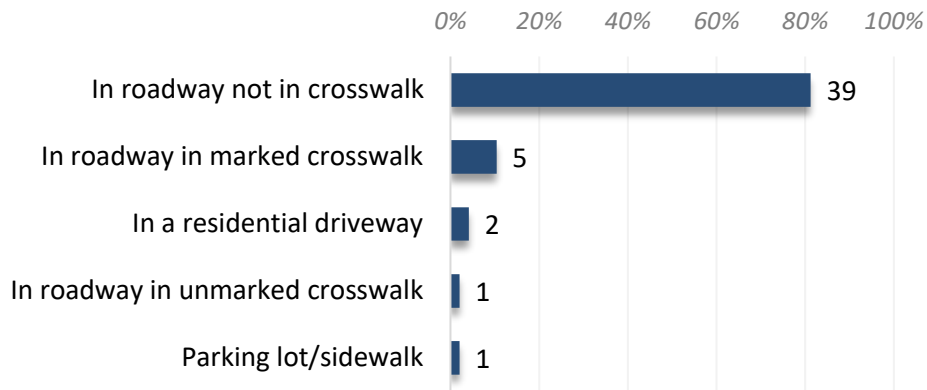
#### Decedent Race/Ethnicity



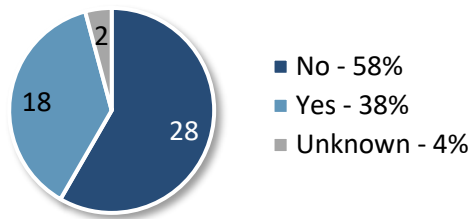
■ White - 42%  
■ Hispanic - 29%  
■ American Indian/Alaska Native - 17%  
■ Black/African American - 13%

Most Pima County pedestrian deaths occurred in a roadway not in a crosswalk (81%). Individuals experiencing homelessness at the time of death represent 38% of 2023 pedestrian deaths.

### Pedestrian Circumstance



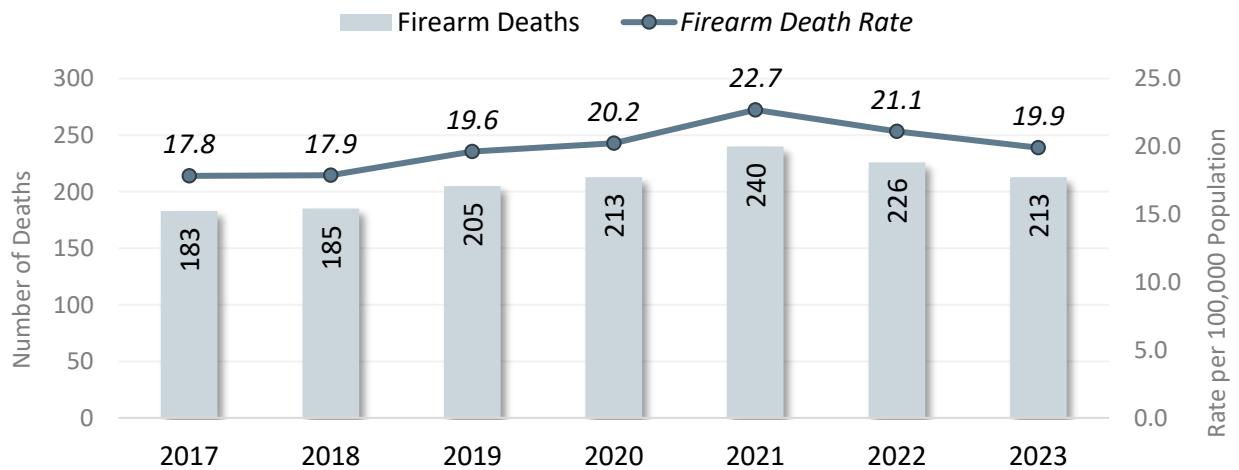
### Decedent Experiencing Homelessness at Time of Death



### Firearms

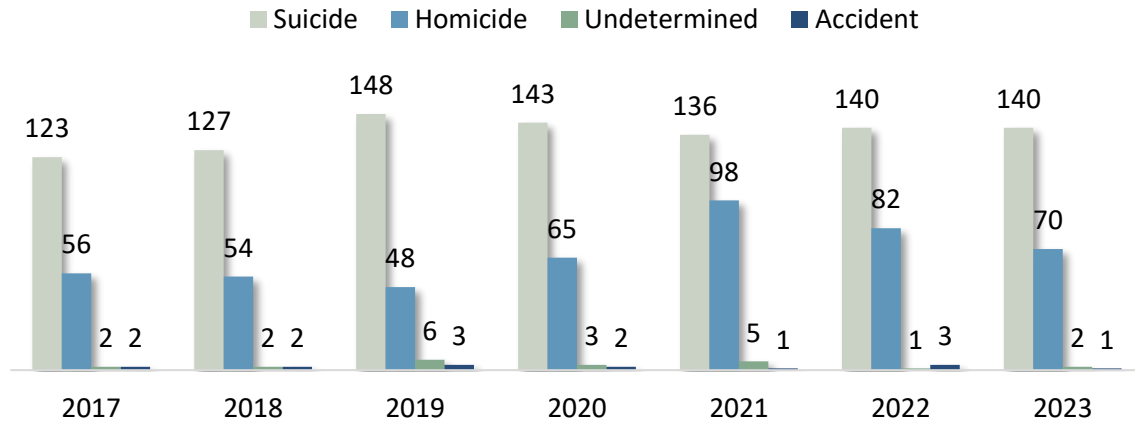
Between 2017 and 2021, firearm deaths in Pima County increased 31%, reaching a high of 240 deaths in 2021. Over the past two years, firearm deaths decreased, totaling 213 in 2023. The firearm death rate was 19.9 per 100,000 population.

### Number and Rate of Firearm Deaths in Pima County



Roughly two-thirds of Pima County firearm deaths each year are suicides and a third are homicides. In 2023, of the 213 deaths due to firearms, 66% were suicides, 33% were homicides, and 1% were certified with an undetermined manner, and <1% were accidents.

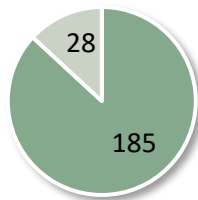
### Pima County Firearm Deaths by MOD



Male decedents comprised 87% of 2023 firearm deaths in Pima County. The largest proportion of deaths of any age group were decedents aged 30-39 years old (18%). Non-Hispanic Whites made up the largest percentage among racial groups (54%).

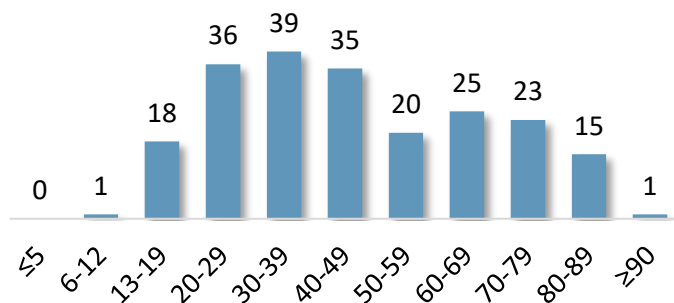
### 2023 Pima County Firearm Deaths

#### Decedent Sex

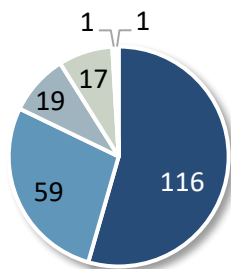


- Male - 87%
- Female - 13%

#### Decedent Age Group



#### Decedent Race/Ethnicity



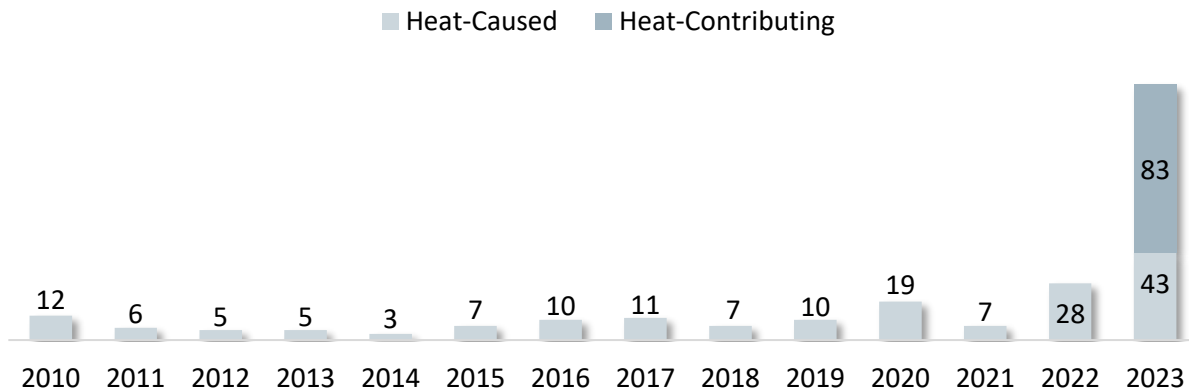
- White - 54%
- Hispanic - 28%
- Black/African American - 9%
- American Indian/Alaska Native - 8%
- Asian/Pacific Islander - <1%
- Unknown - <1%

## Heat-Related

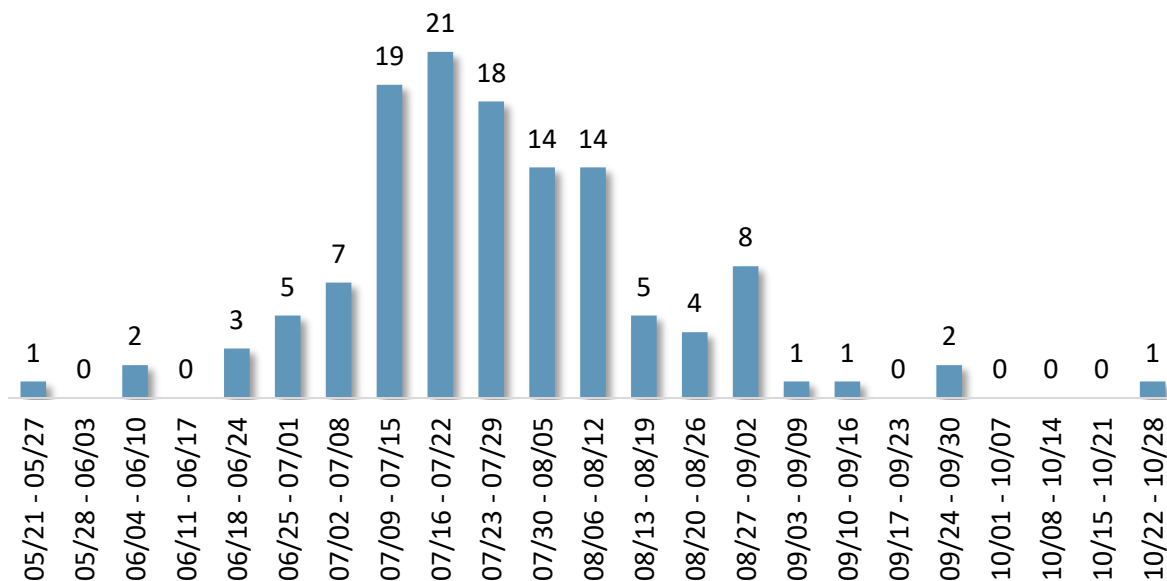
Heat-related deaths include deaths where environmental heat exposure is either the primary cause of death (heat-caused) or a significant contributing factor to the death (heat-contributing). In 2023, tracking of heat-related deaths was expanded to include the latter category. **Therefore, data on heat-contributing deaths is available for 2023 only, whereas data on heat-caused deaths is available dating back to 2010.** Heat-related deaths in undocumented border crossers (UBCs) are excluded from this dataset and can be found in the [UBC section](#) of this report and on the [PCOME Heat-Related Deaths dashboard](#).

In 2023, there were 126 heat-related deaths in Pima County; 43 were heat-caused (34%) and 83 were heat-contributing (66%). The heat-related death rate was 11.8 per 100,000 population. Heat-related deaths peaked in July (68 deaths, 54%) and August (42 deaths, 33%). The week of July 16 – 22, 2023 recorded the highest number of heat-related deaths in a one-week period (21 deaths, 17%). All but one heat-related death in 2023 were certified as accidents; one case (heat-contributing death) was certified with an undetermined manner.

### Pima County Heat-Related Deaths



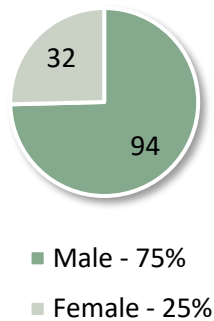
### 2023 Heat-Related Deaths by Week



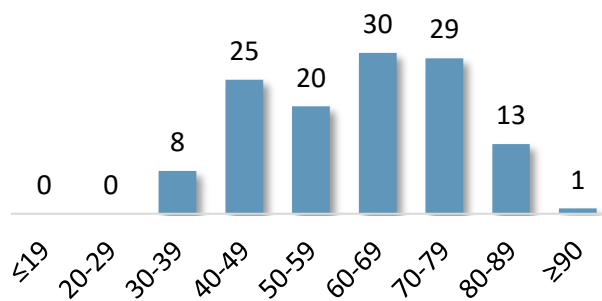
In 2023, the ratio of male to female decedents of heat-related deaths was nearly 3:1. Decedents aged 60-to-69 years old accounted for the largest portion of deaths of any age group (24%), followed closely by decedents in their seventies (23%). Non-Hispanic Whites made up the largest percentage of deaths among racial groups (64%). Of 126 heat-related deaths, 44 were due to overdose with heat as a contributing factor (35%), 43 were due to environmental heat exposure as a primary cause of death (34%), 35 were due to natural causes with heat as a contributing factor (28%), and 4 deaths were due to other causes with heat as a contributing factor (3%). Detailed data on heat-related deaths by place of injury and housing status is displayed in the table and graph on the following page.

## 2023 Pima County Heat-Related Deaths

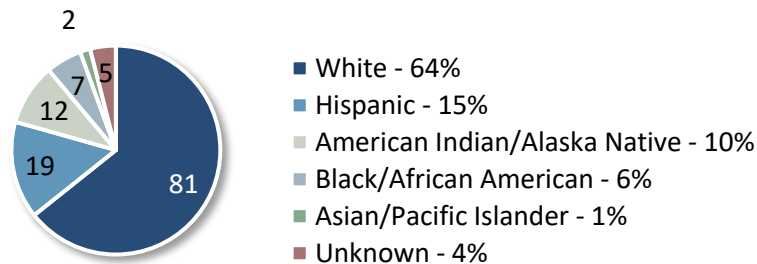
**Decedent Sex**



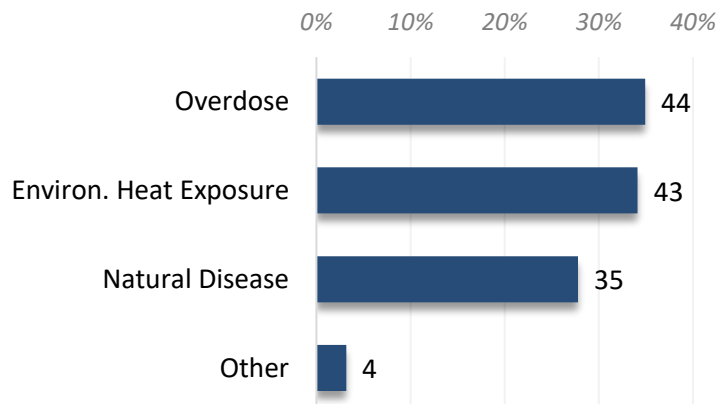
**Decedent Age Group**



**Decedent Race/Ethnicity**



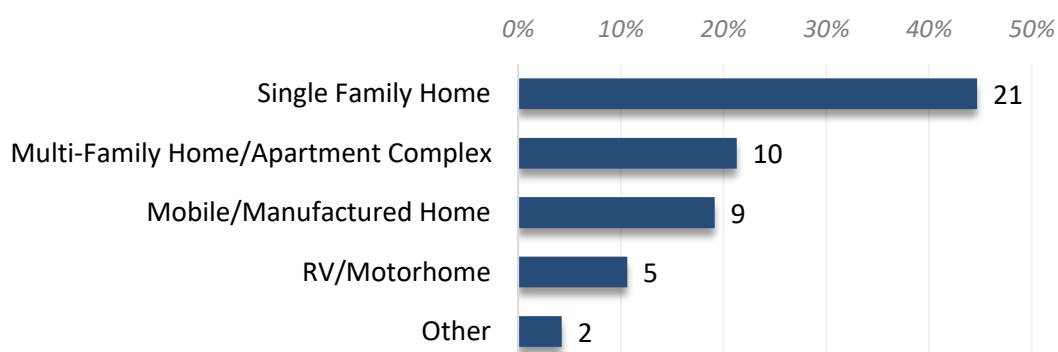
**Heat-Related Deaths by Primary Cause**



### 2023 Pima County Heat-Related Deaths by Place of Injury and Housing Status n (%)

Characteristic	Indoor N=47	Outdoor, Not Experiencing Homelessness N=34	Outdoor, Experiencing Homelessness N=45
<b>Sex</b>			
Male	30 (64%)	23 (68%)	41 (91%)
Female	17 (36%)	11 (32%)	4 (9%)
<b>Age Group</b>			
20 – 29	-	-	-
30 – 39	1 (2%)	1 (3%)	6 (13%)
40 – 49	2 (4%)	5 (15%)	18 (40%)
50 – 59	6 (13%)	5 (15%)	9 (20%)
60 – 69	15 (32%)	4 (12%)	11 (25%)
70 – 79	17 (36%)	11 (32%)	1 (2%)
80 – 89	6 (13%)	7 (20%)	-
≥90	-	1 (3%)	-
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>			
White	34 (72%)	20 (59%)	27 (60%)
Hispanic	4 (9%)	7 (20%)	8 (18%)
American Indian/Alaska Native	6 (13%)	3 (9%)	3 (7%)
Black/African American	1 (2%)	1 (3%)	5 (11%)
Asian/Pacific Islander	-	2 (6%)	-
Unknown	2 (4%)	1 (3%)	2 (4%)
<b>Primary Cause</b>			
Environmental Heat Exposure	21 (45%)	10 (29%)	12 (27%)
Overdose	7 (15%)	7 (21%)	30 (67%)
Natural Disease	18 (38%)	14 (41%)	3 (6%)
Other	1 (2%)	3 (9%)	-

### Indoor Heat-Related Deaths by Housing Type



## Special Populations

### Individuals Experiencing Homelessness

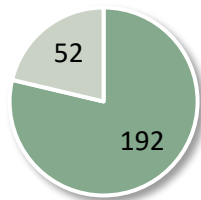
#### Caveats concerning the interpretation of decedents experiencing homelessness at time of death:

- These figures are not inclusive of all deaths of individuals experiencing homelessness in Pima County. Data is limited to deaths certified by the PCOME. Homelessness, in and of itself, is not an OME reporting criteria (see [Jurisdiction](#) section of this report).
- During an initial death report to the PCOME, a death investigator will populate a “yes” or “no” in the homeless data field in our electronic case management system based upon the information provided by law enforcement and/or the reporting agency. Starting in 2022, additional data sources were used by PCOME staff to confirm homelessness and enhance the accuracy of homelessness data (e.g., next of kin, medical records, death certificates); data prior to 2022 should be interpreted with caution.
- Homelessness in this data set is defined as living in a place not meant for human habitation, in an emergency shelter, or residing in a hotel/motel (for days to months).

Of 2,142 Pima County ME cases in 2023, a total of 244 decedents (11%) were identified as experiencing homelessness at time of death. Decedents within this population were most frequently male (79%), aged 50-to-59 years old (29%), and non-Hispanic White (54%).

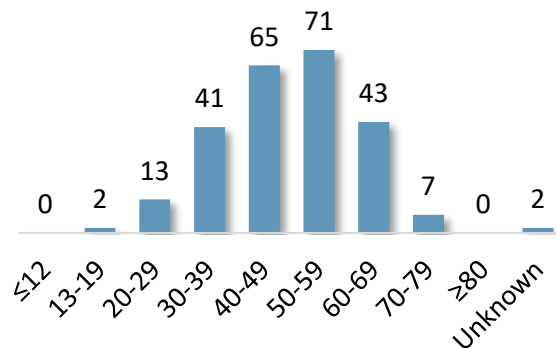
#### 2023 Pima County Deaths in Individuals Experiencing Homelessness

**Decedent Sex**

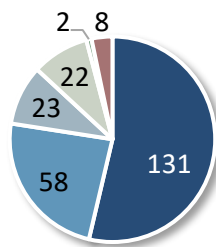


■ Male - 79%  
■ Female - 21%

**Decedent Age Group**



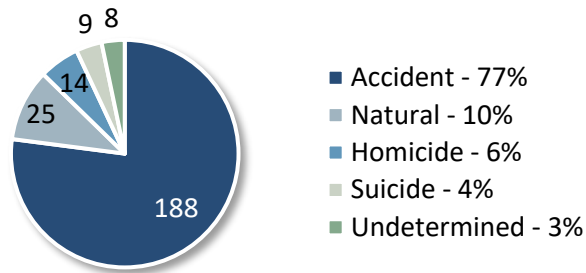
**Decedent Race/Ethnicity**



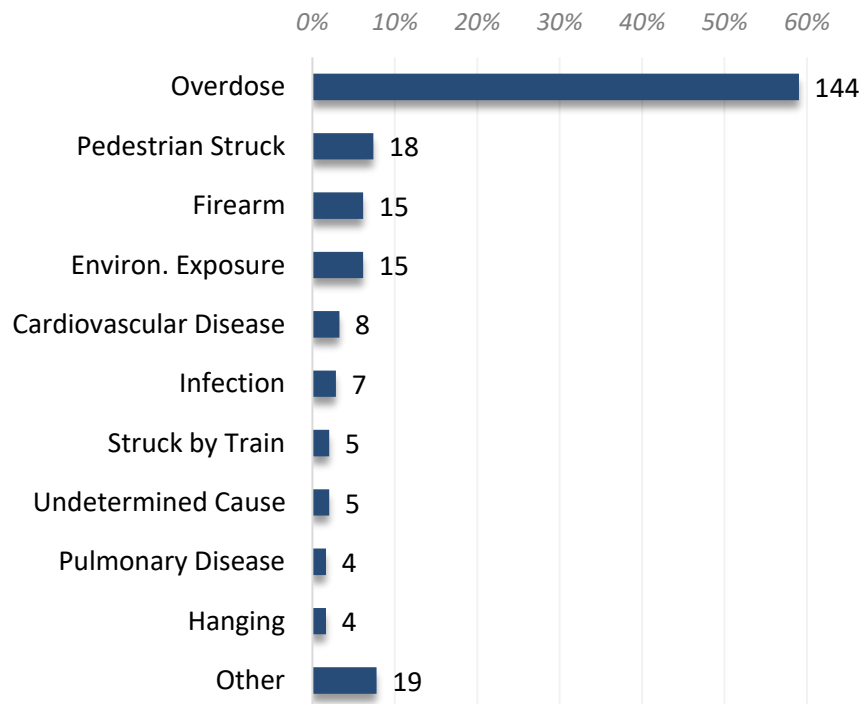
■ White - 54%  
■ Hispanic - 24%  
■ Black/African American - 9%  
■ American Indian/Alaska Native - 9%  
■ Asian/Pacific Islander - 1%  
■ Unknown - 3%

More deaths of individuals experiencing homelessness were certified as accidents (77%) than any other MOD. The most common cause/circumstance of death in this population was overdose (59%), followed by pedestrians struck by a vehicle (7%), firearms (6%), and environmental exposure (6%).

### Manner of Death



### Cause/Circumstance of Death



## Infants

The PCOME certified 8 infant deaths (less than one year old, excludes fetal deaths) in Pima County in 2023: six undetermined manner deaths (75%), 1 accident (13%), and 1 natural death (13%). Demographic data and cause of death for infant deaths are detailed in the graphs below.

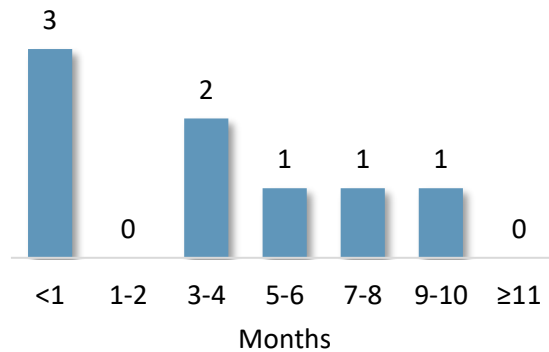
### 2023 Pima County Infant Deaths

**Decedent Sex**

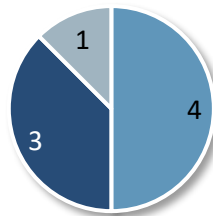


■ Male - 50%  
■ Female - 50%

**Decedent Age (in months)**

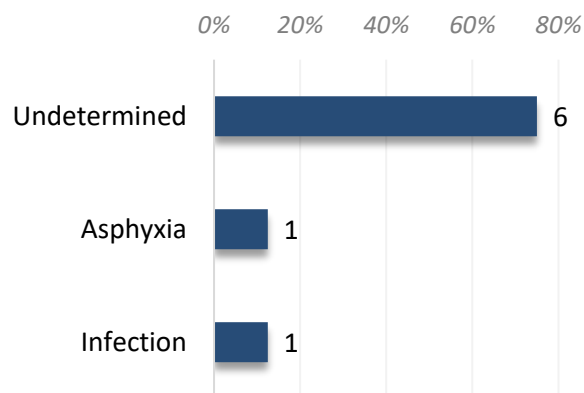


**Decedent Race/Ethnicity**



■ Hispanic - 50%  
■ White - 38%  
■ Black/African American - 13%

**Cause of Death**



## Indigent Interment Program

Legal responsibility for interment (final disposition) of a decedent rest with the next of kin (NOK) as determined pursuant to **A.R.S. §36-831**. In Pima County, if NOK are financially unable to pay for arrangements or the decedent is unclaimed or abandoned, Pima County may provide interment services through the Indigent Interment Program (IIP). In general, IIP applications can be divided into those that are approved for County assistance and those that are declined. The PCOME has served as the appointed administrator of Pima County's IIP and Pima County Cemetery (PCC) since September 2018. The County Public Fiduciary's Office was the appointed administrator prior to the PCOME.

The PCC, located in the northwest corner of Evergreen Cemetery, contains over 5,000 burial plots and four columbaria. Between 50-60% of decedents approved through the IIP each year are either buried or interred as cremains at the PCC.

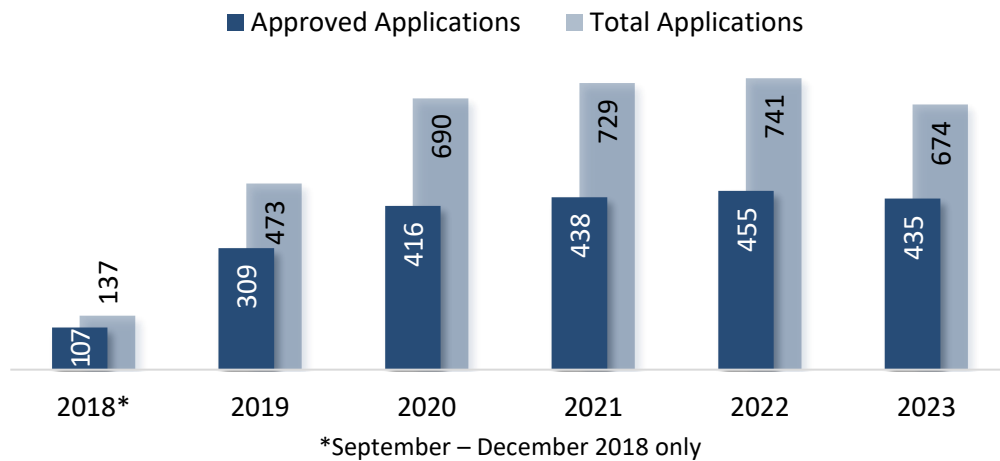
### Key terms used for the IIP:

- **Application Status**
  - **Approved:** The interment of the decedent's remains was funded by the County.
  - **Declined:** The interment of the decedent's remains was not funded by the County and family, guardians, or local assistance groups assume responsibility for the disposition of the remains.
- **Qualifying Conditions**
  - **Abandonment:** The decedent's NOK are known but fail or refuse to make interment arrangements for the decedent.
  - **Met poverty standard:** The decedent's NOK are known and meet current federal poverty guidelines as promulgated by the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services; therefore, NOK qualify for government interment assistance.
  - **No NOK:** A search is conducted for family members of a decedent to locate any known NOK who might make interment arrangements, but no NOK are found.
  - **Unidentified:** The identity of the decedent is unknown and therefore NOK and financial status is unknown.
- **Final Disposition of the Remains**
  - **Burial:** The decedent is interred either at the PCC or other cemetery as buried remains (not cremated or otherwise altered).
  - **Cremation:** The decedent is interred as cremains in one of four columbaria at the PCC, a columbarium at another cemetery, or released to NOK for their retention.

## Applications and Approvals

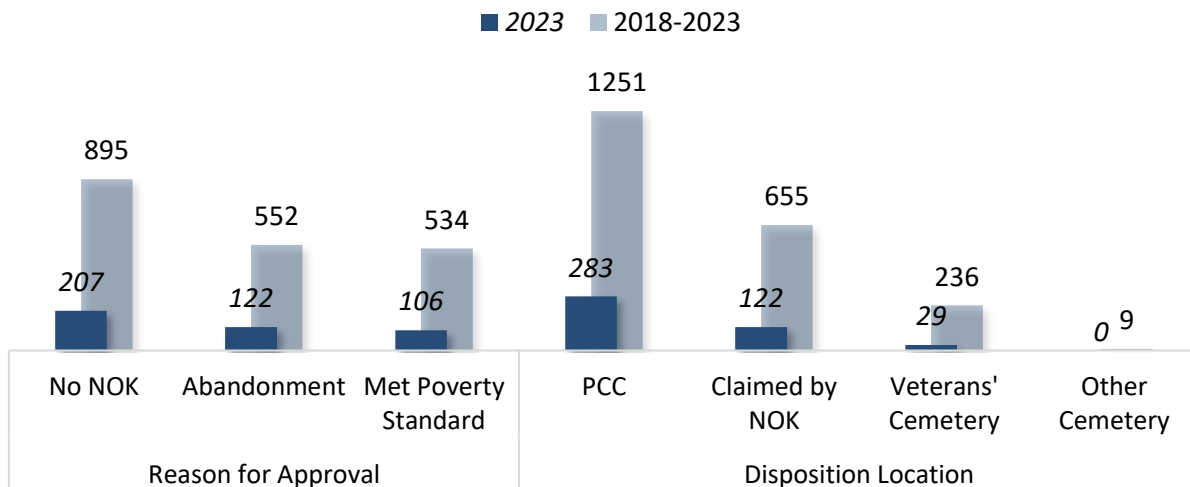
On average, the number of IIP applications received by the PCOME represents 5% of the total deaths in Pima County in that year. Of the applications received, roughly 60% are approved each year. In 2023, the PCOME received 674 IIP applications (671 applications for decedents in Pima County and 3 applications for decedents in other counties). Of these, 435 applications were approved (62%). Applications for decedents who died outside of Pima County and are not Pima County residents (e.g., a Cochise County resident who dies in Cochise County) do not qualify for the Pima County IIP and were declined (3 applications).

### IIP Applications and Approvals by Year



Overall, the most common qualifying condition for IIP approvals is no NOK. Of the approved applications in 2023, 207 qualified based on no NOK (48%), 122 for abandonment (28%), and 106 met the poverty standard (24%); all resulted in cremation as the final disposition of the remains. Disposition locations are displayed in the graph below.

