



Annual Report 2023



We investigate deaths to serve the living

**2023 Annual Report
Office of the Medical Investigator
State of New Mexico**

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**Office of the Medical Investigator (OMI)
2023 Annual Report**

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Introduction

The Office of the Medical Investigator (OMI) investigates any death occurring in the State of New Mexico that is sudden, violent, untimely, unexpected or where a person is found dead and the cause of death is unknown. OMI performed services for a total of 9,429 deaths in 2023. A detailed breakout of the case distribution can be found in this report.

This report is presented in two sections. The first section of the report summarizes the activity of the OMI. The second represents data routinely collected by the OMI in a manner that answers questions related to mortality and public health from a medical examiner's perspective. The tables and figures included in the report are designed to be self-explanatory, and we hope you find them easy to read and understand. Definitions can be found in the Glossary and may provide assistance with the terminology encountered in the report. Readers with special interests, needs, or whose questions are not answered by this report may contact the OMI. Additionally, we encourage interested researchers to contact the New Mexico Bureau of Vital Records and Health Statistics (BVRHS) for complete mortality statistics.

Comments or suggestions concerning the content, format, or clarity of the report are always welcome.

Preparation of the Annual Report

The OMI data from which this report was compiled are maintained on a web-based data management system located at the New Mexico Scientific Laboratories in Albuquerque. OMI faculty Sarah Lathrop, DVM, Ph.D., and OMI Research Scientist Garon Bodor, MS using Microsoft Office 2016 Professional, prepared this report. UNM Health Sciences Center – Digital Printing and Document Services printed and bound the final distribution copies. Electronic copies of this report may be downloaded in .PDF format from the OMI website: <http://omi.unm.edu>.

Overview – Office of the Medical Investigator – 2023

The Office of the Medical Investigator (OMI) was created by the New Mexico State Legislature in 1972 and became operational in 1973. Replacing the county coroner system, the OMI was tasked¹ with investigating all reportable deaths occurring in New Mexico, to subsequently determine the cause and manner of death in such cases, and to provide formal death certification.

¹ NMSA Statute 24-11-1, et seq., and 7-NMAC 3.2.8

Reportable Deaths

Those deaths to be reported to the OMI include all deaths occurring in New Mexico as outlined below, regardless of where or when the initial injuring event occurred.

- Any death that occurs suddenly and unexpectedly, that is, when the person has not been under medical care for significant heart, lung or other disease.
- Any death suspected to be due to violence, i.e., suicidal, accidental or homicidal injury, regardless of when or where the injury occurred.
- Any death suspected to be due to alcohol intoxication or the result of exposure to toxic agents.
- Any death of a resident housed in a county or state institution, regardless of where death occurs. This refers to any ward of the state or individual placed in such a facility by legal authorization.
- Any death of a person in the custody of law enforcement officers.
- Any death of a person in a nursing home or other private institution without recent medical attendance.
- Any death that occurs unexpectedly during, in association with, or as a result of diagnostic, therapeutic, surgical or anesthetic procedures.
- Any death alleged to have been caused by an act of malpractice.
- Any death suspected to be involved with the decedent's occupation.
- Any death unattended by a physician.
- Any death due to neglect.
- Any stillbirth of 20 or more weeks' gestation unattended by a physician.
- Any maternal death to include death of a pregnant woman regardless of the length of the pregnancy, and up to six weeks post-delivery, even where the cause of death is unrelated to the pregnancy.
- Any death of an infant or child where the medical history has not established some pre-existing medical condition.
- Any death, which is possibly, directly or indirectly, attributable to environmental exposure, not otherwise specified.
- Any death suspected to be due to infectious or contagious disease wherein the diagnosis and extent of disease at the time of death are undetermined.
- Any death occurring under suspicious circumstances.
- Any death in which there is doubt as to whether or not it is a medical investigator's case should be reported.

Statutory Duty

The OMI Policy Manual, derived from statute, requires the OMI to perform the following duties in all cases of reportable deaths:

- Receive all reports of sudden, unexpected or unexplained deaths.
- Respond to all sudden, unexpected or unexplained deaths.
- In the absence of a physician, pronounce death.
- Take custody of the body and all articles on or near the body.
- Maintain the chain of custody of the body and all articles obtained there from.
- Conduct an investigation leading to the determination of the cause and manner of death.
- Obtain toxicology samples from the body when indicated, and arrange for necessary tests upon those samples that will aid in the determination of cause and manner of death; maintain the proper chain of custody and evidence on those samples; store those samples for an appropriate period of time.
- Certify the cause and manner of death and forward written certification to designated agencies.
- Properly dispose of human remains through release to family or designated and authorized entities.
- Provide accurate identification of all human remains when possible.
- Cooperate with authorized agencies having involvement with death investigation.
- Provide professional, objective testimony in state and local courts of law.
- Define procedures that establish fees for services and material provided by the OMI.
- Define procedures to reimburse all parties providing services to the OMI.
- Establish and maintain a disaster plan outlining the role of OMI staff.
- Maintain records of each official death investigation and provide reports to official agencies.

The above duties are exclusive of deaths that occur on tribal or federal land. The OMI provides consulting services for requesting agencies such as the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI), Tribal Law Enforcement, military law enforcement, or neighboring state jurisdictions.

The OMI is designated as a special program within the Department of Pathology at the University of New Mexico School of Medicine. A Board of Medical Investigations comprised of the Dean of the UNM School of Medicine, the Chief of the New Mexico State Police, the Secretary of the Department of Health, the Chairman of the New Mexico Board of Thanatopractice and the Cabinet Secretary of the Indian Affairs Department was established to oversee and develop policy. The Board appoints the Chief Medical Investigator, a physician licensed in New Mexico, trained in Pathology and Forensic Medicine, who has responsibility for operations.

The program operates out of the Central Office located in the UNM Health Sciences Center in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The Central Office directs all investigative activities statewide. Specially trained and certified Field Deputy Medical Investigators (FDMI) conduct field investigations. Every county in New Mexico has FDMIs who conduct investigations at the scene of death to collect information used to determine jurisdiction, possible cause and manner of death and, in the absence

of a physician provide the pronouncement of death. The FDMIs contact the Central Office and present the results of each investigation to Central Office Deputy Medical Investigators who work with on-call Medical Investigators (forensic pathologists) to make the ultimate decisions regarding jurisdiction and the need for further medicolegal investigation. All autopsy services are conducted in the Central Office and are performed by forensic pathologists with the assistance of morphology technicians. The Scientific Laboratory Division (SLD) provides some toxicology services, with other commercial laboratories providing specialized testing. All documentation is archived by the Central Office and is available as provided for by public record statutes and regulations.

Such a strongly defined and professionally staffed system provides investigative agencies, the medical community and the citizens of New Mexico with standardized death investigation protocols and a central repository for the information compiled during those medicolegal investigations. The centralization of these services has proven valuable in many areas of public concern including:

- Criminal investigations such as homicide or child abuse
- Protection of public health from environmental hazards and the spread of infectious disease
- Surveillance and reporting of deaths that may represent bioterrorist activities
- Medical and statistical research contributing to positive preventive measures (such as seat belt laws)
- Expert testimony in court cases
- Proper certification of death
- Services to families of the deceased persons (Grief Services Program)

Program Summary and Highlights for 2023

Investigative Activity

In 2023, New Mexico had 9,429 deaths that met the criteria to become a reportable death. The OMI provided investigative services for each of these 9,429 deaths. OMI's Deputy Medical Investigators conducted 8,522 scene investigations in 2023. Following these investigations, OMI retained jurisdiction of 5,374 deaths and relinquished jurisdiction of 1,703 deaths to private physicians. An additional 61 deaths were investigated as consultations, resulting in a total caseload of 5,435 medicolegal investigations. OMI ordered the transportation of 5,449 decedents who died in 2023. A granular examination of the case distribution is presented in the Total Cases section beginning on the section entitled 'Total Cases'.

Examination Types

Of the 9,429 reportable deaths in 2023, OMI performed 1,808 autopsies (1,707 full + 101 partial), 2,439 pathologist externals, 664 field externals, and 4,518 decedents did not receive a physical examination of any type. As a department of the UNM Health Sciences Center, OMI performs autopsies for the hospital as a consultant; however, OMI does occasionally take jurisdiction over some of those cases. In 2023, OMI took jurisdiction over 730 cases. Of those cases, 37 received a full or partial autopsy, 3 received an external examination, and 690 cases only needed their records

reviewed in order to have a proper cause and manner of death assigned. A granular examination of the examination types is presented in the 'Total Cases' section of this report.

Identification

Each year OMI receives hundreds of cases where remains are initially unidentified. Approximately 99% of these cases are successfully identified through OMI's investigative efforts. Our staff identifies these cases through fingerprint analysis, postmortem forensic dental examinations, DNA analysis, and x-ray and CT comparisons. The investigative staff dedicates many hours to reviewing "cold cases" and are able to identify many cases with the advancement of DNA technology and by resubmitting fingerprints to the FBI that were originally unmatched. In 2023, the investigative staff identified all but 33 decedents.

Training and Education

At the OMI, the activity of training and education is an integral part of day-to-day operations. The OMI is designated as a special program within the Department of Pathology at the University of New Mexico School of Medicine. The forensic pathologists are faculty members within the School of Medicine and are expected to participate in training of medical students, residents and fellows, as well as conduct research activity to further advance the science of forensic medicine.

Forensic Pathology Fellowship Program

The OMI Forensic Pathology Fellowship Program is considered one of the best in the country. The fellowship is a one-year, in-depth training program in the subspecialty of forensic pathology. Applicants must have completed an accredited pathology residency program. Four positions for this competitive program are available each year and are generally filled two years in advance.

Certification Training

All OMI Central Office deputy medical investigators are required to become certified by the American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators to perform a death investigation. Additionally, the OMI provides in-house training for the deputy medical investigators throughout New Mexico and in the past year, 13 individuals successfully completed the training and received certification as new Field Investigators. Upon request, OMI will provide the certification training to other medical investigators, coroners and law enforcement agencies for adaptation to the needs of their local systems. (i.e., Native American police officers).

Death Investigation Training

OMI provided continuing education on a variety of forensic topics to Field Investigators through weekly webinars. This training was open to several other medical examiner offices throughout the country through Project ECHO.

Law Enforcement Training

Death investigation training is provided at the New Mexico State Police Academy, the New Mexico Law Enforcement Academy, APD Citizen's Police Academy, and the Albuquerque Police Academy. In addition, specialized training is provided to individual police departments at their request.

Public Education

OMI Staff conducts in-service training throughout the state for a wide variety of agencies. Examples of agencies include the New Mexico Department of Health, funeral homes, hospitals, correction facilities, the EMS training site, UNM, CNM, high schools, civic organizations, state search and rescue groups, and tribal authorities.

OMI Website

The OMI website at <http://omi.unm.edu> provides instant access to information concerning OMI, staff, services offered, reports, and record requests.

Center for Forensic Imaging

The Center for Forensic Imaging (CFI) is located within OMI. The CFI performs computed tomography (CT), magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), and radiography, in support of the clinical service of the OMI, as well as research and education.

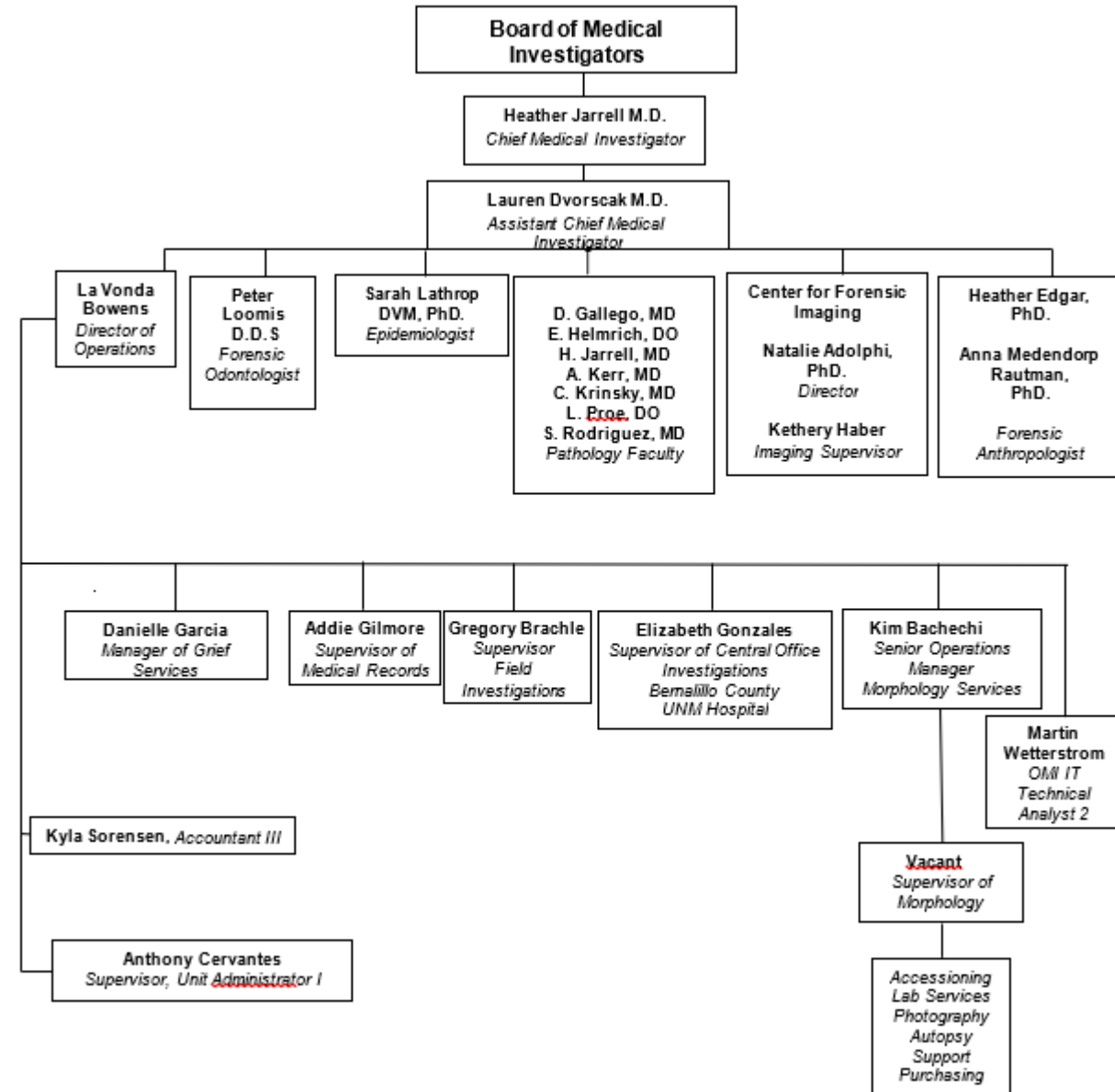
Grief Services Program

The Grief Services Program (GSP) was established in 1975. Initially, the Program provided crisis intervention and education to families whose child died as a result of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). The Program has expanded over time and now includes support for those experiencing a family member's death arising from homicide, suicide, or various accidents in New Mexico. Currently, GSP has three clinical social workers located on-site in Albuquerque, and contracts with mental health clinicians throughout the state, all who provide trauma and grief support for families dealing with this sudden and unexplained death. The GSP also provides internship opportunities to master-level students in mental health disciplines. Services provided by the GSP include: crisis support, trauma and grief support/companioning, advocacy, support groups, and information and referrals. Additionally, the GSP provides consultation, training, and public presentations focusing on trauma and traumatic/complicated grief education across New Mexico for agencies such as law enforcement, emergency responders, nurses, mental health providers, teachers and other groups who request such training.

