

# DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE OFFICE OF CHIEF MEDICAL EXAMINER

**Dr. Jason Graham, Chief Medical Examiner**



## WHAT WE DO

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

## FOCUS ON EQUITY

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

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

## OUR SERVICES AND GOALS

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

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

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

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

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

# HOW WE PERFORMED IN FISCAL 2024

## 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.

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 increased 36 minutes from Fiscal 2023 to 2 hours and 13 minutes in Fiscal 2024. This is largely because OCME continues to see a sustained increased caseload across all OCME Forensic Operational areas in contrast to the pre-COVID-19 pandemic levels, including an increased number of cases where the Agency took Medical Examiner jurisdiction. The Agency estimates the increase in caseloads may be partly due to an increase in drug overdose deaths in the City. While the number of deaths reported have decreased slightly since Fiscal 2023 and significantly since the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, they are up 27 percent from Fiscal 2019, before the pandemic, to 39,298 deaths in Fiscal 2024. The number of cases where OCME took Medical Examiner jurisdiction increased slightly since Fiscal 2023 to 12,302 cases in Fiscal 2024. Most of these cases (9,004) involved decedents being physically examined by Medical Examiners on OCME premises, while the rest (3,298) entailed OCME issuing a death certificate for a decedent without taking physical custody of the body.

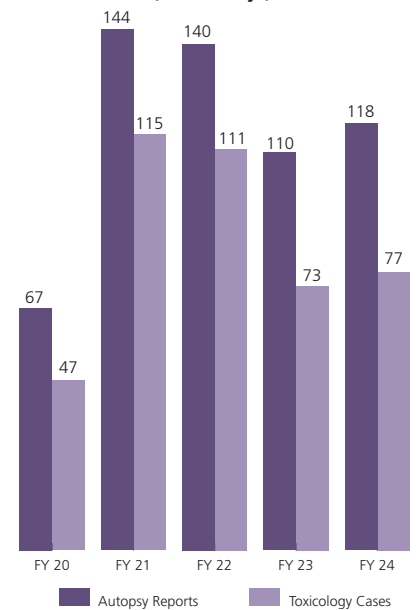
Performance Indicators	Actual					Target		Trend	
	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY24	FY25	5-Year	Desired Direction
Median time for scene arrivals by medicolegal investigators (hours:minutes)	1:46	1:36	1:36	1:37	2:13	*	*	Up	Down
Deaths reported	65,712	42,121	40,384	39,308	39,298	*	*	Down	*
★ Cases where Medical Examiner takes jurisdiction and certifies death at an OCME facility	7,547	7,735	8,211	8,879	9,004	*	*	Up	*
★ Cases where Medical Examiner investigates, takes jurisdiction and certifies death at scene or a health care facility	NA	NA	NA	3,383	3,298	*	*	NA	*
Cases where Medical Examiner declines jurisdiction	2,512	2,786	3,096	3,163	3,322	*	*	Up	*

★ Critical Indicator    ● Equity Indicator    "NA" Not Available    ↑↓ Directional Target    \* None

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

The elevated caseload has also affected the autopsy report completion time. The overall median turnaround time for autopsy reports reached 118 days in Fiscal 2024, lagging behind the 90-day target. While this is slightly up from 110 days in Fiscal 2023, the turnaround time began showing marked improvement at the end of Fiscal 2024, with a median turnaround time of 91 days in the month of June. This improvement is largely attributed to financial investments in the Forensic Toxicology Laboratory as well as new workflow efficiencies put in place by the Agency for the medical examiners. Based on this and the reduced turnaround time seen in June 2024, OCME expects to see a lower turnaround time in Fiscal 2025.