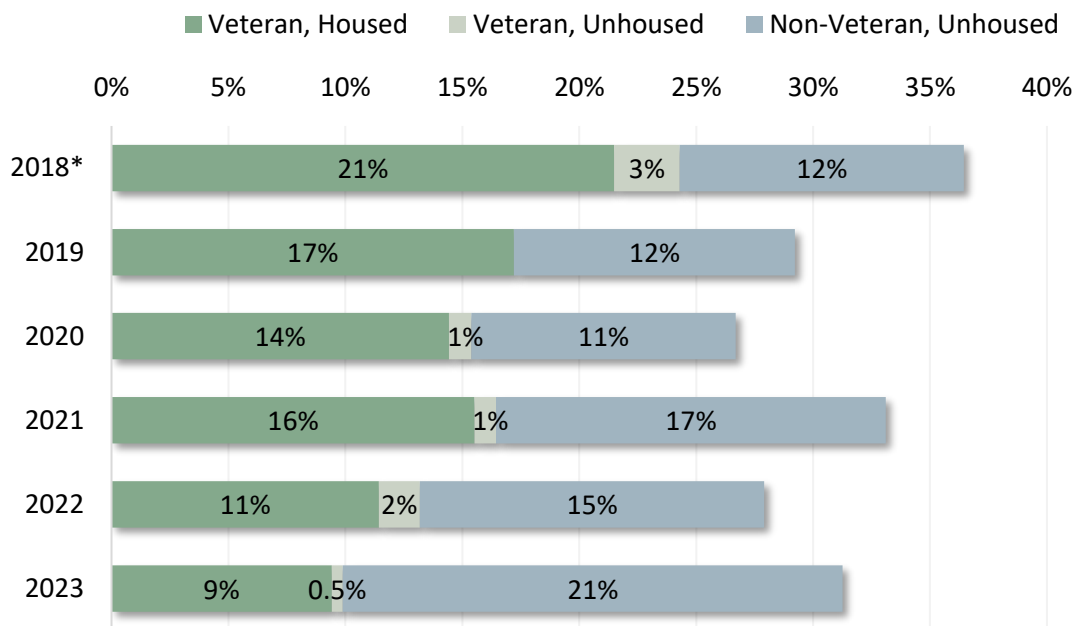
### Approvals by Qualifying Condition and Final Disposition Location



### Special Interest Groups

On average, veterans and decedents experiencing homelessness at time of death each represent 16% of approved IIP applications in a year. Out of the 435 approved applications in 2023, 43 were veterans (10%), 41 housed and 2 unhoused. A total of 95 decedents experiencing homelessness were approved (22%), 93 non-veterans and 2 veterans. For both veterans and decedents experiencing homelessness, the most common qualifying condition for 2023 IIP approvals was no NOK (63% and 54%, respectively). Most veterans are interred at a Veterans' Memorial Cemetery (63%) whereas most unhoused decedents are interred at the PCC (74%).

#### Proportion of Special Interest Groups in IIP Approvals

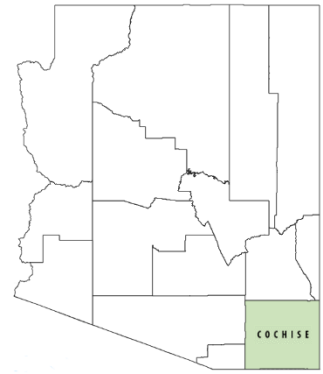


\*September – December 2018 only

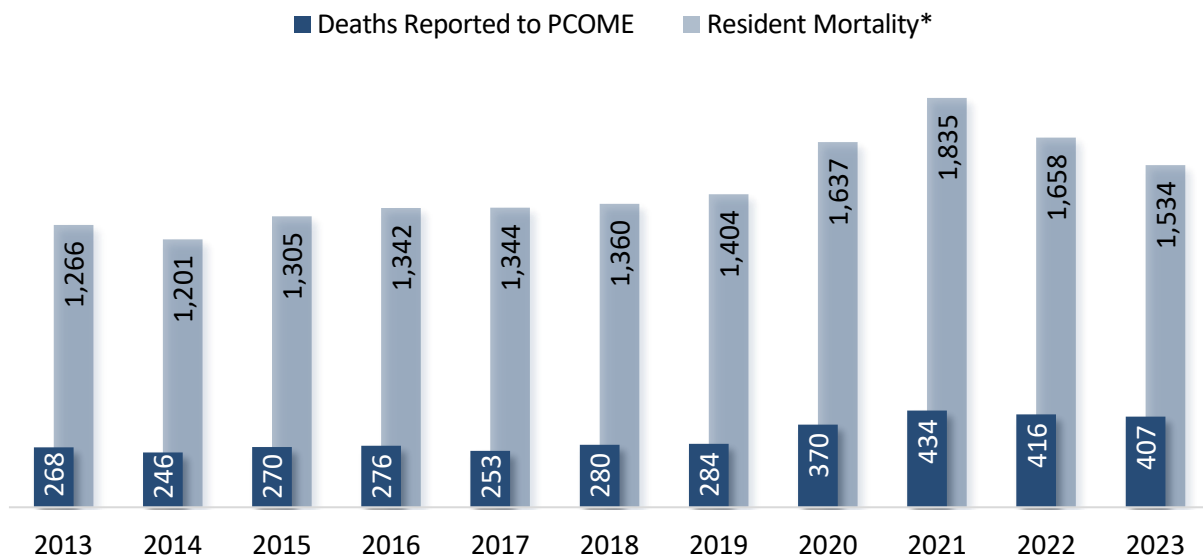
2023 Pima County Approved IIP Applications for Special Interest Group n (%)		
IIP Approval Details	Veterans N=43	Decedents Experiencing Homelessness N=95
<b>Reason for IIP Approval</b>		
No NOK	27 (62.8%)	51 (54%)
Abandonment	8 (18.6%)	28 (29%)
Met Poverty Standard	8 (18.6%)	16 (17%)
<b>Disposition Location</b>		
Pima County Cemetery	9 (21%)	70 (74%)
Claimed by NOK	7 (16%)	24 (25%)
Veterans' Memorial Cemetery	27 (63%)	1 (1%)

## Cochise County

Beginning July 1, 2012, Cochise County contracts with the PCOME to certify deaths that fall under the jurisdiction of the medical examiner in Cochise County. In 2023, there were 1,534 total deaths of Cochise County residents; 407 deaths (27%) were reported to the PCOME for investigation. The PCOME accepted jurisdiction of 243 cases (60% of deaths reported), representing 16% of Cochise County resident mortality\* in 2023. One fetal death case is excluded from manner and cause of death data in the proceeding sections.

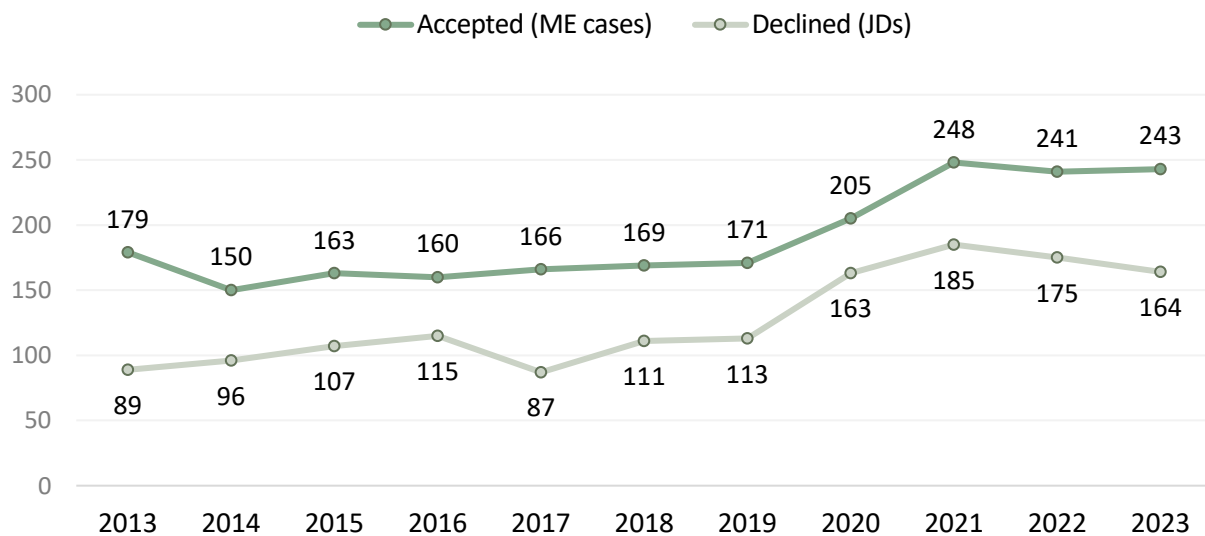


### Cochise County Resident Mortality and Reported Deaths



\*Cochise County resident mortality from Arizona Department of Health Services Vital Statistics as of 1/29/2024

### Jurisdictional Disposition of Cochise County Reported Deaths

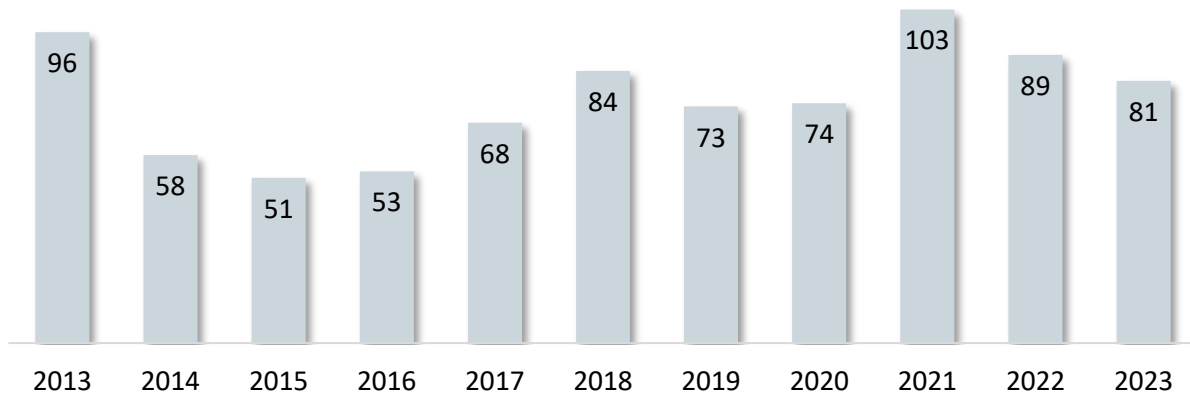


## Natural Deaths

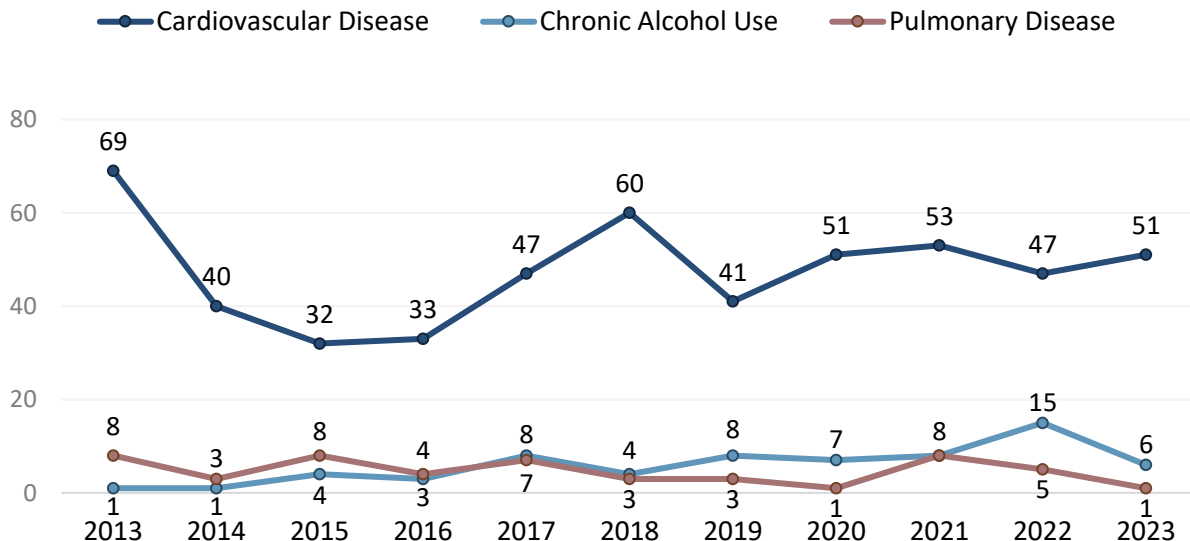
**Natural death data in this report is limited to deaths certified by the PCOME (ME cases) and does not reflect the total number of natural deaths in Cochise County.** Most natural deaths that occur in a county do not fall under the jurisdiction of a medical examiner and instead, are certified by a decedent's healthcare provider. The PCOME accepts jurisdiction of cases that appear to be natural deaths if the decedent is not in the care of a healthcare provider, dies while in custody, is unidentified, and/or a previously healthy individual dies suddenly/unexpectedly, as determined by the PCOME. Natural death data should be interpreted with caution as the PCOME is not aware of the number of natural deaths certified by physicians in the community.

A total of 81 Cochise County deaths were certified as natural by the PCOME in 2023 (33% of Cochise County ME cases). On average, nearly two-thirds of PCOME-certified natural deaths in Cochise County are due to cardiovascular disease.

### Cochise County Natural Deaths Certified by the PCOME



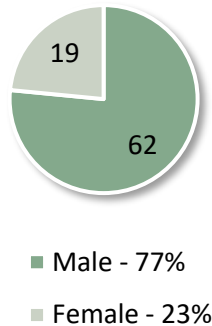
### Top Causes of Cochise County Natural Deaths (ME Cases Only)



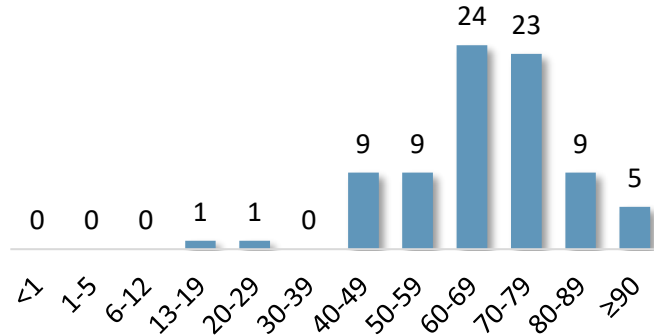
Male decedents comprised 77% of Cochise County natural deaths certified by the PCOME. Decedents aged 60-to-69 years old accounted for the largest portion of natural deaths of any age group (30%), followed closely by decedents aged 70-79 years old (28%). Non-Hispanic Whites made up the largest percentage of deaths among all racial groups (79%). Cardiovascular disease was the most common cause of death (63%), followed by nonspecific natural causes (11%), and chronic alcohol use (7%).

### 2023 Cochise County Natural Deaths (ME Cases Only)

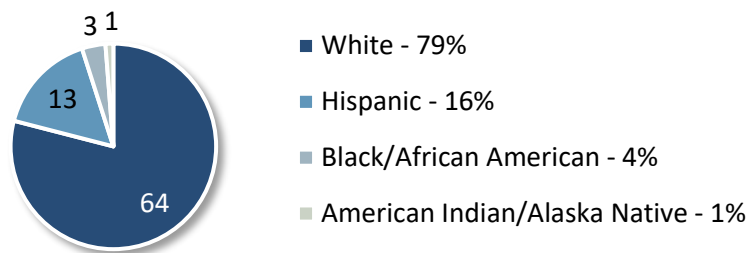
**Decedent Sex**



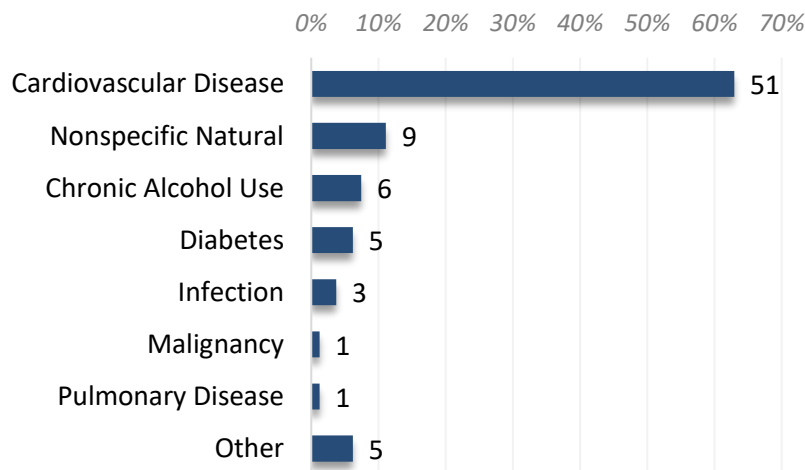
**Decedent Age Group**



**Decedent Race/Ethnicity**



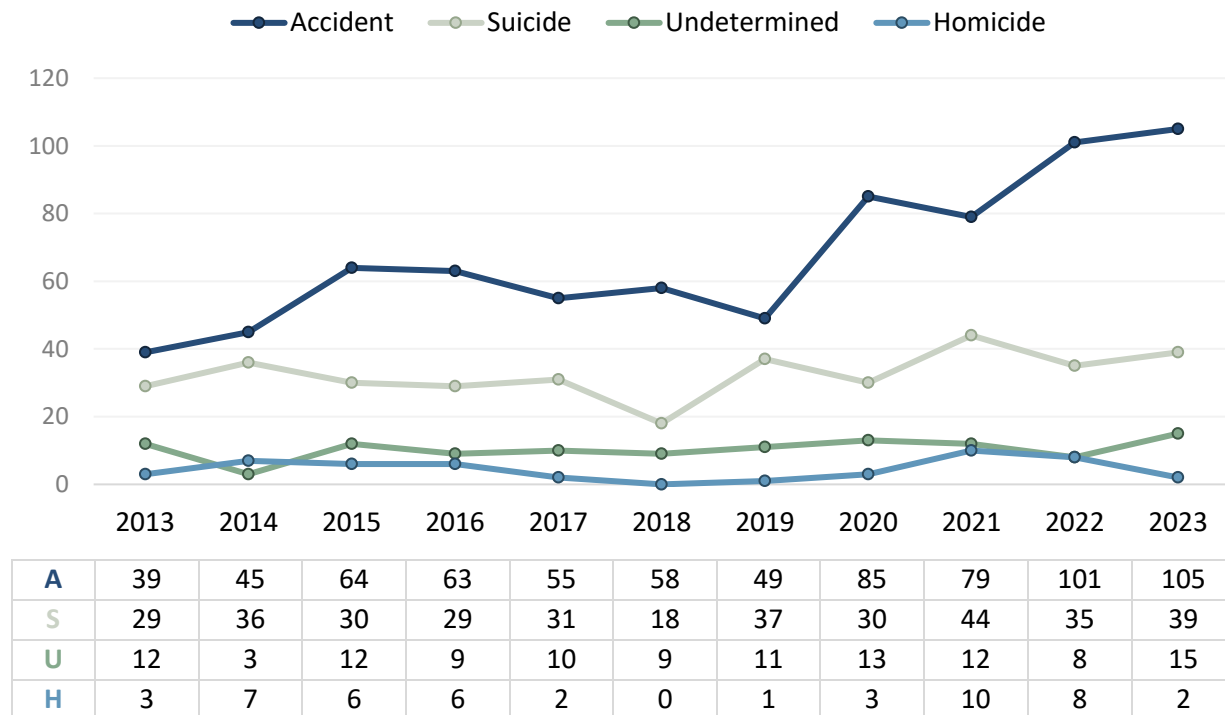
**Cause of Death**



## Non-Natural Manner Deaths

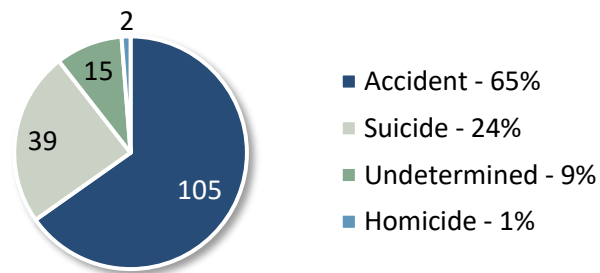
Non-natural manner of death (MOD) classifications include accident, homicide, suicide, and undetermined. The graph below displays Cochise County ME Cases by non-natural MOD from 2013 to 2023. Accidental deaths have increased markedly since 2019, reaching a high of 105 in 2023. Suicides in Cochise County have fluctuated over the past several years but overall, have been on an upward trend since 2018. Undetermined manner deaths have remained relatively low and unchanged year to year. Homicides reached a high of 10 in 2021 and have decreased in subsequent years.

### Cochise County ME Cases by Non-Natural MOD



In total, the PCOME certified 161 deaths in Cochise County with a non-natural manner in 2023; accident deaths made up the largest proportion (65%); the other 35% were comprised of suicides (24%), homicides (1%), and undetermined manner deaths (9%).

### 2023 Cochise County Non-Natural Manner Deaths

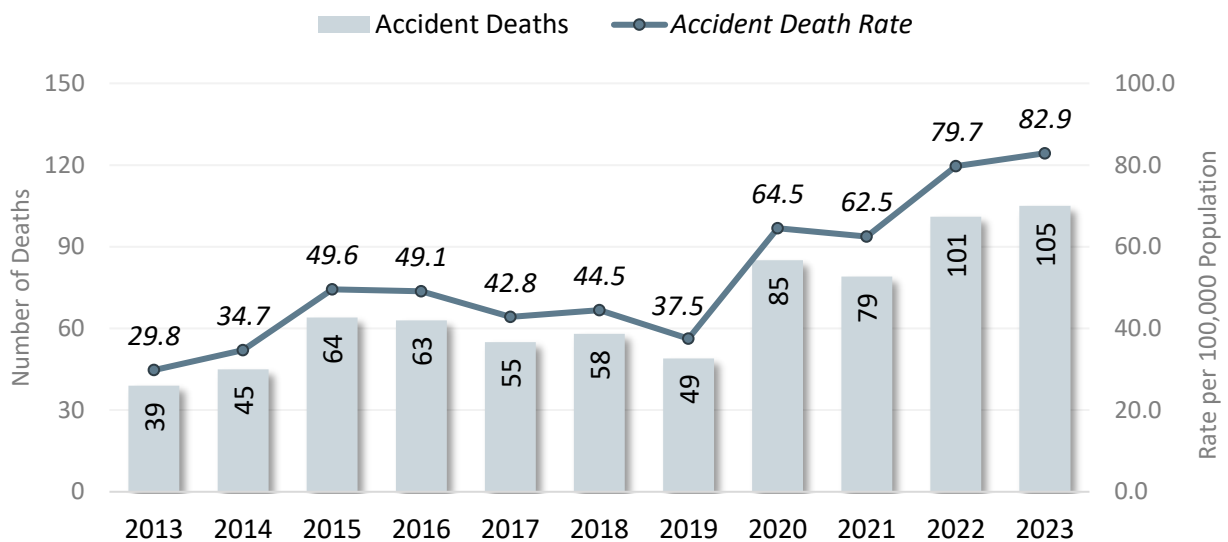


## Accident

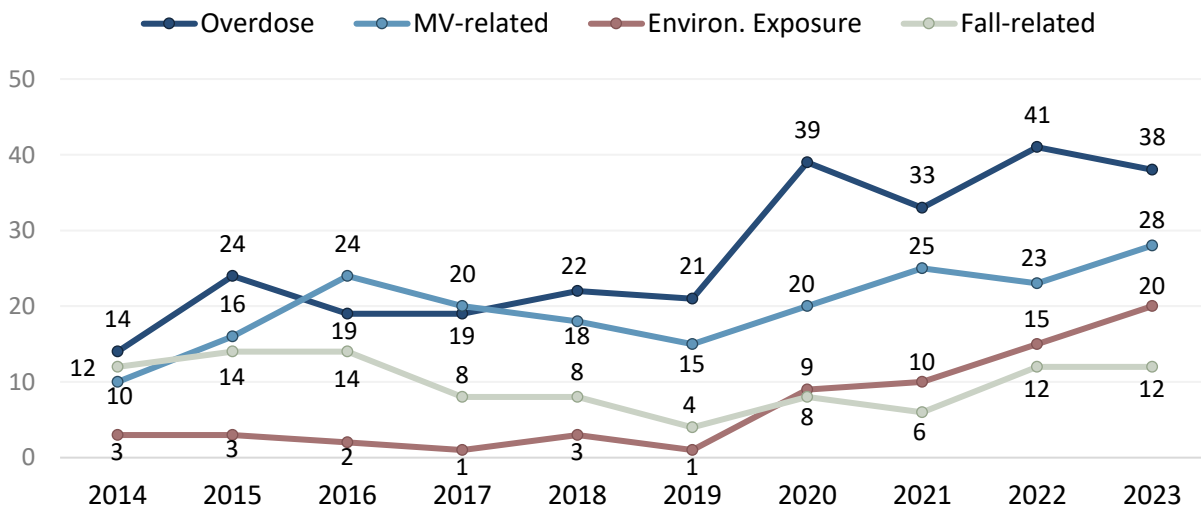
Cochise County deaths certified as accidents in 2023 represent the highest number certified by the PCOME to date (105 cases). The greatest increase in accident deaths was between 2019 and 2020, a 73% increase. Since then, an average of 93 Cochise County deaths are certified as accidents each year. In 2023, the accident death rate was 82.9 per 100,000 population. Please note that at the time this report was written, Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS) had not yet released population statistics for 2023. Therefore, **2023 death rates were calculated using 2022 population size and are subject to change.**

For the sixth year in a row, overdose is the top cause of accident deaths in Cochise County and injuries from motor vehicle-related (MV-related) accidents is the second leading cause. In 2020, environmental exposure deaths exceeded fall-related accident deaths as the third leading cause; it remains the third leading cause in 2023 and has more than doubled in number since 2020.

### Number and Rate of Accident Deaths in Cochise County



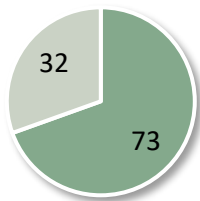
### Top Causes of Cochise County Accident Deaths



Male decedents comprised 70% of Cochise County accident deaths in 2023. Decedents aged 50-to-59 years old accounted for the largest portion of accident deaths of any age group (19%). Non-Hispanic Whites made up the largest percentage of deaths among all racial groups (54%). Overdose was the most common cause of death (36%), followed by injuries from MV-related accidents (27%), and environmental exposure (19%).

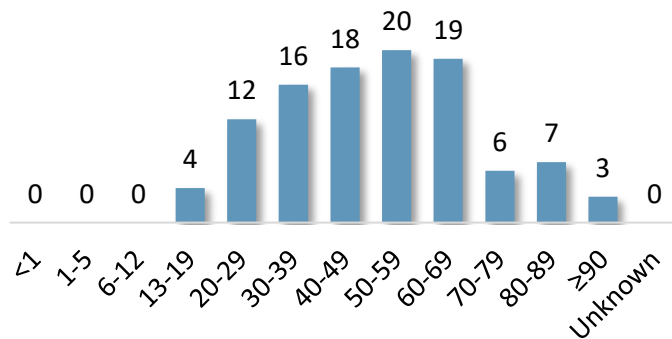
## **2023 Cochise County Accident Deaths**

**Decedent Sex**

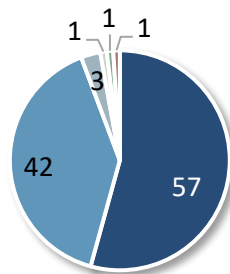


■ Male - 70%  
■ Female - 30%

**Decedent Age Group**

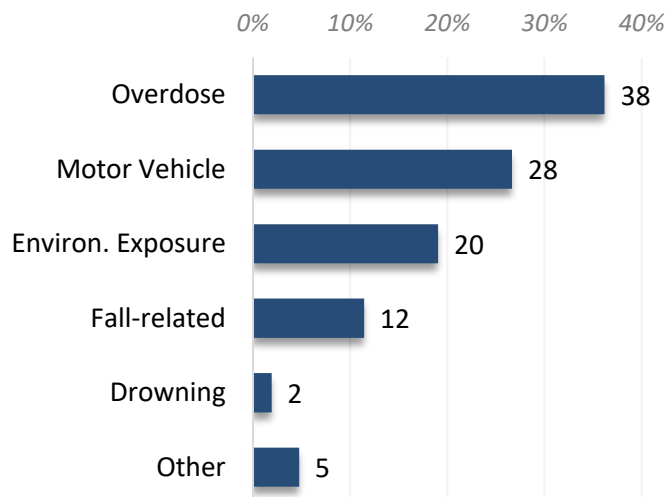


**Decedent Race/Ethnicity**



■ White - 54%  
■ Hispanic - 40%  
■ Black/African American - 3%  
■ American Indian/Alaska Native - 1%  
■ Asian/Pacific Islander - 1%  
■ Unknown - 1%

**Cause of Death**

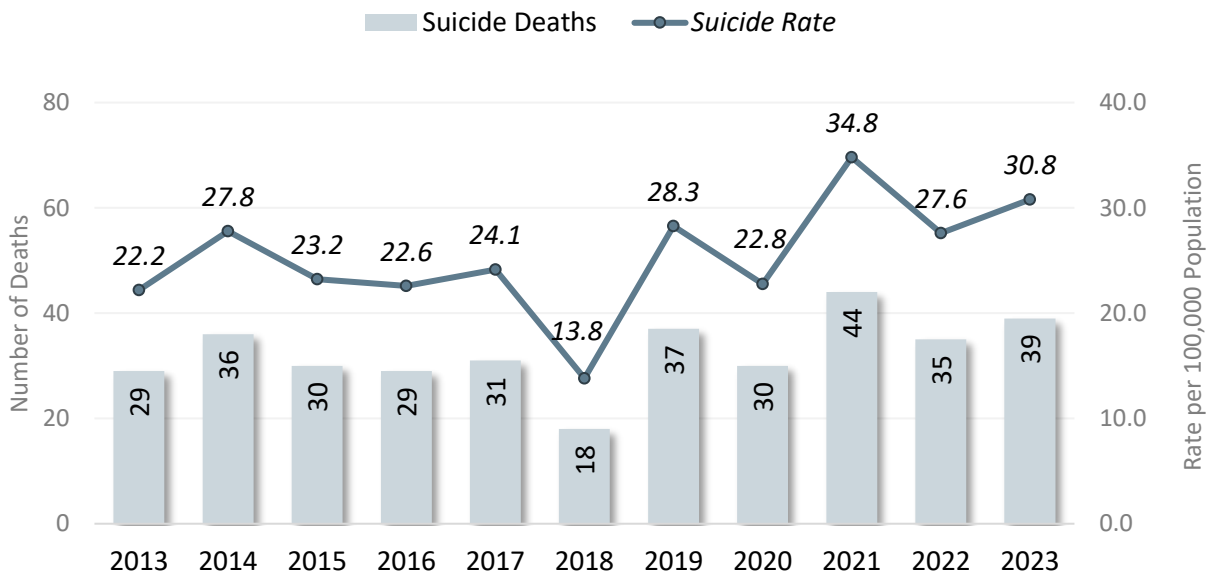


## Suicide

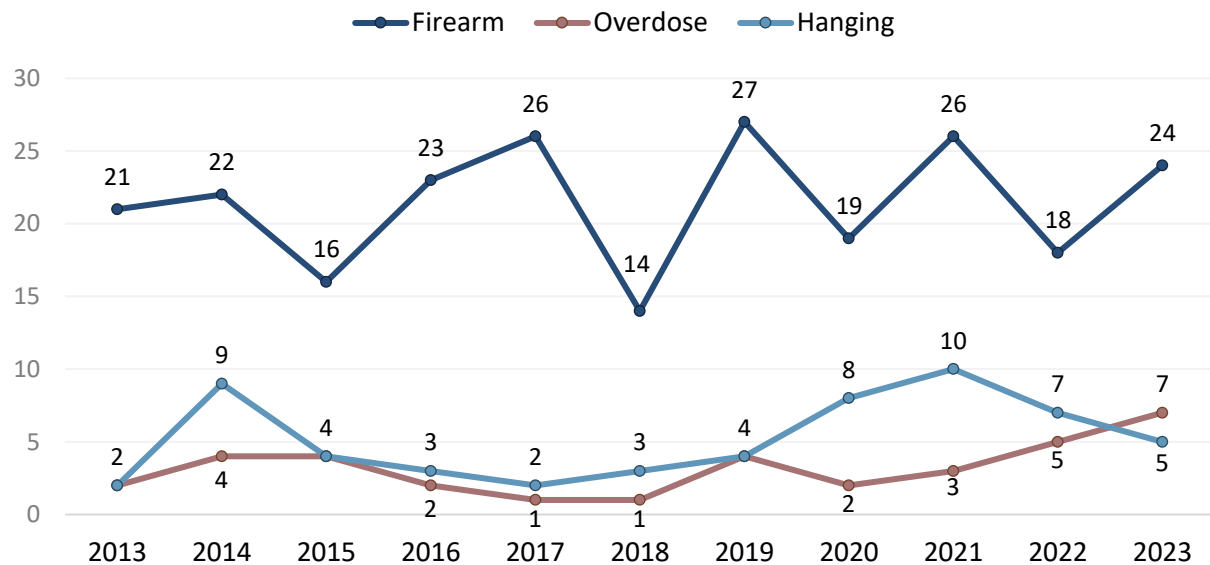
In 2023, 39 Cochise County deaths were certified as suicides by the PCOME, and the suicide rate was 30.8 per 100,000 population. Please note that at the time this report was written, Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS) had not yet released population statistics for 2022. Therefore, **2022 death rates were calculated using 2021 population size and are subject to change.**

Firearms continue to be the most common means of Cochise County suicide deaths investigated by the PCOME. Suicides by hanging decreased for the second year in a row, while suicides by overdose have increased annually since 2020.