Donor Services

In 2023, OMI ensured that 100% of potential organ donors and their families were allowed to give the gift of life. OMI works closely with New Mexico Donor Services and Lion's Eye Bank to provide life-saving organs for transplantation, in New Mexico and across the country. Our thanks go to the families whose loved ones became an organ or tissue donor, providing an enhanced quality of life to hundreds of transplant recipients.

OMI Organizational Chart



Total Cases

The remainder of this report will present data routinely collected by the OMI in a manner that answers questions regarding mortality and public health. The tables and charts summarize data collected on every medicolegal investigation, including consultation cases that the OMI conducted for this reporting period. The data, a subset of total mortality figures, represent findings on cases that come to the attention of forensic pathology. Readers who need complete mortality figures are encouraged to contact the State Center for Health Statistics – Bureau of Vital Records and Health Statistics, New Mexico Department of Health.

Figure 2. Total Cases (2014 - 2023)

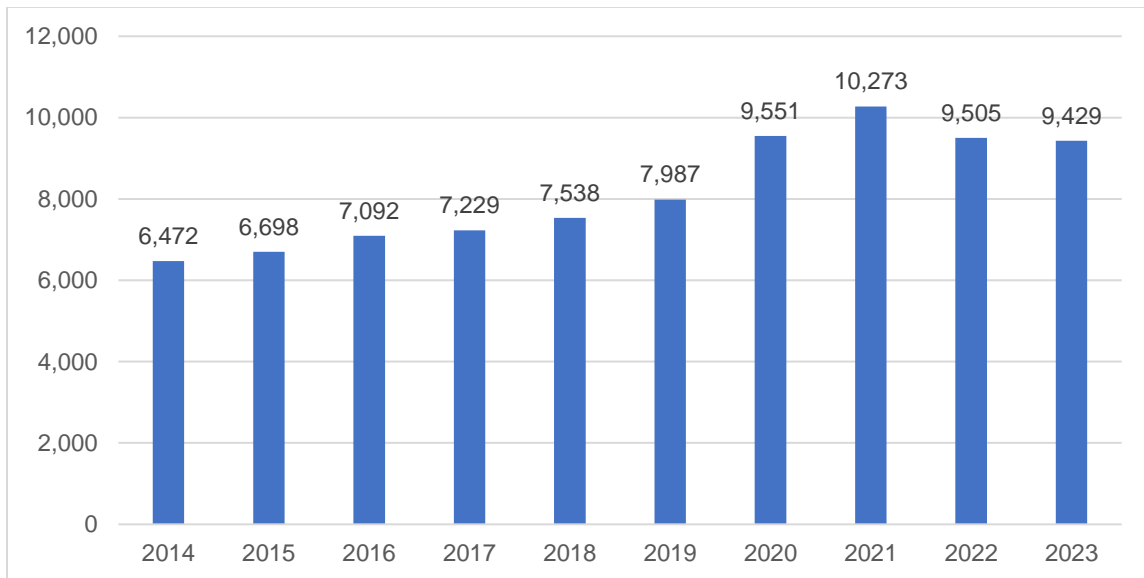


Figure 3. Total Cases by Month 2023

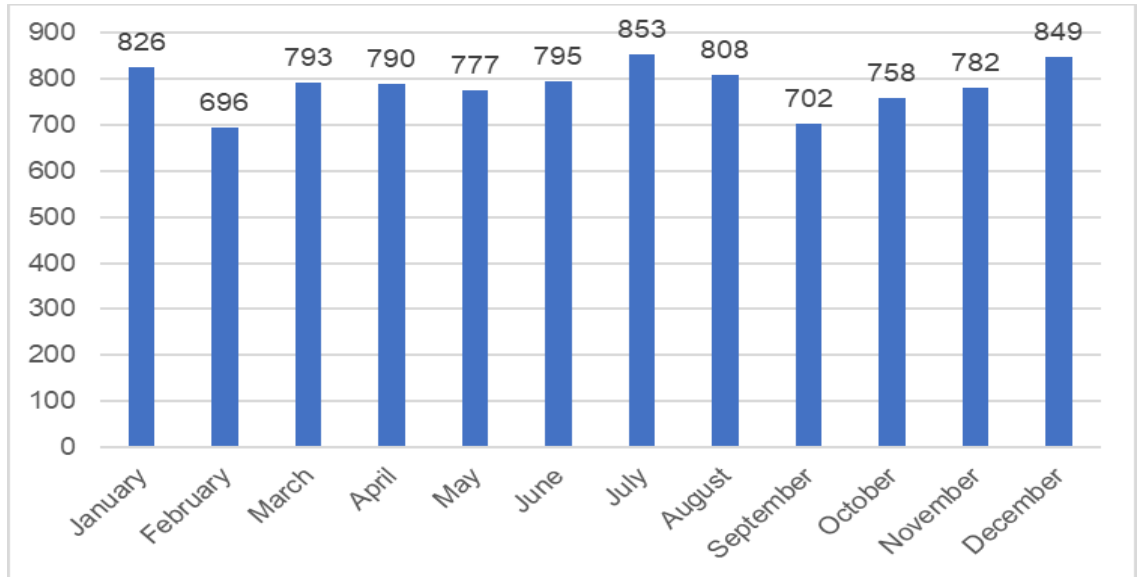


Figure 4. Total Cases by Day 2023

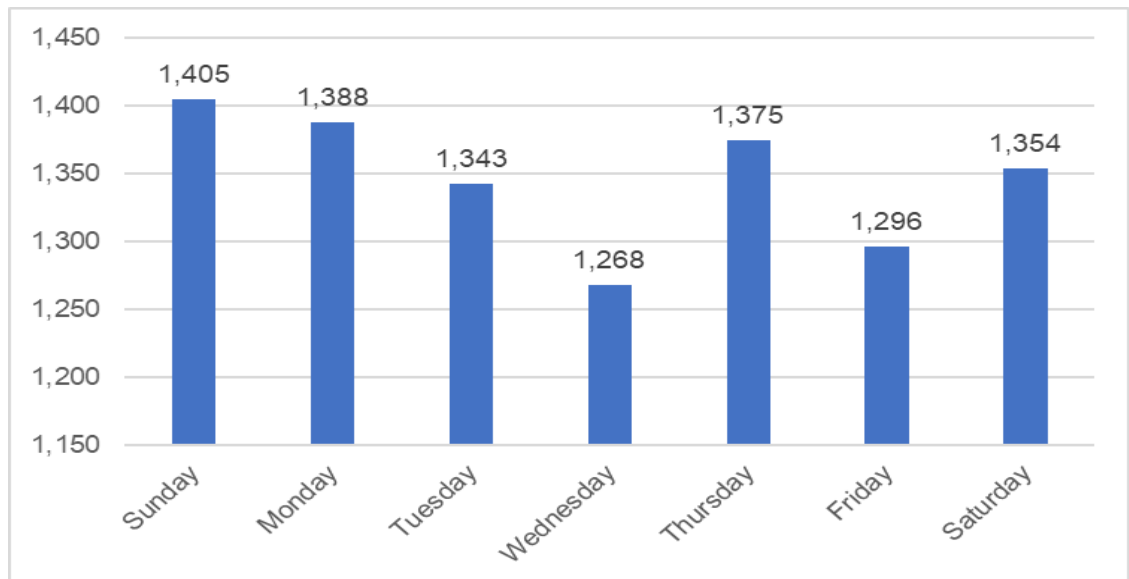


Figure 5. Total Cases by Race / Ethnicity 2023

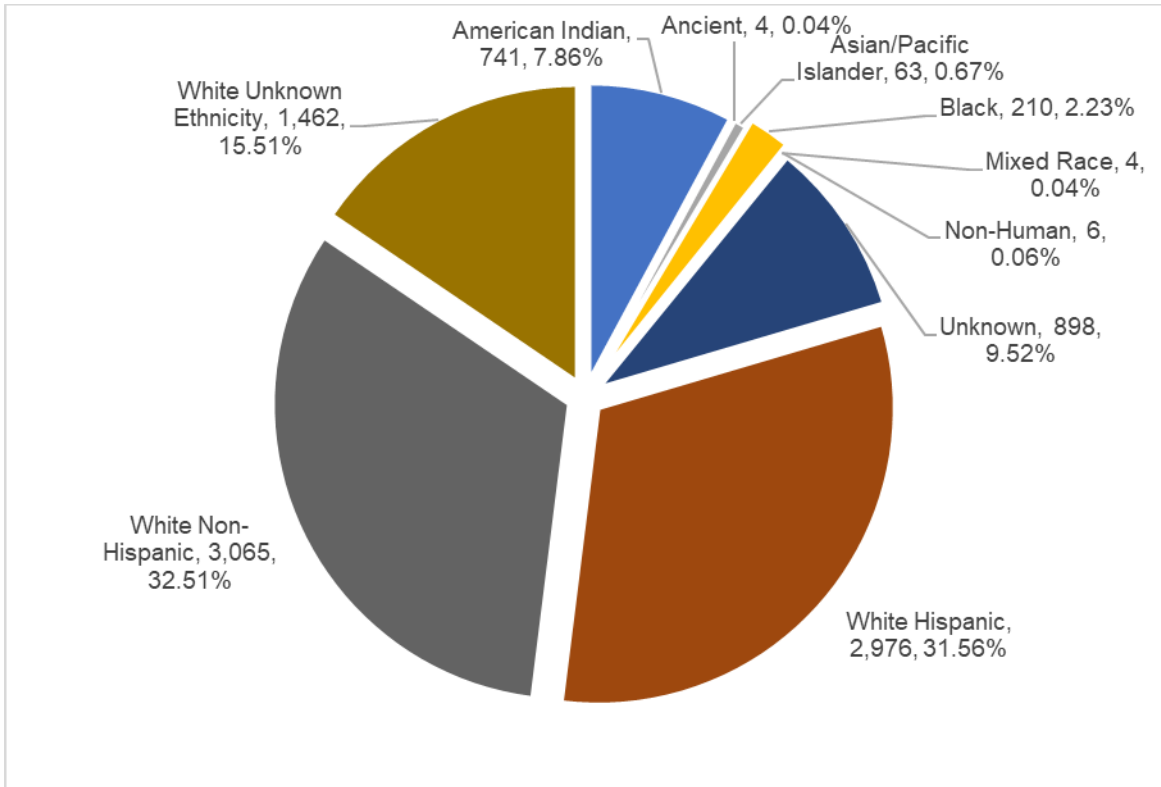


Figure 6. Total Cases by Age and Gender 2023

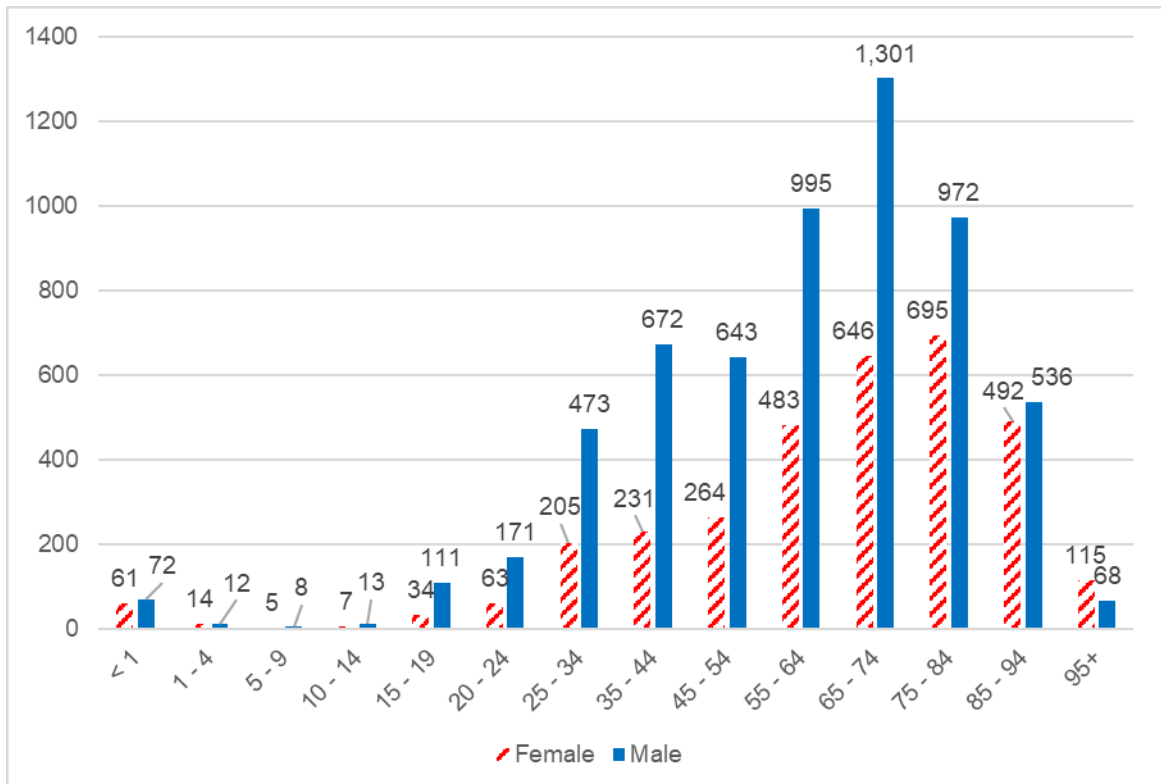


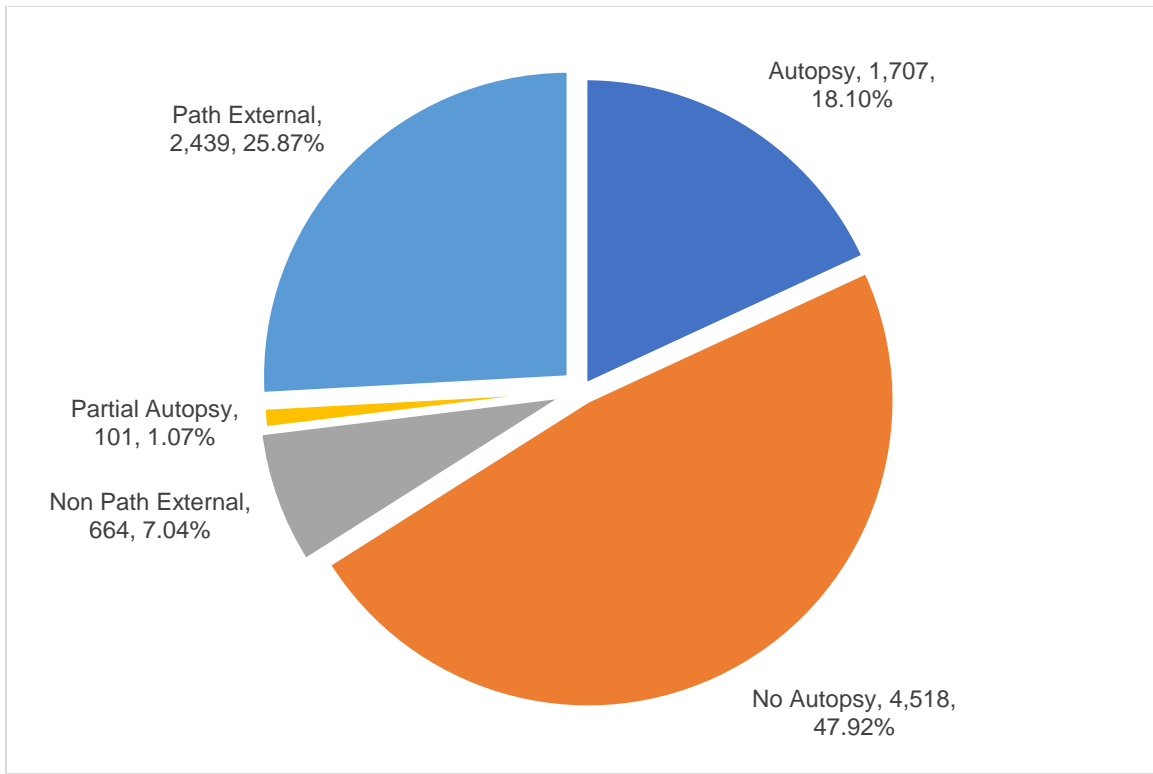
Table 1. Total Cases - Autopsy Status 2023

Autopsy	Accident	Homicide	Jurisdiction Terminated	Natural	Non-Accept	Non-Human	Other	Suicide	Undetermined	Unknown	Grand Total
No	1,636		1,703	2,519	1,447	2	3	299	11	1	7,621
Yes	701	309		451		1		183	163		1,808
Grand Total	2,337	309	1,703	2,970	1,447	3	3	482	174	1	9,429

Table 2. Total Cases Distribution 2023

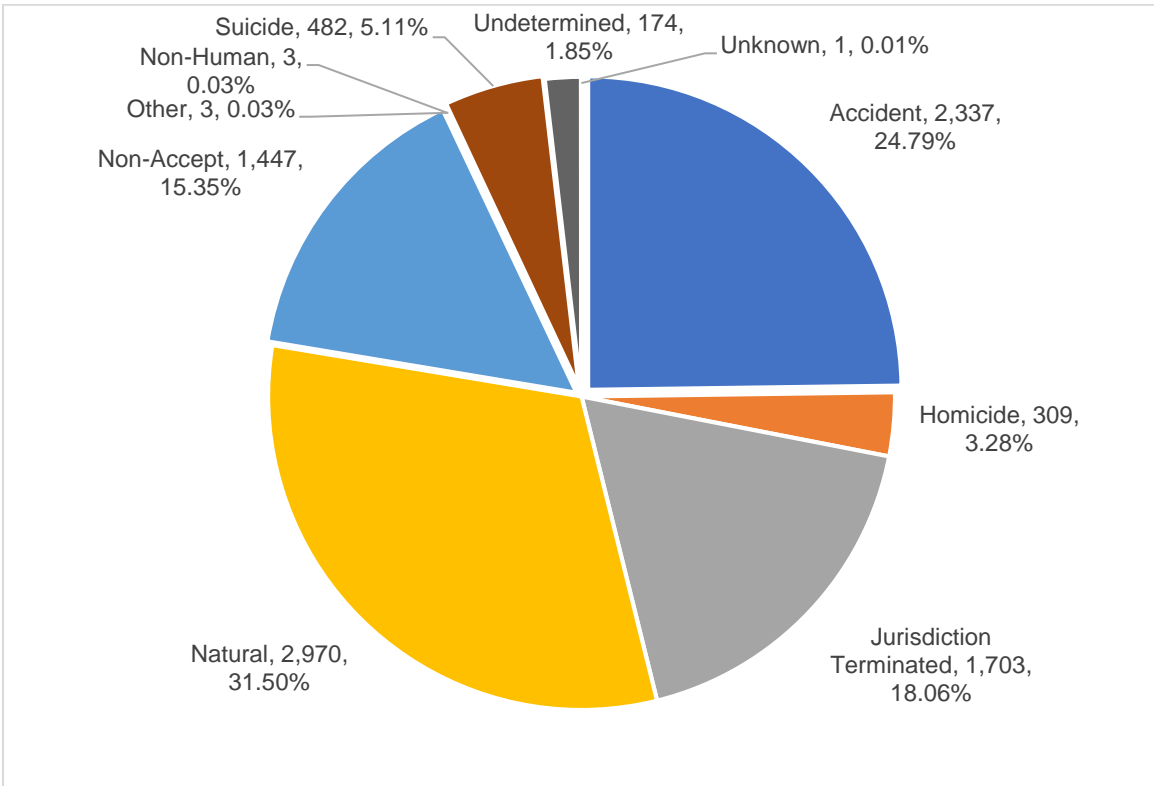
Jurisdiction	Autopsy No	Autopsy Yes	Percent Autopsied	Grand Total
OMI				
Accident	1,614	679	29.61%	2,293
Homicide	0	296	100.00%	296
Natural	1,731	352	16.90%	2,083
Non-Accept	1	0	0.00%	1
Non-Human	1	1	50.00%	2
Other	3	0	0.00%	3
Suicide	294	179	37.84%	473
Undetermined	10	154	93.90%	164
Subtotal	3,654	1,661	31.25%	5,315
Consult				
Accident	22	22	50.00%	44
Homicide	0	13	100.00%	13
Natural	788	99	11.16%	887
Non-Human	1	0	0.00%	1
