

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE OFFICE OF CHIEF MEDICAL EXAMINER

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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 thorough analysis of evidence offer 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 access to services. 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 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 also provides language translation services, including for informational materials, to better serve all New Yorkers, regardless of language.

OCME additionally focuses on racial equity work in service delivery beyond the traditional role of medical examiner, addressing unmet needs and reducing disparities. The OCME Drug Intelligence & Intervention Group (DIIG) is a first-of-its kind model that combines expanded, comprehensive death investigations with support and guidance for the families and social networks affected by opioid-related fatalities. Through this initiative, OCME social workers and healthcare professionals provide wide-ranging services and referrals to potentially lifesaving interventions, including grief counseling, substance use services, housing assistance services, and health care, to traditionally underserved populations.

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, as well as all 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 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.
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SERVICE 5 Provide preventative and supportive fatality-related services to New Yorkers.

- Goal 5a Conduct outreach efforts to families and close contacts of victims of overdose deaths.

HOW WE PERFORMED

- During the first four months of Fiscal 2025, the median scene arrival time for OCME medicolegal investigators increased by more than half an hour compared to the same period in Fiscal 2024, reaching two hours and 25 minutes. OCME collaborates with law enforcement to coordinate scene responses, ensuring thorough death investigations without disrupting criminal investigations. While several factors may influence OCME's response times, these time fluctuations do not affect the integrity of criminal investigations.
- The median time to complete autopsy reports decreased by 37 percent compared to the first four months of Fiscal 2024 to 84 days during the first four months of Fiscal 2025, out-performing the 90-day target. This improvement is largely attributed to financial investments in improving OCME's operations, including through hiring additional forensic toxicologists and purchasing essential laboratory equipment, supplies, and a service contract to enhance the Toxicology Laboratory's capacity. Outsourcing specialized testing to an external laboratory was also a key component of the expenditure strategy. These efficiency improvements decreased the turnaround time for toxicology testing results, upon which many autopsy reports rely. Additionally, OCME implemented several updated staffing efficiencies, including reorganizing the Forensic Pathology Coordinators and establishing the Medical Examiner Support Unit, in order to better support Medical Examiners (MEs) to allow them to focus more on their case work, improving operations despite a reduction in staff as the result of the national shortage of board-certified forensic pathologists.
- There were 30 percent fewer autopsies performed, and 36 percent more external examinations performed in the first four months of Fiscal 2025 compared to the same period in Fiscal 2024. Due to ongoing shortages in forensic pathology staff, OCME adjusted the criteria for performing autopsies in limited types of cases, primarily drug overdose deaths, to accommodate workloads while maintaining accuracy. This adjustment accounts for the decrease in autopsies performed and the increase in external examinations (non-autopsies) with toxicology testing as certain cases are selected for external examination instead of autopsy at the discretion of the medical examiner responsible for the case, provided it does not compromise the accuracy of the cause and manner of death determination.
- The Forensic Biology Laboratory, which is responsible for all types of DNA case testing, continues to out-perform all target turnaround times. The median turnaround time across all DNA case types was 51 days in the first four months of Fiscal 2025, up from 40 days in the first four months of Fiscal 2024. Median time to complete DNA homicide cases also slightly increased to 51 days during the first four months of Fiscal 2025. Turnaround time for homicide cases can vary based on the complexity of the case and materials submitted to OCME for testing. The DNA lab can always rapidly expedite testing in any case of urgent public safety concern. DNA sexual assault cases and DNA gun crime cases turnaround times improved, decreasing to 38 days and 24 days, respectively. DNA property crimes have no target for turnaround time, as they are governed by a timeline appropriate for the judicial system. During the first four months of Fiscal 2025, 100 percent of DNA property crime samples submitted to the Agency were processed and ready when needed for criminal justice proceedings.
- The Forensic Toxicology Laboratory, which is responsible for all types of toxicology case testing, saw dramatic improvements in the first four months of Fiscal 2025 compared to the first four months of Fiscal 2024, as all their turnaround times now significantly out-perform the 90-day targets. The median time to complete toxicology cases decreased 55 percent, improving to 40 days in the first four months of Fiscal 2025 compared to the same period in Fiscal 2024. Similarly, the median time to complete toxicology DUI cases decreased 60 percent to 40 days and the median time to complete toxicology sexual assault cases decreased 63 percent to 62 days. These improvements were achieved while simultaneously dealing with increased toxicology case submissions, directly related to the opioid crisis, and were largely due to the investment of additional resources for the Laboratory, made possible by opioid settlement-related funds, as well as workflow and efficiency improvements, which streamlined Laboratory production.
- In the first four months of Fiscal 2025 there were 728 clients reached through OCME's Drug Intelligence and Intervention Group (DIIG), and 552 clients directly provided or referred to services. OCME created DIIG in September 2022 as an innovative way to fight the fentanyl-driven opioid crisis on a new front in the City. Through this initiative, when someone dies from a drug overdose, OCME's investigation and response now includes skilled social workers and public health professionals who engage with surviving family members and close contacts to provide a wide range of potentially lifesaving services and referrals including grief counseling, substance use services, housing assistance, health care, and more. Between the group's formation in September 2022 and December 1, 2024, OCME's DIIG team has spoken with more than 2,536 individuals who have lost a loved one to overdose. Of these individuals, 75 percent (1,897 individuals) have received help from DIIG's Family Support Team or referrals to other programs for support.