### Number and Rate of Suicides in Cochise County



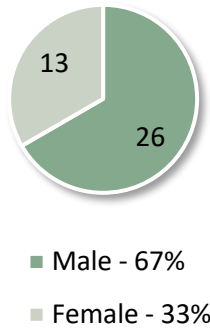
### Top Causes of Cochise County Suicides



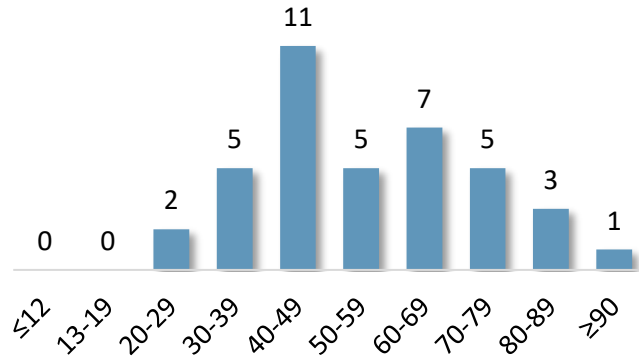
Individuals who died by suicide in Cochise County in 2023 were most frequently male (67%); between 40-49 years of age (28%); and non-Hispanic White (90%). In 2023, the number of suicides by firearm (n=24, 62%) was 3.4 times higher than the next leading means of suicide, overdose (n=7, 18%).

### 2023 Cochise County Suicides

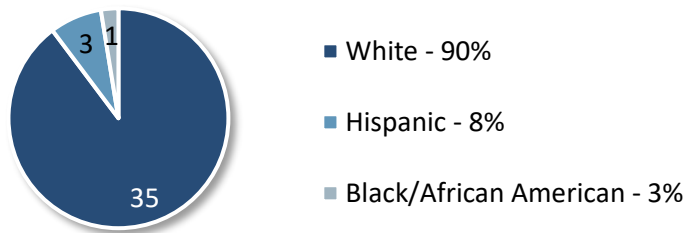
#### Decedent Sex



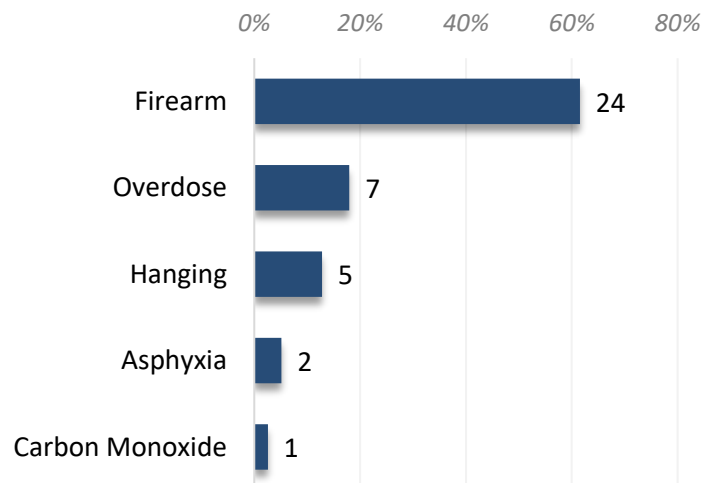
#### Decedent Age Group



#### Decedent Race/Ethnicity



#### Cause of Death

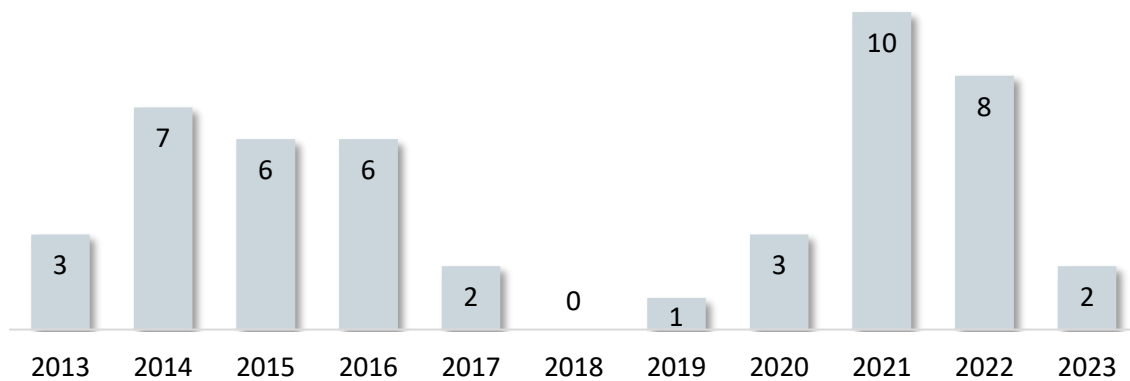


## Homicide

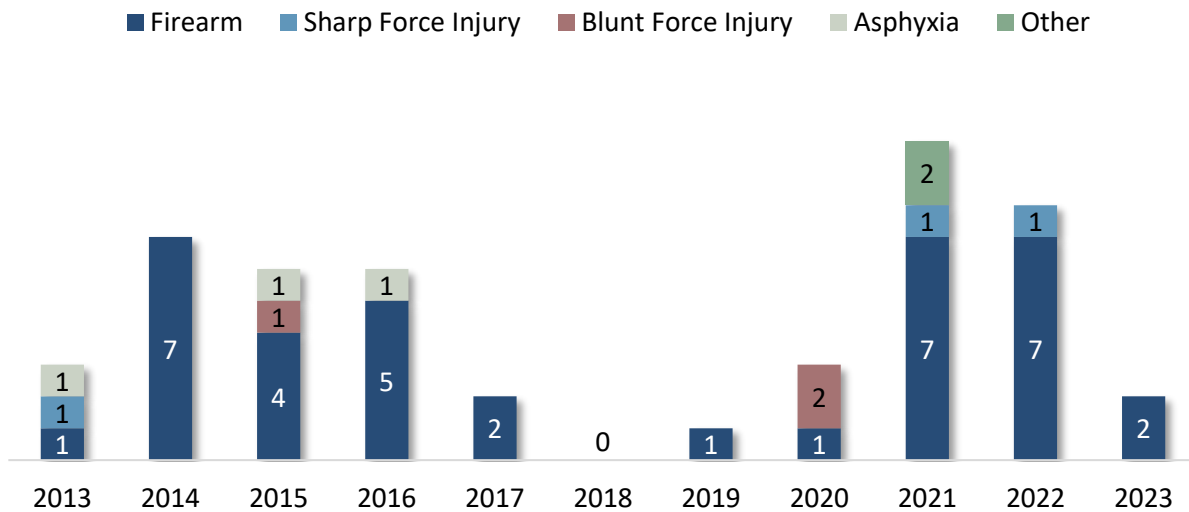
In 2023, two deaths from Cochise County were certified as homicides, a quarter of the number of homicides from the year prior. Due to relatively small numbers, the PCOME does not present Cochise County homicide rates. Additionally, demographic data on the two cases from 2023 are excluded.

Most homicide deaths in Cochise County each year are a result of firearms. Since 2013, 77% of homicides in Cochise County have involved a firearm (37 deaths).

### Homicides in Cochise County



### Top Causes of Homicides in Cochise County

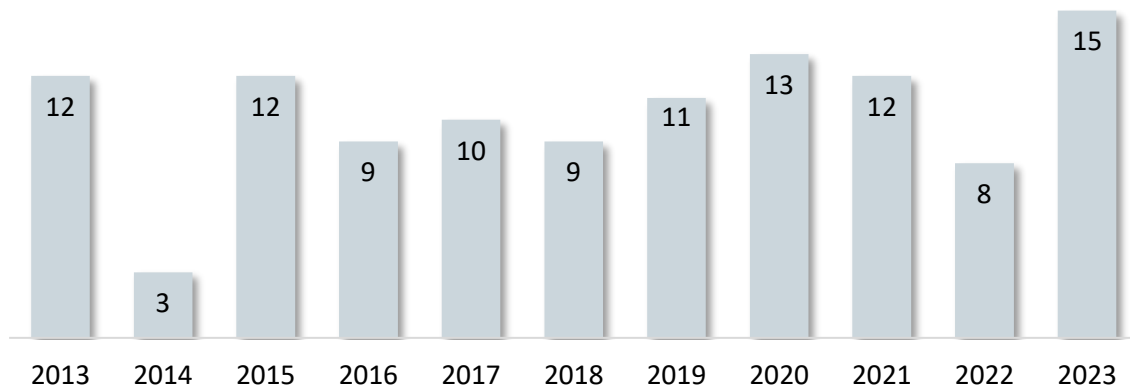


### Undetermined

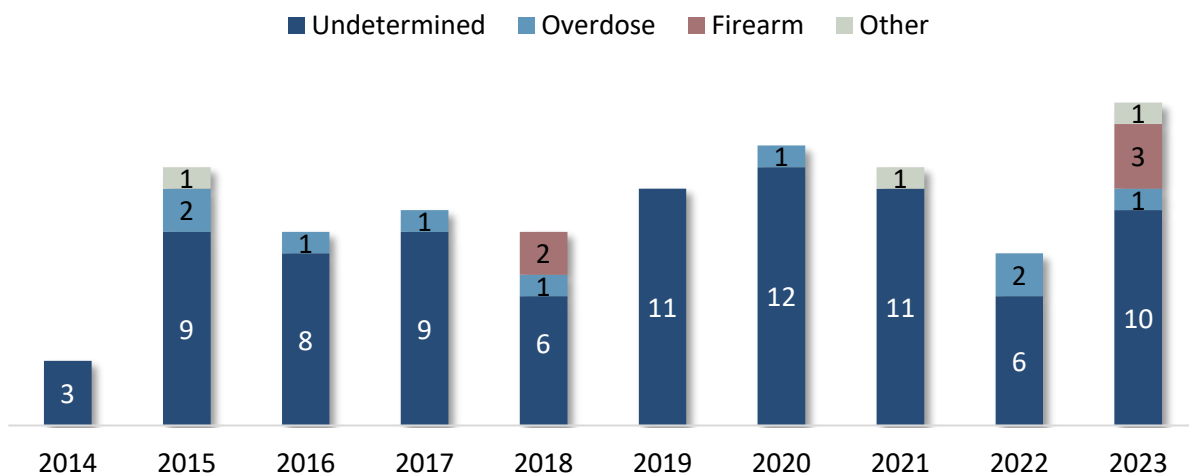
In a small number of cases each year, the manner of death is certified as undetermined. Cochise County deaths certified by the PCOME with an undetermined manner totaled 15 in 2023. Due to relatively small numbers, the PCOME does not present Cochise County rates for undetermined manner deaths.

Cases certified by the PCOME with an undetermined manner are most frequently certified with an undetermined cause, mainly due to exam limitations of decomposed/skeletal remains. Of the 102 Cochise County deaths certified with an undetermined manner since 2014, 83% were certified with an undetermined cause.

### Undetermined Manner Deaths in Cochise County



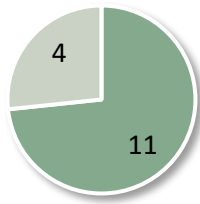
### Cochise County Undetermined MOD Cases by Cause of Death



Cochise County undetermined manner deaths in 2023 were most frequently male (73%); between 50-59 years of age (20%); and non-Hispanic White (53%). Three decedents with an undetermined MOD remain unidentified at the time of reporting (i.e., the PCOME is unable to confirm age and race/ethnicity). Sixty-seven percent of deaths with an undetermined manner in 2023 were certified with an undetermined cause of death.

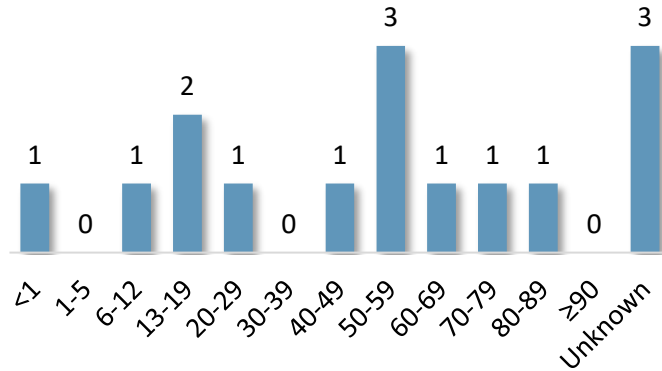
### **2023 Cochise County Undetermined Manner Deaths**

**Decedent Sex**

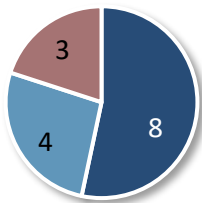


■ Male - 73%  
■ Female - 27%

**Decedent Age Group**

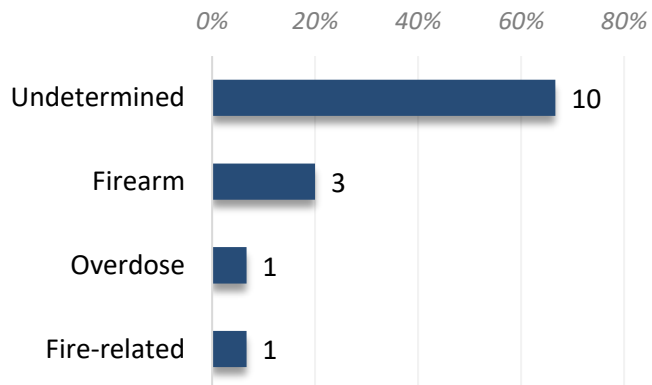


**Decedent Race/Ethnicity**



■ White - 53%  
■ Hispanic - 27%  
■ Unknown - 20%

**Cause of Death**



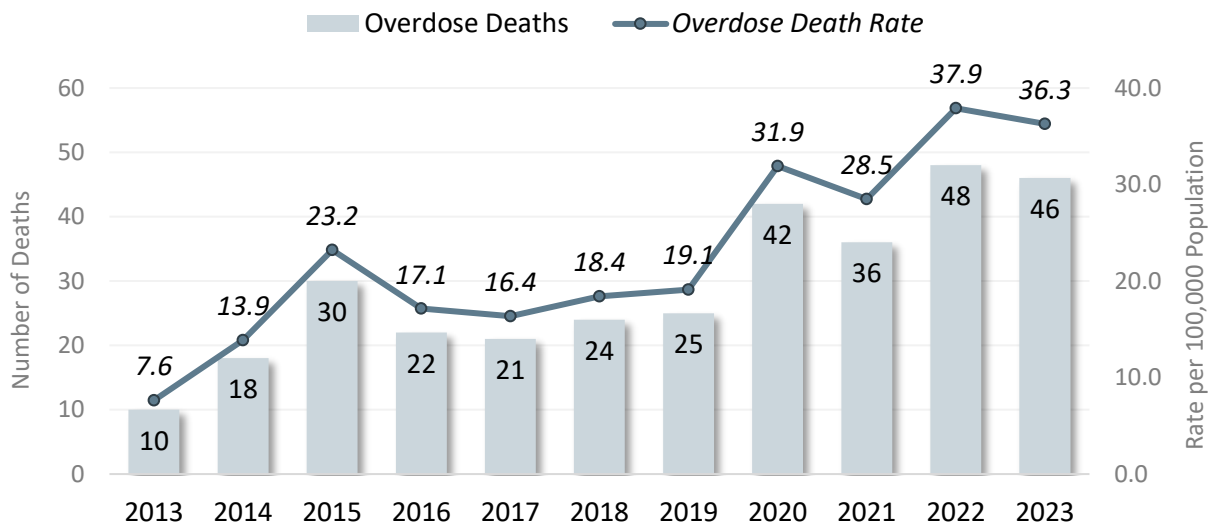
## Cause-Specific Deaths

The leading causes of death for Cochise County cases certified with a non-natural manner (i.e., accidents, homicides, suicides, and undetermined manner deaths) are presented in this section. Of the 161 Cochise County deaths certified by the PCOME with a non-natural manner in 2023, the most common cause was overdose (n=46, 29%), followed by firearms (n=29, 18%), and injuries from motor vehicle-related accidents (n=28, 17%).

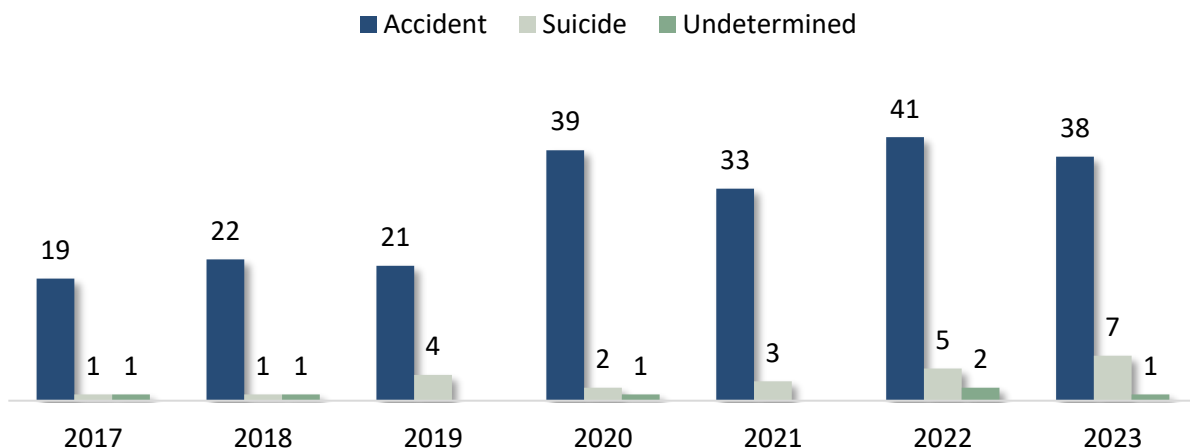
### Overdose

For the fourth year in a row, overdose was the leading cause of non-natural manner deaths in Cochise County. In 2023, 46 deaths were attributed to an overdose and the overdose death rate was 36.3 per 100,000 population. Increases in overdose deaths in recent years are largely due to rises in accidental overdose deaths. Of the 46 overdose deaths in Cochise County in 2023, 83% were accidents, 15% were suicides, and 2% were certified with an undetermined manner.

#### Number and Rate of Overdose Deaths in Cochise County

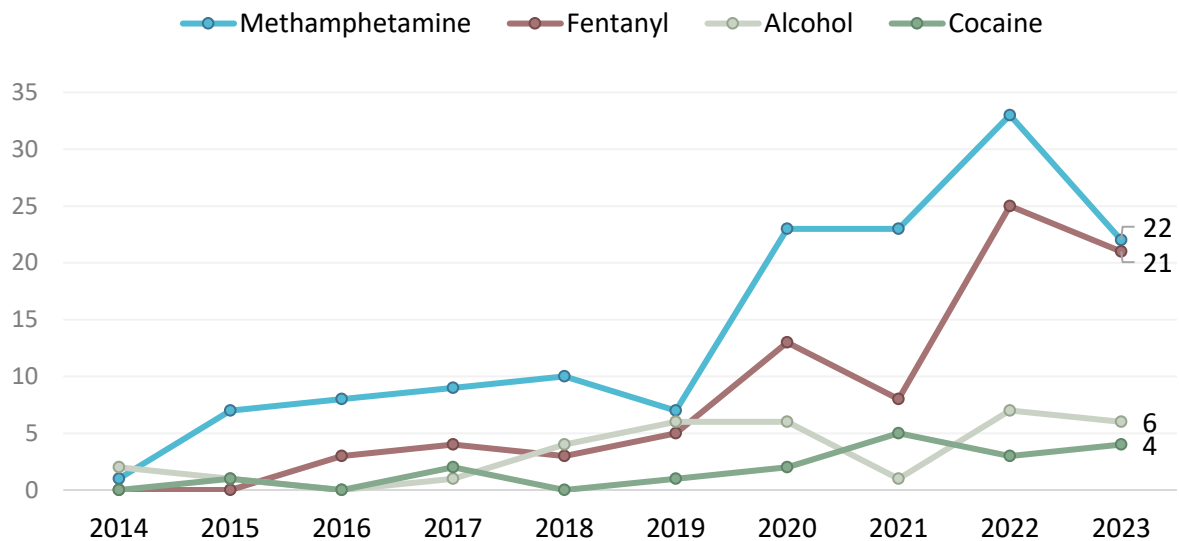


#### Cochise County Overdose Deaths by MOD

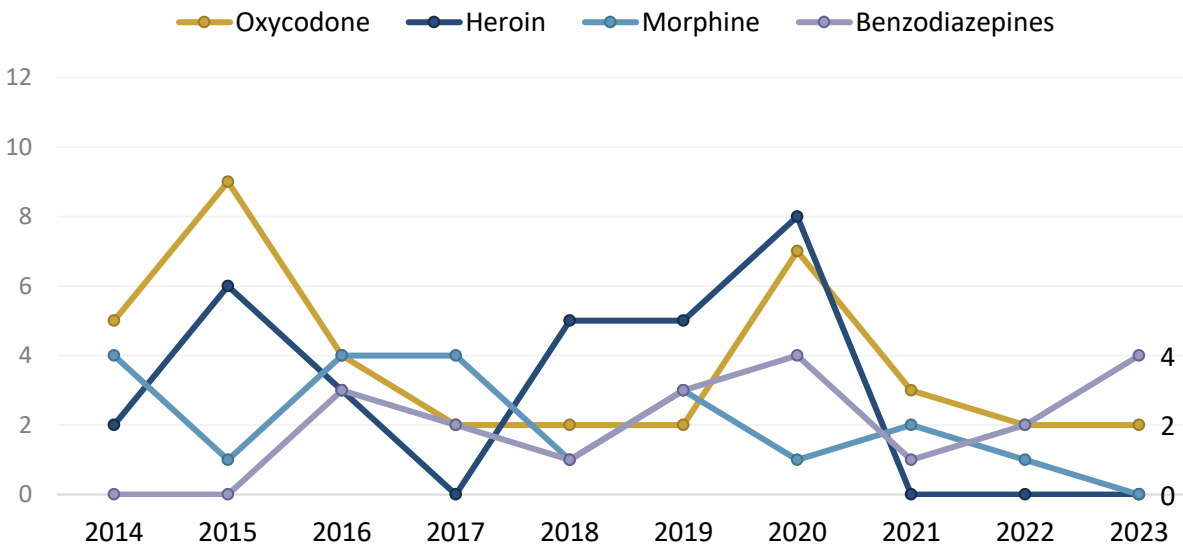


The two graphs below show overdose deaths involving select drugs over time. Prior to 2016, oxycodone contributed to the most overdose deaths in Cochise County. From 2016 to 2023, methamphetamine has contributed to the greatest number of overdose deaths each year. Notably, fentanyl deaths tripled from 2021 to 2022 (8 deaths and 25 deaths, respectively) and remained elevated in 2023 (21 deaths). Between 2021 and 2023, benzodiazepine-involved overdose deaths increased slightly while heroin deaths dropped to zero. It is important to note that heroin deaths are likely underreported each year as heroin is rapidly metabolized to morphine by the body; if the metabolite indicative for heroin, 6-monoacetylmorphine, is not present on the toxicology report, the cause of death may be classified as morphine intoxication or opiate (unspecified) intoxication. Nonetheless, deaths involving morphine have remained low and in 2023 there were no heroin or morphine-involved overdose deaths in Cochise County.

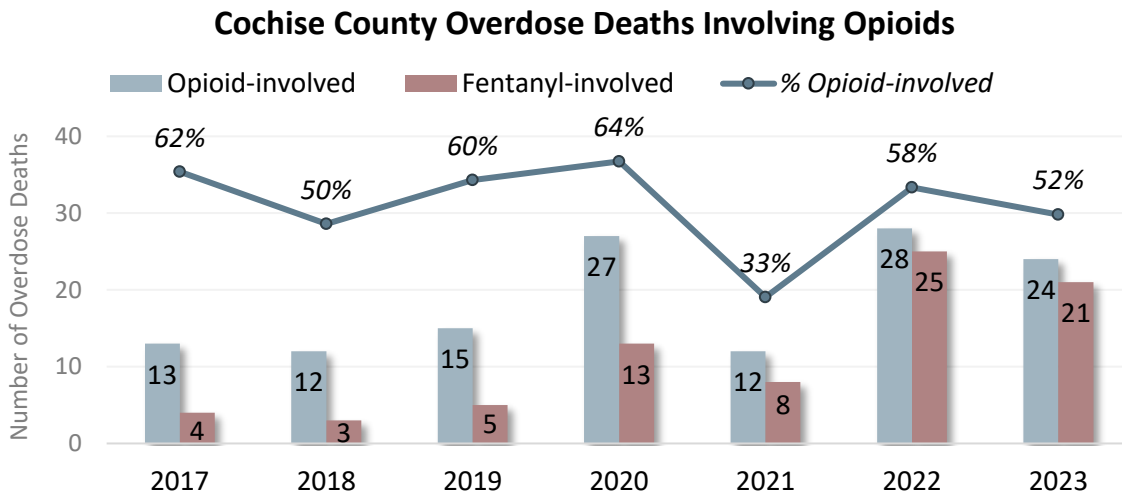
### Cochise County Overdose Deaths involving Select Drugs



### Cochise County Overdose Deaths involving Select Drugs



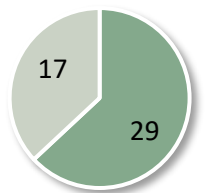
The impact of opioid compounds (e.g., heroin, oxycodone, methadone, fentanyl) on overdose deaths is of significant interest. On average, 54% of Cochise County overdose deaths involve an opioid. Changes in opioid-involved overdose death trends are displayed in the graph below. Over the past two years, opioid overdose deaths remain elevated, with fentanyl contributing to an overwhelming majority of these deaths (89% in 2022 and 88% in 2023). Overall, an opioid contributed to death, either as a single drug or as a component of a polydrug overdose in just over half of 2023 Cochise County overdose deaths (52%).



In 2023, the ratio of male to female decedents of overdose death was nearly 3:2. Decedents aged 50-to-59 years old accounted for the largest portion of overdose deaths of any age group (35%). Non-Hispanic Whites made up the largest percentage of overdose deaths among all racial groups (67%).

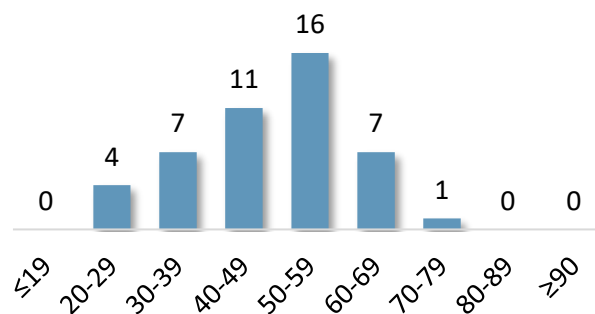
### 2023 Cochise County Overdose Deaths

#### Decedent Sex

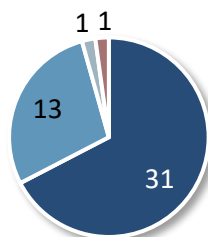


■ Male - 63%  
■ Female - 37%

#### Decedent Age Group



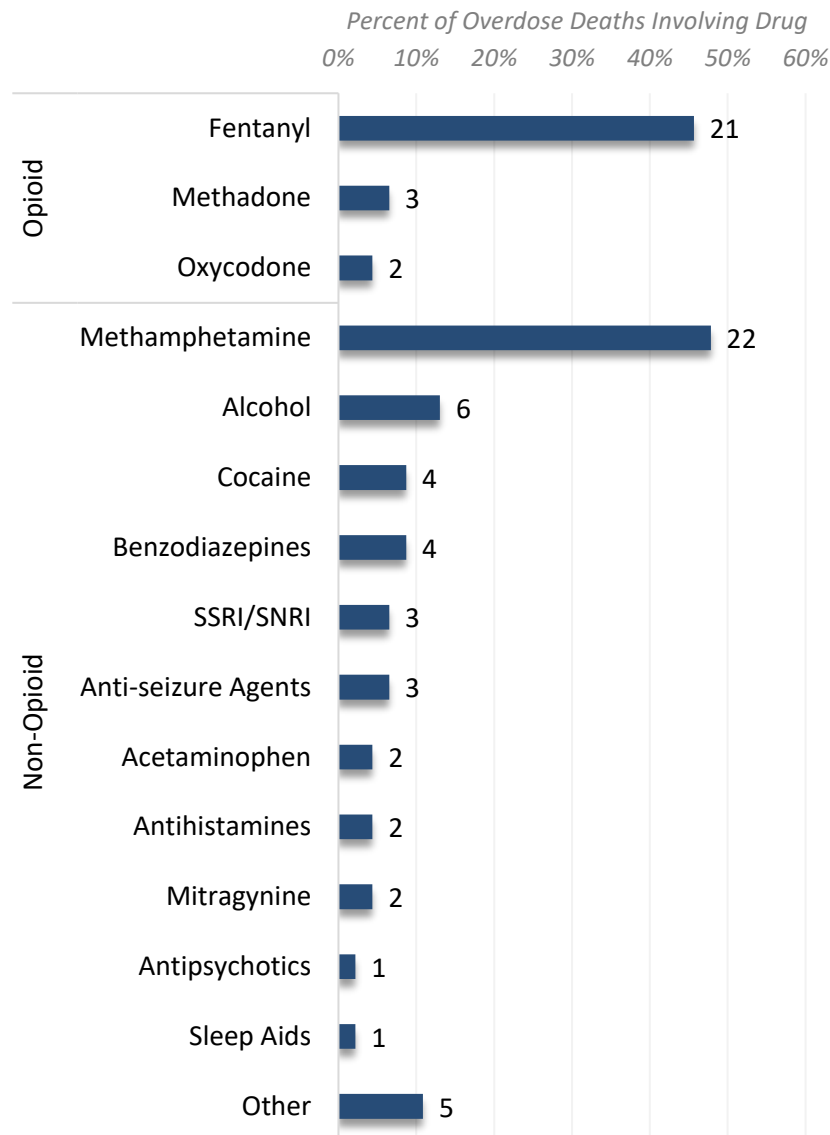
#### Decedent Race/Ethnicity



■ White - 67%  
■ Hispanic - 28%  
■ Black/African American - 2%  
■ Unknown - 2%

In 2023, a single drug contributed to an overdose death in 21 cases (46%) and a combination of drugs contributed to death in 25 cases (54%). Methamphetamine was the most frequently found drug in overdose deaths (22 cases), contributing to 48% of overdoses. Fentanyl nearly equaled methamphetamine overdose deaths in 2023 (21 cases), contributing to 46% of overdoses. An overdose death may involve more than one drug, therefore the sum of drugs contributing exceeds the sum of total overdose deaths for the year.

