

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE
OFFICE OF CHIEF MEDICAL EXAMINER
Dr. Barbara Sampson, Chief Medical Examiner



WHAT WE DO

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

FOCUS ON EQUITY

To best serve all New Yorkers—regardless of economic ability—OCME operates Family Services Centers in all five boroughs so that all communities have equal service access. At these centers, staff interact with family members, medical practitioners, and other advisors to receive and verify information that will assist in determining the identity of deceased persons and aid in final disposition. For families who may need or choose interment of their loved ones in the City Cemetery, OCME provides an opportunity for a final viewing before burial. In addition, OCME also serves as the independent pathologist for families by performing its own impartial death investigations and autopsies, free from undue influence by legal or medical communities or law enforcement. OCME develops and maintains a workplace culture in which employment and advancement decisions are made fairly and employees are treated equitably, regardless of race/ethnicity, age, gender, religion/creed, national origin, disability, or sexual orientation. This is accomplished through agency wide training and continual engagement with managers to ensure familiarity with the city's EEO, diversity and inclusion policies, and through incorporating these policies into recruitment, selection, promotion, and workplace activities so that all employees feel welcome and inspired to succeed.

OUR SERVICES AND GOALS

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

- Goal 1a Respond promptly to scenes of reportable fatalities and conduct related investigations.
 - Goal 1b Complete autopsy reports in a timely manner to best serve families, the criminal justice system and other stakeholders.
 - Goal 1c Provide diligent investigation for all cremation requests.
 - Goal 1d Certify death certificates in a timely manner.
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SERVICE 2 Provide mortuary services to the City.

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

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

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

HOW WE PERFORMED IN FISCAL 2021

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

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

In Fiscal 2021, OCME took jurisdiction in 7,735 cases. OCME death scene investigators, called medicolegal investigators (MLIs), respond to the scene of reported deaths that fall within Medical Examiner jurisdiction. The median time for scene arrivals by MLIs remained approximately the same from the preceding fiscal year at 1.6 hours. The number of deaths reported to OCME decreased from the previous year, which was elevated corresponding to the surge in NYC deaths during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Performance Indicators	Actual					Target		Trend	
	FY17	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY21	FY22	5-Year	Desired Direction
Median time for scene arrivals by medicolegal investigators (MLIs) (hours)	1.9	1.8	1.9	1.8	1.6	*	*	Down	Down
Deaths reported	28,940	30,213	30,964	65,712	42,121	*	*	Up	*
★ Cases where Chief Medical Examiner takes jurisdiction	7,704	7,632	7,554	7,547	7,735	*	*	Neutral	*

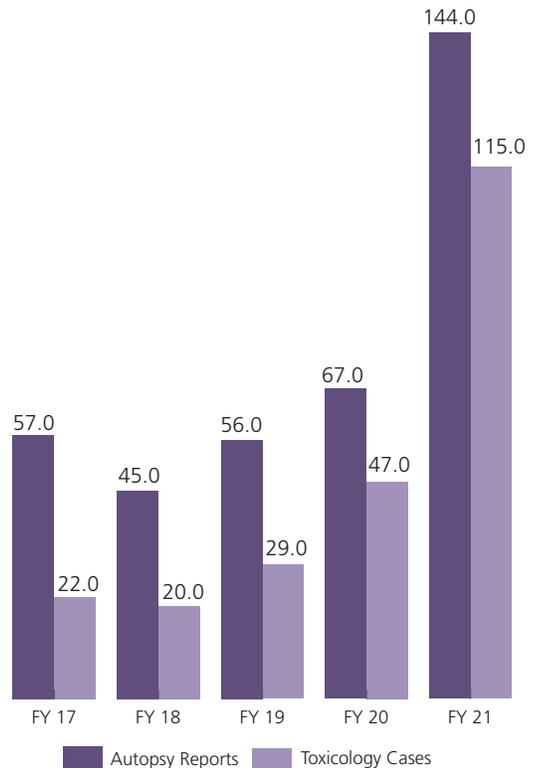
★ Critical Indicator ● Equity Indicator "NA" Not Available ⬆️⬆️ Directional Target * None

Goal 1b Complete autopsy reports in a timely manner to best serve families, the criminal justice system and other stakeholders.

OCME forensic pathologists examined 7,735 decedents in Fiscal 2021, up from 7,568 in Fiscal 2020. OCME performed 6,225 autopsies in Fiscal 2021, up from the 4,854 autopsies in Fiscal 2020. The median time to complete OCME autopsy reports in Fiscal 2021 was 144 days, a 77-day increase from the previous year.