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	
	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25	FY26	FY24	FY25
Median time for scene arrivals by medicolegal investigators (hours:minutes)	1:36	1:37	2:13	*	*	1:48	2:25
Deaths reported	40,384	39,308	39,298	*	*	12,610	12,440
★ Cases where Medical Examiner takes jurisdiction and certifies death at an OCME facility	8,211	8,879	9,004	*	*	3,016	2,684
★ Cases where Medical Examiner investigates, takes jurisdiction and certifies death at scene or a health care facility	NA	3,383	3,298	*	*	1,015	1,071
Cases where Medical Examiner declines jurisdiction	3,096	3,163	3,322	*	*	1,000	1,046
★ Critical Indicator ● Equity Indicator "NA" Not Available ⇅ Directional Target * None							

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

Performance Indicators	Actual			Target		4-Month Actual	
	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25	FY26	FY24	FY25
★ Median time to complete autopsy reports (days)	140.0	110.0	118.0	90.0	90.0	133.0	84.0
Autopsies performed	6,085	6,544	6,170	*	*	2,156	1,504
External examinations performed	2,124	2,335	2,769	*	*	850	1,154
★ 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	
	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25	FY26	FY24	FY25
Cremation requests received and investigated as requirement of processing	19,592	18,904	18,670	*	*	5,948	6,057
★ Cremation requests rejected after investigation and turned over to Medical Examiner jurisdiction	175	170	201	*	*	69	67
★ 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	
	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25	FY26	FY24	FY25
★ Median time to certify death certificates after initial receipt of decedents' remains (hours:minutes)	15:01	15:06	15:31	72:00	72:00	15:16	15:58
★ 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	
	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25	FY26	FY24	FY25
Decedents' remains transported and stored by OCME	13,931	14,067	14,112	*	*	4,678	4,212
★ Median time from OCME receipt of decedents' remains to "Ready to Release" status (hours:minutes)	7:52	9:45	9:59	*	*	9:57	9:14
Median time to release a decedent remains to a funeral director (minutes)	37	39	41	*	*	40	40
★ 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	
	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25	FY26	FY24	FY25
★ Fatalities handled by OCME following a mass fatality event	30	0	0	*	*	0	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	
	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25	FY26	FY24	FY25
★ Remains identified following the September 11, 2001 attacks (cumulative)	14,771	14,867	14,914	↑	↑	14,894	14,914
★ 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	
	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25	FY26	FY24	FY25
Median time to complete analysis of a DNA case (days)	71.0	54.0	42.0	90.0	90.0	40.0	51.0
★ Median time to complete DNA homicide cases from evidence submission to report (days)	69.0	69.0	47.0	90.0	90.0	48.0	51.0
★ Median time to complete DNA sexual assault cases from evidence submission to report (days)	50.0	51.0	40.0	90.0	90.0	41.0	38.0
Median time to complete DNA property crime cases from evidence submission to report (days)	216.0	176.0	466.0	*	*	575.0	365.0
★ DNA property crime cases that are completed on-time for trial (%)	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Median time to complete DNA gun crime cases from evidence submission to report (days)	65.0	24.0	28.0	*	*	29.0	24.0
DNA gun crime samples received	21,714	19,961	17,831	*	*	6,781	2,832
DNA matches with profiles in database	4,760	4,781	6,111	*	*	2,039	1,676
★ Median time to complete toxicology cases (days)	111.0	73.0	77.0	90.0	90.0	88.0	40.0
Median time to complete toxicology DUI cases (days)	56.0	49.0	77.0	90.0	90.0	101.0	40.0
Median time to complete toxicology sexual assault cases (days)	116.0	94.0	153.0	90.0	90.0	168.0	62.0
★ Critical Indicator	● Equity Indicator	“NA” Not Available	↕ Directional Target	* None			