### Frequency of Drugs Contributing to Cochise County Overdose Deaths, 2023

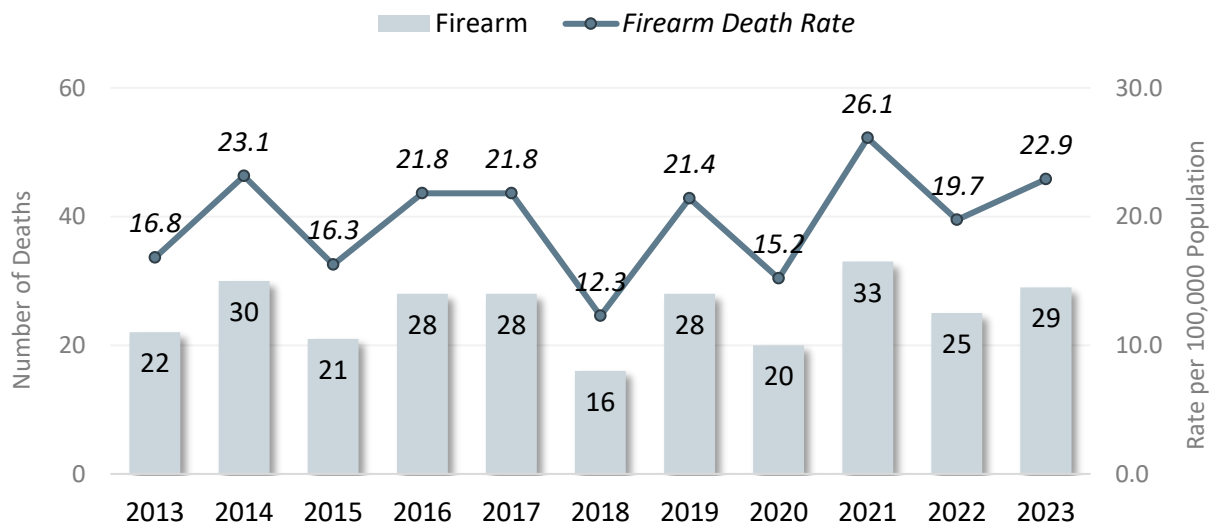


## Firearms

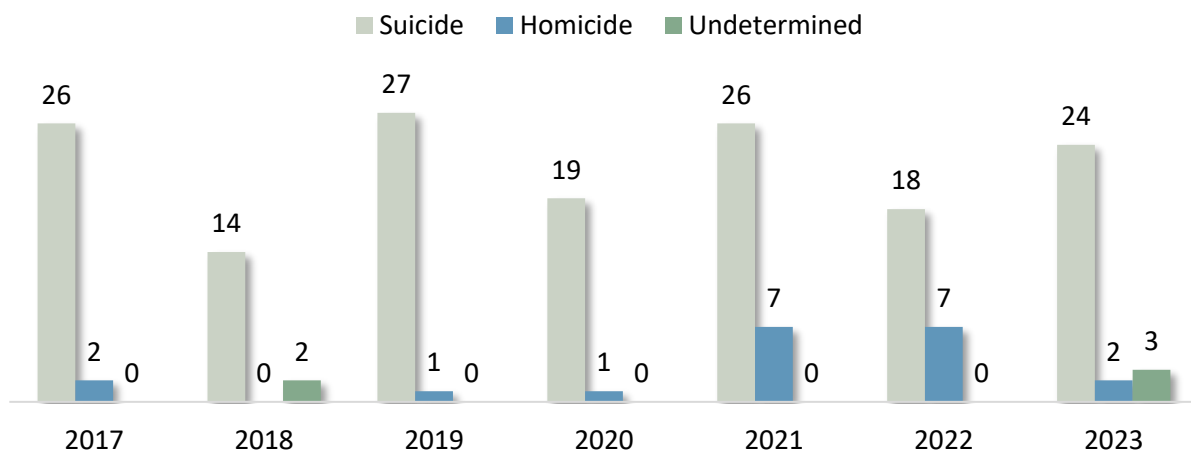
Firearm-related injuries were the second most common cause of non-natural manner deaths in Cochise County in 2023. On average, the PCOME certifies 25 firearm-related deaths a year in Cochise County. In 2023, 29 deaths were firearm-related and the death rate from firearms was 22.9 per 100,000 population. Please note that at the time this report was written, Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS) had not yet released population statistics for 2022. Therefore, **2023 death rates were calculated using 2022 population size and are subject to change.**

Most firearm deaths each year are suicides. Of the 29 firearm deaths in Cochise County in 2023, 83% were suicides, 10% were undetermined manner deaths, and 7% were homicides.

### Number and Rate of Firearm Deaths in Cochise County



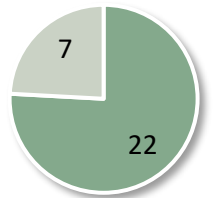
### Cochise County Firearm Deaths by MOD



In 2023, three times more males died of firearm-related injuries than females (22 and 7, respectively). Decedents in their sixties accounted for the largest portion of deaths of any age group (24%). Non-Hispanic Whites made up the largest percentage of deaths among racial groups (83%).

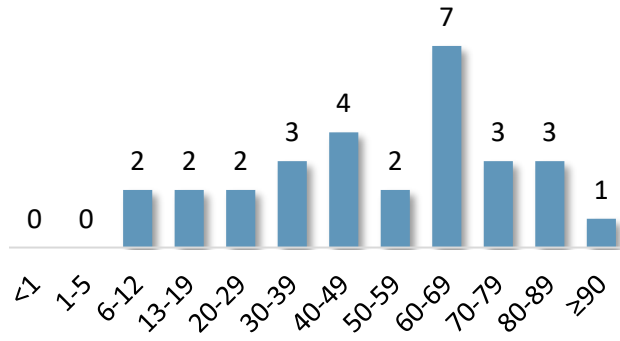
### **2023 Cochise County Firearm Deaths**

**Decedent Sex**

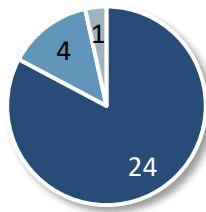


■ Male - 76%  
■ Female - 24%

**Decedent Age Group**



**Decedent Race/Ethnicity**

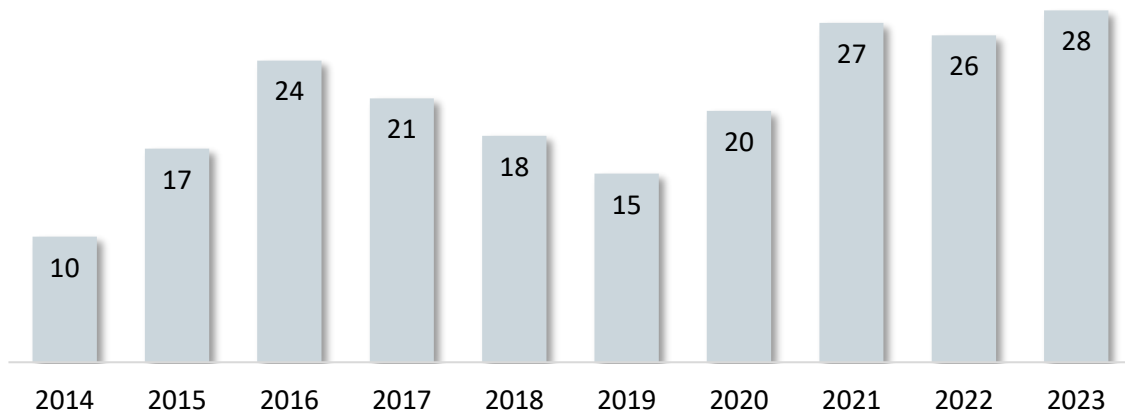


■ White - 83%  
■ Hispanic - 14%  
■ Black/African American - 3%

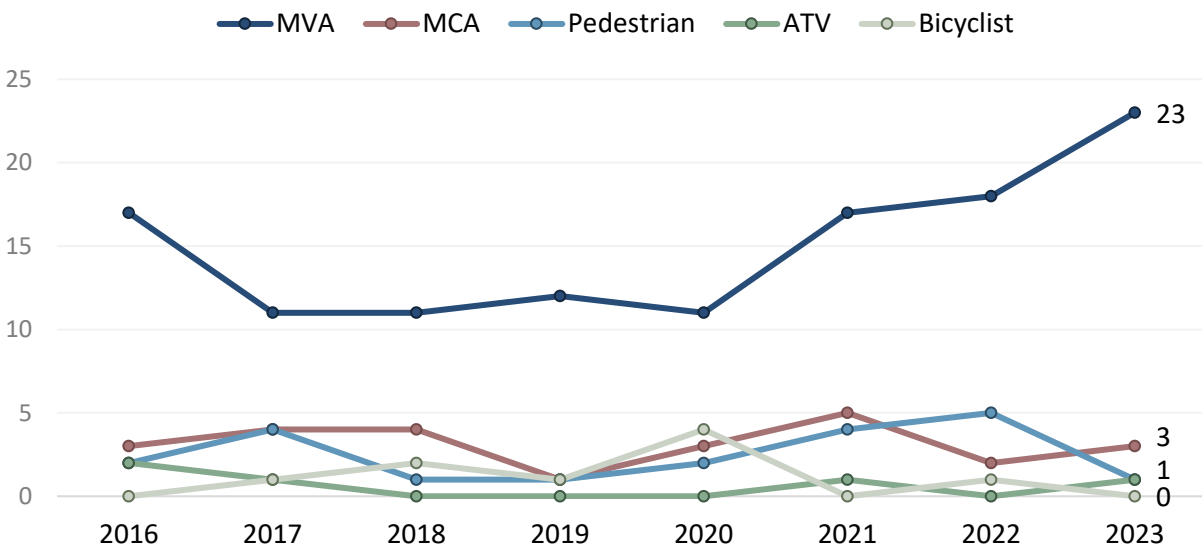
## Motor Vehicle-Related

Motor vehicle-related (MV-related) injuries were the third leading cause of non-natural manner deaths in Cochise County in 2023 (28 deaths). Due to relatively small numbers, the PCOME does not present Cochise County death rates from MV-related accidents. Deaths of occupants (i.e., driver or passenger) of a motor vehicle involved in an accident (MVA) represent most of MV-related deaths in Cochise County and have increased annually since 2020. A smaller portion of MV-related deaths consists of motorcycle riders involved in an accident (MCA), pedestrians struck by vehicles, occupants involved in an all-terrain vehicle accident (ATV), and bicyclists involved in an accident.

### MV-Related Deaths in Cochise County



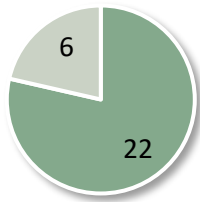
### Cochise County MV-Related Deaths by Incident Type



All 28 MV-related deaths in Cochise County in 2023 were certified as accidents. Males comprised 79% of these deaths. Decedents aged 30-to-39 years old accounted for the largest portion of MV-related deaths of any age group (25%). Hispanics made up the largest percentage of MV-related deaths among all racial groups (57%). Eighty-two percent of decedents were occupants of an MVA (i.e., driver or passenger), 11% were motorcycle riders, 4% were occupants of an ATV, and 4% were pedestrians.

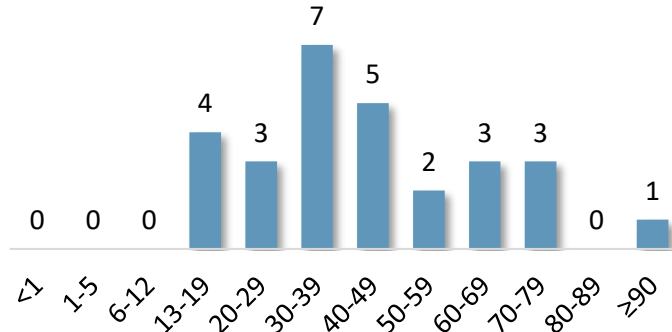
### **2023 Cochise County Motor Vehicle-Related Deaths**

**Decedent Sex**

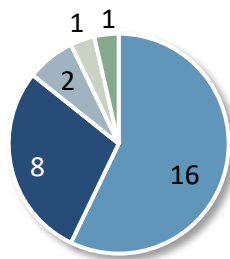


■ Male - 79%  
■ Female - 21%

**Decedent Age Group**

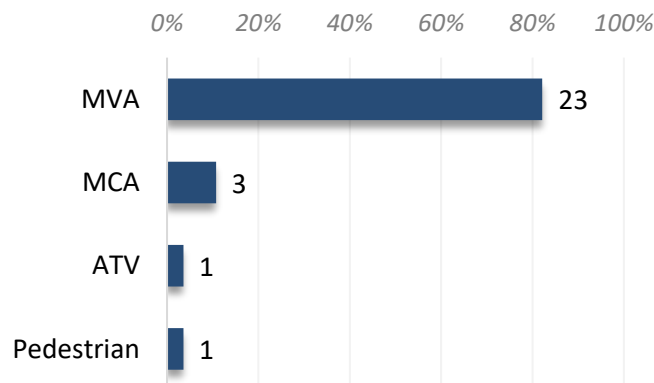


**Decedent Race/Ethnicity**



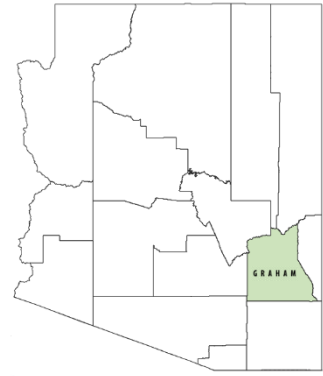
■ Hispanic - 57%  
■ White - 29%  
■ Black/African American - 7%  
■ American Indian/Alaska Native - 4%  
■ Asian/Pacific Islander - 4%

**Incident Type**

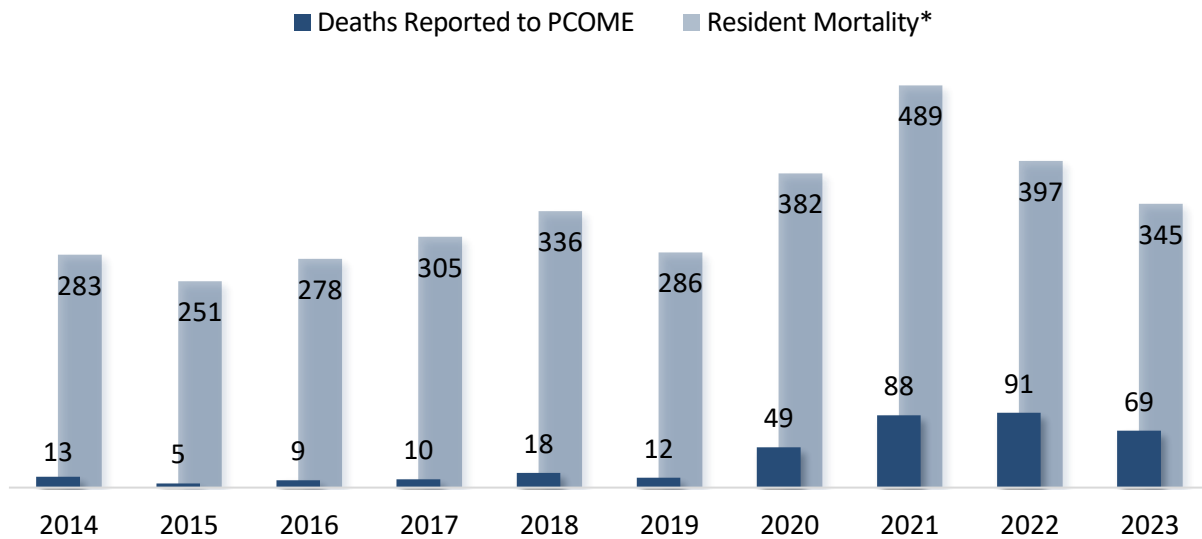


## Graham County

Beginning July 1, 2020, Graham County contracts with the PCOME to certify deaths that fall under the jurisdiction of the medical examiner in Graham County. Thus, 2021 data represents the first full calendar year that the PCOME has served as the appointed ME to Graham County. In 2023, there were 345 total deaths in Graham County residents; 69 deaths (20%) were reported to the PCOME for investigation. The PCOME accepted jurisdiction of 53 cases (77% of deaths reported), representing 15% of Graham County resident mortality\* in 2023.

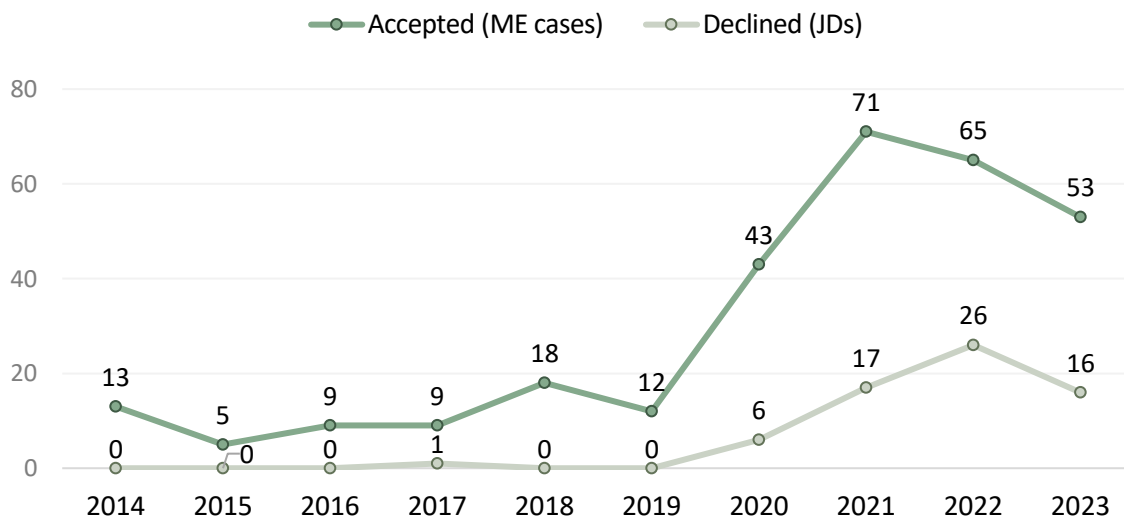


### Graham County Resident Mortality and Reported Deaths



\*Graham County resident mortality from Arizona Department of Health Services Vital Statistics as of 1/29/2024

### Jurisdictional Disposition of Graham County Reported Deaths

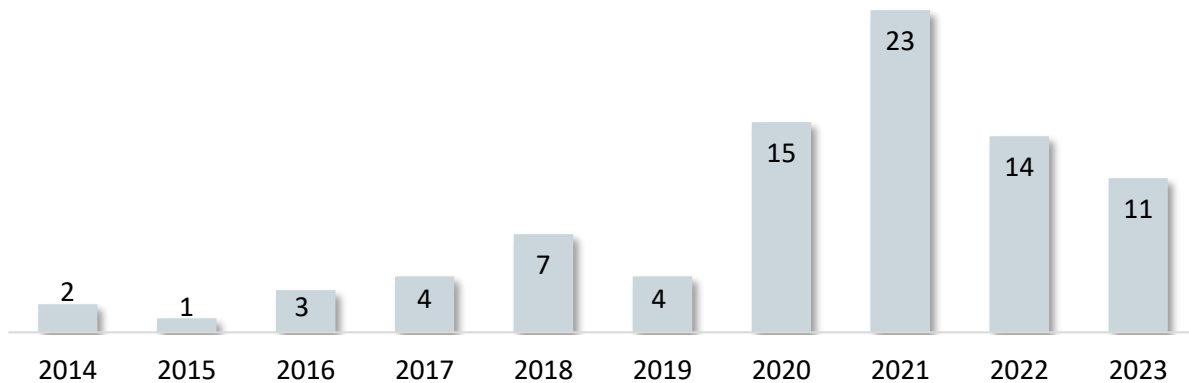


## Natural Deaths

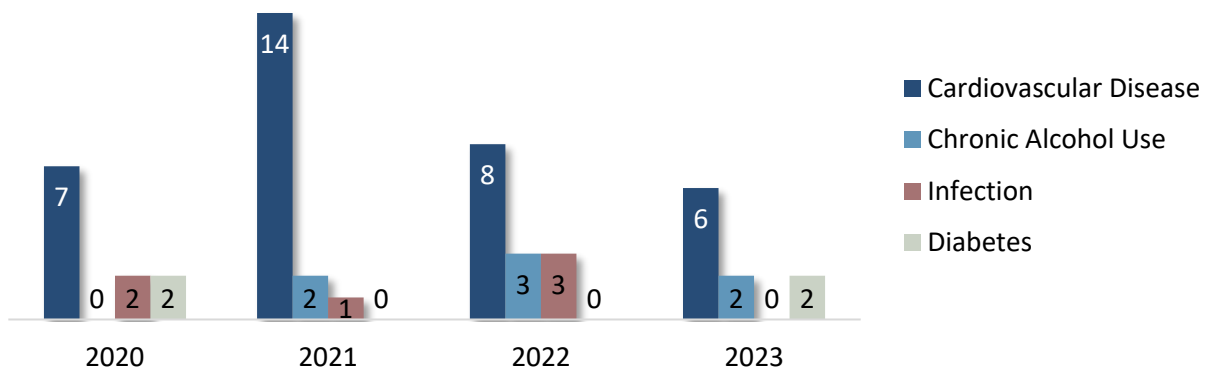
**Natural death data in this report is limited to deaths certified by the PCOME (ME cases) and does not reflect the total number of natural deaths in Graham County.** Most natural deaths that occur in a county do not fall under the jurisdiction of a medical examiner and instead, are certified by a decedent's healthcare provider. The PCOME accepts jurisdiction of cases that appear to be natural deaths if the decedent is not in the care of a healthcare provider, dies while in custody, is unidentified, and/or a previously healthy individual dies suddenly/unexpectedly, as determined by the PCOME. Natural death data should be interpreted with caution as the PCOME is not aware of the number of natural deaths certified by physicians in the community.

Since contracting with the PCOME in 2020, natural deaths have made up the second largest proportion of Graham County ME Cases each year. In 2023, 11 Graham County cases were certified as natural deaths. Cardiovascular disease remains the most common cause of natural deaths certified by our office.

### Graham County Natural Deaths Certified by the PCOME



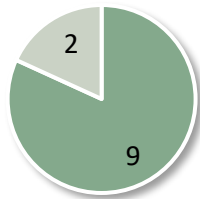
### Top Causes of Graham County Natural Deaths (ME Cases Only)



Male decedents comprised 82% of Graham County natural deaths certified by the PCOME. Decedents aged 50-to-59 years old accounted for the largest portion of natural deaths of any age group (36%). Non-Hispanic Whites made up the largest percentage of deaths among all racial groups (73%). Cardiovascular disease was the most common cause of death (55%).

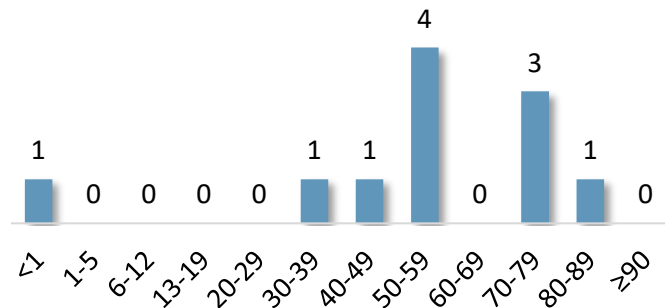
### **2023 Graham County Natural Deaths (ME Cases Only)**

**Decedent Sex**

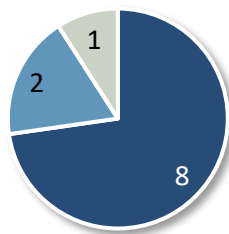


■ Male - 82%  
■ Female - 18%

**Decedent Age Group**

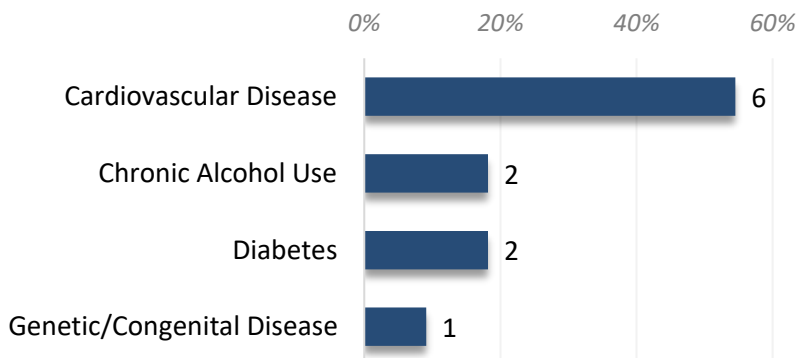


**Decedent Race/Ethnicity**



■ White - 73%  
■ Hispanic - 18%  
■ American Indian/Alaska Native - 9%

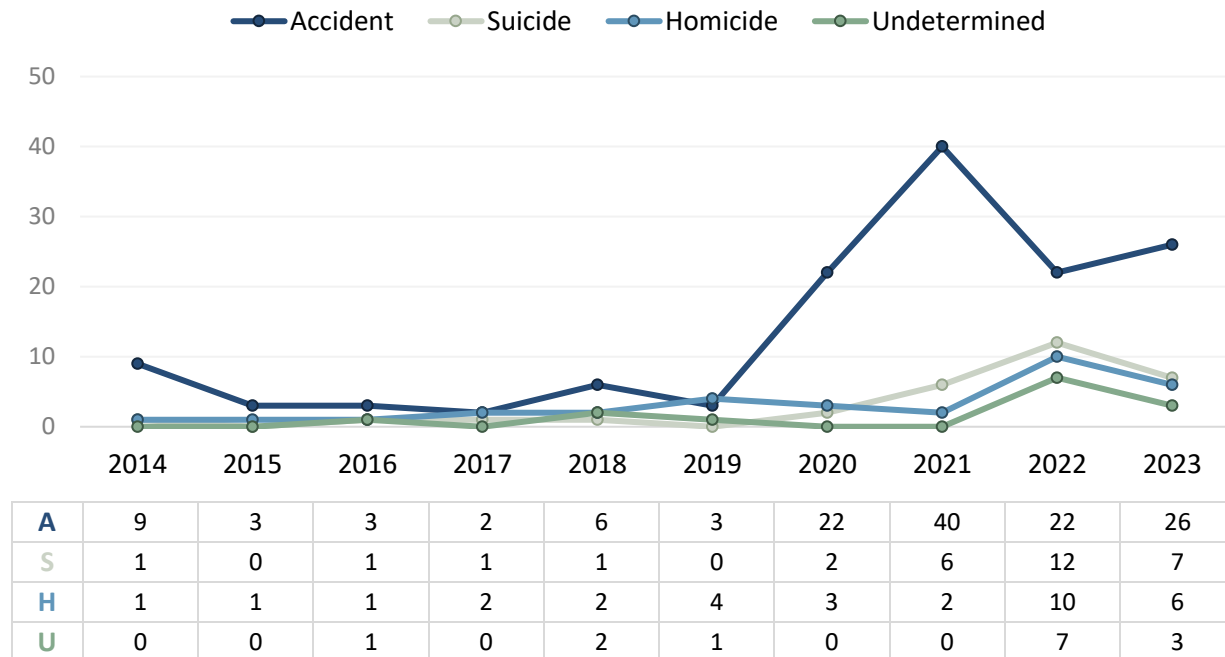
**Cause of Death**



## Non-Natural Manner Deaths

Non-natural manner of death (MOD) classifications include accident, homicide, suicide, and undetermined. The graph and table below display Graham County ME Cases by non-natural MOD from 2014 to 2023. Since contracting with the PCOME in 2020, accidental deaths have made up the largest portion of Graham County cases. In 2023, suicides, homicides, and undetermined manner deaths all decreased from the year prior, whereas accidents increased.

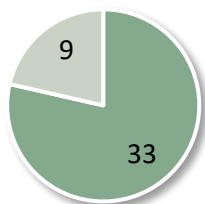
### Graham County ME Cases by Non-Natural MOD



The PCOME certified 42 Graham County deaths with a non-natural manner in 2023. Male decedents comprised 79% of these cases. Decedents aged 50-to-59 years old accounted for the largest portion of deaths of any age group (21%). Non-Hispanic Whites accounted for the largest percentage of deaths among all racial groups (48%). Demographic data by MOD is presented in the table on the following page.

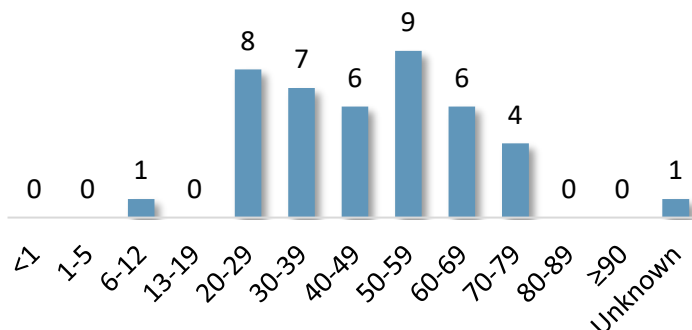
### 2023 Graham County Non-Natural MOD Cases by Demographics

#### Decedent Sex

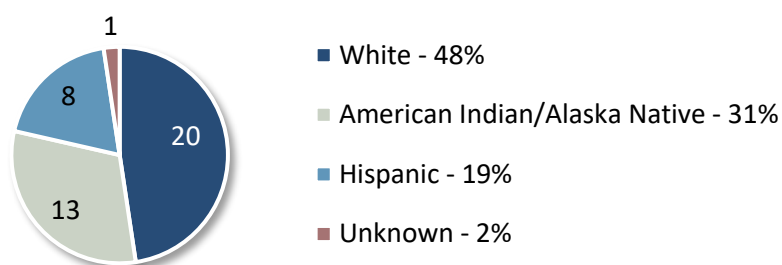


- Male - 79%
- Female - 21%

#### Decedent Age Group



## Decedent Race/Ethnicity

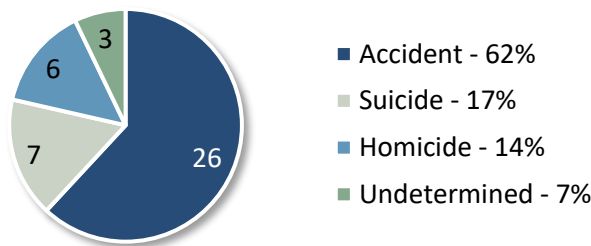


2023 Graham County ME Case Demographics by Non-Natural MOD n (%)				
Characteristic	Accident N=26	Suicide N=7	Homicide N=6	Undeterm. N=3
<b>Sex</b>				
Male	18 (69%)	7 (100%)	5 (83%)	3 (100%)
Female	8 (31%)	-	1 (17%)	-
<b>Age Group</b>				
<6	-	-	-	-
6 – 12	1 (4%)	-	-	-
13 – 19	-	-	-	-
20 – 29	2 (8%)	4 (57%)	2 (33%)	-
30 – 39	6 (23%)	1 (14%)	-	-
40 – 49	2 (8%)	-	4 (67%)	-
50 – 59	7 (27%)	1 (14%)	-	1 (33%)
60 – 69	4 (15%)	1 (14%)	-	1 (33%)
70 – 79	4 (15%)	-	-	-
Unknown	-	-	-	1 (33%)
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>				
White	16 (62%)	3 (43%)	1 (17%)	-
Hispanic	5 (19%)	2 (29%)	-	1 (33%)
American Indian/Alaska Native	5 (19%)	2 (29%)	5 (83%)	1 (33%)
Unknown	-	-	-	1 (33%)

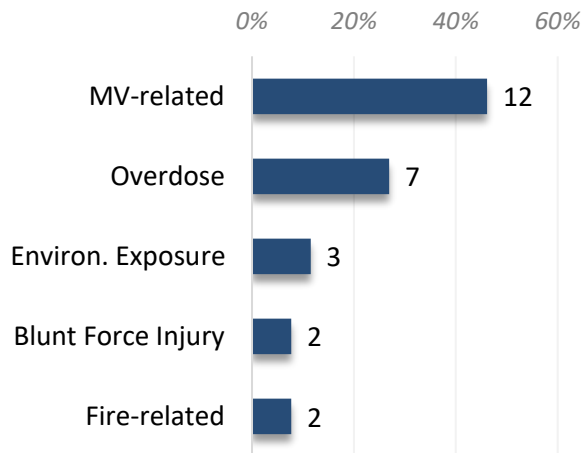
Accident deaths made up the largest proportion of 2023 Graham County non-natural manner deaths (62%). Cause of death by manner is displayed in the bar graphs below. Injuries from motor vehicle-related (MV-related) accidents (i.e., motor vehicles, motorcyclists, bicyclists, pedestrians, etc.) were the most frequent cause of accidental deaths (46%). Firearms were the most common means of suicide (57%). All homicide deaths were a result of firearms (100%). Lastly, most undetermined manner deaths were certified with an undetermined cause (67%).