Other	1	0	0.00%	1
Suicide	5	4	44.44%	9
Undetermined	1	9	90.00%	10
Subtotal	818	147	15.23%	965
Jurisdiction Terminated	1,703	0	0.00%	1,703
Non-Accept	1,446	0	0.00%	1,446
Grand Total	7,621	1,808	19.17%	9,429

Figure 7. Total Cases by Exam Type 2023



Cause and Manner of Death

Figure 8. Total Cases by Manner of Death 2023



Cause and Manner of Death - Overview

In 2023, OMI investigated 9,429 deaths, representing approximately *41.17% of the estimated total deaths in New Mexico in 2023 (*New Mexico Department of Health 2022). Of the deaths investigated by OMI in 2023:

The total number of deaths investigated represents an 0.80% decrease from the 2022 total, and a 45.69% increase since 2014.

The ratio of male to female deaths, when gender was clearly determined, was 1.82. Decedents classified as White non-Hispanic represented 32.51% of the total, White Hispanic 31.56%, White Hispanic ethnicity unknown 15.51%, American Indian 7.86%, Black 2.23%, and Asian/Pacific Islander 0.67%. The racial-ethnic composition of New Mexico was listed in 2019 as: 37.6% Non-Hispanic White, 49.3% Hispanic, 9.1% American Indian, 2.3% Black or African-American and 1.8% Asian/Pacific Islander. (Source: <https://www.nmhealth.org/data/view/vital/2504/>)

While natural deaths contributed the largest portion of OMI deaths investigated (31.50%), most natural deaths did not fall under the jurisdiction of the OMI. Multiple cases are called into OMI every day in order to verify if OMI has jurisdiction over the case. The physicians then decide if OMI is

statutorily obligated to investigate the case and issue the death certificate. If they are not statutorily obligated, the case is considered as jurisdiction terminated (18.06% of 2023 cases) or non-accept (15.35% of 2023 cases). Data presented regarding natural deaths should not be interpreted as representative of all natural deaths in New Mexico.

Table 3. Total Cases by Gender and Manner 2023

Manner	Ancient	Female	Male	Non-Human	Unknown	Grand Total
Accident		749	1,588			2,337
Homicide		61	247		1	309
Jurisdiction Terminated	2	664	1,037			1,703
Natural		1,072	1,889		9	2,970
Non-Accept	2	651	790	2	2	1,447
Non-Human				3		3
Other		2	1	1		4
Suicide		72	410			482
Undetermined		66	95		13	174
Grand Total	4	3,337	6,057	6	25	9,429

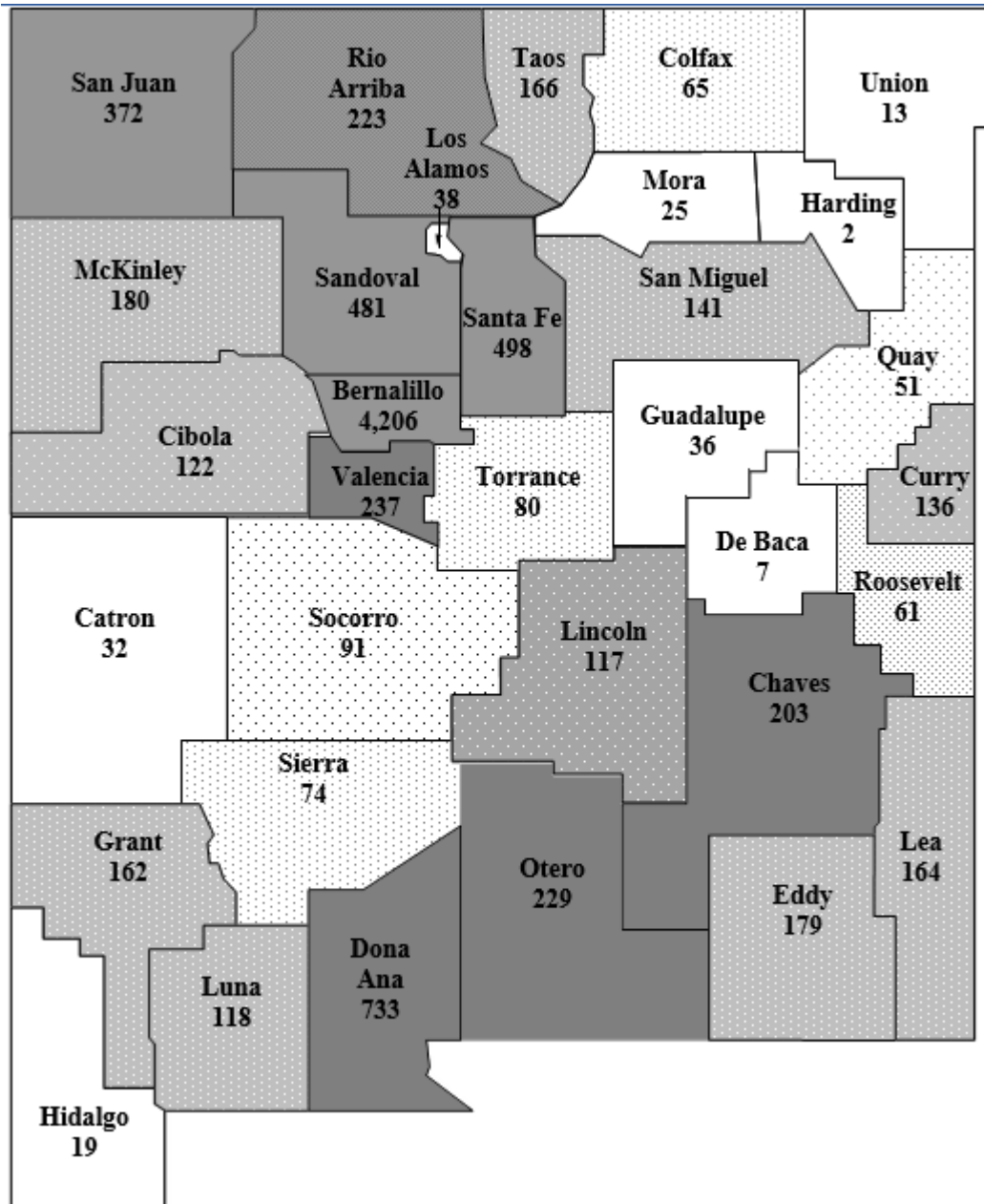
Table 4. Total Cases by Manner of Death and Race/Ethnicity 2023