**Autopsy Report and Toxicology Results Completion (median days)**



Performance Indicators	Actual					Target		Trend	
	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY24	FY25	5-Year	Desired Direction
★ Median time to complete autopsy reports (days)	67.0	144.0	140.0	110.0	118.0	90.0	90.0	Up	Down
Autopsies performed	4,854	6,225	6,085	6,544	6,170	*	*	Up	*
External examinations performed	2,714	1,510	2,124	2,335	2,769	*	*	Up	*
★ Critical Indicator    ● Equity Indicator    "NA" Not Available    ⬆️⬆️ Directional Target    * None									

**Goal 1c** Provide diligent investigation for all cremation requests.

OCME reviews all applications from funeral homes in New York City for a permit to cremate a body. If it is found that a cause of death is sufficiently unclear or involves an injury that falls within Medical Examiner jurisdiction, the application will be rejected and OCME will investigate accordingly. 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 2024, OCME reviewed 18,670 cremation requests, which, while down slightly from Fiscal 2023, continues to be elevated in comparison to pre-COVID-19 pandemic years. In Fiscal 2024, OCME rejected 201 cremation requests after investigation and converted them over to the Medical Examiner for evaluation, 18 percent more than in Fiscal 2023. This number can fluctuate due to variations in questionable cases each year.

Performance Indicators	Actual					Target		Trend	
	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY24	FY25	5-Year	Desired Direction
Cremation requests received and investigated as requirement of processing	27,863	20,636	19,592	18,904	18,670	*	*	Down	*
★ Cremation requests rejected after investigation and turned over to Medical Examiner jurisdiction	159	115	175	170	201	*	*	Up	*
★ Critical Indicator    ● Equity Indicator    "NA" Not Available    ⬆️⬆️ Directional Target    * None									

**Goal 1d** Certify death certificates in a timely manner.

In Fiscal 2024, the median time for OCME to certify deaths, which requires completing death certificates, for decedents examined in any Forensic Pathology Centers increased to 15 hours and 31 minutes after receiving these decedent's remains into OCME facilities. Though this is up slightly from Fiscal 2023, it is well under the 72-hour target.

Performance Indicators	Actual					Target		Trend	
	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY24	FY25	5-Year	Desired Direction
★ Median time to certify death certificates after initial receipt of decedents' remains (hours:minutes)	15:37	15:49	15:01	15:06	15:31	72:00	72:00	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 unclaimed and Medical Examiner decedents to City mortuary facilities in a timely manner.

In addition to certifying and investigating deaths that fall under Medical Examiner jurisdiction, OCME provides mortuary services for the City, including the retrieval and processing of unclaimed decedents. These services are provided for both Medical Examiner cases and for unclaimed decedents cases. In Fiscal 2024, it took OCME a median time of nine hours and 59 minutes from when the Agency received a decedents' remains to when those remains were processed and considered "Ready to Release" to mortuary services, up slightly from Fiscal 2023 likely due to a slight increase in the number of decedents' remains processed by OCME in Fiscal 2024. Once decedents' remains are ready to be released, OCME must notify funeral directors and follow protocol to clear and release the remains. The median time from when funeral directors arrive at an OCME facility to when they are cleared and depart with the correct remains similarly increased slightly, from 39 minutes in Fiscal 2023 to 41 minutes in Fiscal 2024. The number of remains transported and stored by OCME remains elevated, increasing to 14,112 in Fiscal 2024, and has not returned to pre-COVID-19 pandemic levels when the numbers were consistently around 11,000. This increase remains consistent with more deaths falling under Medical Examiner jurisdiction.

Performance Indicators	Actual					Target		Trend	
	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY24	FY25	5-Year	Desired Direction
Decedents' remains transported and stored by OCME	17,606	14,079	13,931	14,067	14,112	*	*	Down	*
★ Median time from OCME receipt of decedents' remains to "Ready to Release" status (hours:minutes)	0:06	6:32	7:52	9:45	9:59	*	*	Up	*
Median time to release a decedent remains to a funeral director (minutes)	37	39	37	39	41	*	*	Neutral	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.

Under the Citywide Incident Management System, 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 ten 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. Fortunately, in Fiscal 2024 there were zero mass fatality incidents, the same as in Fiscal 2023.