### **2023 Graham County Non-Natural MOD Cases by Manner and Cause of Death**

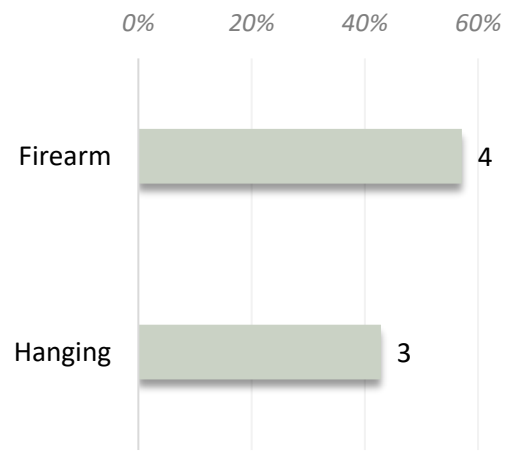
#### **Manner of Death**



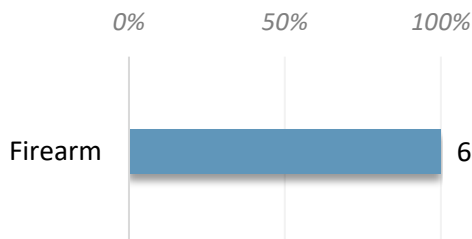
#### **Accident**



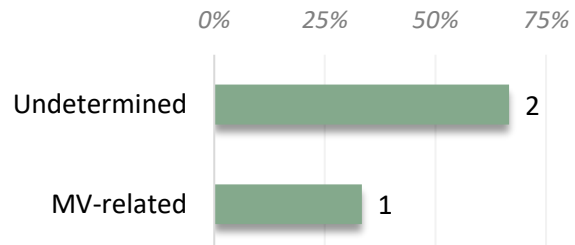
#### **Suicide**



#### **Homicide**



#### **Undetermined**



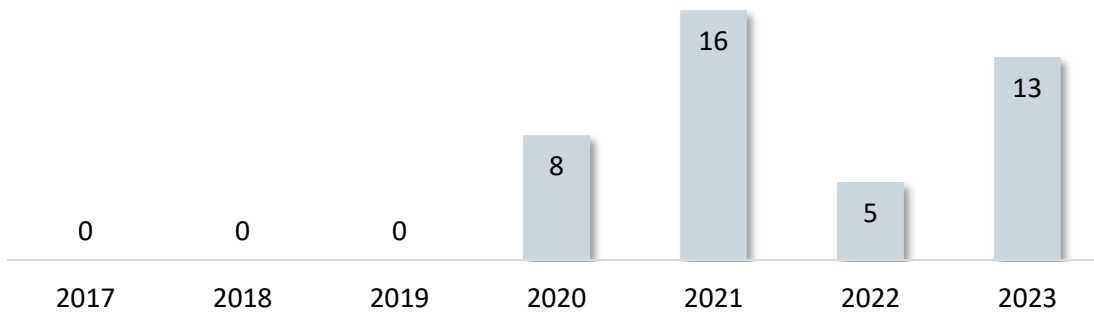
## Cause-Specific Deaths

The leading causes of death for Graham County cases certified with a non-natural manner (i.e., accidents, homicides, suicides, and undetermined manner deaths) are presented in this section. Since contracting with the PCOME in 2020, the leading causes of non-natural manner deaths in Graham County have alternated between injuries from motor-vehicle related (MV-related) accidents, overdose, and firearms. Of 42 non-natural manner deaths certified in 2023, the most common cause was injuries from MV-related accidents (n=13, 31%), followed by firearms (n=10, 24%), and overdose (n=7, 17%). Data on these three cause-specific deaths are detailed in this section.

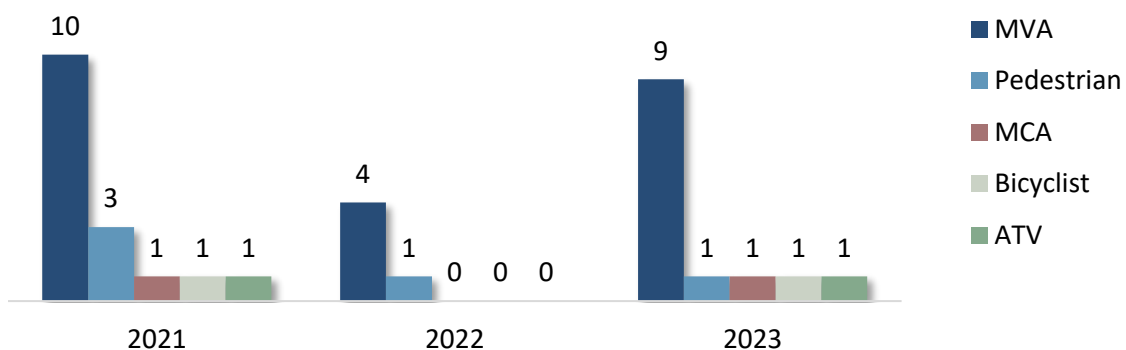
### Motor Vehicle-Related

MV-related injuries were the leading cause of non-natural manner deaths in Graham County in 2023 (13 deaths). Twelve cases were certified with an accidental manner (92%), and one was certified with an undetermined manner of death (8%). Most MV-related deaths in Graham County each year are occupants (i.e., driver or passenger) of a motor vehicle involved in an accident (MVA). A smaller portion consists of pedestrians struck by vehicles, motorcycle riders involved in an accident (MCA), bicyclists involved in an accident, and occupants involved in an all-terrain vehicle (ATV) accident.

**Graham County MV-Related Deaths Certified by the PCOME**



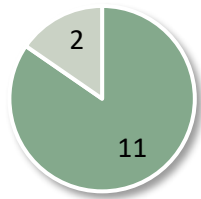
**Graham County MV-Related Deaths by Incident Type**



Decedents were predominantly male (85%); in their thirties or seventies (23% each); and non-Hispanic White (46%). Occupants of an MVA (i.e., driver or passenger) represent 69% of all MV-related injury deaths in Graham County in 2023.

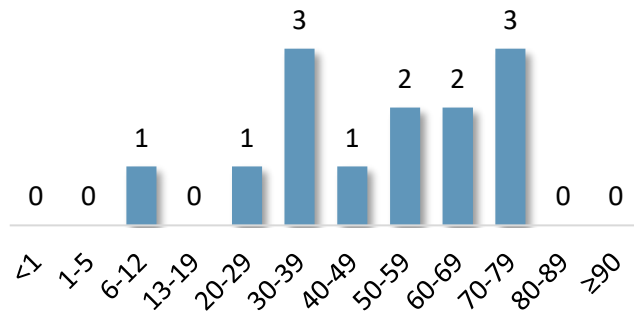
### 2023 Graham County Motor Vehicle-Related Deaths

**Decedent Sex**

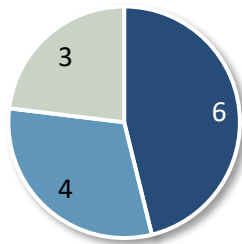


■ Male - 85%  
■ Female - 15%

**Decedent Age Group**

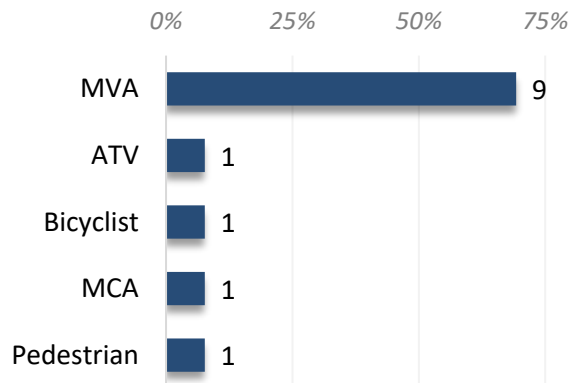


**Decedent Race/Ethnicity**



■ White - 46%  
■ Hispanic - 31%  
■ American Indian/Alaska Native - 23%

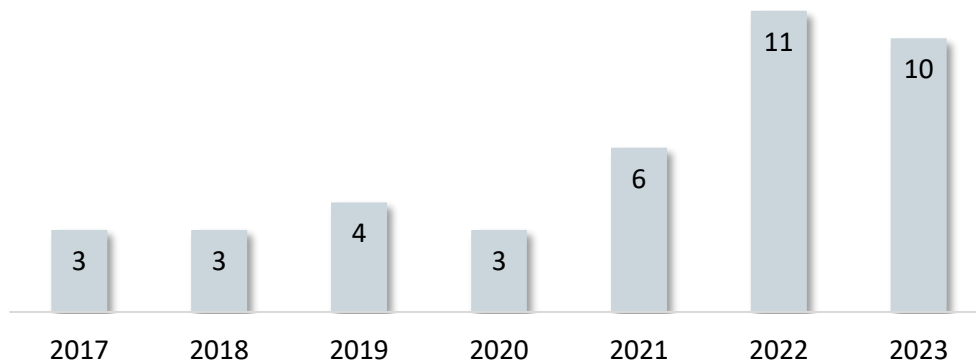
**Incident Type**



## Firearms

For the second year in a row, firearm-related injuries were the second most common cause of non-natural manner deaths in Graham County in 2023. Firearm deaths nearly doubled from 2021 to 2022 (6 to 11, respectively), and remained elevated in 2023 at 10 deaths. Sixty percent of firearm deaths in 2023 were homicides and the other 40% were suicides.

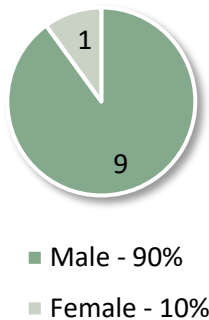
### Graham County Firearm Deaths Certified by the PCOME



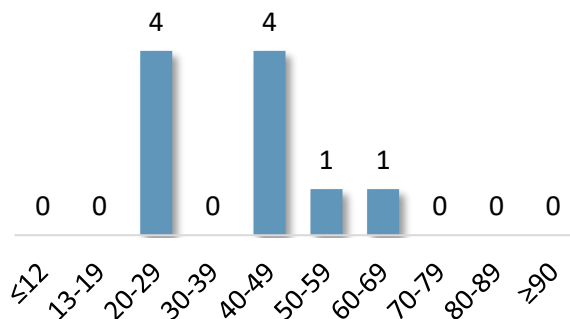
In 2023, male decedents comprised 90% of Graham County firearm deaths. Decedents in their twenties and forties equally accounted for the largest portions of deaths of any age group (40% each). American Indians/Alaska Natives made up the largest percentage of deaths among racial groups (50%).

### 2023 Graham County Firearm Deaths

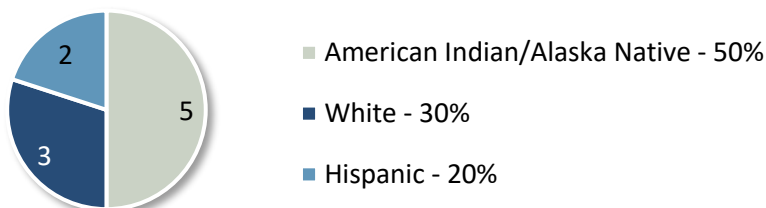
#### Decedent Sex



#### Decedent Age Group



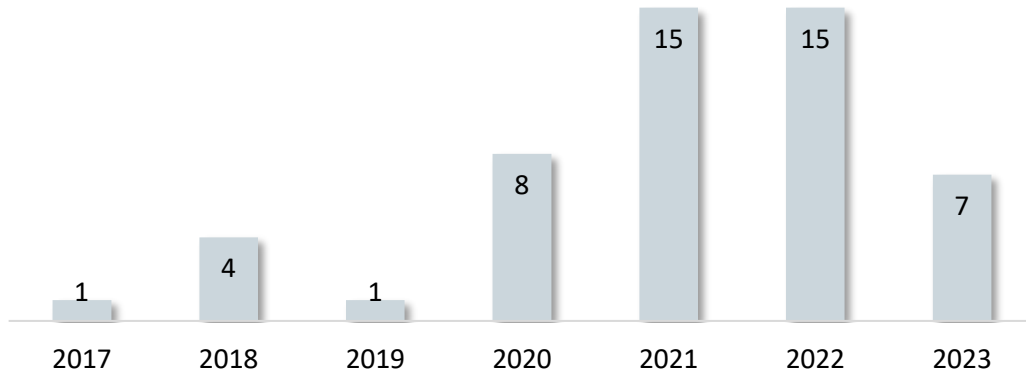
#### Decedent Race/Ethnicity



## Overdose

In 2023, overdose was the third leading cause of non-natural manner deaths in Graham County (previously the leading cause in 2022). A total of 7 deaths were attributed to an overdose, a 53% decrease from the year prior. All overdose deaths in 2023 were certified as accidents.

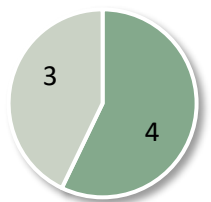
### Graham County Overdose Deaths Certified by the PCOME



In 2023, more males than females died of an overdose (4:3). Decedents aged 30-to-39 years old accounted for the largest portion of overdose deaths of any age group (43%). Non-Hispanic Whites made up the largest percentage of overdose deaths among racial groups (71% each).

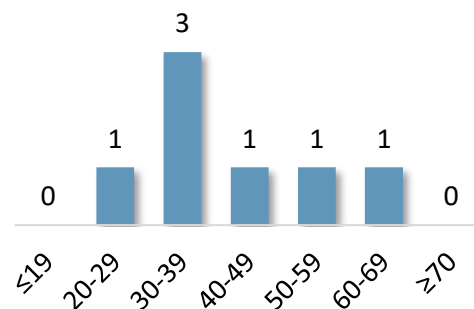
### 2023 Graham County Overdose Deaths

#### Decedent Sex

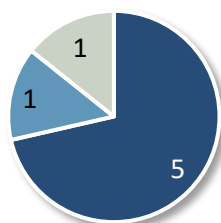


■ Male - 57%  
■ Female - 43%

#### Decedent Age Group



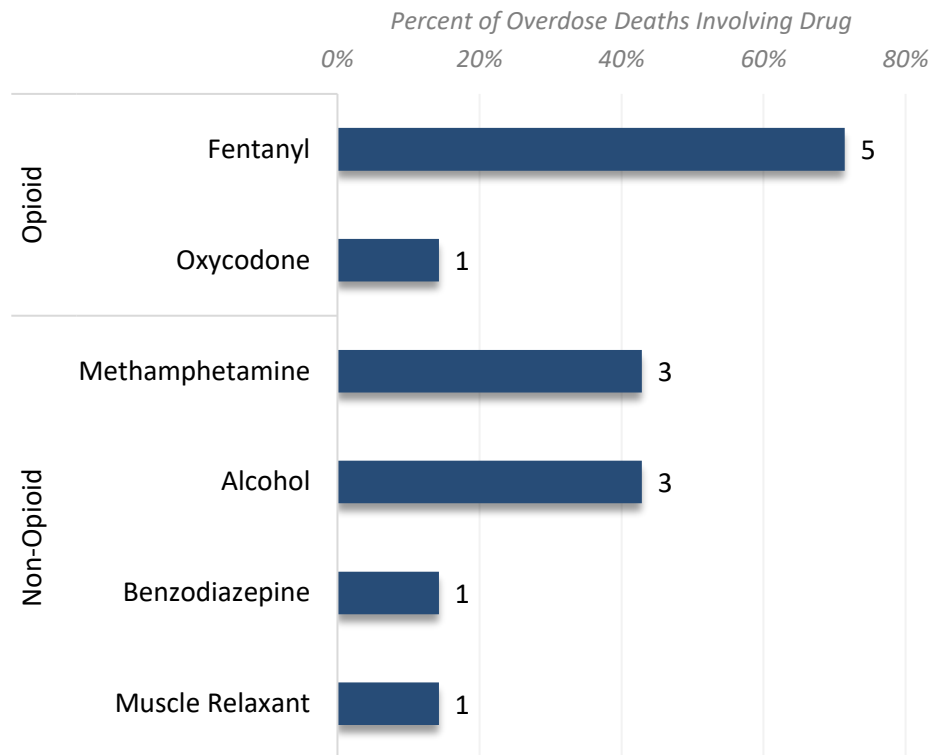
#### Decedent Race/Ethnicity



■ White - 71%  
■ Hispanic - 14%  
■ American Indian/Alaska Native - 14%

A single drug contributed to an overdose death in 2 cases (29%) and a combination of drugs contributed to death in 5 cases (71%). An opioid contributed to death either as a single drug or as a component of a polydrug overdose in all but one case (86%). Fentanyl was the most frequently found drug, contributing to 71% of Graham County overdose deaths in 2023. Methamphetamine and alcohol were the next most frequently found drugs, each contributing to 43% of overdose deaths. An overdose death may involve more than one drug, therefore the sum of drugs contributing exceeds the sum of total overdose deaths for the year.

### Frequency of Drugs Contributing to Graham County Overdose Deaths, 2023

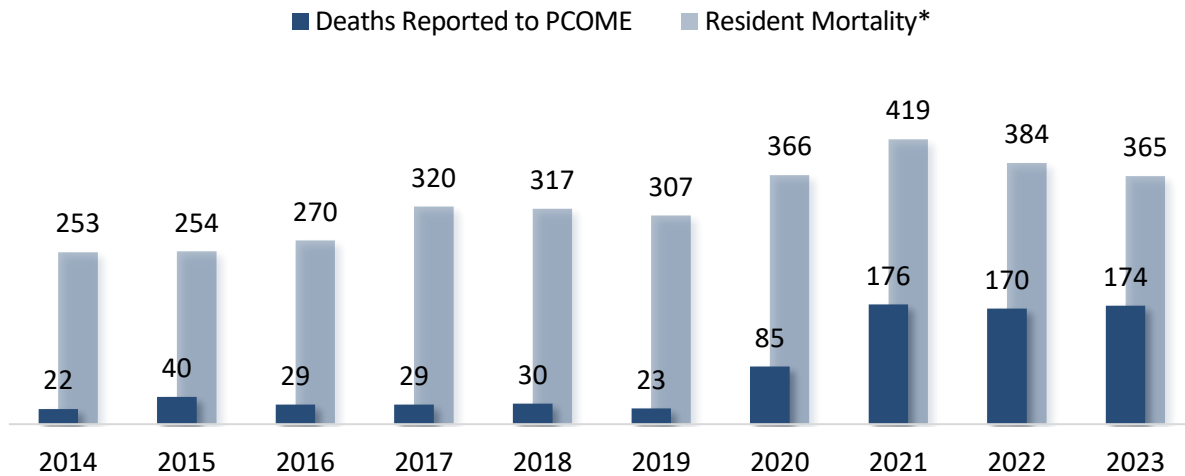


## La Paz County

Beginning July 1, 2020, La Paz County contracts with the PCOME to certify deaths that fall under the jurisdiction of the medical examiner (ME) in La Paz County. Prior to this, cases were referred to the PCOME by La Paz County's Alternate Medical Examiner on an as-needed basis for examinations and death certifications. 2021 data represents the first full calendar year that the PCOME has served as the appointed ME to La Paz County. Since then, the number of deaths in La Paz County reported to the PCOME have been consistent, while the number of cases accepted under PCOME jurisdiction have increased slightly each year. In 2023, jurisdiction was accepted in 121 cases, representing 33% of La Paz County resident mortality\*. Two subsumed cases and one fetal death case are excluded from manner and cause of death data in the proceeding sections.

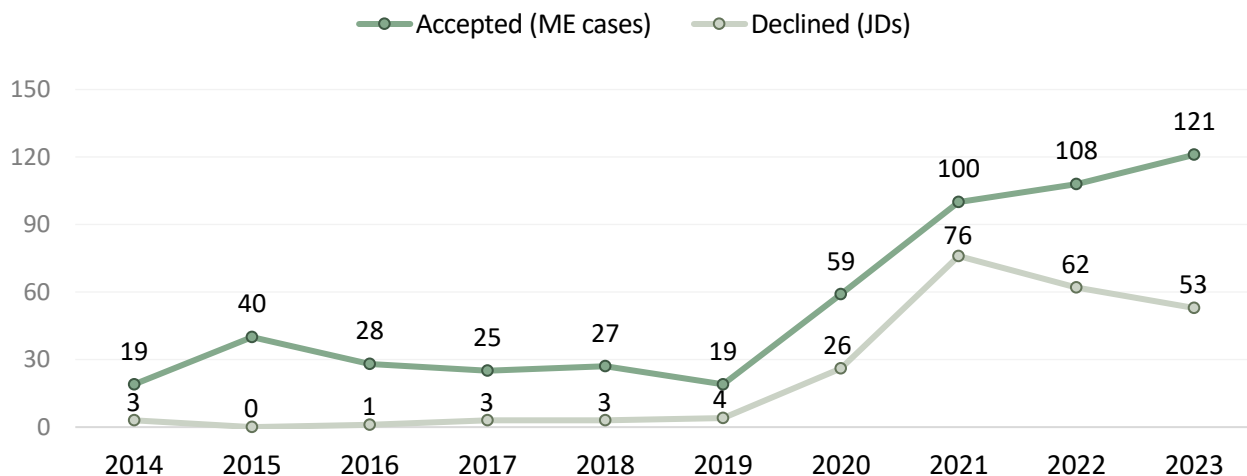


### La Paz County Resident Mortality and Reported Deaths



\*La Paz County resident mortality from Arizona Department of Health Services Vital Statistics as of 1/29/2024

### Jurisdictional Disposition of La Paz County Reported Deaths

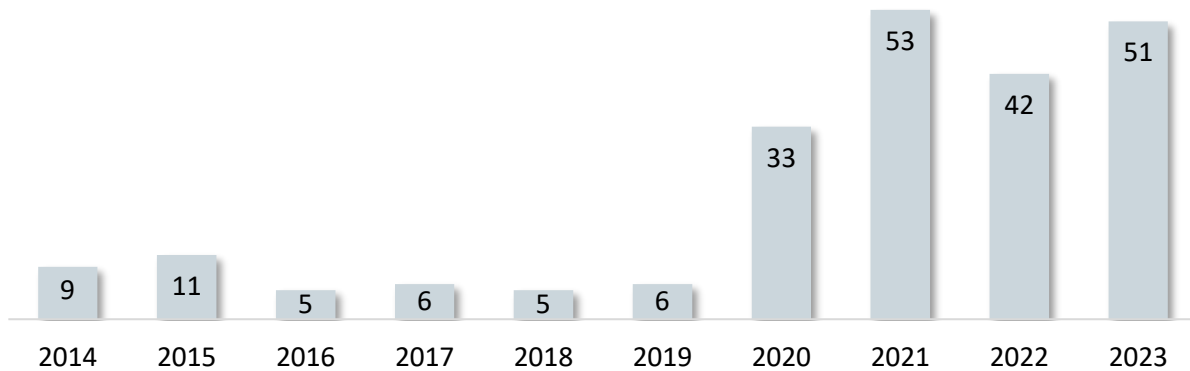


## Natural Deaths

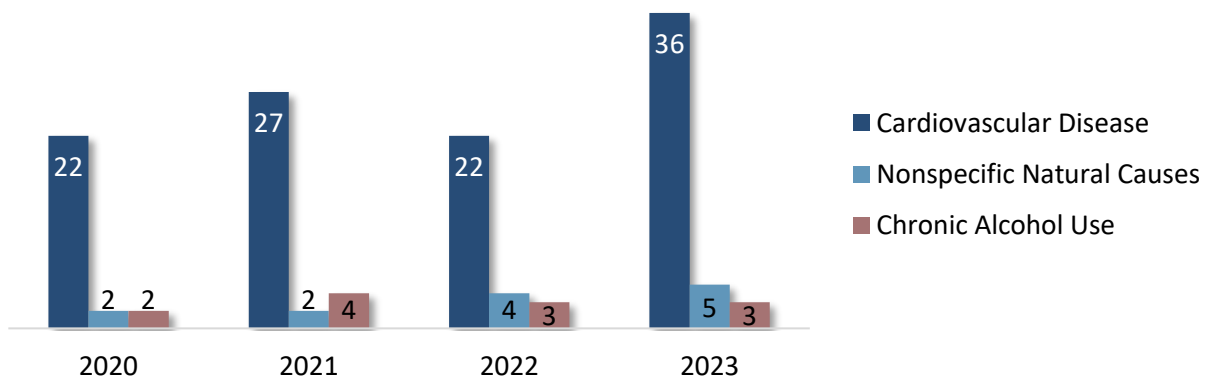
**Natural death data in this report is limited to deaths certified by the PCOME (ME cases) and does not reflect the total number of natural deaths in La Paz County.** Most natural deaths that occur in a county do not fall under the jurisdiction of a medical examiner and instead, are certified by a decedent's healthcare provider. The PCOME accepts jurisdiction of cases that appear to be natural deaths if the decedent is not in the care of a healthcare provider, dies while in custody, is unidentified, and/or a previously healthy individual dies suddenly/unexpectedly, as determined by the PCOME. Natural death data should be interpreted with caution as the PCOME is not aware of the number of natural deaths certified by physicians in the community.

Since contracting with the PCOME in 2020, natural deaths have made up the largest proportion of La Paz County ME Cases each year (average of 47% of ME Cases). In 2023, the PCOME certified 51 La Paz County cases as natural deaths. Cardiovascular disease is the most common cause of La Paz County natural deaths certified by the PCOME.

### La Paz County Natural Deaths Certified by the PCOME



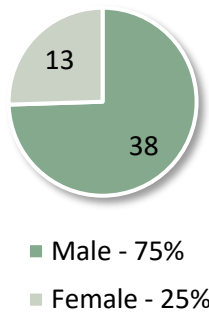
### Top Causes of La Paz County Natural Deaths (ME Cases Only)



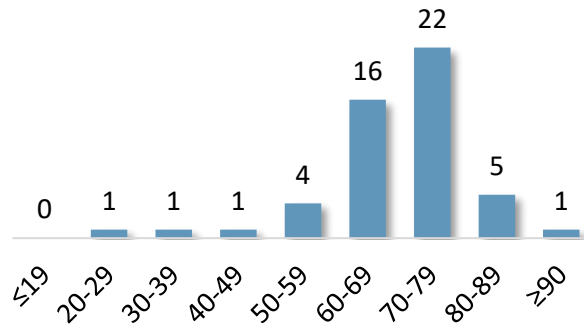
Male decedents comprised 75% of La Paz County natural deaths (ME cases only). Decedents aged 70-to-79 years old accounted for the largest portion of natural deaths of any age group (43%). Non-Hispanic Whites made up the largest percentage of deaths among all racial groups (82%). Cardiovascular disease was the most common cause of natural deaths (71%).

### **2023 La Paz County Natural Deaths (ME Cases Only)**

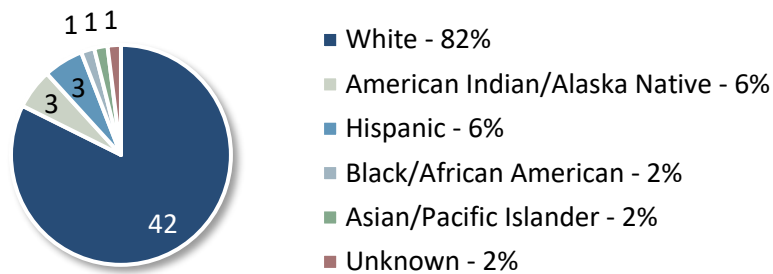
**Decedent Sex**



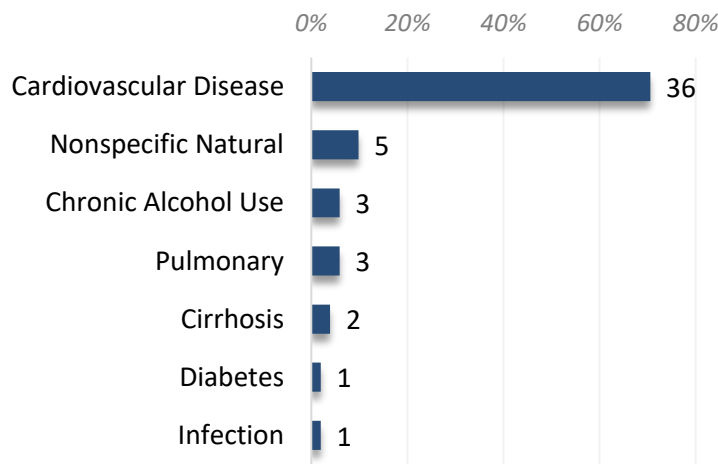
**Decedent Age Group**



**Decedent Race/Ethnicity**



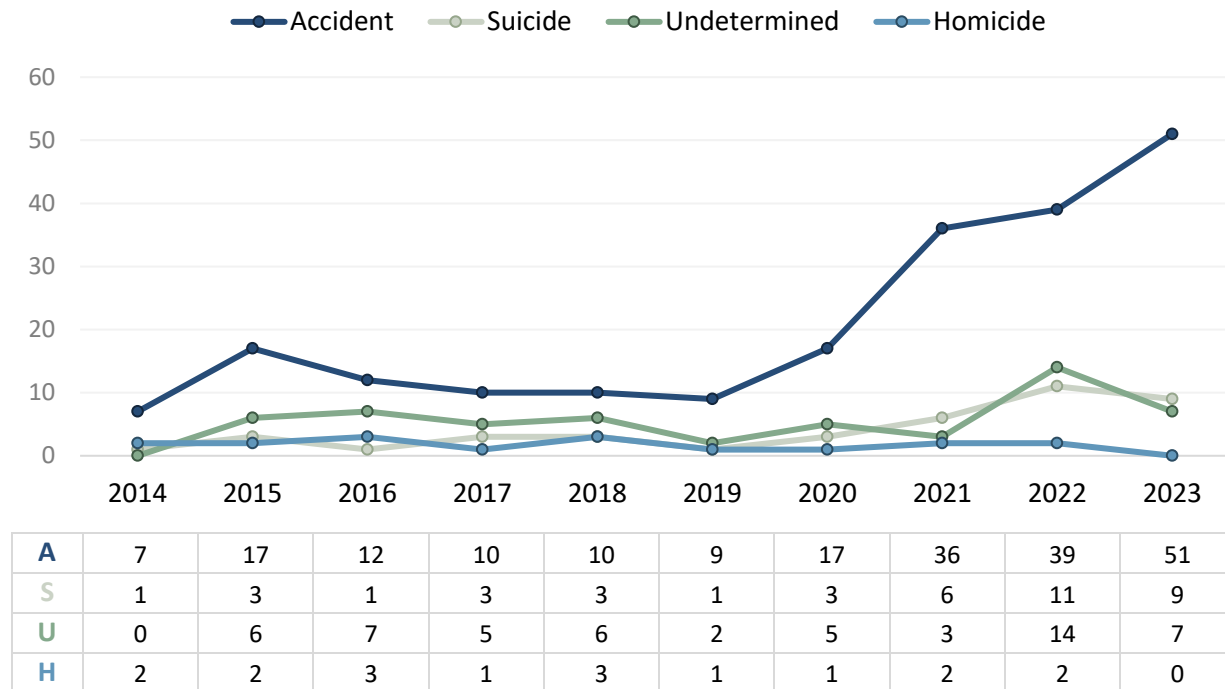
**Cause of Death**



## Non-Natural Manner Deaths

Non-natural manner of death (MOD) classifications include accident, homicide, suicide, and undetermined. Trends in La Paz County ME cases with a non-natural MOD are displayed below. Data comparison is best made between calendar years 2021 through 2023, after La Paz County's contract with the PCOME began. Accident deaths increased for a second year in a row, reaching a high of 51 in 2023, a 31% increase from the year prior. Suicides, undetermined manner deaths, and homicides decreased slightly from 2022 to 2023. Notably, there were no homicides in La Paz County in 2023.

