



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.

SERVICE 2 Provide mortuary services to the City.

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

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.

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

- The median time to complete OCME autopsy reports in the first four months of Fiscal 2021 was 181 days, an increase from the same time period the previous year. The increase is a direct result of the laboratory backlog caused by the pandemic, during which time the 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, medical examiners were also 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 medical examiners 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 they would have otherwise used to complete autopsy reports. These multiple factors directly related to the COVID emergency response have had a negative impact on autopsy report turnaround time as backlogs developed during the crisis. Laboratories have now resumed operations under COVID risk mitigation protocols (social distancing, staggered work shifts, etc.) and medical examiners have returned to full time medical examiner work. Based on this, autopsy report turnaround times are expected to improve over time as backlogs are eliminated, so long as there is not a second surge in deaths necessitating laboratory staff and medical examiners to again be detailed to disaster response functions.
- In addition to those cases falling under Medical Examiner jurisdiction, the Office provides mortuary services for the City, including the recovery and processing of unclaimed deceased bodies. In the first four months of Fiscal 2021, the median time from OCME receipt of decedents' remains to "Ready to Release" was shorter, at 7.78 hours compared to 11.24 hours during the same time period in Fiscal 2020. During the reporting period, a larger proportion of decedent cases were not forensic cases. These cases are generally processed more quickly than forensic decedent cases, which are more complex. Because these decedents arrived at the OCME having already been identified, generally having come from health care facilities, they were typically ready to release almost as soon as they arrived at OCME. Therefore, the increased number of these cases resulted in a reduced median processing time.
- The Forensic Biology Department's median time for completion of cases increased across all case types during the first four months of Fiscal Year 2021 compared to the same reporting period in Fiscal 2020. As a result of the pandemic the Forensic Biology lab suspended operations from March 13th, 2020 to June 9th, 2020 and only a small team were processing priority cases. As a result, turnaround times rose towards the end of Fiscal 2020 and the resulting backlog in cases continued to impact the lab's turnaround time during the first four months of Fiscal 2021.
- The number of DNA matches with profiles in the database was also reduced from 2,668 during the first four months of Fiscal 2020 to 1,943 during the same reporting period in Fiscal 2021. This was also the result of the lab suspension and the reduced number of staff working on only a small number of priority cases during the pandemic.
- Median turnaround times for the Forensic Toxicology Department increased during the reporting period as the pandemic resulted in the temporary suspension of the Forensic Toxicology laboratories for over 3 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 the OCME Evidence Unit awaiting the reopening of the Forensic Toxicology laboratory. The Department has made great progress on reducing this backlog by having staff in the department work tirelessly to process cases 7 days per week and has completed testing of over 3,000 postmortem cases since the laboratory reopened at the end of June resulting in month by month decreases in turnaround times.
- Median turnaround times for toxicology DUI and toxicology sexual assault cases at the start of Fiscal 2021 were 3 to 8-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. For the first four months of Fiscal 2021, median turnaround times and toxicology DUI cases increased from 31 days to 82 days and for toxicology sexual assault cases increased from 31 days to 243 days compared to the same period last year. Since the end of the reporting period, OCME has worked to improve turnaround times for these types of cases. The median turnaround times for the month of December were below the target of 30 days for toxicology DUI cases at 27 days and was reduced by 80 percent for toxicology sexual assault cases from 223 days to 43 days.

- The forensic laboratories are addressing the backlog by prioritizing the most serious crimes against people and working as diligently and swiftly as possible given the constraints of an increased workload caused by the backlog and having 20 percent fewer scientists to process the cases due to staff attrition and the inability to hire replacements as a result of the fiscal climate.

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

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

Performance Indicators	Actual			Target		4-Month Actual	
	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY20	FY21
Median time for scene arrivals by medicolegal investigators (MLIs) (hours)	1.8	1.9	1.8	*	*	1.8	1.6
Deaths reported	30,213	30,964	65,712	*	*	11,074	12,461
★ Cases where Chief Medical Examiner takes jurisdiction	7,632	7,554	7,547	*	*	2,617	2,481
★ Critical 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.

Performance Indicators	Actual			Target		4-Month Actual	
	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY20	FY21
★ Median time to complete autopsy reports (days)	45.0	56.0	67.0	90.0	90.0	53.0	181.0
★ Critical Indicator	"NA" Not Available	⇅ Directional Target	* None				

Goal 1c Provide diligent investigation for all cremation requests.

Performance Indicators	Actual			Target		4-Month Actual	
	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY20	FY21
Total cremation requests received and investigated as requirement of processing	17,252	17,148	27,863	*	*	5,547	5,749
★ Cremation requests rejected after investigation and turned over to Medical Examiner jurisdiction	91	140	159	*	*	59	36
★ Critical Indicator	"NA" Not Available	⇅ Directional Target	* None				

Goal 1d Certify death certificates in a timely manner.