Performance Indicators	Actual					Target		Trend	
	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY24	FY25	5-Year	Desired Direction
★ Fatalities handled by OCME following a mass fatality event	17,606	14,079	30	0	0	*	*	Down	*
★ 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 breakthroughs in science allow. OCME identified 47 remains of the 9/11 World Trade Center attacks in Fiscal 2024. Forty-four of these remains matched previously identified individuals. Three of these remains were associated with previously unidentified individuals, representing the identification of these three individual victims for the first time since September 11, 2001.

Performance Indicators	Actual					Target		Trend	
	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY24	FY25	5-Year	Desired Direction
★ Remains identified following the September 11, 2001 attacks (cumulative)	14,701	14,701	14,771	14,867	14,914	⬆️	⬆️	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.

In Fiscal 2024, the Forensic Biology Laboratory achieved a 42-day median turnaround time across all DNA case types, down 22 percent from Fiscal 2023 and its best performance in over a decade. Median time to turnaround DNA homicide cases decreased 32 percent from Fiscal 2023, improving to 47 days in Fiscal 2024. DNA sexual assault cases turnaround times also improved to 40 days in Fiscal 2024, down 22 percent from Fiscal 2023. The Forensic Biology Laboratory's pioneering Gun Crimes Unit, dedicated to processing DNA gun crimes evidence, maintained a sub-30-day turnaround in Fiscal 2024, unmatched by municipal DNA laboratories in other major cities. However, the turnaround time for DNA property crime cases more than doubled in Fiscal 2024, as the Agency focused on resolving the oldest property crimes cases. Once resolved, these cases were included in the calculation for overall median turnaround time, temporarily inflating the metric. Now that these older cases are largely resolved, the Forensic Biology Laboratory expects turnaround times to start decreasing in Fiscal 2025. The Agency continues to prioritize crimes against people cases. The increase in turnaround time for property crimes had no impact upon judicial cases as the criminal justice system proceeds with active cases without waiting for forensic DNA reports. Any case can be expedited and completed within 24 to 48 hours upon request if there is an urgent public safety matter.

While cases examined by the Forensic Biology Laboratory saw overall turnaround time improvements for DNA cases in Fiscal 2024, the Forensic Toxicology Laboratory turnaround times were elevated compared to Fiscal 2023. This is largely due to an increase in resources required to transition to and maintain a more stringent international standard of accreditation that proves laboratories have acceptable testing and management systems in place, which OCME achieved at the end of Fiscal 2023. This transition, coupled with the continued high submission rate of cases for toxicological analysis, contributed to the increased turnaround times.

In Fiscal 2024, the median time to complete all toxicology case types increased to 77 days, up six percent from Fiscal 2023, but still successfully below the 90-day target. Median time to complete toxicology DUI cases also outperformed its 90-day target, though it increased 57 percent from Fiscal 2023 to 77 days in Fiscal 2024. The turnaround time for toxicology sexual assault cases fell significantly behind the 90-day target, increasing 63 percent from Fiscal 2023 to 153 days in Fiscal 2024. This is due to an ongoing record increase in postmortem cases submitted to the Forensic Toxicology Laboratory for toxicological testing, likely impacted by the increase in overdose deaths in New York City. The number of sexual assault cases requiring toxicology analysis also increased over the last fiscal year. Despite the increase in cases, the Toxicology Laboratory saw turnaround time improvements across all types of toxicology cases at the close of Fiscal 2024, thanks in part to the City's investment of additional resources for the Laboratory. The median turnaround time for toxicology cases dropped to just 53 days for the month of June 2024. This decrease has already had a positive impact upon autopsy report turnaround times. It is expected that improvements will continue into Fiscal 2025.