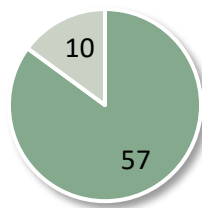
### La Paz County ME Cases by Non-Natural MOD



The PCOME certified 67 La Paz County deaths with a non-natural manner in 2023. Male decedents comprised 85% of these cases. Decedents aged 60-to-69 years old accounted for the largest portion of deaths of any age group (31%). Non-Hispanic Whites accounted for the largest percentage of deaths among all racial groups (75%). Demographic data by MOD is presented in the table on the following page.

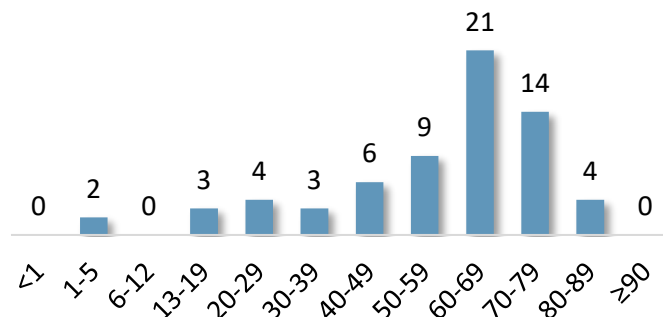
### 2023 La Paz County Non-Natural MOD Cases by Demographics

#### Decedent Sex

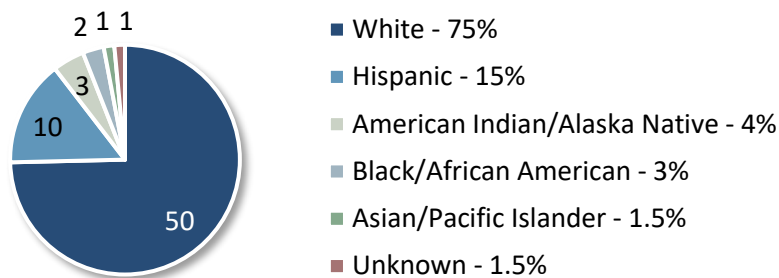


■ Male - 85%  
■ Female - 15%

#### Decedent Age Group



## Decedent Race/Ethnicity



2023 La Paz County ME Case Demographics by Non-Natural MOD <i>n (%)</i>			
Characteristic	Accident N=51	Suicide N=9	Undeterm. N=7
<b>Sex</b>			
Male	42 (82%)	8 (89%)	7 (100%)
Female	9 (18%)	1 (11%)	-
<b>Age Group</b>			
<1	-	-	-
1 – 5	1 (2%)	-	1 (14%)
6 – 12	-	-	-
13 – 19	3 (6%)	-	-
20 – 29	4 (8%)	-	-
30 – 39	3 (6%)	-	-
40 – 49	4 (8%)	2 (22%)	-
50 – 59	6 (12%)	2 (22%)	1 (14%)
60 – 69	17 (33%)	2 (22%)	2 (29%)
70 – 79	9 (17%)	3 (33%)	2 (29%)
80 – 89	4 (8%)	-	-
Unknown	-	-	1 (14%)
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>			
White	38 (74%)	7 (78%)	5 (71%)
Hispanic	8 (16%)	1 (11%)	1 (14%)
American Indian/Alaska Native	2 (4%)	1 (11%)	-
Black/African American	2 (4%)	-	-
Asian/Pacific Islander	1 (2%)	-	-
Unknown	-	-	1 (14%)

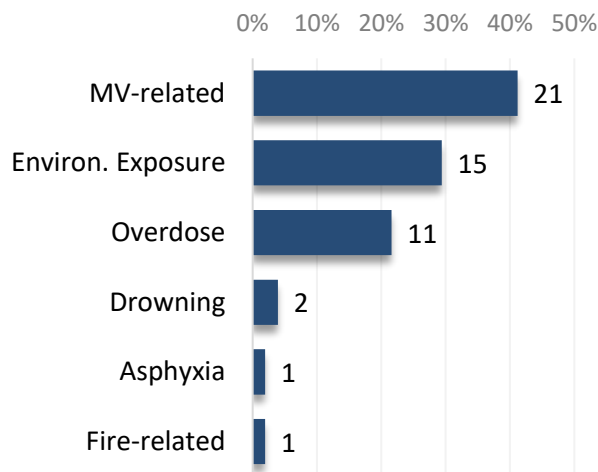
Accident deaths made up the largest proportion of La Paz County non-natural manner deaths (76%). The bar graphs below, separated by MOD, display the number and percentage of 2023 La Paz County ME cases by cause/mechanism of death. In 2023, injuries from motor vehicle-related (MV-related) accidents (i.e., motor vehicles, motorcyclists, bicyclists, pedestrians, etc.) were the leading cause of accident deaths in La Paz County (41%). Most undetermined manner deaths were certified with an undetermined cause of death (57%). Firearms were the most common means of suicide (88%).

## **2023 La Paz County Non-Natural MOD Cases by Manner and Cause of Death**

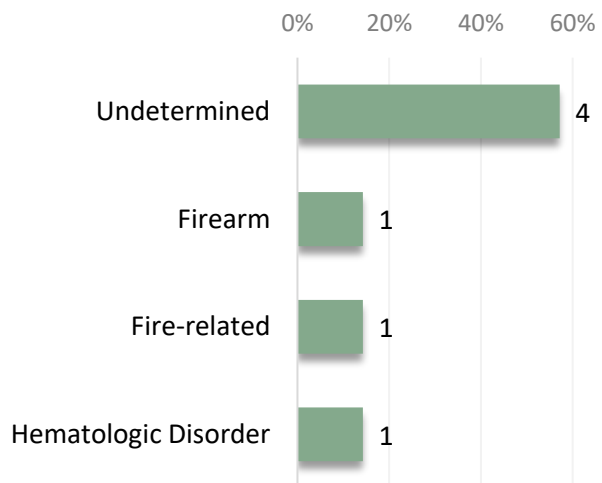
### **Manner of Death**



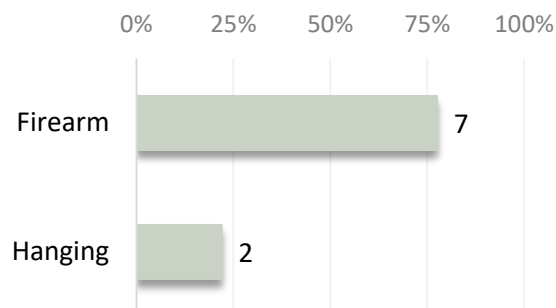
### **Accident**



### **Undetermined**



### **Suicide**



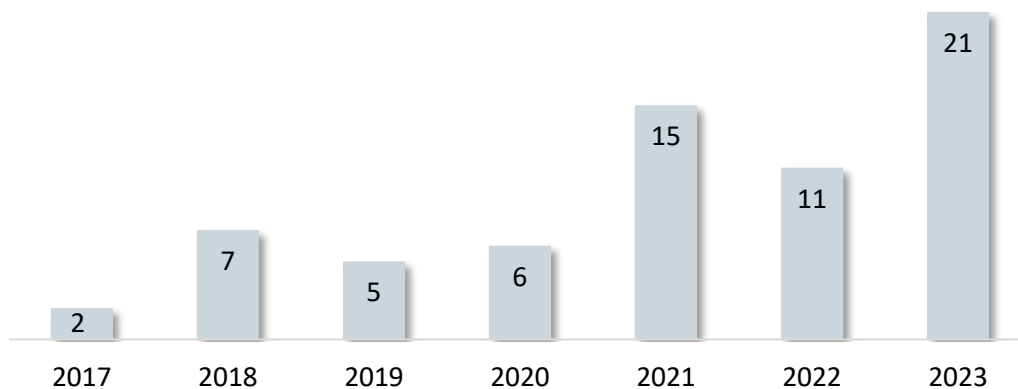
## Cause-Specific Deaths

The leading causes of death for La Paz County cases certified with a non-natural manner (i.e., accidents, homicides, suicides, and undetermined manner deaths) are presented in detail in this section. Compared to the year prior, injuries from motor vehicle-related (MV-related) accidents and environmental exposure deaths both increased in 2023, while deaths due to overdose and firearms decreased. A total of 67 deaths were certified with a non-natural manner in 2023. Of those, the most common cause was injuries from motor vehicle-related accidents (n=21, 31%), followed by exposure deaths (n=15, 22%), overdose (n=11, 16%), and firearms (n=8, 12%).

### Motor Vehicle-Related

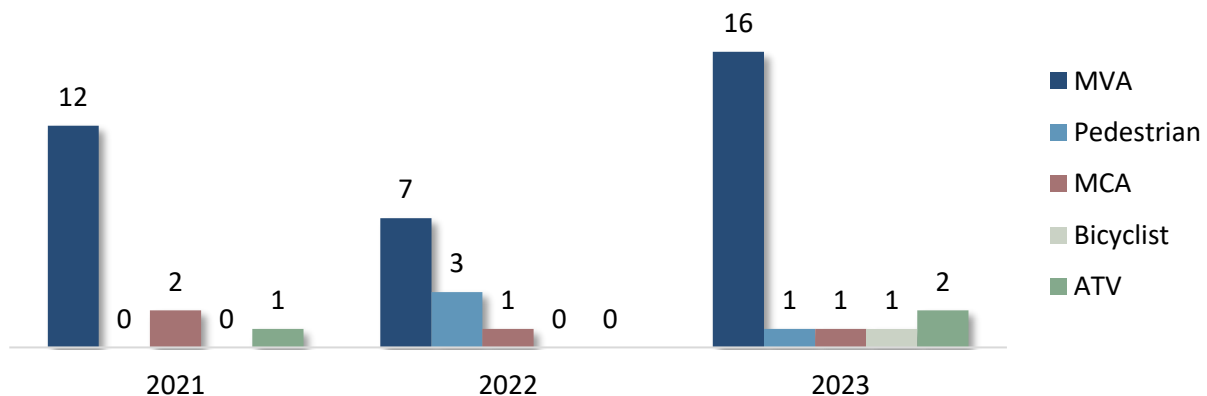
MV-related injuries were the leading cause of non-natural manner deaths in La Paz County in 2023 (21 deaths), nearly twice as many as the year prior; all 21 were certified with an accidental manner.

**La Paz County MV-Related Deaths Certified by the PCOME**



As seen in the graph below, most MV-related deaths in La Paz County each year are occupants (i.e., driver or passenger) of a motor vehicle involved in an accident (MVA). A smaller portion consists of pedestrians struck by vehicles, motorcycle riders involved in an accident (MCA), bicyclists involved in an accident, and occupants involved in an all-terrain vehicle (ATV) accident.

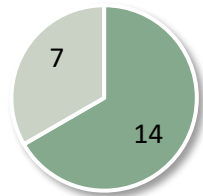
**La Paz County MV-Related Deaths by Incident Type**



In 2023, male decedents comprised 67% of MV-related accident deaths in La Paz County. Nearly half of decedents were aged 60 to 89 years old (48%). Decedents in their seventies accounted for the largest portion of deaths of any 10-year age group (19%). Non-Hispanic Whites accounted for the largest percentage of deaths among all racial groups (62%). Occupants of an MVA (i.e., driver or passenger) represent 76% of all MV-related deaths in La Paz County in 2023.

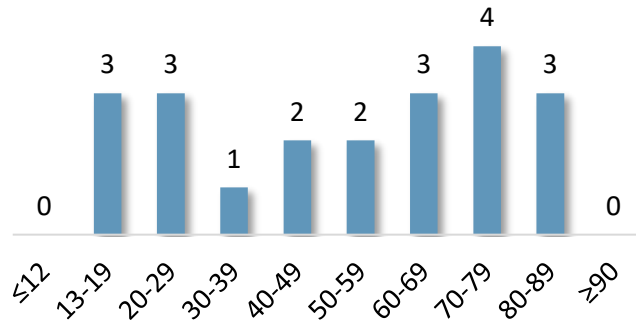
### **2023 La Paz County Motor Vehicle-Related Deaths**

**Decedent Sex**

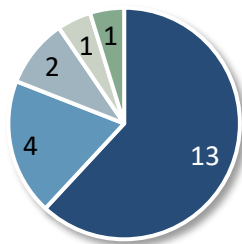


■ Male - 67%  
■ Female - 33%

**Decedent Age Group**

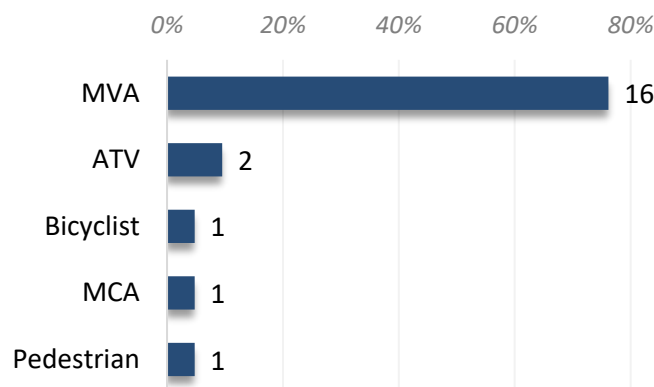


**Decedent Race/Ethnicity**



■ White - 62%  
■ Hispanic - 19%  
■ Black/African American - 9%  
■ American Indian/Alaska Native - 5%  
■ Asian/Pacific Islander - 5%

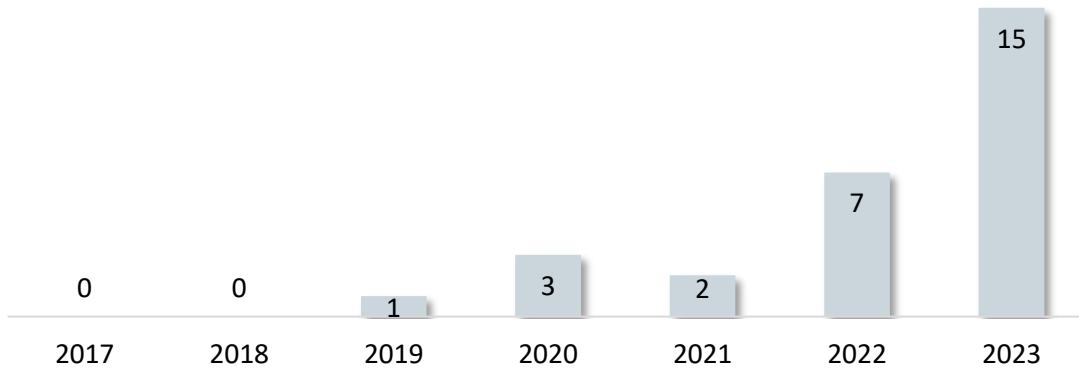
**Incident Type**



## Environmental Exposure

Environmental exposure (i.e. hyperthermia, hypothermia) was the second leading cause of non-natural manner deaths in La Paz County in 2023 (15 deaths), over twice as many as the year prior. All La Paz County exposure deaths certified by the PCOME to date are certified as accidental manner deaths.

### La Paz County Environ. Exposure Deaths Certified by the PCOME



Males comprised 100% of La Paz County exposure deaths in 2023. Notably, all exposure deaths were in decedents aged 50 years or older. Decedents aged 60-69 years old made up the largest proportion of any 10-year age group (53%). Decedents were predominantly non-Hispanic White (87%).

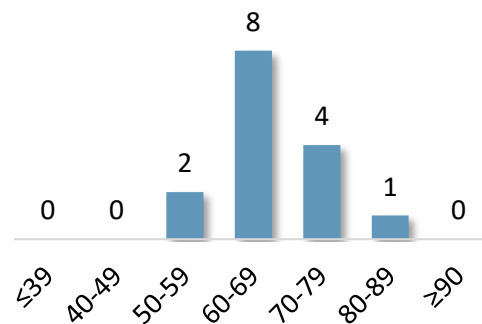
### 2023 La Paz County Environmental Exposure Deaths

#### Decedent Sex

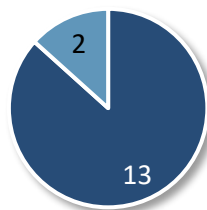


Male - 100%

#### Decedent Age Group



#### Decedent Race/Ethnicity

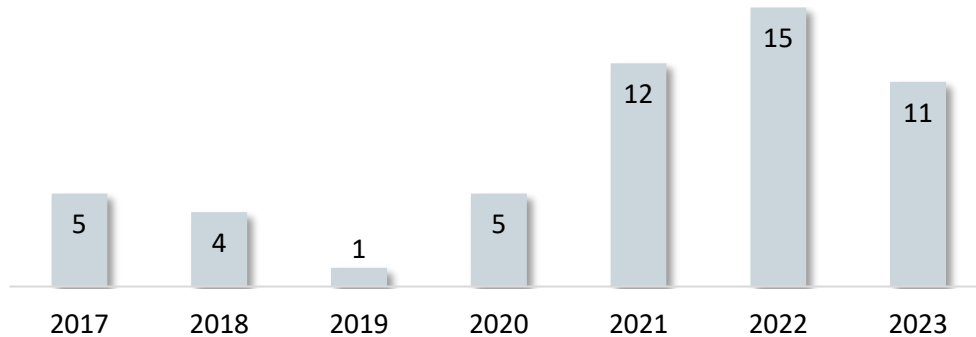


White - 87%  
Hispanic - 13%

## Overdose

Overdose was the third leading cause of non-natural manner deaths in La Paz County in 2023. A total of 11 La Paz County deaths were attributed to an overdose, a 27% decrease from the year prior. All 2023 overdose deaths in La Paz County were certified with an accidental manner of death.

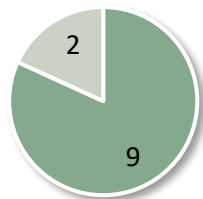
### La Paz County Overdose Deaths Certified by the PCOME



Decedents of a drug overdose in La Paz County in 2023 were predominantly male (82%); between 60-69 years old (45%); and non-Hispanic White (91%).

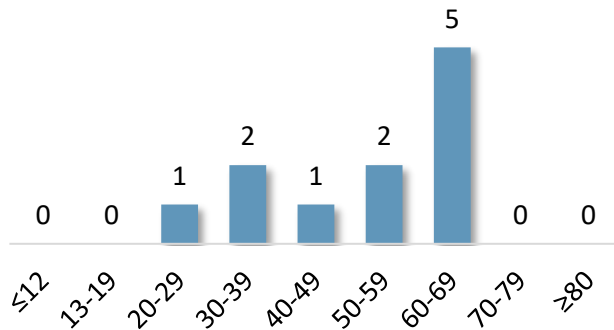
### 2023 La Paz County Overdose Deaths

#### Decedent Sex

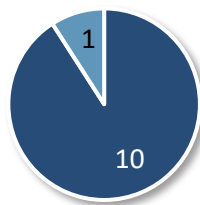


- Male - 82%
- Female - 18%

#### Decedent Age Group



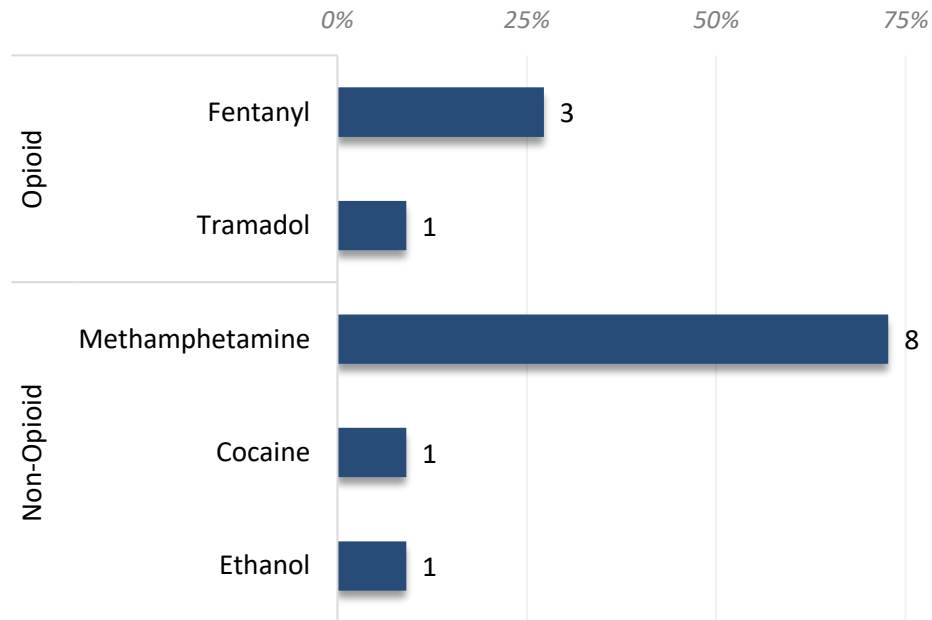
#### Decedent Race/Ethnicity



- White - 91%
- Hispanic - 9%

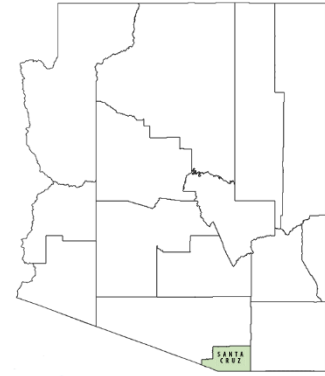
Overdose due to a single drug was more common than polydrug deaths (8:3). An opioid was involved in four La Paz County overdose deaths in 2023 (36%), either as a single drug or as a component of a polydrug overdose. Methamphetamine remained the most frequently found drug, contributing to 73% of La Paz County overdose deaths. Second to methamphetamine was fentanyl, which contributed to 27% of overdose deaths.

### Frequency of Drugs Contributing to La Paz County Overdose Deaths, 2023

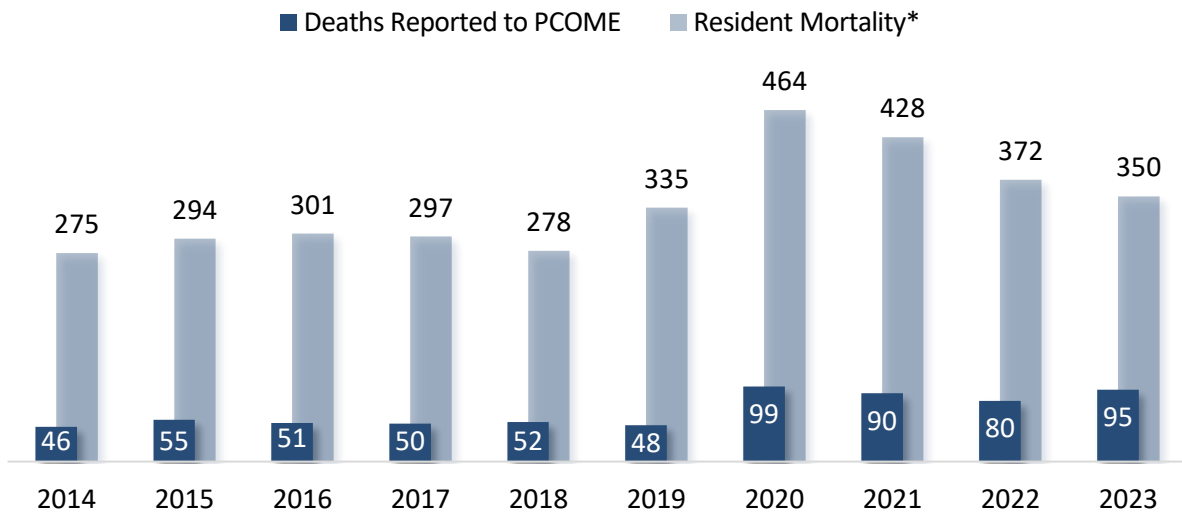


## Santa Cruz County

On average, roughly 20% of Santa Cruz County deaths are reported to the PCOME each year. In 2023, there were 350 deaths of Santa Cruz County residents. Ninety-five deaths were reported to the PCOME for investigation (27% of total resident mortality). The PCOME accepted jurisdiction of 72 cases, representing 21% of Santa Cruz County resident mortality\* in 2023. Jurisdiction was declined in 22 cases. One case was reported to the PCOME for anthropologic examination only, without certification of the death by the PCOME (this case is not included in the jurisdictional disposition graph below).

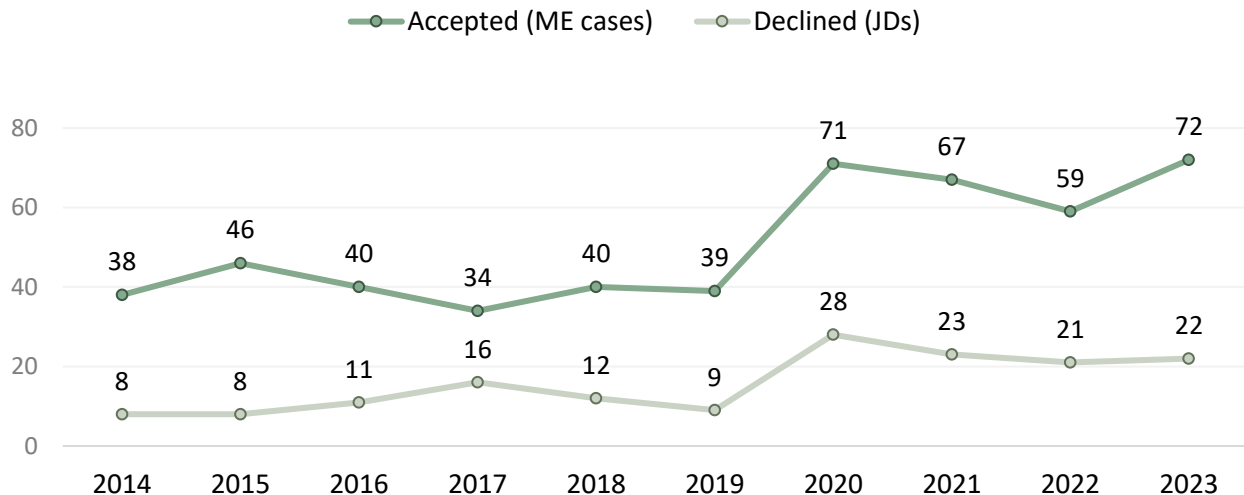


### Santa Cruz County Resident Mortality and Reported Deaths



\*Santa Cruz County resident mortality from Arizona Department of Health Services Vital Statistics as of 1/29/2024

### Jurisdictional Disposition of Santa Cruz County Reported Deaths

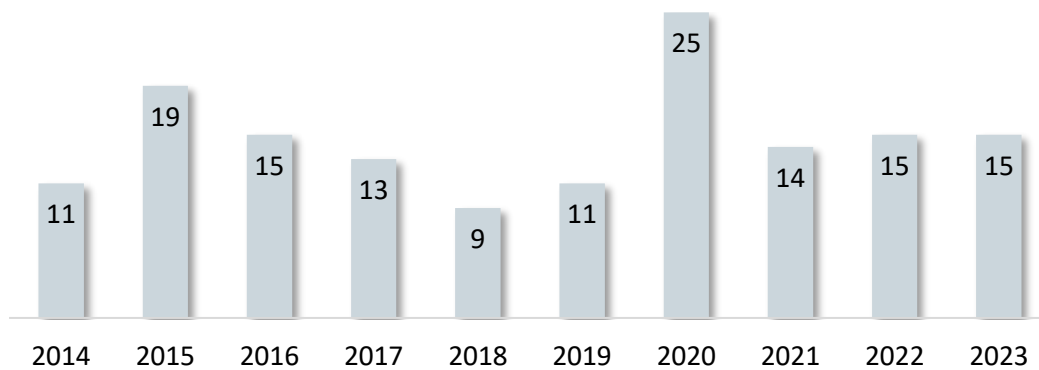


## Natural Deaths

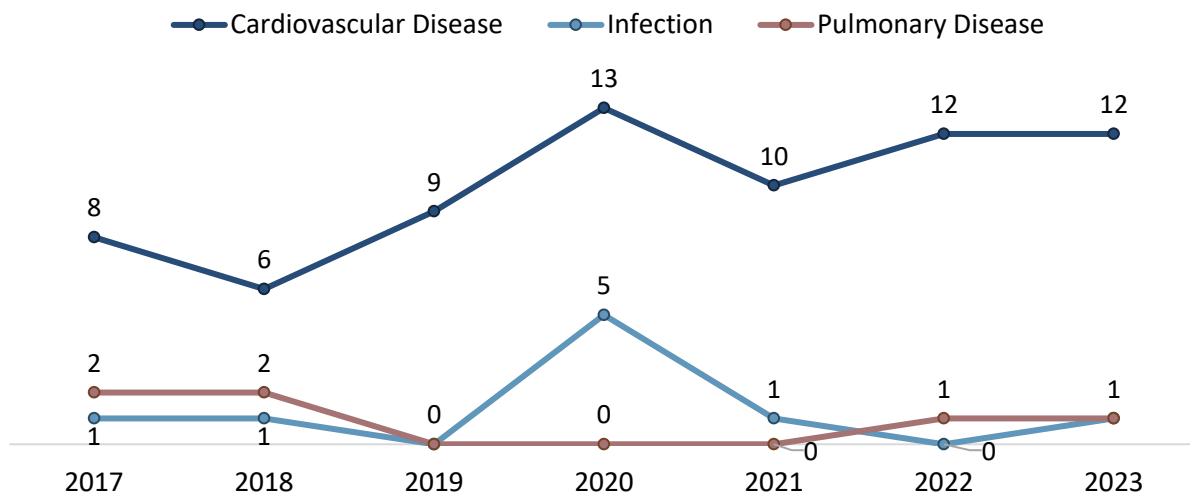
**Natural death data in this report is limited to deaths certified by the PCOME (ME cases) and does not reflect the total number of natural deaths in Santa Cruz County.** Most natural deaths that occur in a county do not fall under the jurisdiction of a medical examiner and instead, are certified by a decedent's healthcare provider. The PCOME accepts jurisdiction of cases that appear to be natural deaths if the decedent is not in the care of a healthcare provider, dies while in custody, is unidentified, and/or a previously healthy individual dies suddenly/unexpectedly, as determined by the PCOME. Natural death data should be interpreted with caution as the PCOME is not aware of the number of natural deaths certified by physicians in the community.

Fifteen Santa Cruz County cases were certified by the PCOME in 2023 as natural deaths; cardiovascular disease continues to be the most common cause of death.