The increase is a result of the laboratory backlog caused by the pandemic, during which time OCME laboratories were suspended but for some high priority cases. The majority of laboratory staff were temporarily reassigned to assist in the mortuary to keep up with the surge in deaths. This created a backlog that lab staff were still working to resolve during the reporting period, and it contributed to a delay in toxicology reports that are relied upon by medical examiners to help complete autopsy reports. Beyond these issues, OCME medical examiners were deployed during the pandemic to cover forensic investigations as team leaders, 24/7; during this period, all routine medical examiner work was suspended for the individuals who were detailed to this auxiliary work (roughly half of the entire medical staff). In addition, the remaining half of the medical examiners were detailed to support forensic investigations on workdays during which they were not actively performing autopsies; these were workdays that they would have otherwise used to complete autopsy reports. These multiple factors directly related to the COVID-19 emergency response had a negative impact on autopsy report turnaround time as backlogs developed during the crisis. Laboratories have now resumed operations under COVID-19 risk mitigation protocols (social distancing, staggered work shifts, etc.) and medical examiners have returned to full time medical examiner work, allowing significantly more time to focus on the completion of autopsy reports. Based on this, autopsy report turnaround times are expected to improve in Fiscal 2022.

Autopsy Report and Toxicology Results Completion (median days)



Performance Indicators	Actual					Target		Trend	
	FY17	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY21	FY22	5-Year	Desired Direction
★ Median time to complete autopsy reports (days)	57.0	45.0	56.0	67.0	144.0	90.0	90.0	Up	Down
★ Critical Indicator	● Equity Indicator	“NA” Not Available	↕↔ Directional Target	* None					

Goal 1c Provide diligent investigation for all cremation requests.

OCME reviews all applications for a permit to cremate the body of any person who dies in the City. When OCME’s review of the cremation application reveals a cause or manner of death that falls within the Medical Examiner jurisdiction, the application will be rejected and OCME will investigate accordingly. However, once the investigation is complete, family members will have the opportunity to have the remains of their loved ones cremated if they wish.

In Fiscal 2021, OCME responded to 20,636 cremation requests, down from 27,863 last year but elevated in comparison to pre-pandemic years. OCME rejected 115 cremation requests after investigation and converted them over to the Medical Examiner jurisdiction.

Performance Indicators	Actual					Target		Trend	
	FY17	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY21	FY22	5-Year	Desired Direction
Total cremation requests received and investigated as requirement of processing	16,525	17,252	17,148	27,863	20,636	*	*	Up	*
★ Cremation requests rejected after investigation and turned over to Medical Examiner jurisdiction	84	91	140	159	115	*	*	Up	*
★ Critical Indicator	● Equity Indicator	“NA” Not Available	↕↔ Directional Target	* None					

Goal 1d Certify death certificates in a timely manner.

In Fiscal 2021, the median time for OCME to certify the cause and manner of death for all death certificates was 15.8 hours after initial receipt of decedents’ remains, well within the 72 hour target.

Performance Indicators	Actual					Target		Trend	
	FY17	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY21	FY22	5-Year	Desired Direction
★ Median time to certify death certificates after initial receipt of decedents’ remains (hours)	15.8	16.6	16.3	15.6	15.8	72.0	72.0	Neutral	Down
★ Critical Indicator	● Equity Indicator	“NA” Not Available	↕↔ Directional Target	* None					

SERVICE 2 Provide mortuary services to the City.

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

In addition to those cases falling under Medical Examiner jurisdiction, OCME provides mortuary services for the City, including the retrieval and processing of unclaimed deceased bodies. In Fiscal 2021, the median time from OCME receipt of decedents’ remains to “Ready to Release” was 6.54 hours. This number is up from the previous year. The reason is that during the months of March through June in Fiscal 2020, because of the pandemic, the vast majority of the deceased that arrived at OCME constituted non-forensic cases. Because these decedents arrive at OCME having already been identified, generally having come from healthcare facilities, they were typically ready to release almost as soon as they arrived. Therefore the large number of these cases resulted in a median time under one hour. For Fiscal Year 2021, the median time to clear and release to funeral directors per case was 39 minutes.