Race/Ethnicity	Accident	Homicide	Jurisdiction Terminated	Natural	Non-Accept	Non-Human	Other	Suicide	Undetermined	Grand Total
American Indian	234	35	46	281	91		1	34	19	741
Ancient			2		2					4
Asian/Pacific Islander	21	1	10	21	7			3		63
Black	53	11	41	81	16			7	1	210
Mixed Race	2							1	1	4
Non-Human					2	3	1			6
Unknown	209	49	65	257	226			39	53	898
White Hispanic	896	136	529	831	372			156	56	2,976
White Non-Hispanic	612	52	747	1,035	414		1	173	31	3,065
White Unknown Ethnicity	310	25	263	464	317		1	69	13	1,462
Grand Total	2,337	309	1,703	2,970	1,447	3	4	482	174	9,429

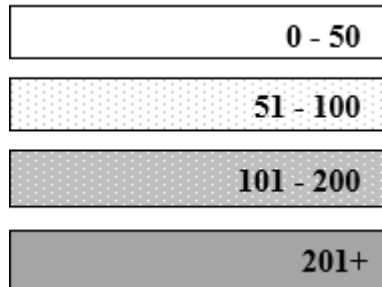
Table 5. Total Cases by Manner of Death (Age and Gender) 2023

Gender / Age Group	Accident	Homicide	Jurisdiction Terminated	Natural	Non-Accept	Non-Human	Other	Suicide	Undetermined	Grand Total
Female										
< 1	4	1	2	19	17				6	49
1 - 4	7		1	3					3	14
5 - 9	2	1		1	1					5
10 - 14	2	1	1	2				1		7
15 - 19	14	8		5				4	3	34
20 - 24	28	8	1	7	1			12	6	63
25 - 34	111	12	2	45	8			14	13	205
35 - 44	109	9	4	70	19			12	8	231
45 - 54	98	5	20	101	25			10	5	264
55 - 64	108	6	89	184	86			6	4	483
65 - 74	73	6	166	266	120		1	8	6	646
75 - 84	77	3	192	230	185		1	5	2	695
85 - 94	93		145	105	149					492
95+	20	1	38	19	37					115
Unknown IUFD	3		3	3	3				11	23
				12						12
Subtotal	749	61	664	1,072	651		2	72	67	3,338
Male	12	2	1	20	21				2	58
< 1	5		1	4					2	12
1 - 4	2	2	1	3						8
5 - 9	5	5		1				1	1	13
10 - 14	43	27		4				34	3	111
15 - 19	89	27		7	1			42	5	171
20 - 24	230	53	3	73	12			84	21	476
25 - 34	315	78	16	139	25			82	17	672
35 - 44	270	23	46	211	34			42	17	643
45 - 54	241	17	159	414	99		1	52	12	995
55 - 64	172	9	286	568	218			37	11	1,301
65 - 74	100	3	317	305	216			28	3	972
75 - 84	86		179	118	145			7	1	536
85 - 94	16		26	8	17			1		68
95+	2	1	2		2				2	9
Unknown IUFD				16						16
Subtotal	1,588	247	1,037	1,891	790		1	410	97	6,061
Non-Human					2	3	1			6
Unknown Age/Gender		2		14	4				20	40
Ancient			2		2					4
Grand Total	2,337	309	1,703	2,970	1,447	3	4	482	174	9,429

Figure 9. OMI Deaths by County of Pronouncement 2023

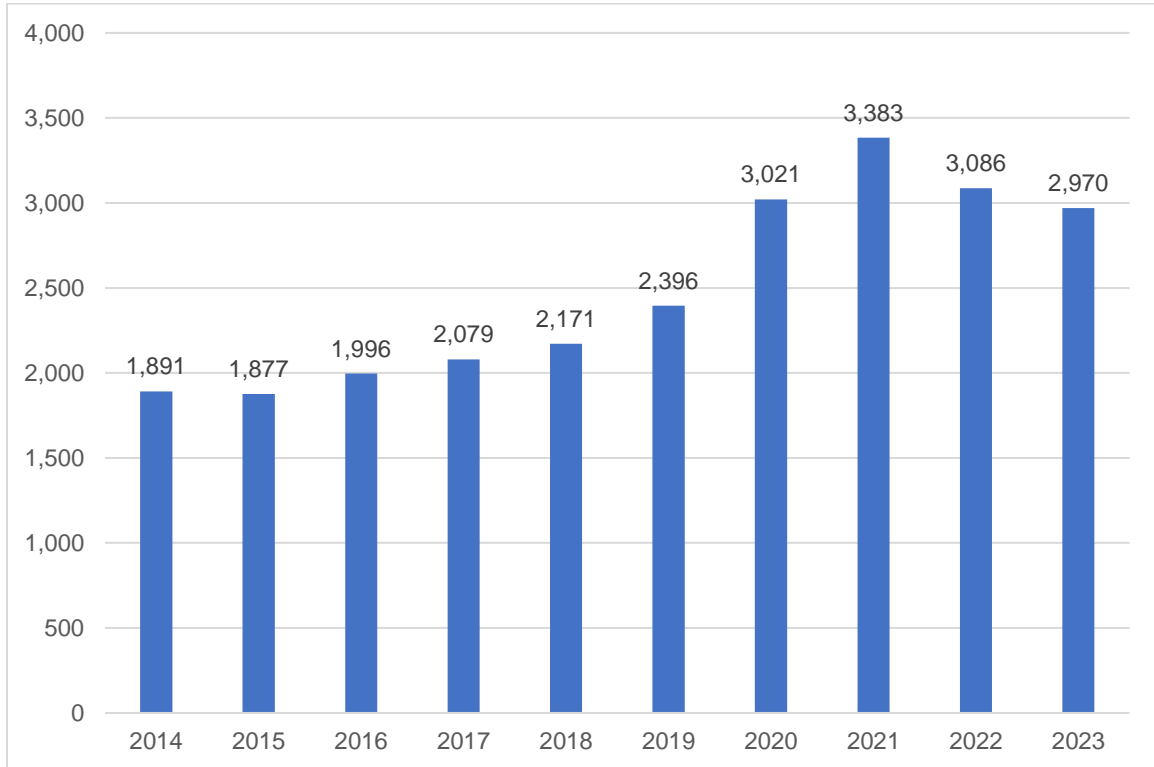


- There were 192 cases pronounced out of state



Overview – Manner of Death – Natural Deaths

Figure 10. Natural Deaths (2014- 2023)



Natural Deaths – Overview

Deaths classified as a “natural” manner of death, as compared to suicides, homicides, accidents, and undetermined manners of death, represent the largest number of deaths investigated by OMI (31.50% in 2023). Starting in 2013, cases reported to but not accepted by OMI were no longer assigned a manner of death, resulting in the lower numbers of natural deaths. Most natural deaths that occur in New Mexico do not fall under the jurisdiction of OMI and are, therefore, not represented in this report. An excellent resource for all mortality statistics in the state is the publication “New Mexico Selected Health Statistics Annual Report,” published by the State Center for Health Statistics at the Office of New Mexico Vital Records & Health Statistics, Public Health Division, Department of Health, 1105 St. Francis Dr., PO Box 26110, Santa Fe, NM 87502-6110. The 2019 Department of Health Annual Report is available online at: <https://www.nmhealth.org/data/view/vital/2504/>

Figure 11. Natural Deaths by Race / Ethnicity 2023

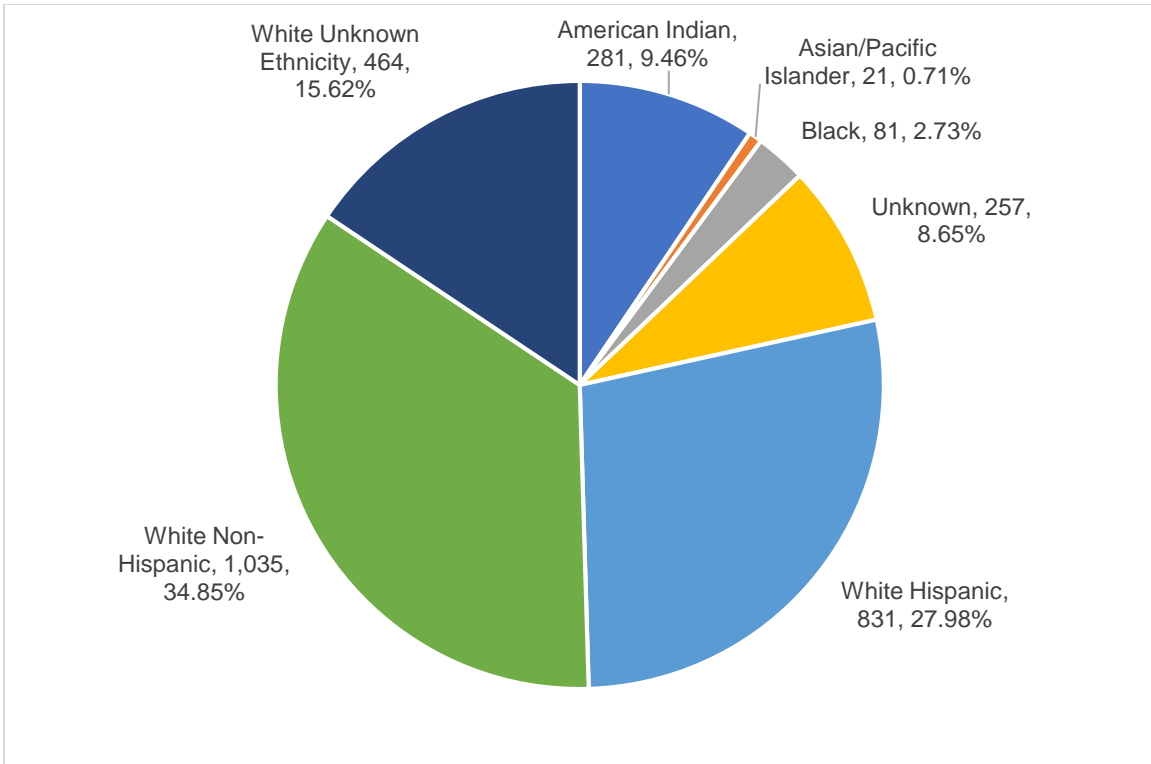
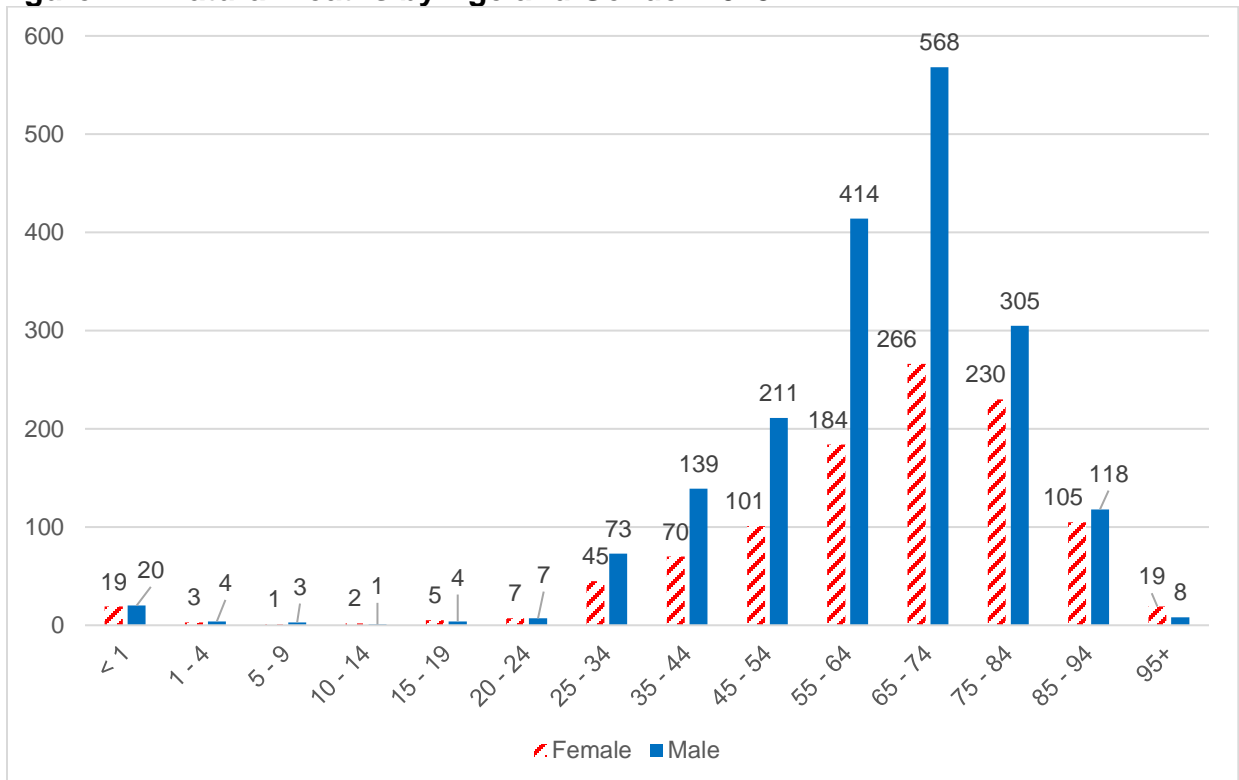
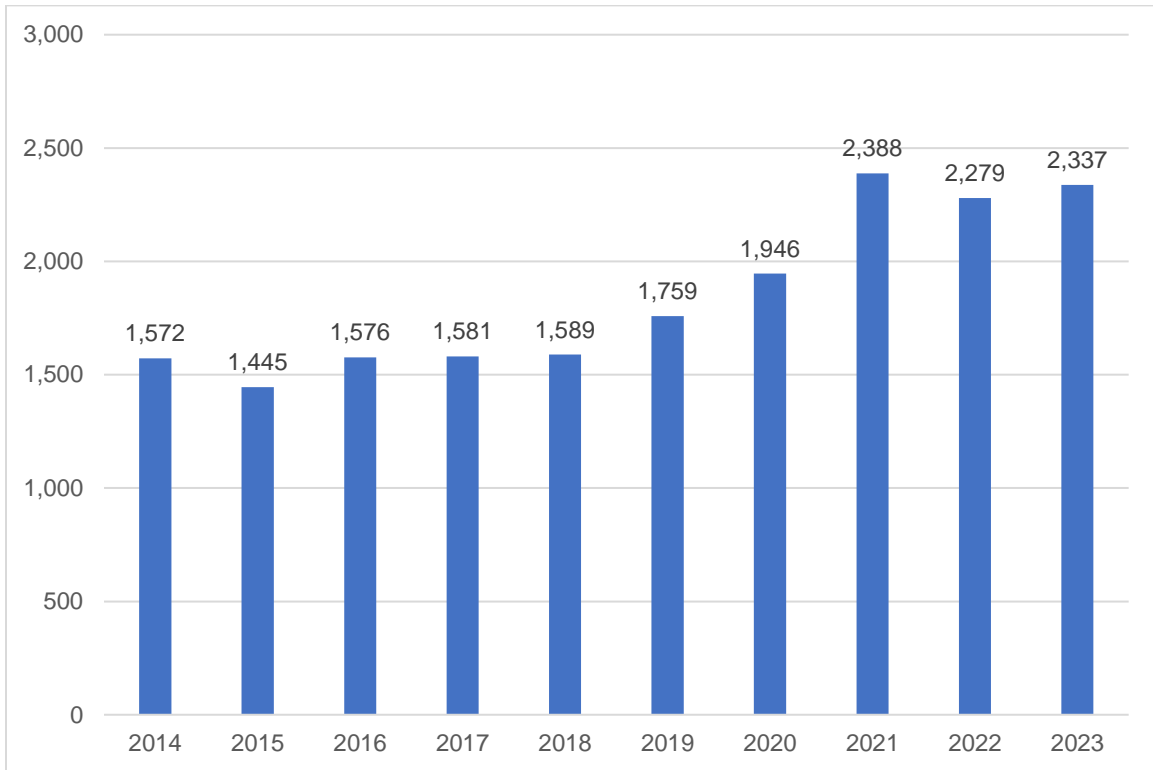