### Santa Cruz County Natural Deaths Certified by the PCOME



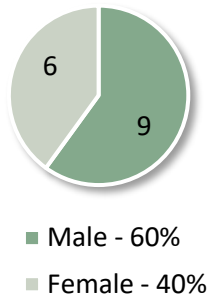
### Top Causes of Santa Cruz County Natural Deaths (ME Cases Only)



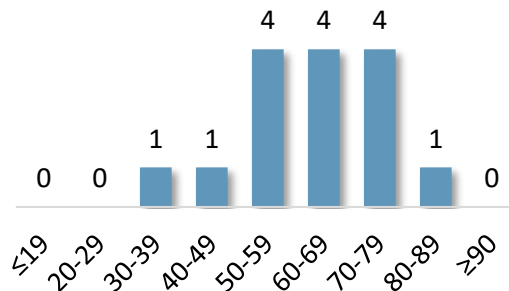
The ratio of male to female decedents was 3:2 for 2023 PCOME-certified natural deaths in Santa Cruz County. Eighty percent of decedents were between the ages of 50 and 79. Fifty-three percent of decedents were non-Hispanic White and 47% were Hispanic. Cardiovascular disease was the most common cause of death in these cases (80%).

### **2023 Santa Cruz County Natural Deaths (ME Cases Only)**

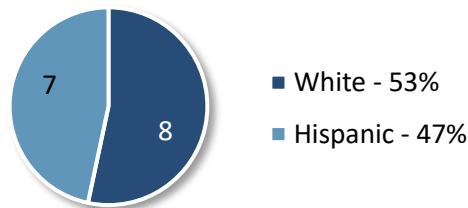
**Decedent Sex**



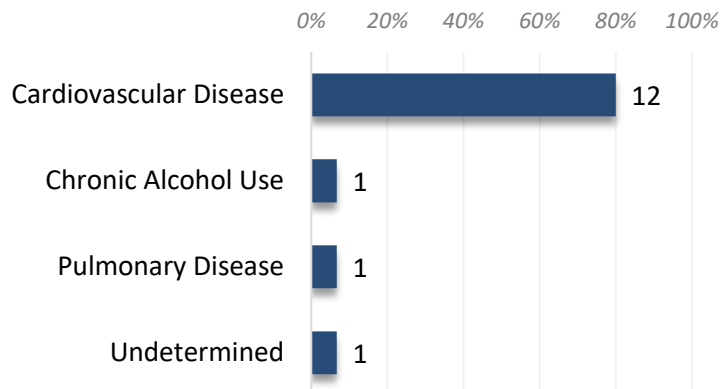
**Decedent Age Group**



**Decedent Race/Ethnicity**



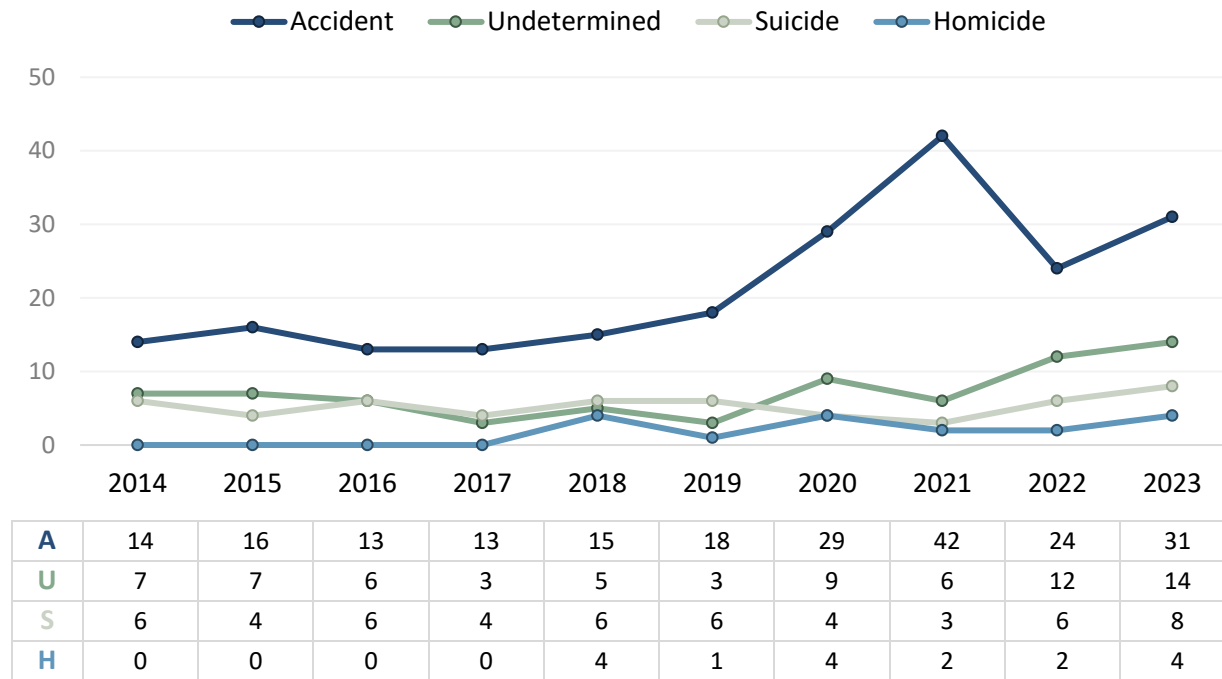
**Cause of Death**



## Non-Natural Manner Deaths

Non-natural MOD classifications include accident, homicide, suicide, and undetermined. Trends in Santa Cruz County ME cases with a non-natural MOD are displayed below. In 2023, all deaths certified with a non-natural manner increased from the previous year. Accident deaths remain the most common, averaging 60% of non-natural MOD cases in Santa Cruz County.

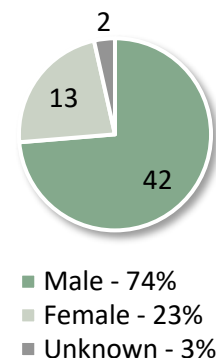
**Santa Cruz County ME Cases by Non-Natural MOD**



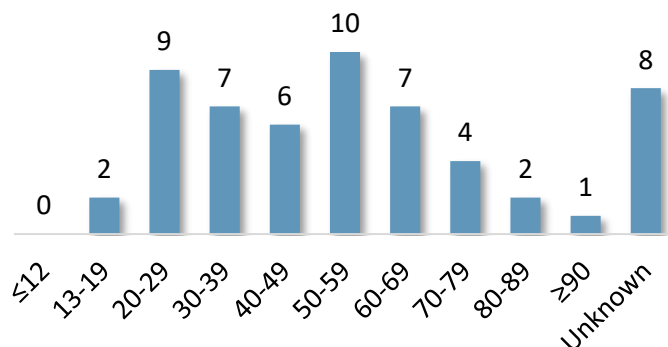
A total of 57 Santa Cruz County deaths were certified with a non-natural manner in 2023. Male decedents comprised 74% of these cases. Decedents aged 50-to-59 years old accounted for the largest portion of deaths of any age group (18%). Hispanics accounted for the largest percentage of non-natural manner deaths among all racial groups (56%). Demographic data by MOD is presented on the following page.

### 2023 Santa Cruz County Non-Natural MOD Cases by Demographics

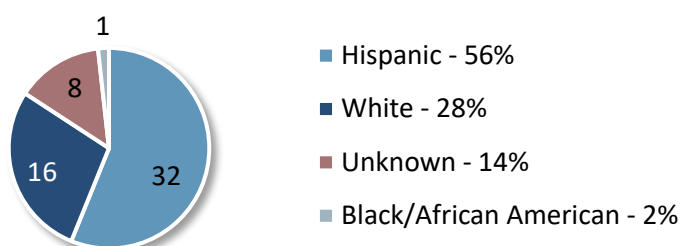
**Decedent Sex**



**Decedent Age Group**



## Decedent Race/Ethnicity

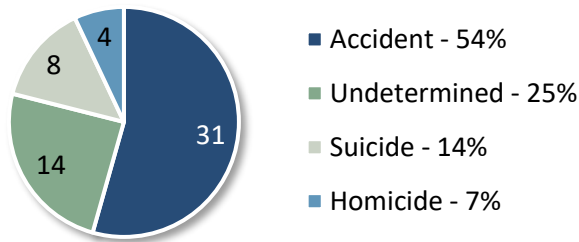


2023 Santa Cruz County ME Case Demographics by Non-Natural MOD n (%)				
Characteristic	Accident N=31	Undeterm. N=14	Suicide N=8	Homicide N=4
<b>Sex</b>				
Male	21 (68%)	9 (64%)	8 (100%)	4 (100%)
Female	10 (32%)	3 (22%)	-	-
Unsure	-	2 (14%)	-	-
<b>Age Group</b>				
<1	-	1 (7%)	-	-
1 – 5	-	-	-	-
6 – 12	-	-	-	-
13 – 19	1 (3%)	1 (7%)	-	-
20 – 29	4 (13%)	2 (15%)	3 (38%)	-
30 – 39	6 (19%)	-	-	1 (25%)
40 – 49	3 (10%)	-	1 (13%)	2 (50%)
50 – 59	6 (19%)	2 (15%)	2 (25%)	-
60 – 69	4 (13%)	-	2 (25%)	1 (25%)
70 – 79	3 (10%)	1 (7%)	-	-
80 – 89	2 (7%)	-	-	-
≥90	1 (3%)	-	-	-
Unknown	1 (3%)	7 (50%)	-	-
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>				
Hispanic	21 (68%)	6 (43%)	2 (25%)	3 (75%)
White	8 (26%)	1 (7%)	6 (75%)	1 (25%)
Black/African American	1 (3%)	-	-	-
Unknown	1 (3%)	7 (50%)	-	-

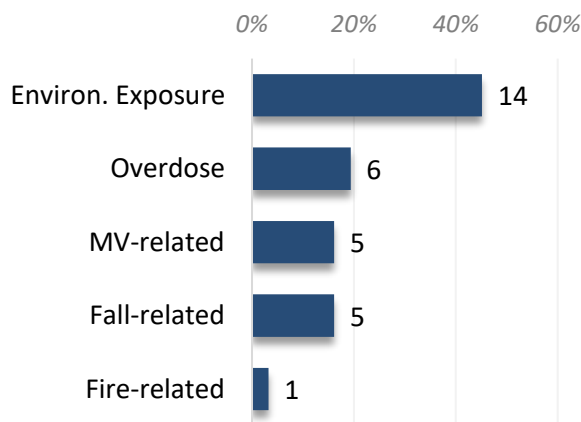
In 2023, accidents made up the largest proportion of non-natural manner deaths in Santa Cruz County (54%), followed by undetermined manner deaths (25%). The bar graph below displays the number of 2023 Santa Cruz County ME cases by manner and cause/mechanism of death. Environmental exposure (i.e., hyperthermia, hypothermia) was the most frequent cause of accidental deaths (45%). Firearms were the most common means of Santa Cruz County suicide deaths and the most common cause of homicide deaths. All undetermined manner deaths were certified with an undetermined cause.

### 2023 Santa Cruz County Non-Natural MOD Cases by Manner and Cause

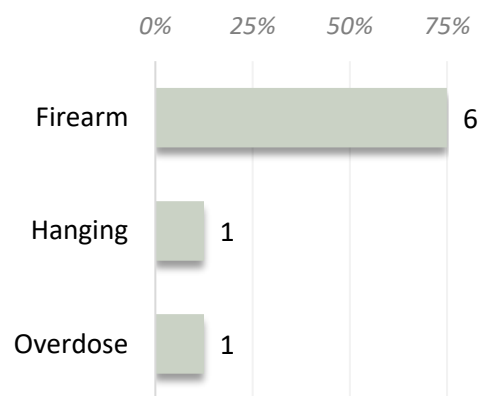
#### Manner of Death



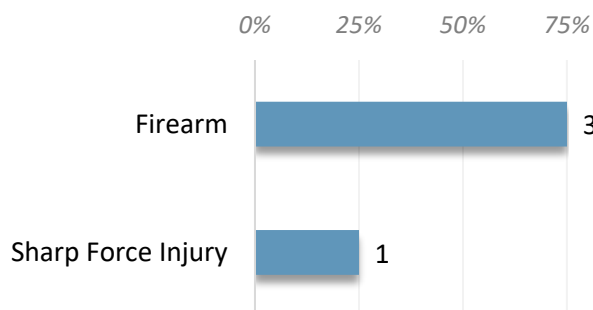
#### Accident



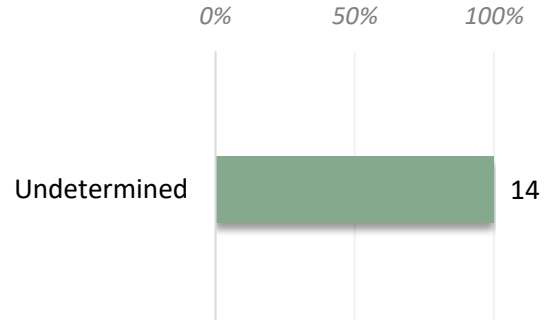
#### Suicide



#### Homicide

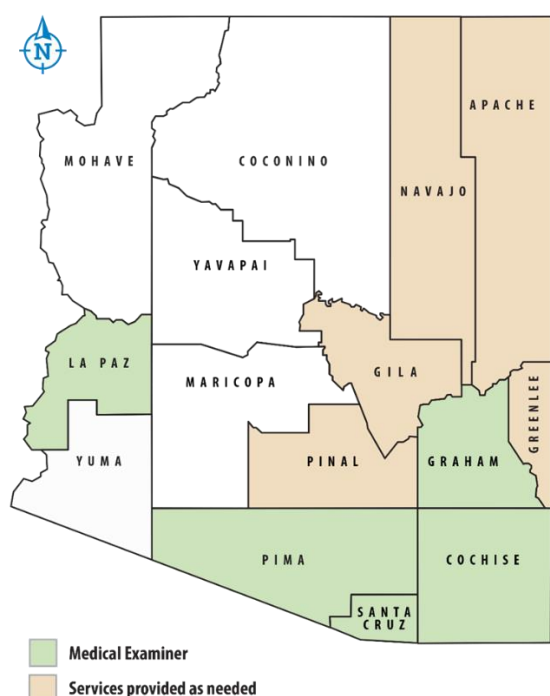


#### Undetermined



## DEATHS BY COUNTY: NON-MEDICAL EXAMINER COUNTIES

Non-Medical Examiner Counties are those counties in which the PCOME performs examinations on a fee-for-service at the request of the County or Tribal organization triaging deaths in their jurisdiction (i.e., Apache, Gila, Greenlee, Navajo, and Pinal). Deaths on Native American tribal lands do not have to be reported through the respective death investigation system of that County and may be reported directly to the PCOME as necessary for the needs of the appropriate agency investigating that death (i.e., Bureau of Indian Affairs, FBI, or local tribal police departments).



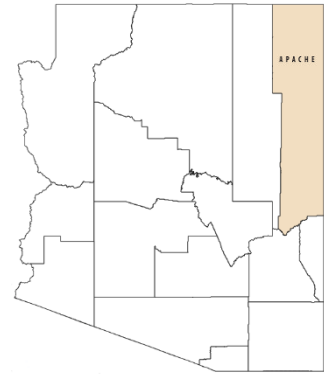
Apache, Greenlee, and Navajo County contracts with an appointed non-Forensic Pathologist physician(s), termed an Alternate Medical Examiner(s) (AME) (A.R.S. §11-591); who triages, investigates, and certifies deaths that fall under the jurisdiction of the medical examiner in their respective County. The AME does not perform autopsy examinations and if the AME deems an autopsy is necessary to certify the cause and manner of death, the decedent may be referred to the PCOME for an examination and death certification.

Pinal County appointed a Medical Examiner in December 2016 and maintains its own Medical Examiner's office staffed to conduct death scene investigations, transport remains, perform examinations, and triage deaths reportable to the ME, as stated in A.R.S §11-593 B. For Pinal County data prior to 2017, please refer to the [2016 PCOME Annual Report](#).

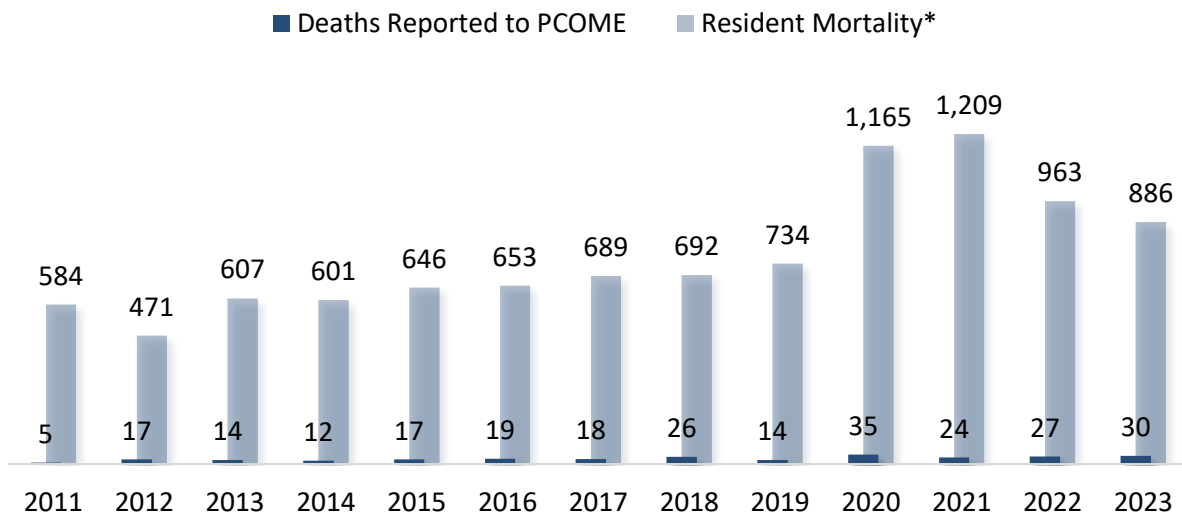
Gila County contracts with the Pinal County Office of the Medical Examiner, who triages, investigates, and certifies deaths that fall under the jurisdiction of the medical examiner (ME) in Gila County.

## Apache County

The PCOME is not aware of how many deaths occurring in Apache County are reported to or certified by the Apache County AME. The PCOME only has a record of deaths reported to or referred for examination to Pima County. In 2023, there were 886 deaths of Apache County residents\*; of these, 30 deaths (3% of total resident mortality) were reported to the PCOME. Jurisdiction was accepted in 29 cases and declined in one case.

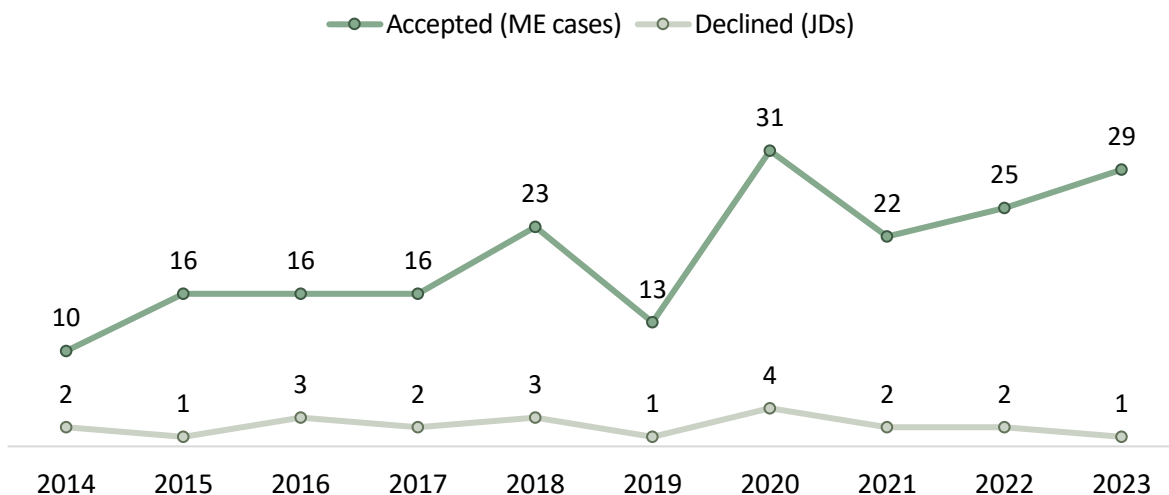


### Apache County Resident Mortality and Reported Deaths



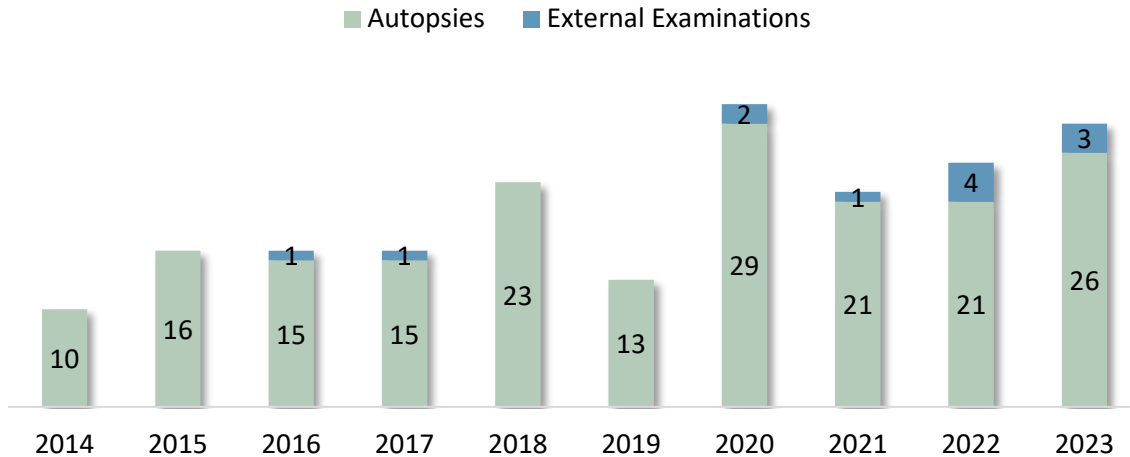
\*Apache County resident mortality from Arizona Department of Health Services Vital Statistics as of 1/29/24

### Jurisdictional Disposition of Apache County Reported Deaths



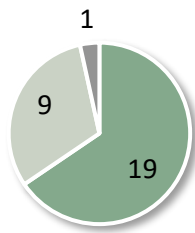
For a detailed description of ME cases and examination types, refer to [page 12](#). Out of the 29 Apache County cases accepted in 2023, the PCOME performed 26 autopsies (90%) and three external examinations (10%). Demographic data, MOD, and COD for ME cases are detailed below.

### Apache County ME Cases by Examination Type



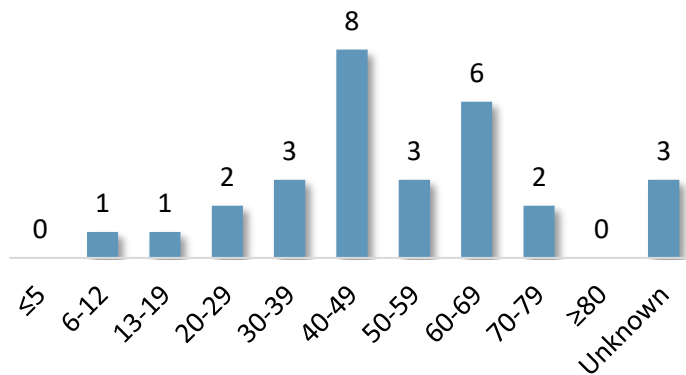
### 2023 Apache County ME Cases by Demographics

#### Decedent Sex



- Male - 66%
- Female - 31%
- Unsure - 3%

#### Decedent Age Group

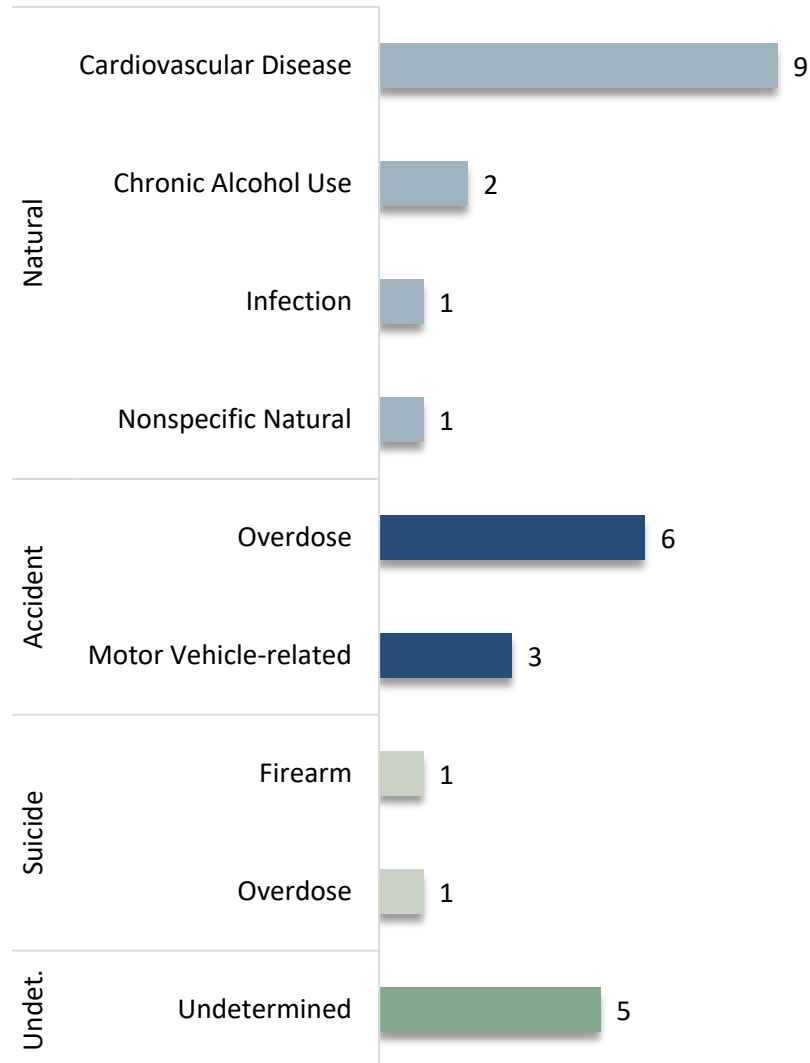


## 2023 Apache County ME Cases by Manner and Cause of Death

### Manner of Death

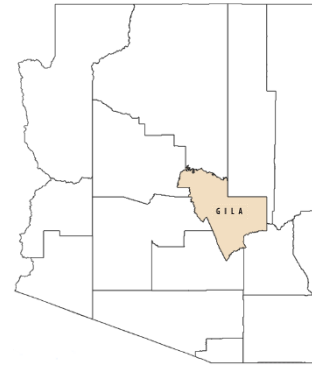


### Cause of Death by Manner

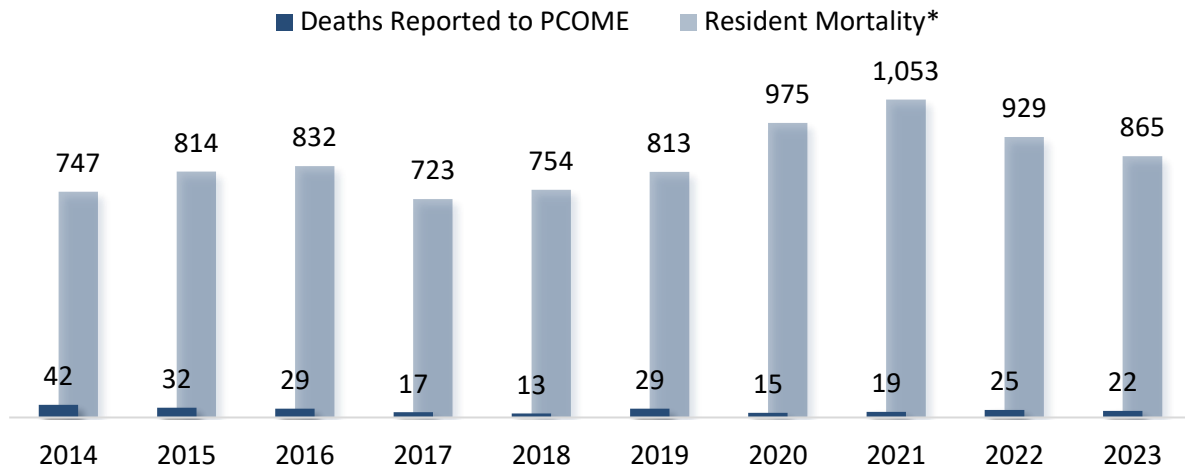


## Gila County

The PCOME is not aware of how many deaths occurring in Gila County are reported to or certified by their appointed ME, the Pinal County OME. The PCOME only has a record of deaths reported to or referred for examination to Pima County. In 2023, there were 865 total deaths of Gila County residents\*; of these, 22 deaths (3% of total resident mortality) were reported to the PCOME for investigation. All but one case was accepted under the PCOME jurisdiction.

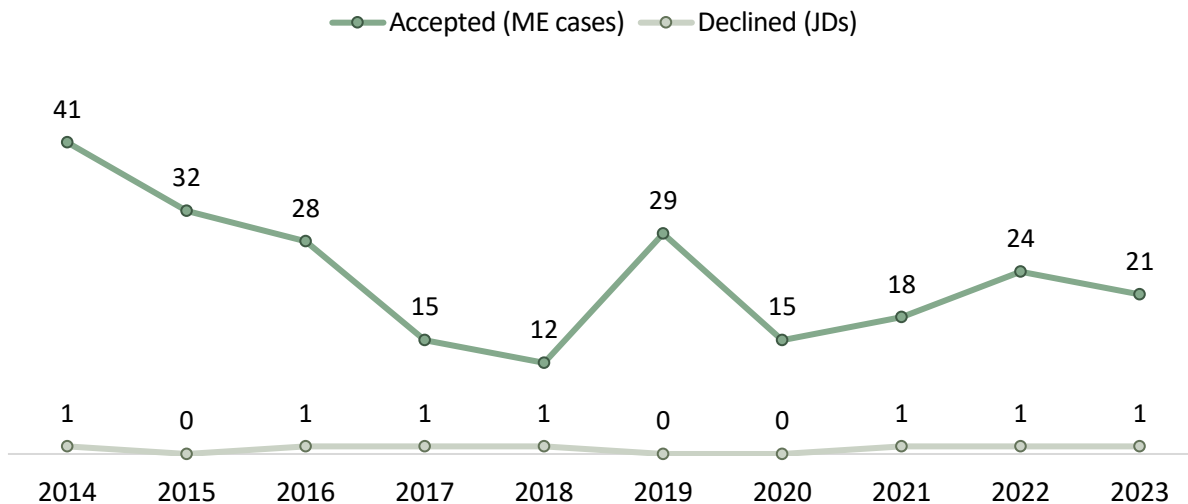


### Gila County Resident Mortality and Reported Deaths



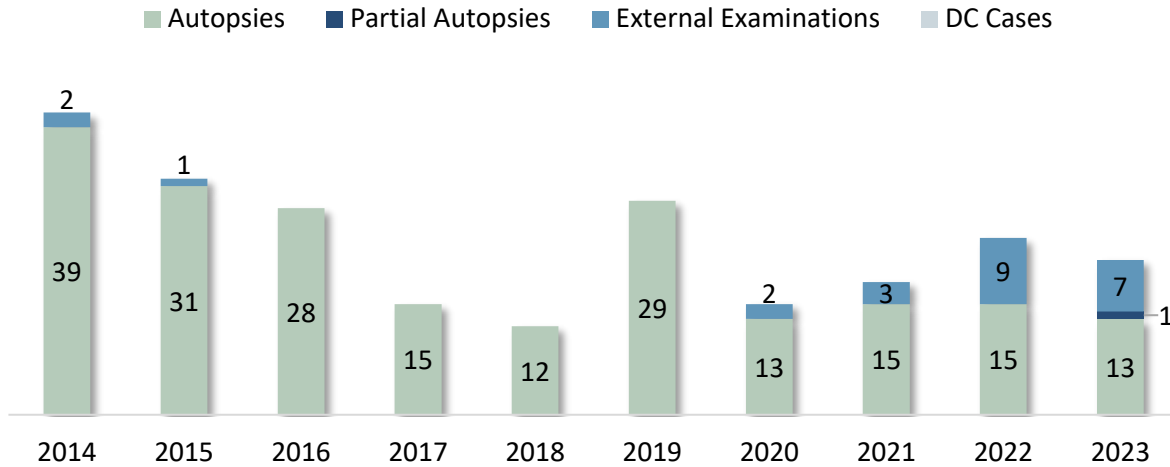
\*Gila County resident mortality from Arizona Department of Health Services Vital Statistics as of 1/29/24

### Jurisdictional Disposition of Gila County Reported Deaths



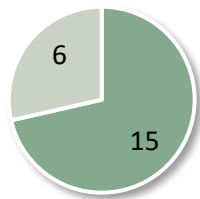
For a detailed description of ME cases and examination types, refer to [page 12](#). Out of the 21 Gila County cases accepted in 2023, the PCOME performed 13 autopsies (62%), seven external examinations (33%), and one partial autopsy (5%). Demographic data, MOD, and COD for ME cases are detailed below.

