

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 criminal 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 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, to support investigations through its DNA crime, forensic toxicology and molecular genetics laboratories. 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. 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 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

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 issue timely death certificates.
 - 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

- Through the first four months of Fiscal 2023 OCME continues to see a sustained increased caseload exceeding pre-pandemic levels. Elevated numbers can be seen in the number of deaths reported, cases where the Medical Examiner takes jurisdiction, and the number of decedents' remains transported and stored by the OCME compared to the same reporting period in Fiscal 2022.
- The autopsy report turnaround time has been improving with a 16 percent reduction in the median time to complete autopsy reports through the first four months of Fiscal 2023 compared to the first four months of Fiscal 2022 but remains elevated as compared to pre-pandemic completion times due to the sustained, elevated caseload, as have corresponding toxicology report turnaround times, upon which many autopsy reports rely. The Department of Forensic Toxicology Laboratory metrics have now improved, which has contributed to the improved Autopsy report turnaround time.
- OCME is proud to report that the Department of Forensic Toxicology Laboratory (Forensic Toxicology Lab) metrics through the first four months of Fiscal 2023 are now better than the target limits for the median time to complete cases across all case types, which has contributed to the improved autopsy report turnaround time. The Forensic Toxicology Lab turnaround times increased in prior reporting periods due to factors including the temporary suspension of operations during the COVID-19 pandemic response and a record increase in postmortem cases submitted for toxicological testing. In Fiscal 2022 there was an overall increase of more than 20 percent in postmortem cases submitted for toxicological testing, and although the Fiscal 2023 count of 2,338 cases over the first four months has surpassed the record number submitted over the same time frame in Fiscal 2022 (2,172), the median time to complete toxicology cases continues to decrease through the first four months of Fiscal 2023. Sexual assault case turnaround times in the Forensic Toxicology Lab remain better than the target although it had increased slightly from 76 days last fiscal year to 85 days in the current reporting period. This is because the number of sexual assault cases in the Forensic Toxicology Lab is statistically small, as they only involve the specific incidence where a sexual assault victim has been given drugs, and therefore any change has a proportionately larger impact on the overall median turnaround time. Additionally forensic toxicology sexual assault cases are significantly more complex, and the current metrics reflects cases that were not yet closed at the end of Fiscal 2022 resulting in an increased turnaround time at the start of Fiscal 2023 when the cases were closed. The turnaround times for sexual assault cases also increased due to increasing postmortem case numbers and they are now decreasing as more cases are closed.
- The Department of Forensic Biology Laboratory (Forensic Biology Lab) metrics are better than the target limits for median time to complete analysis of DNA cases, homicide cases and sexual assault cases. While within the target limits, the turnaround time had increased in comparison to prior reporting cycles. This is because OCME has been onboarding and training new analysts to accommodate the caseload. As new analysts are trained and the Forensic Biology Lab continues to streamline processes to increase efficiency, turnaround times are expected to improve in the future. The median time to complete property crime cases is the only indicator that exceeds the target metric for the reporting period, and that is because OCME prioritizes cases involving crimes against persons. Any case can be prioritized and expedited as needed. When prioritized, property crime cases are generally turned around in under 30 days, and if there is a risk to public safety between 3 and 5 days.
- OCME's Department of Forensic Biology Laboratory is continuing its work to identify the remains from the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack. During the first four months of Fiscal 2023 61 remains linked to previously identified victims were identified, which brings the total remains identified to 14,832. Fortunately, zero mass casualty events took place in the City over the reporting period. As such, zero related fatalities were handled by OCME.

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	
	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY22	FY23
Median time for scene arrivals by medicolegal investigators (MLIs) (hours)	1.8	1.6	1.6	*	*	1.6	1.7
Deaths reported	65,712	42,121	40,384	*	*	12,683	12,884
★ Cases where Chief Medical Examiner takes jurisdiction	7,547	7,735	8,211	*	*	2,722	2,990
★ Critical Indicator ● Equity Indicator "NA" Not Available ⇅ Directional Target * None							

Goal 1b Perform autopsies and examinations necessary to issue timely death certificates.

Performance Indicators	Actual			Target		4-Month Actual	
	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY22	FY23
★ Median time to complete autopsy reports (days)	67.0	144.0	140.0	90.0	90.0	131.0	110.0
★ Critical Indicator ● Equity Indicator "NA" Not Available ⇅ Directional Target * None							

Goal 1c Provide diligent investigation for all cremation requests.

Performance Indicators	Actual			Target		4-Month Actual	
	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY22	FY23
Total cremation requests received and investigated as requirement of processing	27,863	20,636	19,592	*	*	6,257	6,211
★ Cremation requests rejected after investigation and turned over to Medical Examiner jurisdiction	159	115	175	*	*	55	54
★ Critical Indicator ● Equity Indicator "NA" Not Available ⇅ Directional Target * None							

Goal 1d Certify death certificates in a timely manner.