Figure 12. Natural Deaths by Age and Gender 2023



Overview – Manner of Death – Accidental Deaths

Figure 13. Accidental Deaths (2014 - 2023)



Accidental Deaths – Overview

Accidental deaths accounted for 24.79% of the deaths investigated by OMI in 2023, second only to natural deaths as a manner of death. The highest number of accidental deaths was in males 35 - 44 years of age.

Figure 14. Accidental Deaths by Race / Ethnicity 2023

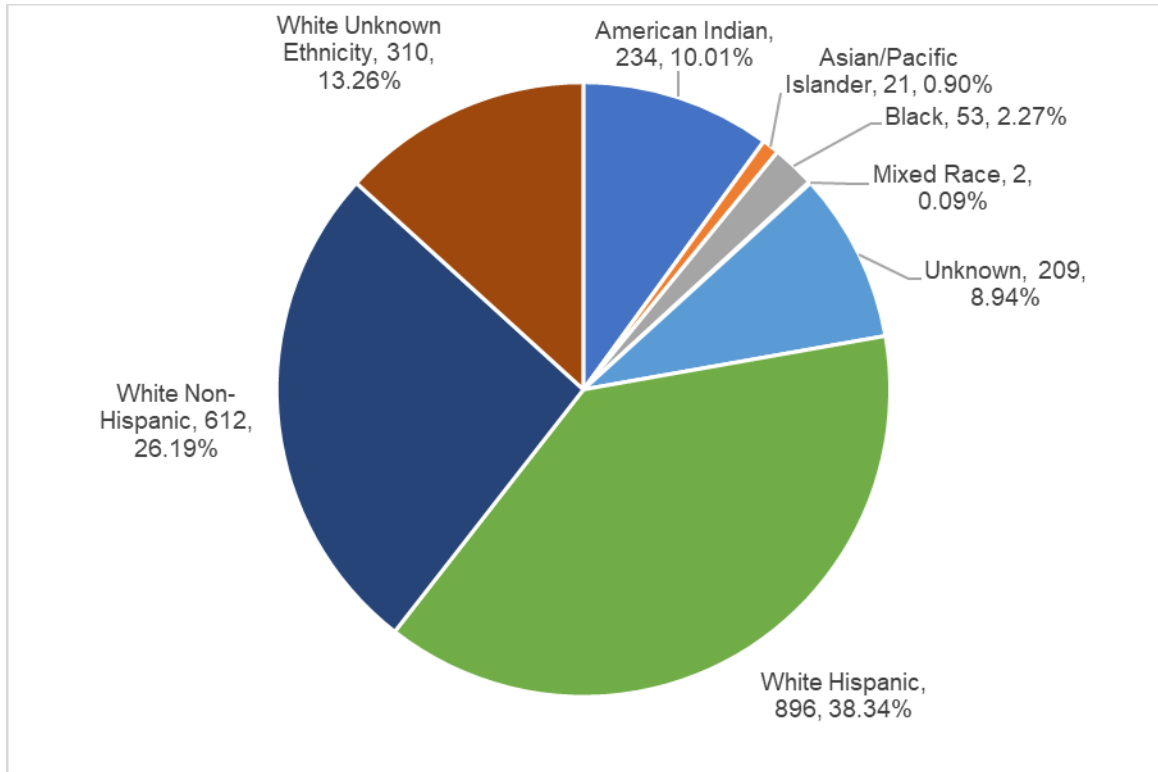


Figure 15. Accidental Deaths by Age and Gender 2023

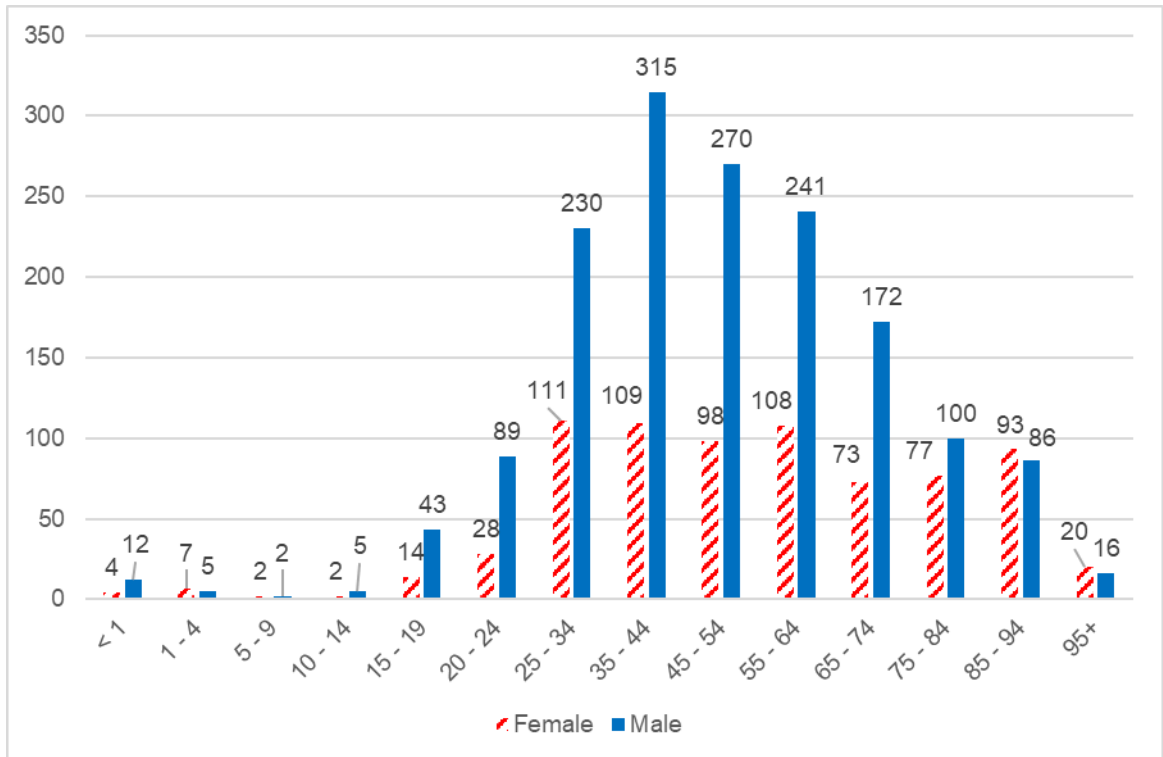


Table 6. Accidental Deaths by Cause 2023

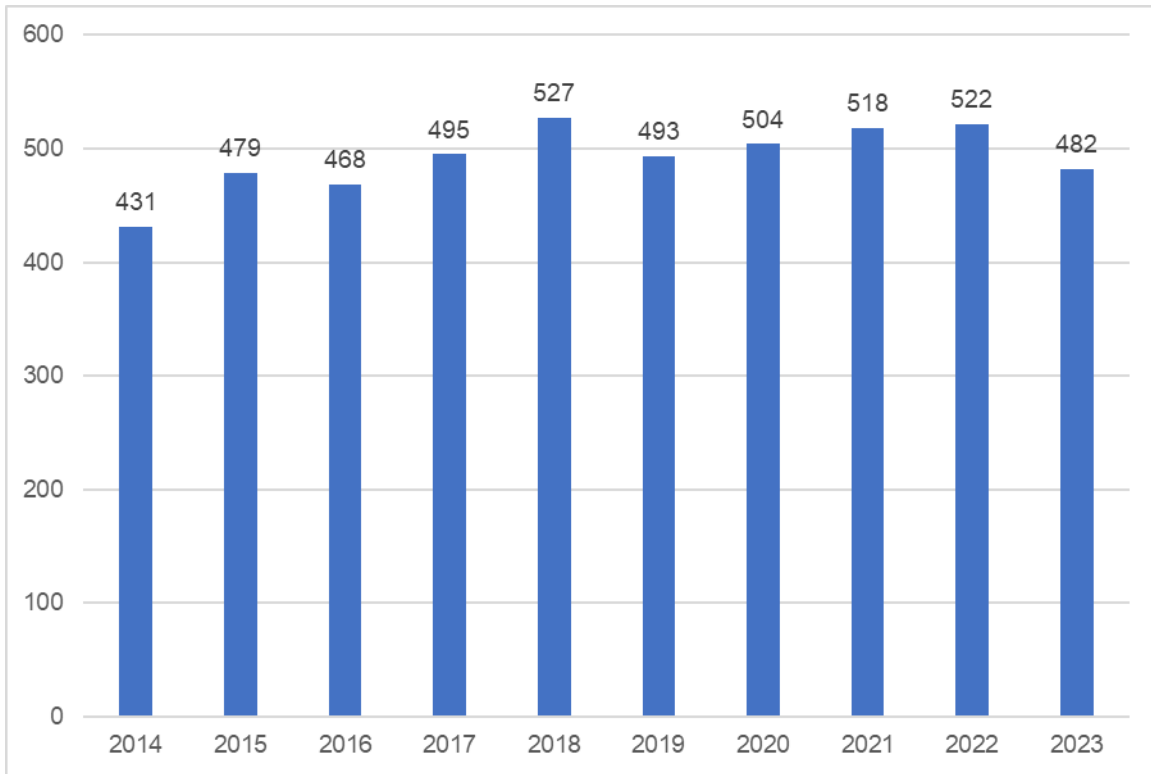
Cause	Total
Substance intoxication (drug, poison, alcohol, etc.)	941
Multiple injuries (fractures, lacerations to internal organs)	575
Cardiac arrhythmia	157
Head and neck injuries (cervical, cranio-, cerebral)	133
Exposure	58
Sepsis	46
Dehydration (hyperthermia, heat stroke)	44
Asphyxia (suffocation, strangulation)	40
Ethanol (alcohol) intoxication	34
Pneumonia (bronchitis)	32
Drowning	28
Ethanolism (chronic, alcoholism, alcoholic liver)	25
Carbon monoxide intoxication (smoke and soot inhalation)	24
Cerebrovascular	24
Alzheimers (senility, dementia, Organic/Chronic Brain Syndrome)	19
Hypertension (hypertensive cardiovascular disease)	12
Subdural hematoma	11
Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)	11
Carcinoma (CA, cancer, malignancy)	11
History of illness or injury	10
Gaserintestinal hemorrhage (gastroenteritis, ulcers, diverticulitis)	9
Aspiration (stomach, gastric, foreign objects)	8
Hepatic failure (liver, cirrhosis)	8
Diabetes	8
Epilepsy (seizure disorder)	8
Emboli (throbos, phlebitus)	7
Thermal injuries (burns)	6
Electrocution	5
Respiratory Distress Syndrome	4
Obesity	4
Spontaneous hemorrhage	4
Obstruction (blockage)	4
Narcotic abuse	2
Hanging	2
Renal failure (kidney, nephritis, uremia)	2
Aneurysm (cerebral hemorrhage, Berry)	2
Parkinson's disease	2
Asthma	2
Other	15
Grand Total	2,337