### Gila County ME Cases by Examination Type



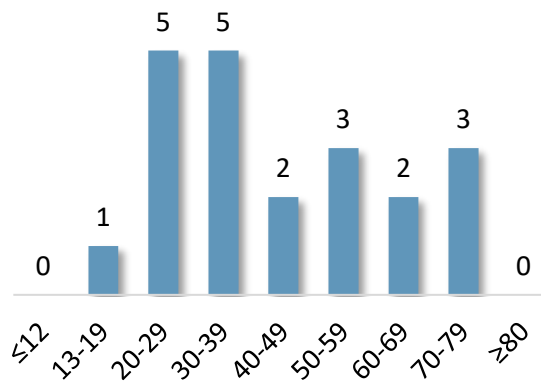
### 2023 Gila County ME Cases by Demographics

#### Decedent Sex



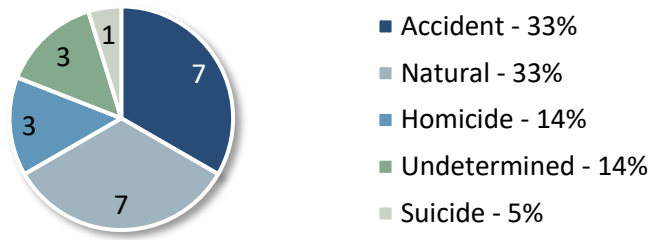
■ Male - 71%  
■ Female - 29%

#### Decedent Age Group

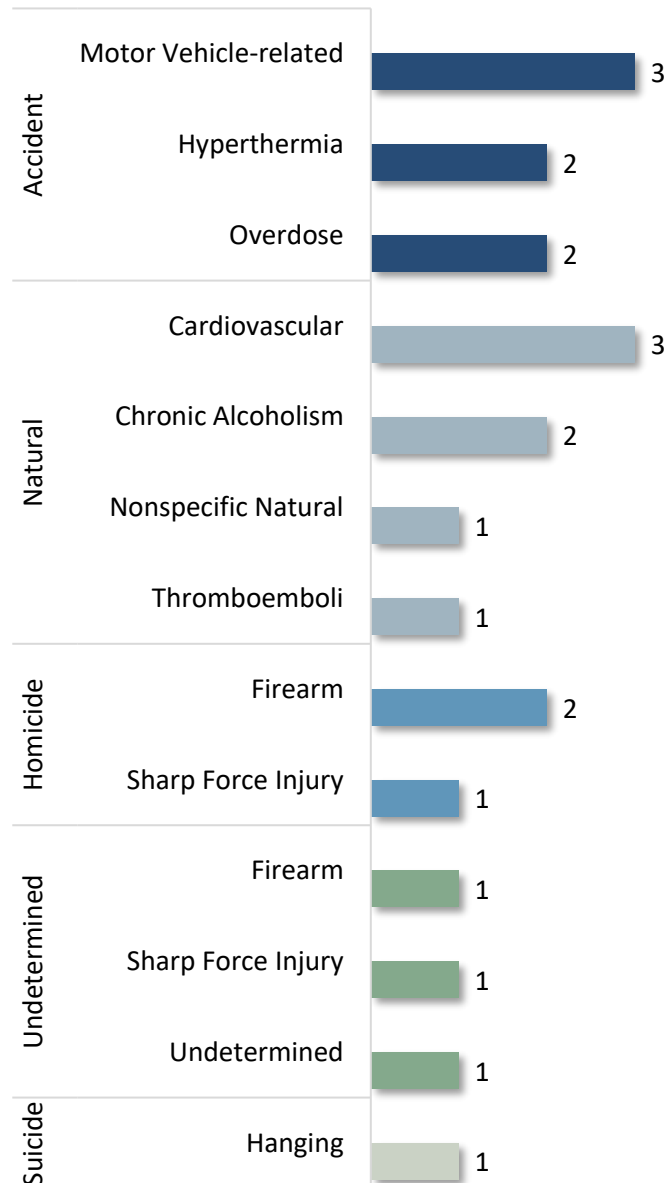


## 2023 Gila County ME Cases by Manner and Cause of Death

**Manner of Death**

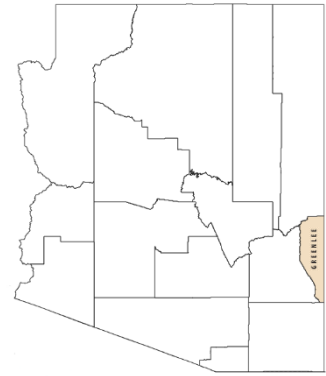


**Cause of Death by Manner**

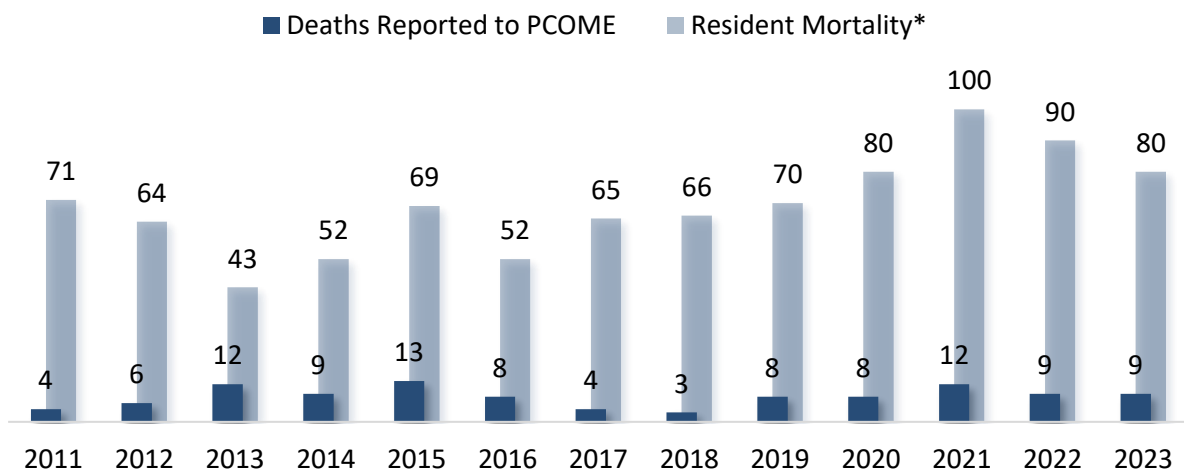


## Greenlee County

The PCOME is not aware of how many deaths occurring in Greenlee County are reported to or certified by the Greenlee County AME. The PCOME only has a record of deaths reported to or referred for examination to Pima County. In 2023, there were 80 deaths of Greenlee County residents\*; of these, nine deaths (11% of total resident mortality) were reported to the PCOME for investigation. All but one case was accepted under the PCOME jurisdiction.

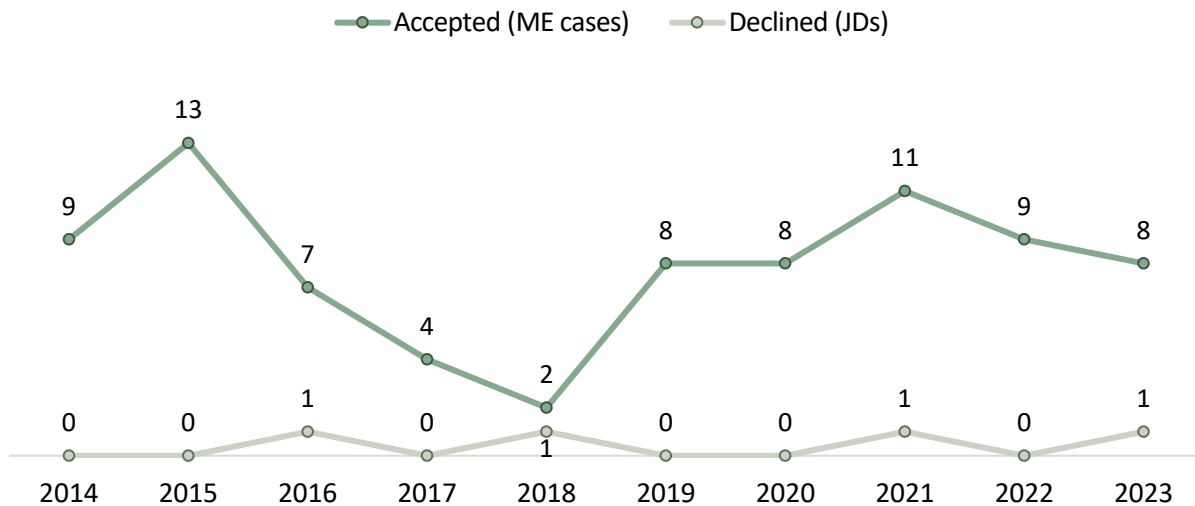


### Greenlee County Resident Mortality and Reported Deaths



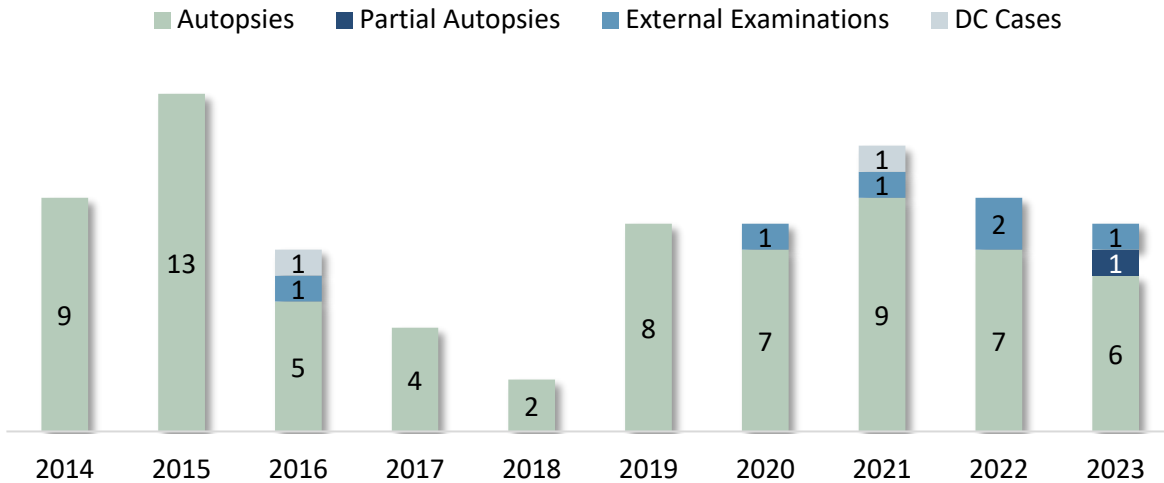
\*Greenlee County resident mortality from Arizona Department of Health Services Vital Statistics as of 1/29/24

### Jurisdictional Disposition of Greenlee County Reported Deaths



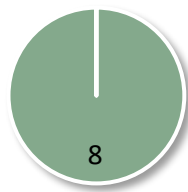
For a detailed description of ME cases and examination types, refer to [page 12](#). Six autopsies, one partial autopsy, and one external examination were performed by the PCOME in 2023 (75%, 12.5%, and 12.5% of Greenlee County ME cases, respectively). Demographic data, MOD, and COD for ME cases are detailed below.

### Greenlee County ME Cases by Examination Type



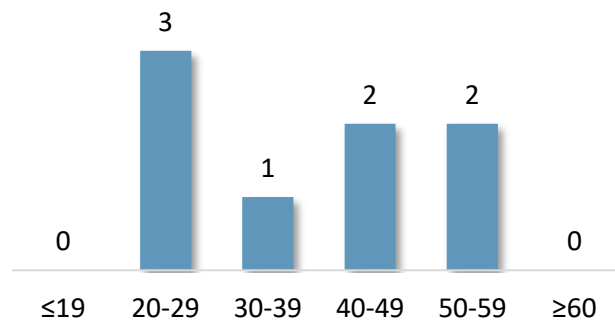
### 2023 Greenlee County ME Cases by Demographics

#### Decedent Sex

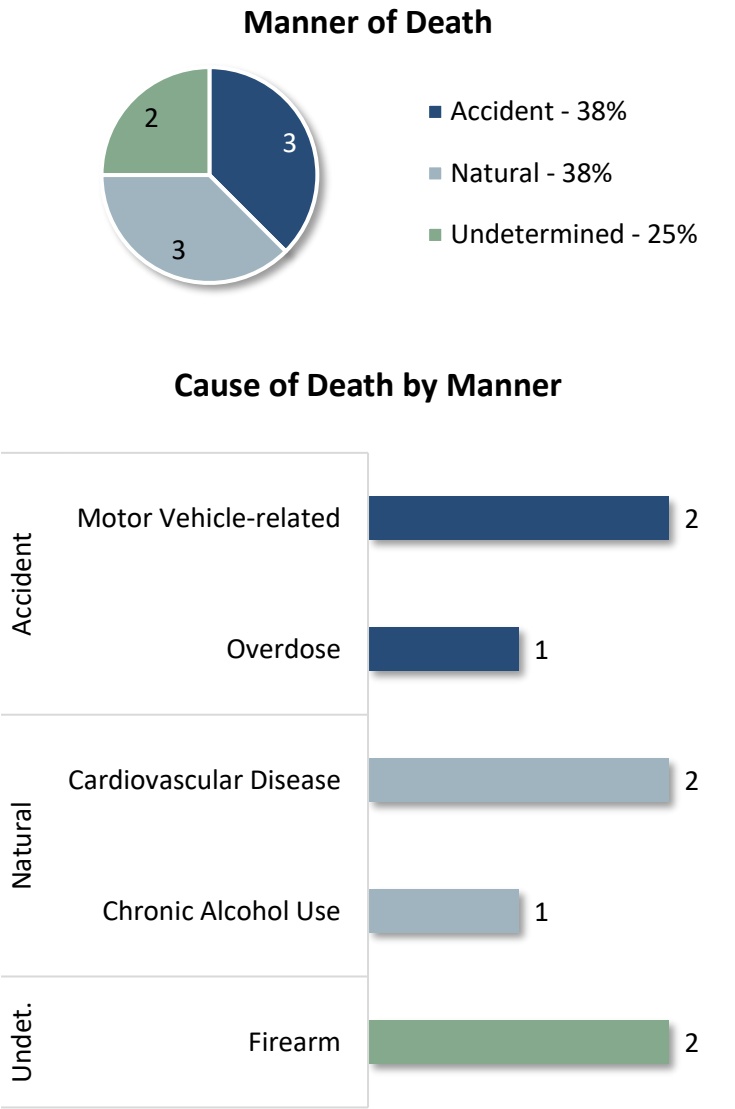


Male - 100%

#### Decedent Age Group

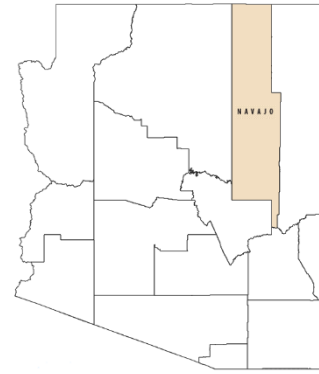


2023 Greenlee County ME Cases by Manner and Cause of Death

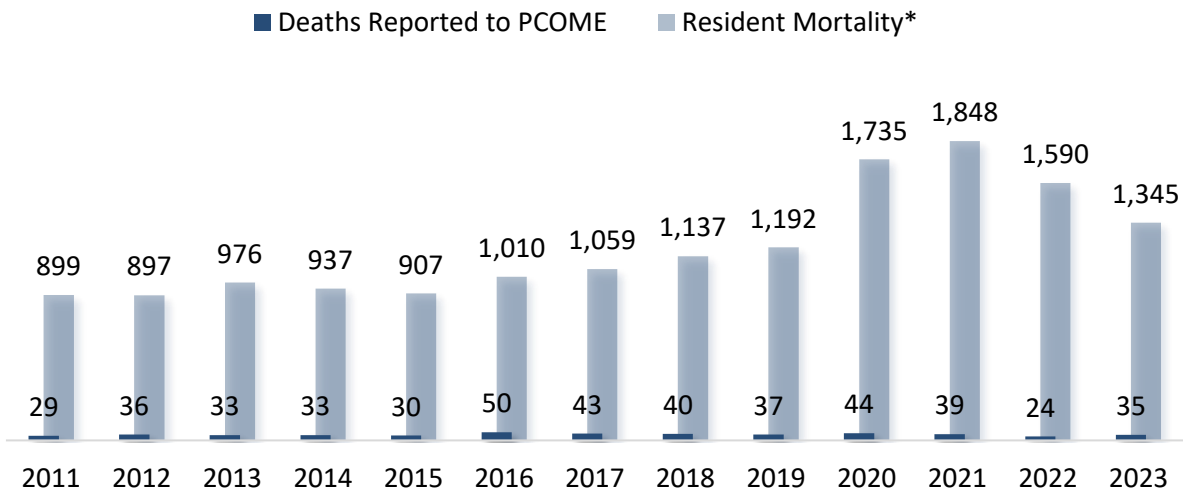


## Navajo County

The PCOME is not aware of how many deaths occurring in Navajo County are reported to or certified by the Navajo County AME. The PCOME only has a record of deaths reported to or referred for examination to Pima County. In 2023, there were 1,345 total deaths of Navajo County residents\*; of these, 35 deaths (3% of total resident mortality) were reported to the PCOME for investigation. All but one case was accepted under the PCOME jurisdiction.

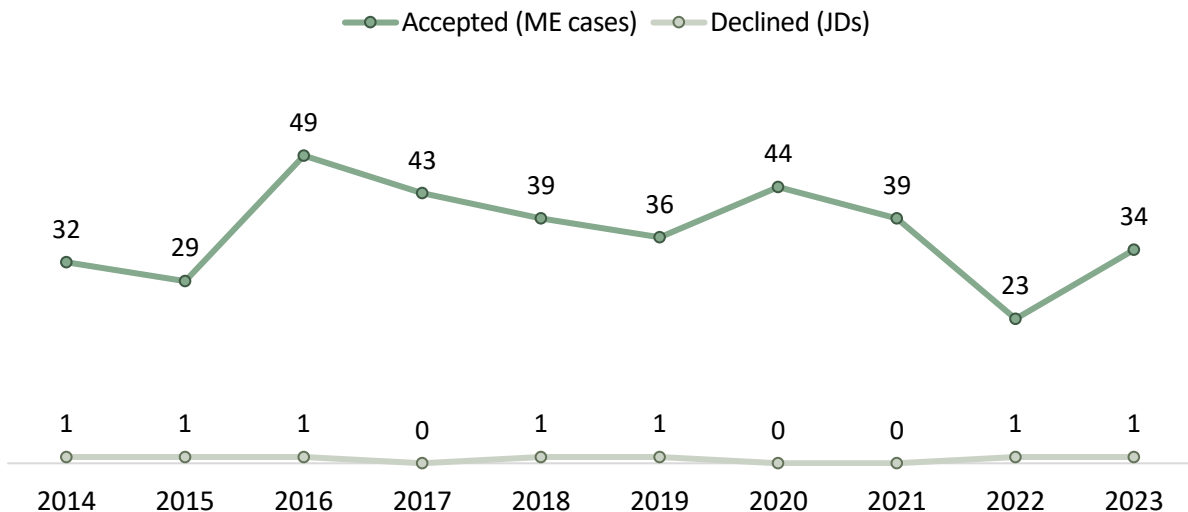


### Navajo County Resident Mortality and Reported Deaths



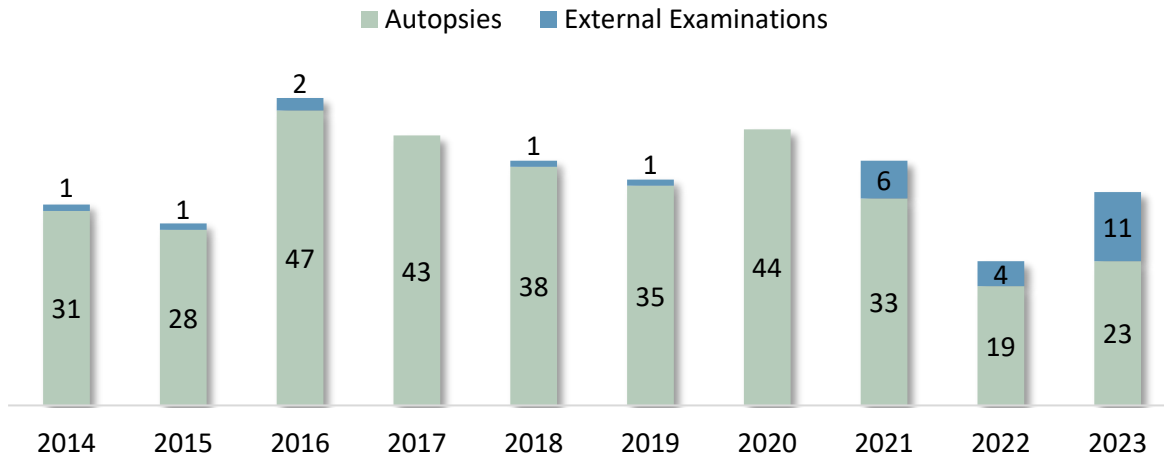
\*Navajo County resident mortality from Arizona Department of Health Services Vital Statistics as of 1/29/24

### Jurisdictional Disposition of Navajo County Reported Deaths



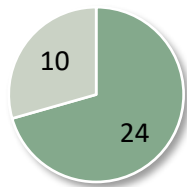
For a detailed description of ME cases and examination types, refer to [page 12](#). Out of the 34 Navajo County cases accepted in 2023, the PCOME performed 23 autopsies (68%) and 11 external examinations (32%). Demographic data, MOD, and COD for ME cases are detailed below.

### Navajo County ME Cases by Examination Type



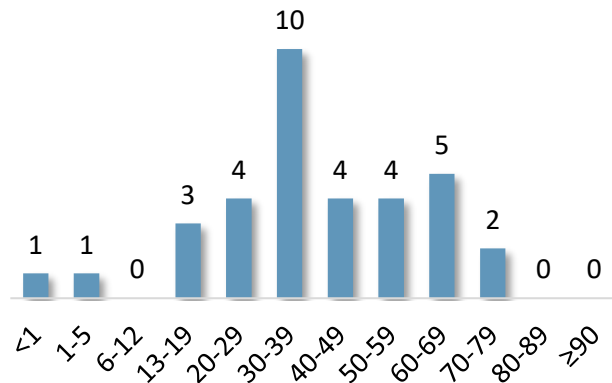
### 2023 Navajo County ME Cases by Demographics

#### Decedent Sex

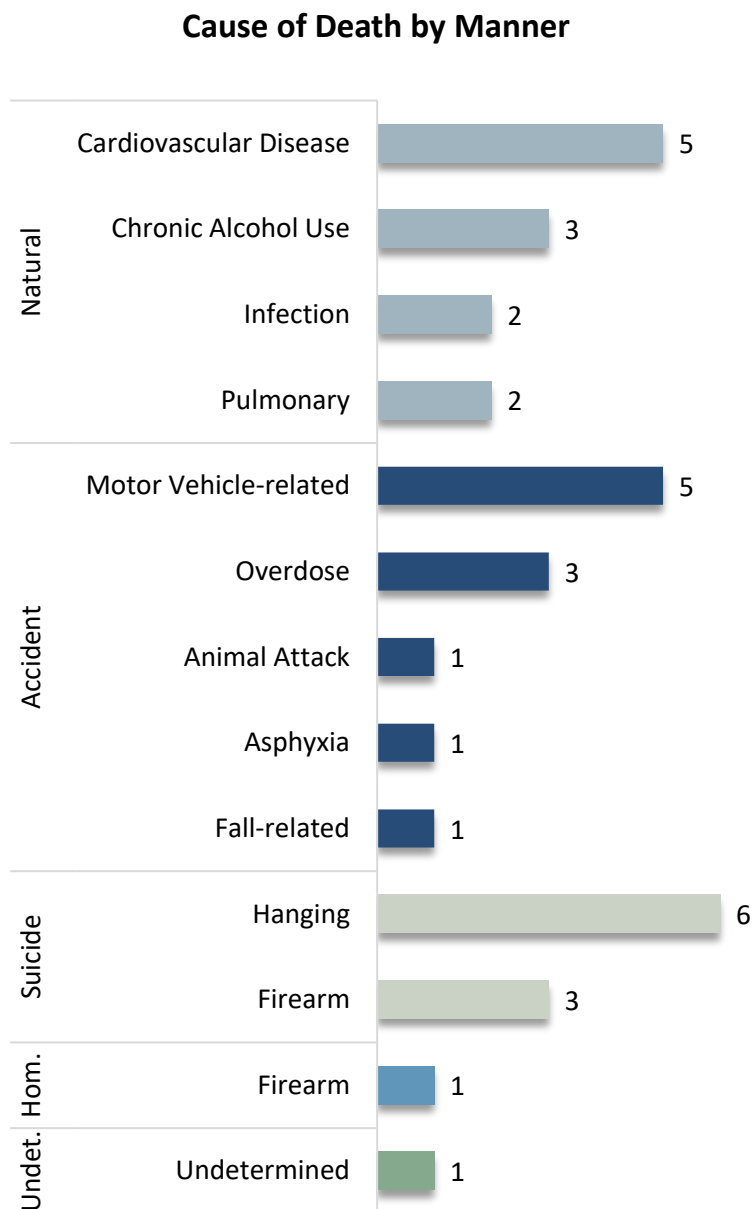
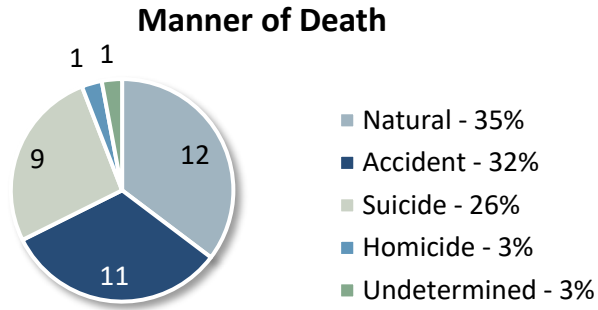


■ Male - 71%  
■ Female - 29%

#### Decedent Age Group

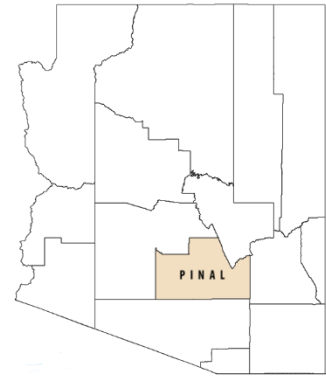


## 2023 Navajo County ME Cases by Manner and Cause of Death

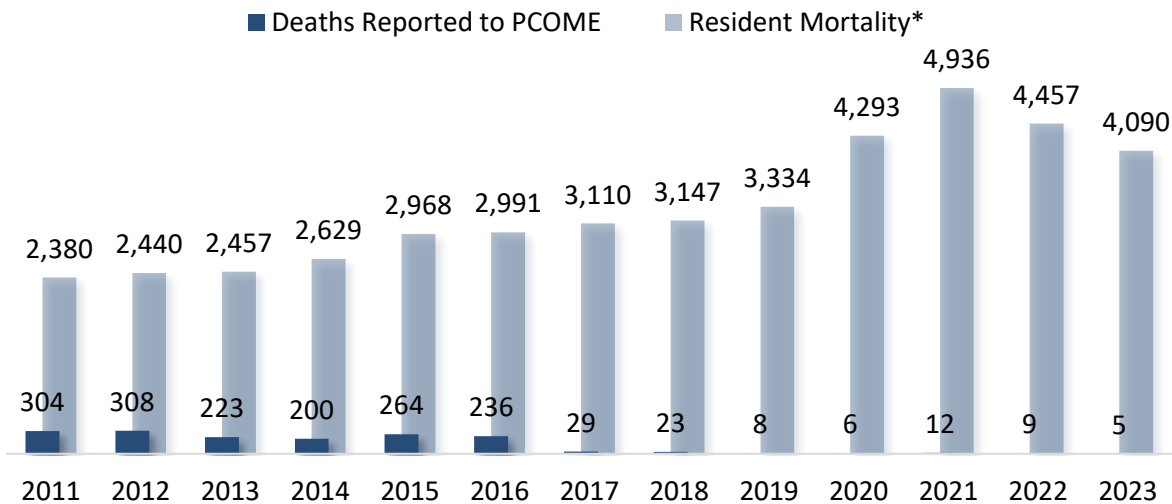


## Pinal County

The PCOME is not aware of how many deaths occurring in Pinal County are reported to or certified by the **Pinal County OME**. The PCOME only has a record of deaths reported to or referred for examination to Pima County. In 2023, there were 4,090 total deaths of Pinal County residents\*; of these, 5 deaths (0.1% of total resident mortality) were reported to the PCOME for investigation. Jurisdiction was accepted in two cases and declined in three cases. One full autopsy and one external examination was conducted for the two Pinal County cases accepted by our office.

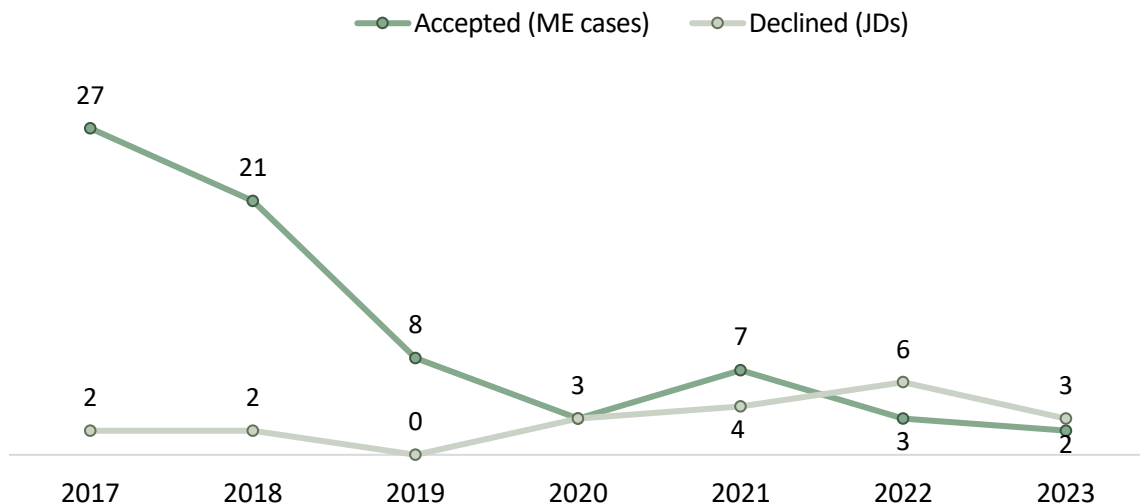


### Pinal County Resident Mortality and Reported Deaths



\*Pinal County resident mortality from Arizona Department of Vital Statistics as of 1/29/24

### Jurisdictional Disposition of Pinal County Reported Deaths



## Other Counties

In 2023, two cases were reported to the PCOME from other counties outside of the counties previously mentioned:

- Coconino County: One case was reported to and transported to the PCOME for an anthropologic examination.
- Yuma County: One case was reported to the PCOME for anthropologic review. The remains were determined to be non-human and jurisdiction was declined.