Performance Indicators	Actual			Target		4-Month Actual	
	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY20	FY21
★ Median time to certify death certificates after initial receipt of decedents' remains (hours)	16.6	16.3	15.6	72.0	72.0	16.3	15.8
★ Critical 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.

Performance Indicators	Actual			Target		4-Month Actual	
	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY20	FY21
Decedents' remains transported and stored by OCME	11,255	11,281	17,606	*	*	3,875	4,277
★ Median time from OCME receipt of decedents' remains to "Ready to Release" status (hours)	11.82	11.59	0.10	⇓	⇓	11.24	7.78
Median time to clear and release to third party for final disposition, per case (minutes)	35.0	35.0	37.0	*	*	36.0	42.0
★ Critical Indicator	"NA" Not Available	⇅ Directional Target	* None				

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

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

Performance Indicators	Actual			Target		4-Month Actual	
	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY20	FY21
Remains recovered following the September 11, 2001 attacks (cumulative)	21,905	21,905	21,905	*	*	21,905	21,905
★ Critical Indicator	"NA" Not Available	⬆️⬇️ Directional Target		* None			

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

Performance Indicators	Actual			Target		4-Month Actual	
	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY20	FY21
Remains identified following the September 11, 2001 attacks (cumulative)	14,467	14,608	14,701	*	*	14,701	14,701
★ Critical Indicator	"NA" Not Available	⬆️⬇️ Directional Target		* None			

SERVICE 4 Provide services to the City for forensic purposes.

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

Performance Indicators	Actual			Target		4-Month Actual	
	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY20	FY21
Median time to complete analysis of a DNA case (days)	69.0	59.0	51.0	60.0	60.0	34.0	74.0
★ Median time to complete DNA homicide cases, from evidence submission to report (days)	38.0	47.0	39.0	45.0	45.0	33.0	53.0
★ Median time to complete DNA sexual assault cases, from evidence submission to report (days)	40.0	32.0	31.0	45.0	45.0	28.0	44.0
★ Median time to complete DNA property crime cases, from evidence submission to report (days)	172.0	149.0	50.0	120.0	120.0	35.0	131.0
DNA matches with profiles in database	8,766	11,042	5,988	*	*	2,668	1,943
★ Median time to complete toxicology cases (days)	20.0	29.0	47.0	30.0	30.0	33.0	131.0
Median time to complete toxicology DUI (driving under the influence) cases (days)	14.0	23.0	42.0	30.0	30.0	31.0	82.0
Median time to complete toxicology sexual assault cases (days)	18.0	28.0	43.0	30.0	30.0	31.0	243.0
★ Critical Indicator	"NA" Not Available	⬆️⬇️ Directional Target		* None			

AGENCY CUSTOMER SERVICE

Performance Indicators	Actual			Target		4-Month Actual	
	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY20	FY21
Customer Experience							
Completed customer requests for interpretation	1,318	1,525	1,161	*	*	537	NA
Letters responded to in 14 days (%)	100%	100%	100%	*	*	100%	42%
E-mails responded to in 14 days (%)	98%	95%	92%	*	*	87%	72%
★ Critical Indicator	"NA" Not Available	⬆️⬇️ Directional Target		* None			

AGENCY RESOURCES

Resource Indicators	Actual			Sept. 2020 MMR Plan	Updated Plan	Plan	4-Month Actual	
	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY21 ¹	FY22 ¹	FY20	FY21
Expenditures (\$000,000) ²	\$76.6	\$84.7	\$110.9	\$90.4	\$152.8	\$87.0	\$35.6	\$52.6
Revenues (\$000)	\$8	\$2	\$1.5	\$50.0	\$50.0	\$50.0	\$0.0	\$0.0
Personnel	639	672	716	769	676	760	664	715
Overtime paid (\$000,000)	\$5.8	\$6.7	\$9.2	\$2.5	\$5.2	\$2.5	\$2.0	\$2.6
¹ January 2021 Financial Plan. ² Expenditures include all funds "NA" - Not Available								

SPENDING AND BUDGET INFORMATION

Unit of Appropriation	Expenditures FY20 ¹ (\$000,000)	January 2021 Financial Plan FY21 ² (\$000,000)	Applicable MMR Goals ⁴
106 - Office of Chief Medical Examiner (Personal Services)	\$70.0	\$72.5	All
116 - Office of Chief Medical Examiner (Other Than Personal Services)	\$40.8	\$80.3	All
Agency Total ¹	\$110.9	\$152.8	
¹ OCME is contained within the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and appropriations are made through that agency. ² Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR) for the Fiscal Year ended June 30, 2020. Includes all funds. ³ Includes all funds. ⁴ Refer to agency goals listed at front of chapter. "NA" Not Available * None			

NOTEWORTHY CHANGES, ADDITIONS OR DELETIONS

None.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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