SERVICE 5 Provide preventative and supportive fatality-related services to New Yorkers.

Goal 5a

Conduct outreach efforts to families and close contacts of victims of overdose deaths.

Performance Indicators	Actual			Target		4-Month Actual	
	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25	FY26	FY24	FY25
★ Drug Intelligence and Intervention Group clients reached	NA	NA	1,364	↑	↑	264	728
★ Drug Intelligence and Intervention Group clients provided services	NA	NA	995	↑	↑	177	552
★ Critical Indicator	● Equity Indicator	“NA” Not Available	↕ Directional Target	* None			

AGENCY CUSTOMER SERVICE

Performance Indicators	Actual			Target		4-Month Actual	
	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25	FY26	FY24	FY25
Customer Experience							
Completed requests for interpretation	1,303	1,375	1,326	*	*	359	331
Letters responded to within 14 days (%)	100%	100%	100%	*	*	100%	100%
E-mails responded to within 14 days (%)	100%	100%	100%	*	*	100%	100%
★ Critical Indicator	● Equity Indicator	“NA” Not Available	↕ Directional Target	* None			

AGENCY RESOURCES

Resource Indicators	Actual			Sept. 2024 MMR Plan	Updated Plan	Plan	4-Month Actual	
	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25	FY25 ¹	FY26 ¹	FY24	FY25
Expenditures (\$000,000) ²	\$108.0	\$99.5	\$106.5	\$104.3	\$119.1	\$119.6	\$36.6	\$41.1
Revenues (\$000)	\$84.0	\$38.3	\$0.4	\$50.0	\$50.0	\$50.0	\$0.0	\$0.3
Personnel	700	716	737	756	846	840	720	739
Overtime paid (\$000,000)	\$8.7	\$9.8	\$9.8	\$2.5	\$3.2	\$2.5	\$2.9	\$2.8

¹January 2025 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 FY24 ¹ (\$000,000)	January 2025 Financial Plan FY25 ² (\$000,000)	Applicable MMR Goals ³
106 - Office of Chief Medical Examiner (Personal Services)	\$80.9	\$89.1	All
116 - Office of Chief Medical Examiner (Other Than Personal Services)	\$25.6	\$30.1	All
Agency Total ¹	\$106.5	\$119.1	

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, 2024. Includes all funds. ³Refer to agency goals listed at front of chapter.

NOTEWORTHY CHANGES, ADDITIONS OR DELETIONS

- The indicator 'DNA property crime cases that are completed on-time for trial (%)' was added in Goal 4a to provide more context about how the Agency performs on providing timely DNA Laboratory services as property crimes cases are governed by a timeline appropriate for the judicial system unlike other DNA case types that are prioritized because they are crimes against people.
- Service 5, 'Provide preventative and supportive fatality-related services to New Yorkers,' was added to highlight supportive programs OCME runs outside of their main mortuary and forensics services.
- Goal 5a, 'Conduct outreach efforts to families and close contacts of victims of overdose deaths,' was created to highlight OCME's new DIIG unit that work to prevent drug overdose deaths.
- The indicators 'Drug Intelligence and Intervention Group clients reached' and 'Drug Intelligence and Intervention Group clients provided services' were added to Goal 5a to measure the reach of the DIIG initiative.
- Previously published Fiscal 2022 figure for 'Personnel' in Agency Resources was corrected from 667 to 700.
- Preceding the Fiscal 2025 Preliminary Mayor's Management Report, the Mayor's Office of Operations continued to standardize indicator names, implementing changes in the Customer Experience section. Indicator definitions and historic data were not changed.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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