Performance Indicators	Actual			Target		4-Month Actual	
	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY22	FY23
★ Median time to certify death certificates after initial receipt of decedents' remains (hours)	15.6	15.8	15.0	72.0	72.0	15.4	15.3
★ 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.

Performance Indicators	Actual			Target		4-Month Actual	
	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY22	FY23
Decedents' remains transported and stored by OCME	17,606	14,079	13,931	*	*	4,451	4,614
★ Median time from OCME receipt of decedents' remains to "Ready to Release" status (hours)	0.10	6.54	7.88	*	*	8.87	10.44
Median time to clear and release to third party for final disposition, per case (minutes)	37.0	39.0	37.0	*	*	37.0	36.0
★ 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.

Performance Indicators	Actual			Target		4-Month Actual	
	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY22	FY23
Remains recovered following the September 11, 2001 attacks (cumulative)	21,905	21,905	21,905	*	*	21,905	21,905
Number of fatalities handled by OCME following a mass fatality event	17,606	14,079	30	*	*	13	0
★ 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.

Performance Indicators	Actual			Target		4-Month Actual	
	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY22	FY23
Remains identified following the September 11, 2001 attacks (cumulative)	14,701	14,701	14,771	*	*	14,770	14,832
★ 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.

Performance Indicators	Actual			Target		4-Month Actual	
	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY22	FY23
Median time to complete analysis of a DNA case (days)	51.0	63.0	71.0	90.0	90.0	44.0	78.0
★ Median time to complete DNA homicide cases, from evidence submission to report (days)	39.0	49.0	69.0	90.0	90.0	42.0	79.0
★ Median time to complete DNA sexual assault cases, from evidence submission to report (days)	31.0	43.0	50.0	90.0	90.0	39.0	64.5
★ Median time to complete DNA property crime cases, from evidence submission to report (days)	50.0	128.0	216.0	120.0	120.0	225.0	243.0
DNA matches with profiles in database	5,988	6,241	4,760	*	*	1,709	1,766
Median time to complete toxicology cases (days)	47.0	115.0	111.0	90.0	90.0	100.0	78.0
Median time to complete toxicology DUI (driving under the influence) cases (days)	42.0	46.0	56.0	90.0	90.0	49.0	44.0
Median time to complete toxicology sexual assault cases (days)	43.0	80.0	116.0	90.0	90.0	76.0	85.0
★ Critical Indicator ● Equity Indicator "NA" Not Available ⇅ Directional Target * None							

AGENCY CUSTOMER SERVICE

Performance Indicators	Actual			Target		4-Month Actual	
	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY22	FY23
Customer Experience							
Completed customer requests for interpretation	1,161	1,544	1,303	*	*	NA	NA
Letters responded to in 14 days (%)	100%	100%	100%	*	*	100%	100%
E-mails responded to in 14 days (%)	92%	89%	100%	*	*	100%	100%
★ Critical Indicator ● Equity Indicator "NA" Not Available ⇅ Directional Target * None							

AGENCY RESOURCES

Resource Indicators	Actual			Sept. 2022 MMR Plan	Updated Plan	Plan	4-Month Actual	
	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY23 ¹	FY24 ¹	FY22	FY23
Expenditures (\$000,000) ²	\$110.9	\$109.7	\$108.0	\$91.9	\$96.7	\$91.7	\$37.1	\$34.1
Revenues (\$000)	\$1.5	\$35.0	\$84.0	\$50.0	\$50.0	\$50.0	\$0.2	\$22.1
Personnel	716	667	667	768	764	755	676	725
Overtime paid (\$000,000)	\$9.2	\$9.5	\$8.7	\$2.5	\$2.7	\$2.5	\$2.4	\$2.7

¹January 2023 Financial Plan. ²Expenditures include all funds "NA" - Not Available
The figures shown in the table above are subtotals of the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene totals that appear in the DOHMH chapter of this report.

SPENDING AND BUDGET INFORMATION

Unit of Appropriation	Expenditures FY22 ¹ (\$000,000)	January 2023 Financial Plan FY23 ² (\$000,000)	Applicable MMR Goals ³
106 - Office of Chief Medical Examiner (Personal Services)	\$71.5	\$73.0	All
116 - Office of Chief Medical Examiner (Other Than Personal Services)	\$36.5	\$23.7	All
Agency Total ¹	\$108.0	\$96.7	

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, 2022. Includes all funds. ³Refer to agency goals listed at front of chapter. "NA" Not Available * None

NOTEWORTHY CHANGES, ADDITIONS OR DELETIONS

- The Fiscal 2023 target for 'Median time to complete analysis of a DNA case (days)' was increased from 60 to 90 days to be consistent with toxicology lab targets and established standards.
- The Fiscal 2023 target for 'Median time to complete DNA homicide cases, from evidence submission to report (days)' was increased from 45 to 90 days to be consistent with toxicology lab targets and established standards.
- The Fiscal 2023 target for 'Median time to complete DNA sexual assault cases, from evidence submission to report (days)' was increased from 45 to 90 days to be consistent with toxicology lab targets and established standards.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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