Table 7. Accidental Deaths by County of Pronouncement (2014 - 2023)

County	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Bernalillo	557	606	631	606	664	700	871	1097	985	980
Catron	4	2	2	1	8	3	5	6	9	4
Chaves	37	32	33	44	45	42	33	57	58	49
Cibola	16	19	24	20	18	31	29	35	32	33
Colfax	16	12	12	6	16	13	11	15	15	15
Curry	24	22	23	24	21	29	49	27	31	35
De Baca	2	3	5	1	0	4	1	2	0	1
Dona Ana	110	110	97	114	88	113	105	152	156	227
Eddy	51	43	25	42	53	47	42	49	55	53
Grant	29	16	17	35	13	22	23	19	30	29
Guadalupe	14	12	18	12	5	14	10	11	20	12
Harding	1	0	2	0	1	0	1	0	0	1
Hidalgo	13	7	6	15	1	10	8	6	6	4
Lea	56	34	37	37	53	64	48	49	56	53
Lincoln	18	9	23	17	11	21	11	26	17	21
Los Alamos	7	2	7	6	6	6	3	7	13	11
Luna	11	12	17	7	15	18	22	35	34	28
McKinley	73	49	58	55	75	55	53	72	57	74
Mora	4	3	4	4	0	6	3	4	11	9
Otero	42	33	27	30	27	39	34	48	38	56
Quay	16	12	7	5	2	5	12	11	20	14
Rio Arriba	57	50	50	64	55	58	71	75	84	90
Roosevelt	9	9	11	14	4	9	6	8	21	8
San Juan	96	75	87	80	80	102	104	104	103	102
San Miguel	15	14	23	26	27	28	32	38	39	42
Sandoval	68	49	67	99	86	74	88	108	91	92
Santa Fe	119	110	121	102	83	121	128	154	137	137
Sierra	11	15	19	12	19	9	19	29	9	18
Socorro	18	10	22	4	8	16	22	22	26	26
Taos	23	23	23	21	28	23	29	49	39	42
Torrance	13	12	14	6	19	13	16	12	17	25
Union	3	0	1	4	2	4	2	6	5	3
Valencia	33	19	33	33	38	39	40	49	51	41
Out of State	6	21	30	35	18	21	15	10	14	2
Totals	1,572	1,445	1,576	1,581	1,589	1,759	1,946	2,392	2,279	2,337

Overview – Manner of Death (Suicide)

Figure 16. Suicide Deaths (2014 - 2023)



Suicide Deaths – Overview

New Mexico's suicide rate is consistently higher than the national average, comprising 2.10% of all deaths in New Mexico in 2023. The rate in 2021 (most recent data available) was 26.39 per 100,000 people, compared to a crude rate of 13.94 per 100,000 people in the rest of the U.S (<https://wisqars.cdc.gov/>). Deaths from suicide in 2023 occurred most frequently among White non-Hispanics (37.74%) and males (85.06%). More men between the ages of 25 and 44 years (34.44% of all suicides) died by suicide than any other age group by gender. More people died by suicide on Thursday (16.18%) than any other day of the week. More suicides occurred in June than any other month (9.96%). The fewest occurred in April (6.22%). The total number of suicides decreased from 522 in 2022 to 482 in 2023 (7.66% decrease).