Performance Indicators	Actual					Target		Trend	
	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY24	FY25	5-Year	Desired Direction
Median time to complete analysis of a DNA case (days)	51.0	63.0	71.0	54.0	42.0	90.0	90.0	Down	Down
Median time to complete DNA homicide cases from evidence submission to report (days)	39.0	49.0	69.0	69.0	47.0	90.0	90.0	Up	Down
★ Median time to complete DNA sexual assault cases from evidence submission to report (days)	31.0	43.0	50.0	51.0	40.0	90.0	90.0	Up	Down
Median time to complete DNA property crime cases from evidence submission to report (days)	50.0	128.0	216.0	176.0	466.0	*	*	Up	Down
Median time to complete DNA gun crime cases from evidence submission to report (days)	NA	NA	65.0	24.0	28.0	*	*	NA	Down
DNA gun crime samples received	NA	NA	21,714	19,961	17,831	*	*	NA	*
DNA matches with profiles in database	5,988	6,241	4,760	4,781	6,111	*	*	Neutral	*
Median time to complete toxicology cases (days)	47.0	115.0	111.0	73.0	77.0	90.0	90.0	Neutral	Down
Median time to complete toxicology DUI cases (days)	42.0	46.0	56.0	49.0	77.0	90.0	90.0	Up	Down
Median time to complete toxicology sexual assault cases (days)	43.0	80.0	116.0	94.0	153.0	90.0	90.0	Up	Down
★ Critical Indicator	● Equity Indicator	"NA" Not Available	↕↔ Directional Target	* None					

# AGENCY CUSTOMER SERVICE

Performance Indicators	Actual					Target		Trend	
	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY24	FY25	5-Year	Desired Direction
Customer Experience									
Completed customer requests for interpretation	1,161	1,544	1,303	1,375	1,326	*	*	Neutral	*
Letters responded to in 14 days (%)	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	*	*	Neutral	Up
E-mails responded to in 14 days (%)	92%	89%	100%	100%	100%	*	*	Up	Up

★ Critical Indicator    \* Equity Indicator    "NA" Not Available    ↑↓ Directional Target    \* None

# AGENCY RESOURCES

Resource Indicators	Actual <sup>1</sup>					Plan <sup>2</sup>		5yr Trend
	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY24	FY25	
Expenditures (\$000,000) <sup>3</sup>	\$110.9	\$109.7	\$108.0	\$99.5	\$109.3	\$105.6	\$104.3	Neutral
Revenues (\$000)	\$1.5	\$35.0	\$84.0	\$38.3	\$0.0	\$50.0	\$50.0	Neutral
Personnel	716	667	667	716	737	756	756	Neutral
Overtime paid (\$000,000)	\$9.2	\$9.5	\$8.7	\$9.8	\$2.9	\$2.9	\$2.5	Down

<sup>1</sup>Actual 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](http://nyc.gov/mmr) for details.    <sup>2</sup>Authorized Budget Level    <sup>3</sup>Expenditures 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 <sup>1</sup>	Expenditures FY23 <sup>2</sup> (\$000,000)	Modified Budget FY24 <sup>3</sup> (\$000,000)	Applicable MMR Goals <sup>4</sup>
106 - Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (Personal Services)	\$77.2	\$78.6	All
116 - Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (Other Than Personal Services)	\$22.3	\$30.7	All
Agency Total <sup>1</sup>	\$99.5	\$109.3	

<sup>1</sup>OCME is contained within the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and appropriations are made through that agency.    <sup>2</sup>Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR) for the Fiscal Year ended June 30, 2023. Includes all funds.    <sup>3</sup>City of New York Adopted Budget for Fiscal 2024, as of June 2024. Includes all funds.    <sup>4</sup> Refer to agency goals listed at front of chapter.    "NA" Not Available    \* None

## NOTEWORTHY CHANGES, ADDITIONS OR DELETIONS

- 'Median time for scene arrivals by medicolegal investigators (hours)' in Goal 1a was renamed to 'Median time for scene arrivals by medicolegal investigators (hours:minutes),' 'Median time to certify death certificates after initial receipt of decedents' remains (hours)' in Goal 1d was renamed to 'Median time to certify death certificates after initial receipt of decedents' remains (hours:minutes),' and 'Median time from OCME receipt of decedents' remains to "Ready to Release" status (hours)' in Goal 2a was renamed to 'Median time from OCME receipt of decedents' remains to "Ready to Release" status (hours:minutes)'; and the previously published data for all of these indicators was revised from decimal format to hours:minutes format. This change was made in order to standardize publication of time-value indicators.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For more information on the agency, please visit: [www.nyc.gov/ocme](http://www.nyc.gov/ocme).