Performance Indicators	Actual					Target		Trend	
	FY17	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY21	FY22	5-Year	Desired Direction
Decedents' remains transported and stored by OCME	10,330	11,255	11,281	17,606	14,079	*	*	Up	*
★ Median time from OCME receipt of decedents' remains to "Ready to Release" status (hours)	12.91	11.82	11.59	0.10	6.54	↓	↓	Down	Down
Median time to clear and release to third party for final disposition, per case (minutes)	34.0	35.0	35.0	37.0	39.0	*	*	Up	Down
★ Critical Indicator ● Equity Indicator "NA" Not Available ↑↓ Directional Target * None									

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

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

OCME recovered no new remains from the 9/11 World Trade Center attacks in Fiscal 2021.

Under the City Incident Management System, the OCME's core competency is to manage mass fatality incidents. As defined in the NYC All hazards Mass fatality Response Plan, a mass fatality incident includes: any event having the potential to yield 10 or more fatalities; any situation in which there are remains contaminated by chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, or explosive agents or materials; any incident or other special circumstance requiring a multi-agency response to support mass fatality operations; or any incident involving a protracted or complex remains recovery operation. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic our disaster mortuary operations handled 17,606 cases in Fiscal Year 2020. In Fiscal Year 2021, this number was 14,079.

Performance Indicators	Actual					Target		Trend	
	FY17	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY21	FY22	5-Year	Desired Direction
Remains recovered following the September 11, 2001 attacks (cumulative)	21,905	21,905	21,905	21,905	21,905	*	*	Neutral	*
Number of fatalities handled by OCME following a mass fatality event	0	25	7	17,606	14,079	*	*	Up	*
★ Critical Indicator ● Equity Indicator "NA" Not Available ↑↓ Directional Target * None									

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

OCME continues to identify remains of the victims of the 9/11 World Trade Center attacks as new identification methods become available. OCME identified no new remains from the 9/11 World Trade Center attacks in Fiscal 2021.

Performance Indicators	Actual					Target		Trend	
	FY17	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY21	FY22	5-Year	Desired Direction
Remains identified following the September 11, 2001 attacks (cumulative)	14,348	14,467	14,608	14,701	14,701	*	*	Neutral	Up
★ Critical Indicator ● Equity Indicator "NA" Not Available ↑↓ Directional Target * None									

SERVICE 4 Provide services to the City for forensic purposes.

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

The Forensic Biology Department's median time for completion of cases increased across all case types during Fiscal 2021 compared to the same reporting period in Fiscal 2020. As a result of the pandemic, the Forensic Biology lab suspended operations from March 13, 2020 to June 9, 2020 with only a small team processing priority cases, resulting in turnaround times that rose towards the end of Fiscal 2020 and backlog that continued to impact the Lab's turnaround time into the beginning of Fiscal 2021.

Median turnaround times for the Forensic Toxicology Department increased during the reporting period as the pandemic also resulted in the temporary suspension of the Forensic Toxicology laboratories for over three months. Due to this suspension, the Toxicology Department began Fiscal 2021 with more than 1,373 postmortem cases pending tests with 75 percent over 90 days turnaround time. Furthermore, there were over 1,300 new postmortem cases collected during the laboratory closure and placed in storage by OCME's Evidence Unit awaiting the reopening of the Forensic Toxicology Laboratory. Processing of the cases that had been held in storage took two months to complete before testing could begin, resulting in over 3,000 cases pending tests in August 2020, a three-fold increase compared with August 2019.

The Department has made great progress on reducing this backlog by having staff in the department work tirelessly to process cases seven days per week. This ensured compliance with social distancing requirements of having only 50 percent of staff working in the laboratory and 50 percent working remotely for 10 months of Fiscal 2021. Over 7,400 postmortem toxicology cases have been closed in Fiscal 2021 resulting in month by month decreases in turnaround times. The reduction in turnaround times was achieved even though there was an increase of over 17 percent in postmortem cases submitted to the Laboratory for testing and linked to the reported national increase in drug-related deaths and the ongoing opioid pandemic.

Median turnaround times for toxicology DUI and toxicology sexual assault cases at the start of Fiscal 2021 were three to eight-fold higher than those achieved prior to the introduction of the new discovery law and the laboratory suspension due to COVID-19. Since testing recommenced in July 2020, the Department has successfully cleared the backlog for both case types. In June 2021, the median turnaround time for toxicology DUI cases was 34 days, with a median time of 46 days for the fiscal year. The median turnaround time for toxicology sexual assault cases was reduced by over 50 percent from 243 days (as reported in the Fiscal 2021 PMMR) to 80 days at the end of Fiscal 2021, with a median turnaround time of 50 days for the month of June 2021.