Figure 17. Suicide Deaths by Race / Ethnicity 2023

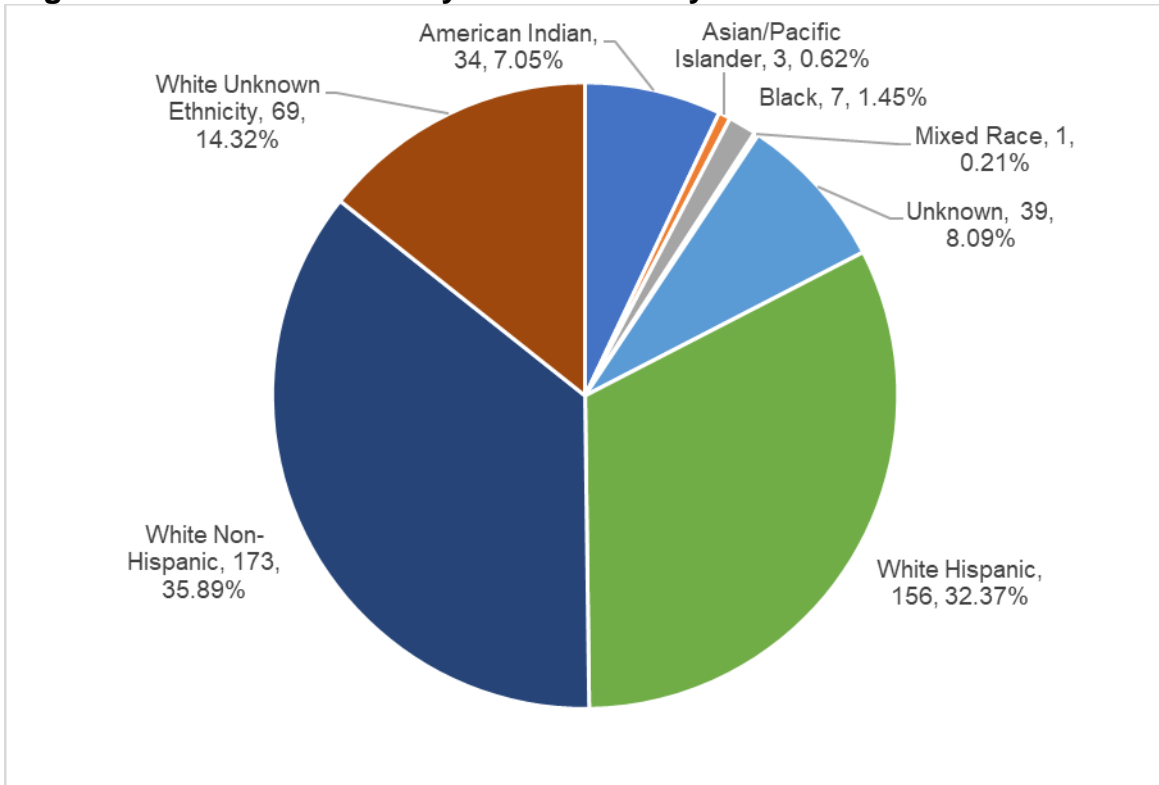


Figure 18. Suicide Deaths by Age and Gender 2023

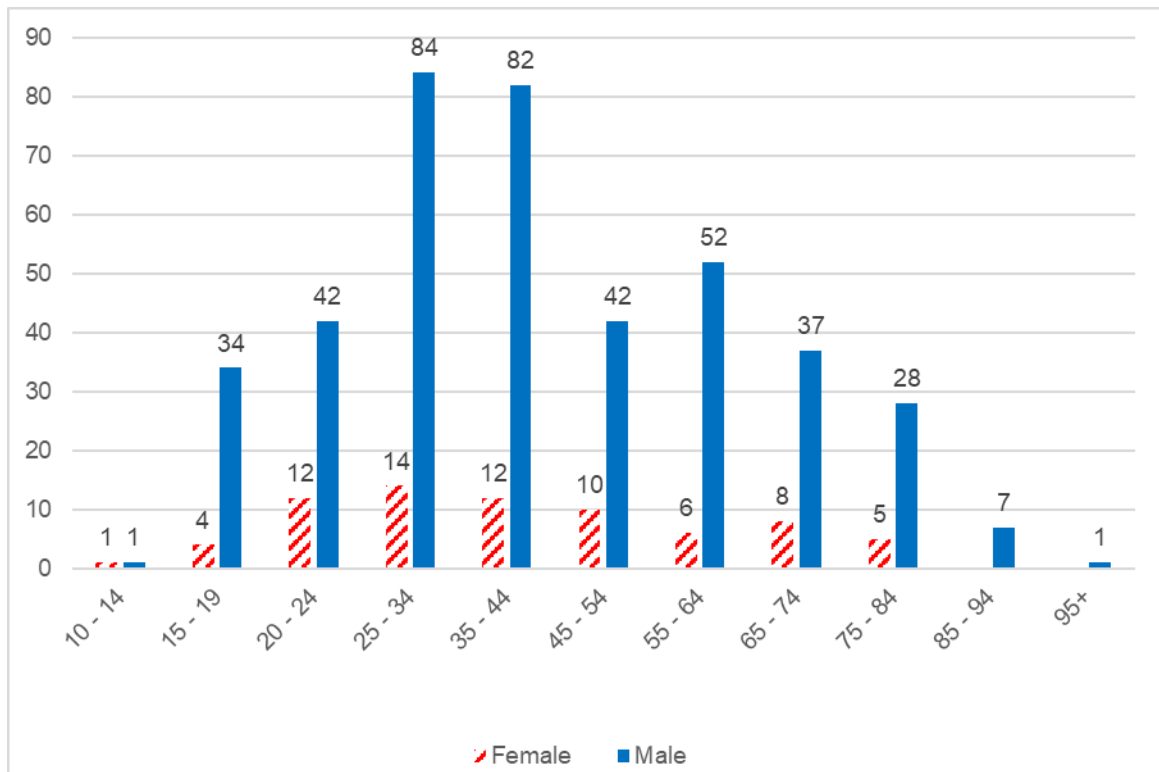


Figure 19. Suicide Deaths by Month 2023

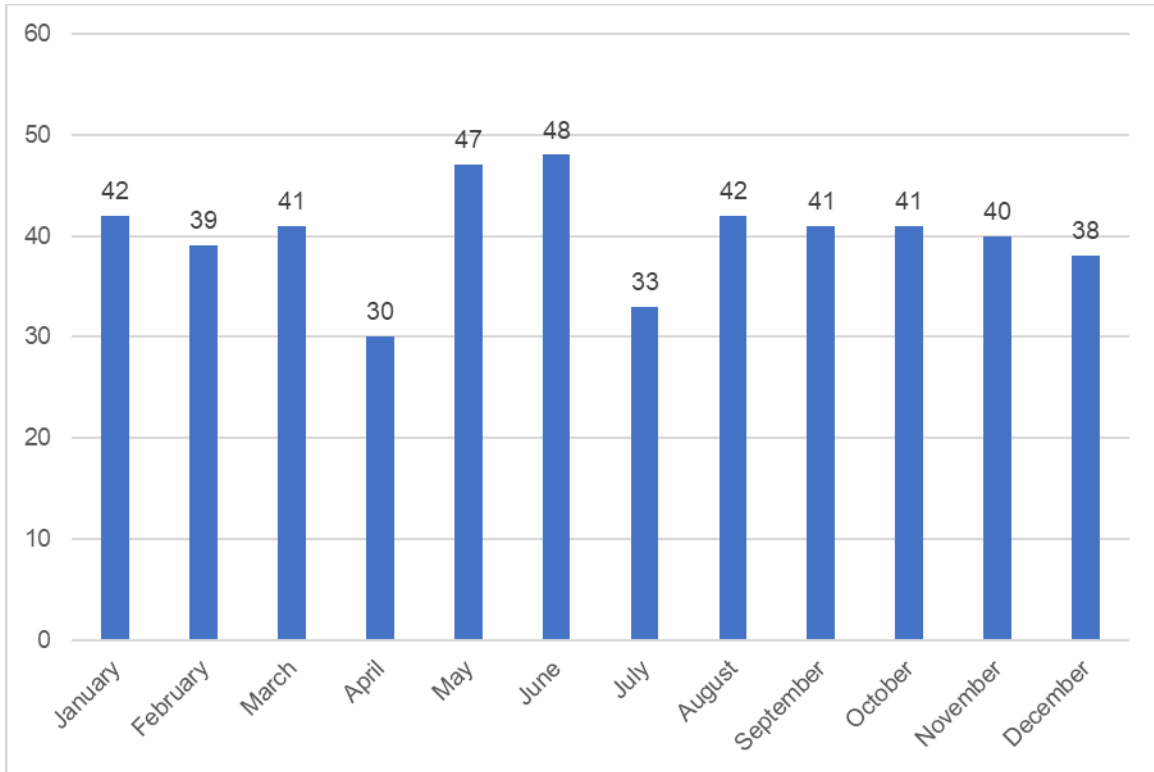


Figure 20. Suicide Deaths by Day of the Week 2023

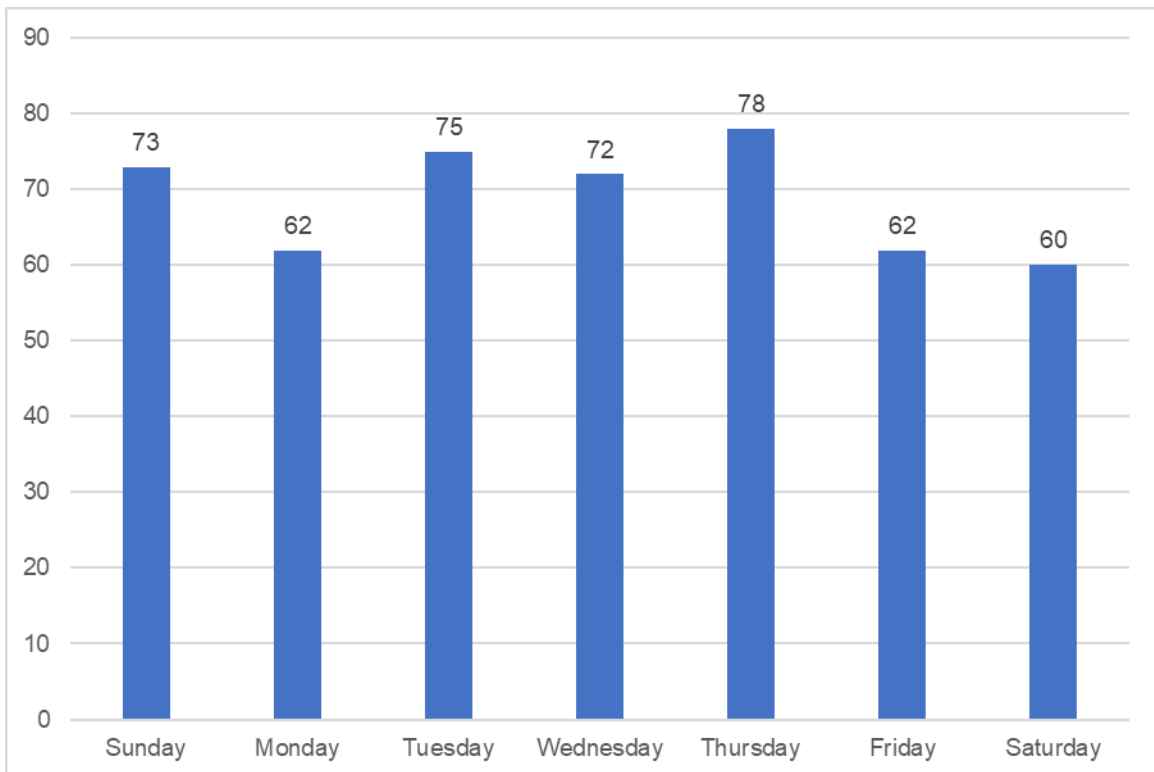


Table 8. Suicide Deaths by Cause 2023

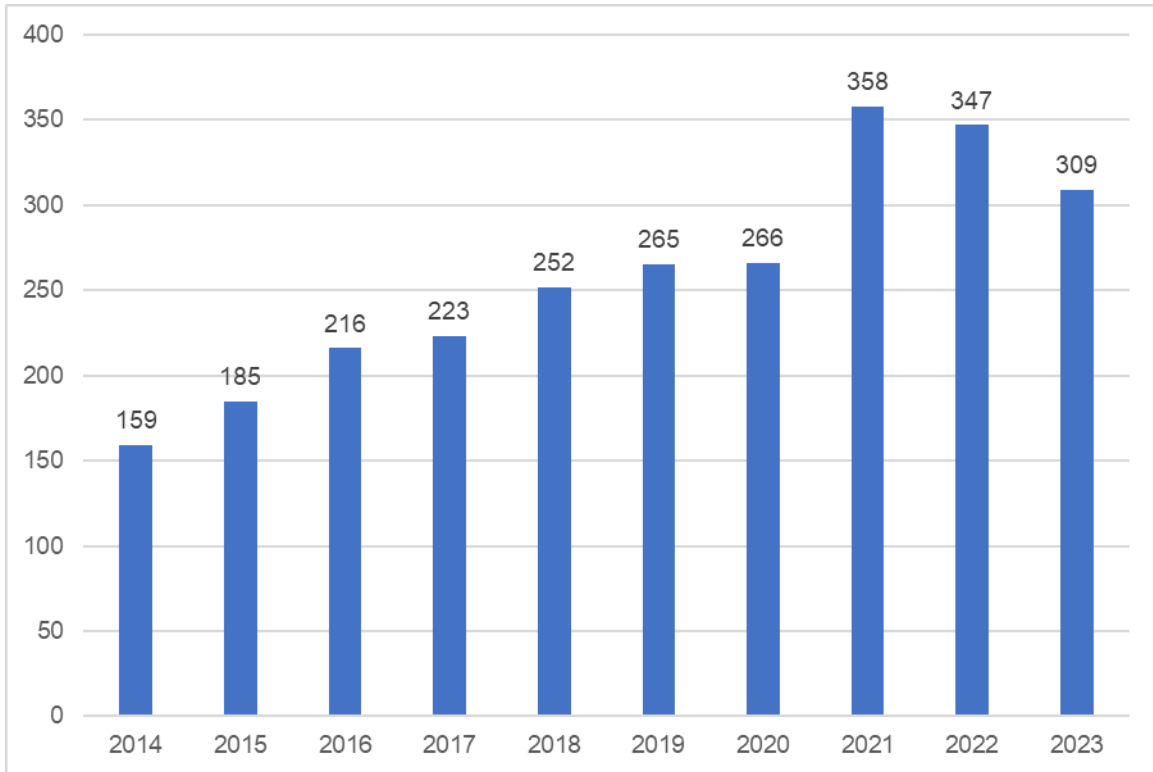
Cause of Death	Cases
Gunshot wound(s)	283
Hanging	134
Substance intoxication	29
Multiple injuries	12
Exposure	7
Stab wound(s) (slash, penetrating cut)	6
Thermal Injuries	4
Carbon monoxide intoxication	3
Head and neck injuries	2
Drowning	1
Other	1
Grand Total	482

Table 9. Suicide Deaths by County of Pronouncement (2014 – 2023)

County	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Bernalillo	147	160	149	167	175	173	178	181	164	171
Catron	1	2	2	1	4	4	2	4	2	0
Chaves	14	13	9	10	14	10	19	19	17	13
Cibola	5	10	4	4	10	9	9	12	15	8
Colfax	5	3	5	4	10	6	4	2	2	5
Curry	5	13	10	6	12	7	8	9	11	6
De Baca	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0
Dona Ana	30	43	33	38	36	36	43	32	41	29
Eddy	13	15	14	17	17	22	13	14	9	11
Grant	11	6	12	8	13	5	6	8	12	7
Guadalupe	2	1	0	2	2	2	2	1	1	1
Harding	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hidalgo	0	5	0	3	2	4	1	1	2	2
Lea	11	14	12	12	12	11	14	19	11	14
Lincoln	11	5	6	9	10	5	7	6	8	6
Los Alamos	1	1	3	1	3	3	7	0	1	5
Luna	3	3	10	7	4	8	7	7	8	3
McKinley	7	3	12	14	13	11	13	7	13	10
Mora	1	2	3	0	2	1	1	1	1	2
Otero	10	13	16	21	19	17	9	15	22	16
Quay	1	3	5	3	5	0	7	3	4	3
Rio Arriba	7	18	12	4	12	9	3	11	11	13
Roosevelt	2	4	4	5	2	6	5	6	4	4
San Juan	27	33	27	34	31	24	36	28	27	31
San Miguel	8	7	10	10	6	4	5	10	11	6
Sandoval	26	27	21	22	26	36	34	39	29	31
Santa Fe	34	34	46	40	34	38	32	44	41	33
Sierra	6	4	4	4	4	6	4	5	9	3
Socorro	6	7	3	5	5	7	2	6	9	10
Taos	15	9	17	19	11	11	11	6	12	18
Torrance	4	7	5	5	8	5	3	0	4	1
Union	2	0	3	3	1	0	1	1	2	2
Valencia	15	13	11	12	19	11	16	19	13	18
Out of State	1	0	0	4	5	2	2	1	5	0
Total	431	479	468	495	527	493	504	518	522	482

Overview – Manner of Death – Homicide Deaths

Figure 21. Homicide Deaths (2014 - 2023)



Homicide Deaths – Overview

Homicides decreased by 10.95% from 2022 to 2023. Homicide victims were most frequently male (79.94%) and White Hispanic (44.01%). As with suicide rates, homicide rates in New Mexico tend to be higher than the national rate, 14.5 per 100,000 in 2022 compared to a national rate of 7.5 per 100,000 (https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/sosmap/homicide_mortality/homicide.htm, <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/homicide.htm>, respectively).