Performance Indicators	Actual					Target		Trend	
	FY17	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY21	FY22	5-Year	Desired Direction
Median time to complete analysis of a DNA case (days)	53.0	69.0	59.0	51.0	63.0	60.0	60.0	Neutral	Down
★ Median time to complete DNA homicide cases, from evidence submission to report (days)	44.0	38.0	47.0	39.0	49.0	45.0	45.0	Up	Down
★ Median time to complete DNA sexual assault cases, from evidence submission to report (days)	36.0	40.0	32.0	31.0	43.0	45.0	45.0	Neutral	Down
★ Median time to complete DNA property crime cases, from evidence submission to report (days)	63.0	172.0	149.0	50.0	128.0	120.0	120.0	Neutral	Down
DNA matches with profiles in database	8,719	8,766	11,042	5,988	6,241	*	*	Down	*
★ Median time to complete toxicology cases (days)	22.0	20.0	29.0	47.0	115.0	30.0	30.0	Up	Down
Median time to complete toxicology DUI (driving under the influence) cases (days)	17.0	14.0	23.0	42.0	46.0	30.0	30.0	Up	Down
Median time to complete toxicology sexual assault cases (days)	23.0	18.0	28.0	43.0	80.0	30.0	30.0	Up	Down
★ Critical Indicator ● Equity Indicator "NA" Not Available ⬆️⬆️ Directional Target * None									

AGENCY CUSTOMER SERVICE

Performance Indicators	Actual					Target		Trend	
	FY17	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY21	FY22	5-Year	Desired Direction
Customer Experience									
Completed customer requests for interpretation	1,091	1,318	1,525	1,161	1,544	*	*	Up	*
Letters responded to in 14 days (%)	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	*	*	Neutral	Up
E-mails responded to in 14 days (%)	100%	98%	95%	92%	89%	*	*	Down	Up
★ Critical Indicator ● Equity Indicator "NA" Not Available ⬆️⬆️ Directional Target * None									

AGENCY RESOURCES

Resource Indicators	Actual ¹					Plan ²		5yr Trend
	FY17	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY21	FY22	
Expenditures (\$000,000) ³	\$71.9	\$76.6	\$84.7	\$110.9	\$157.8	\$152.8	\$90.0	Up
Revenues (\$000)	\$76	\$8	\$2	\$1.5	\$35.0	\$50.0	\$50.0	Down
Personnel	591	639	672	716	667	676	768	Up
Overtime paid (\$000,000)	\$5.5	\$5.8	\$6.7	\$9.2	\$7.0	\$5.2	\$2.5	Up

¹Actual financial amounts for the current fiscal year are not yet final. Final fiscal year actuals, from the Comptroller's Comprehensive Annual Financial Report, will be reported in the next PMMR. Refer to the "Indicator Definitions" at nyc.gov/mmr for details. ²Authorized Budget Level ³Expenditures include all funds "NA" - Not Available * None

SPENDING AND BUDGET INFORMATION

Where possible, the relationship between an agency's goals and its expenditures and planned resources, by budgetary unit of appropriation (UA), is shown in the 'Applicable MMR Goals' column. Each relationship is not necessarily exhaustive or exclusive. Any one goal may be connected to multiple UAs, and any UA may be connected to multiple goals.

Unit of Appropriation	Expenditures FY20 ¹ (\$000,000)	Modified Budget FY21 ² (\$000,000)	Applicable MMR Goals ⁴
106 - Office of Chief Medical Examiner (Personal Services)	\$70.0	\$76.6	All
116 - Office of Chief Medical Examiner (Other Than Personal Services)	\$40.8	\$81.2	All
Agency Total ¹	\$110.9	\$157.8	

¹OCME is contained within the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and appropriations are made through that agency. ²Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR) for the Fiscal Year ended June 30, 2020. Includes all funds. ³City of New York Adopted Budget for Fiscal 2021, as of June 2021. Includes all funds. ⁴Refer to agency goals listed at front of chapter. "NA" Not Available * None

NOTEWORTHY CHANGES, ADDITIONS OR DELETIONS

- OCME added a new indicator 'Number of fatalities handled by OCME following a mass fatality event' to Goal 3a.
- Equity NYC indicators are identified with a burst (*). These indicators are also reported in the Social Indicators and Equity Report (SIER) and explore the economic, social, environmental, and physical health of New York City across race/ethnicity, gender, location, and income.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For additional information go to:

- The Social Indicators and Equity Report, EquityNYC: <http://equity.nyc.gov/>

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