Figure 22. Homicide Deaths by Race / Ethnicity 2023

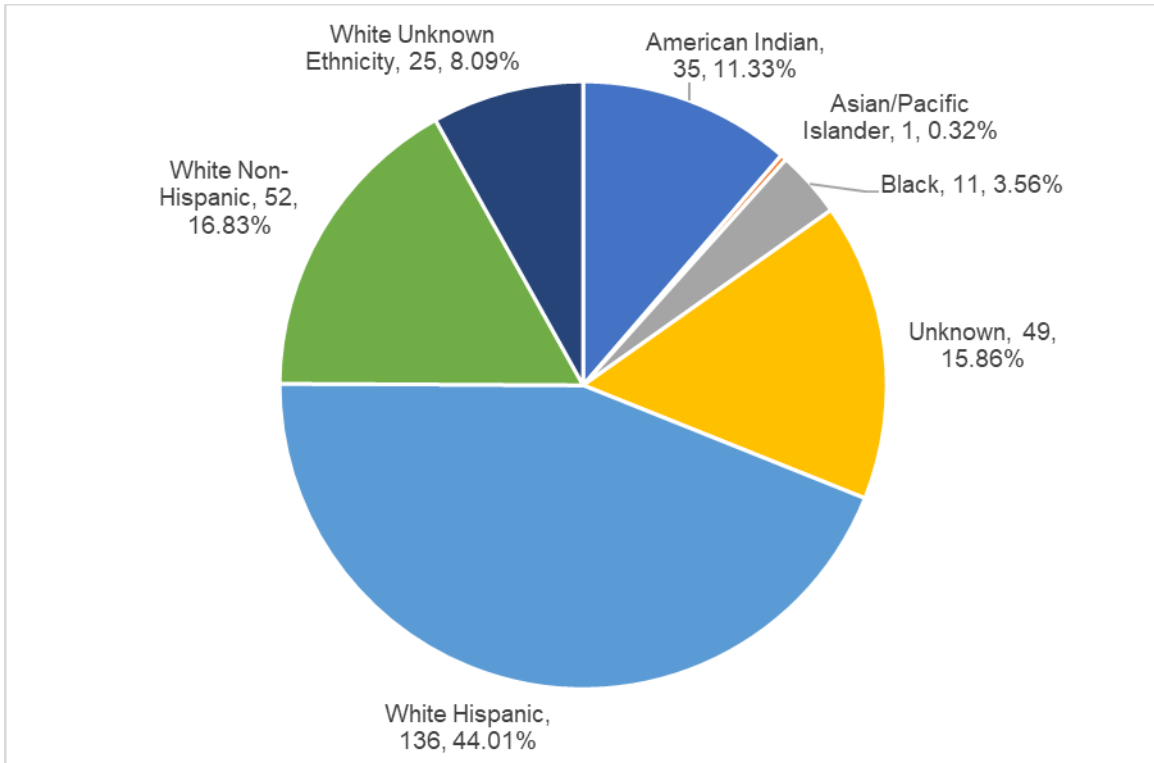


Figure 23. Homicide Deaths by Age and Gender 2023

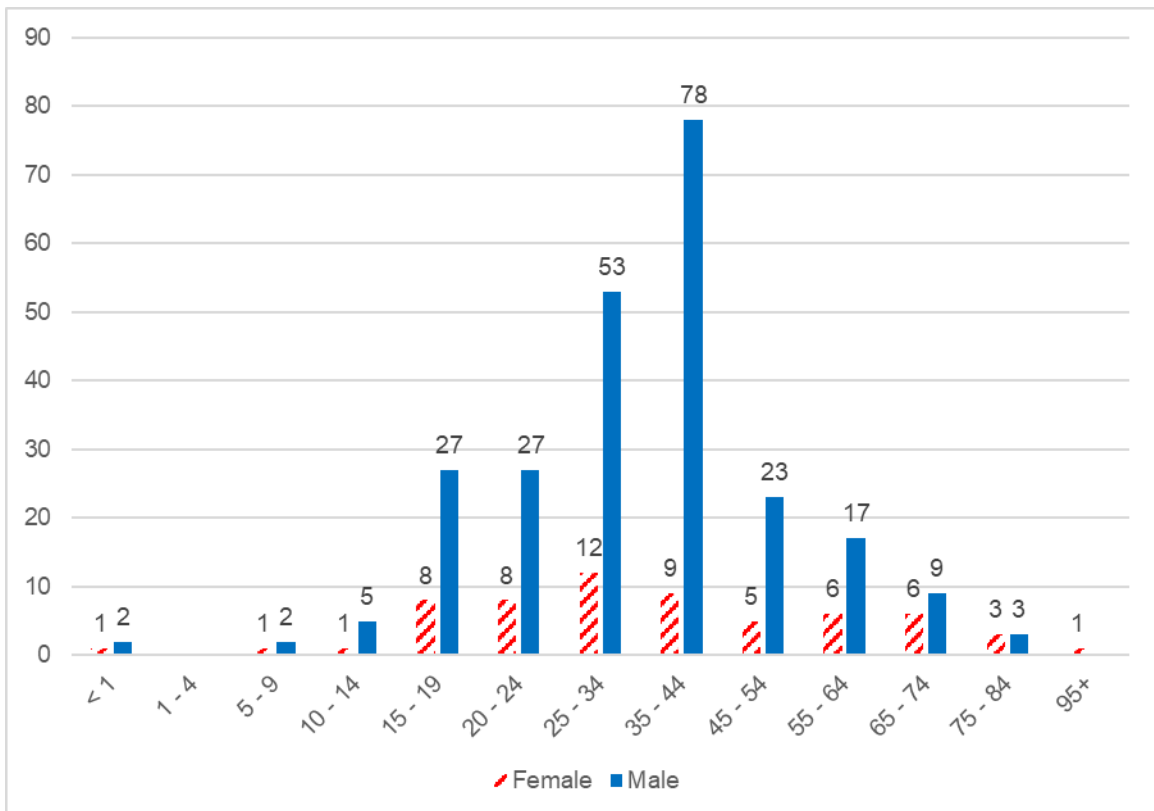


Table 10. Homicide Deaths by Cause 2023

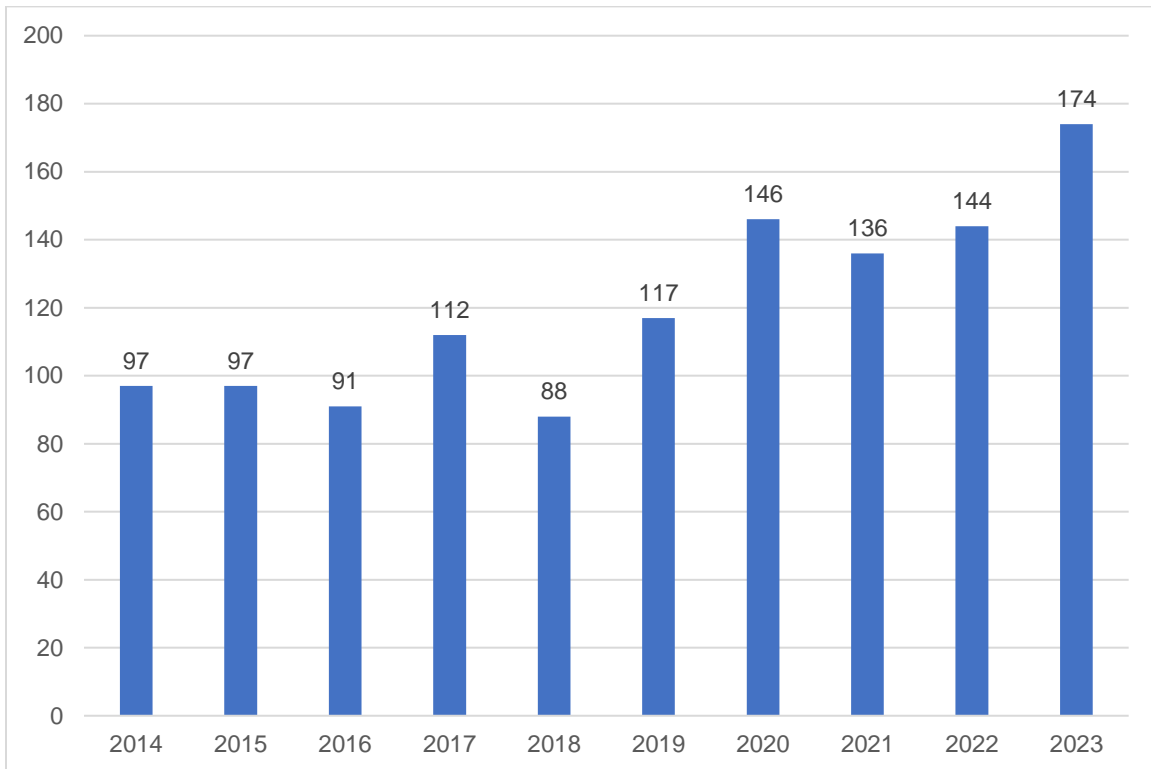
Cause	Cases
Gunshot wound(s)	231
Stab wound (slash, penetrating cut)	29
Multiple injuries (fractures, lacerations to internal organs)	13
Head and neck injuries (cervical, cranio-, cerebral)	13
Asphyxia (suffocation, strangulation)	5
Substance intoxication (drug, poison, alcohol, etc.)	4
Cardiac arrhythmia	3
Other	3
Thermal injuries (burns)	2
Sepsis	2
Carbon monoxide intoxication (smoke and soot inhalation)	1
Exposure	1
Dehydration (hyperthermia, heat stroke)	1
Malnutrition (cachexia, anorexia)	1
Grand Total	309

Table 11. Homicide Deaths – County of Pronouncement (2014 - 2023)

County	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Bernalillo	55	73	87	97	109	119	122	162	174	154
Catron	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Chaves	10	11	12	7	12	11	10	21	12	10
Cibola	4	3	2	5	4	2	2	2	2	6
Colfax	1	2	3	0	0	1	1	2	1	0
Curry	2	3	4	6	2	3	2	7	7	7
De Baca	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	2	0
Dona Ana	10	9	10	13	10	14	16	14	20	18
Eddy	3	3	9	8	4	9	11	9	6	5
Grant	1	3	4	5	0	0	3	2	3	6
Guadalupe	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	2	0	0
Harding	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hidalgo	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	0
Lea	5	8	7	2	7	18	5	6	11	5
Lincoln	0	2	2	2	2	2	1	5	1	3
Los Alamos	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Luna	0	3	0	2	4	0	6	5	2	3
McKinley	11	7	13	8	13	8	11	24	14	7
Mora	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Otero	2	3	4	1	7	5	5	4	6	12
Quay	0	0	2	2	1	1	1	0	1	1
Rio Arriba	1	4	1	6	9	4	7	10	9	6
Roosevelt	1	0	2	0	3	3	1	2	2	2
San Juan	13	10	11	13	15	14	10	12	18	22
San Miguel	2	3	3	3	3	6	4	9	2	6
Sandoval	7	5	9	8	10	7	12	5	10	8
Santa Fe	6	6	5	8	7	8	8	17	15	12
Sierra	1	3	2	0	1	1	0	0	1	1
Socorro	0	2	3	2	0	1	1	2	3	1
Taos	2	2	2	4	1	5	5	7	5	8
Torrance	4	3	1	1	0	0	0	3	3	2
Union	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Valencia	5	5	6	3	12	10	6	10	5	2
Out of State	11	10	11	16	13	6	15	15	9	0
GrandTotal	159	185	216	223	252	265	266	358	347	309

Overview – Manner of Death – Undetermined Deaths

Figure 24. Undetermined Deaths (2014 - 2023)



Undetermined Deaths – Overview

All possible efforts are made to determine both a manner (accident, suicide, homicide, natural) and a cause of death for all deaths investigated by OMI. In a very small percentage of cases (less than 1% most years) neither the manner nor cause of death can be determined, even with a complete autopsy, scene investigation, and laboratory testing. In other cases, only skeletal or mummified remains were found, or a request for an autopsy was withdrawn.

Figure 25. Undetermined Deaths by Race / Ethnicity 2023

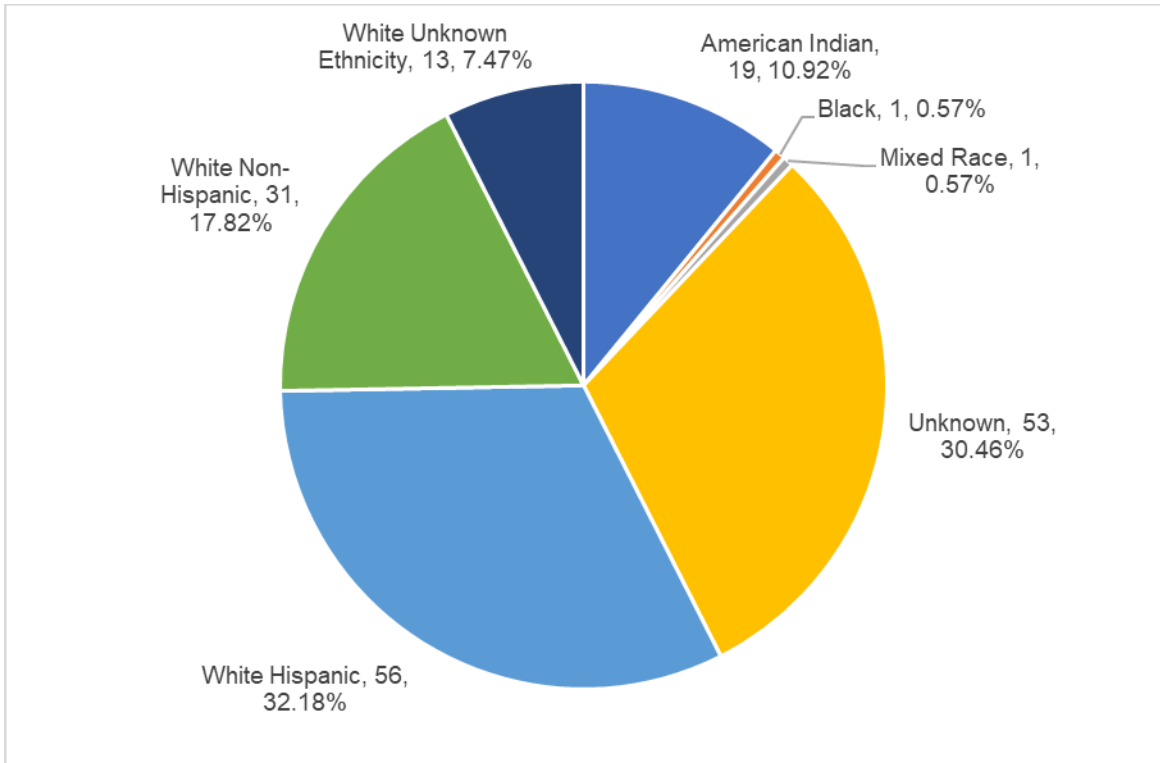
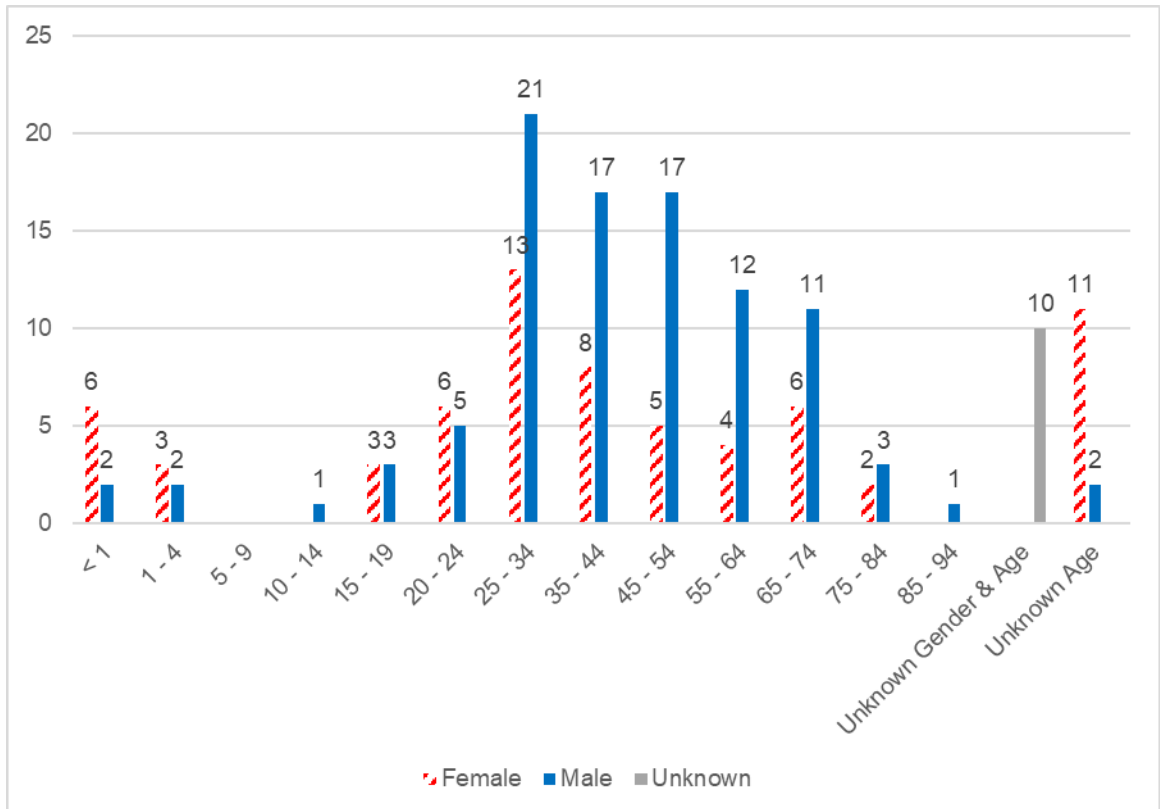


Figure 26. Undetermined Deaths by Age and Gender 2023



Deaths of Children Overview (19 years of age and younger)

The 10-year summaries presented in this report for childhood deaths all include ages 19 and younger. The 300 deaths of people aged 19 and younger represented 3.18% of all deaths investigated by the OMI in 2023. Male decedents comprised 64.67% of the total deaths in children. The most common manner of death among children was accident, contributing 30.67% of the total. There were 40 suicides among children in 2023. Suicide deaths were more common among young males (85.00%) than females (15.0%), and gunshot wounds were the most common method of suicide in children (65%). The total number of childhood homicides increased from 38 homicides in 2022 to 44 in 2023. Homicide deaths among children tended to be male (77.27%), White Hispanic (54.55%) and killed by a firearm (90.91%). The majority of childhood homicide victims (79.55%) were between the ages of 15 and 19. Firearms played a role in 26 suicides (65.00%) and 40 homicides (90.91% of child homicides). Homicide rates increased by 15.79% from 2022 to 2023 with the largest homicide population impacting the age group 15–19 years.

An excellent resource for additional information about the deaths of children in New Mexico, their circumstances, risk factors, and opportunities for prevention is the Annual Report of the New Mexico Child Fatality Review (NMCFR), published by the New Mexico Department of Health Public Health Division, Maternal and Child Health Epidemiology Program. NMCFR consists of volunteers from many state and local agencies organized into four panels: Suicide, Sudden Unexplained Infant Death (SUID), Unintentional Injury, and Child Abuse and Neglect. The experts on these panels review the circumstances of childhood deaths in order to identify risk factors and develop prevention strategies, and their findings are presented in their annual report.

Refer to <https://www.nmhealth.org/publication/view/report/8272/> for 2023 NMCFR.

Figure 27. Children/Deaths (2014 - 2023)

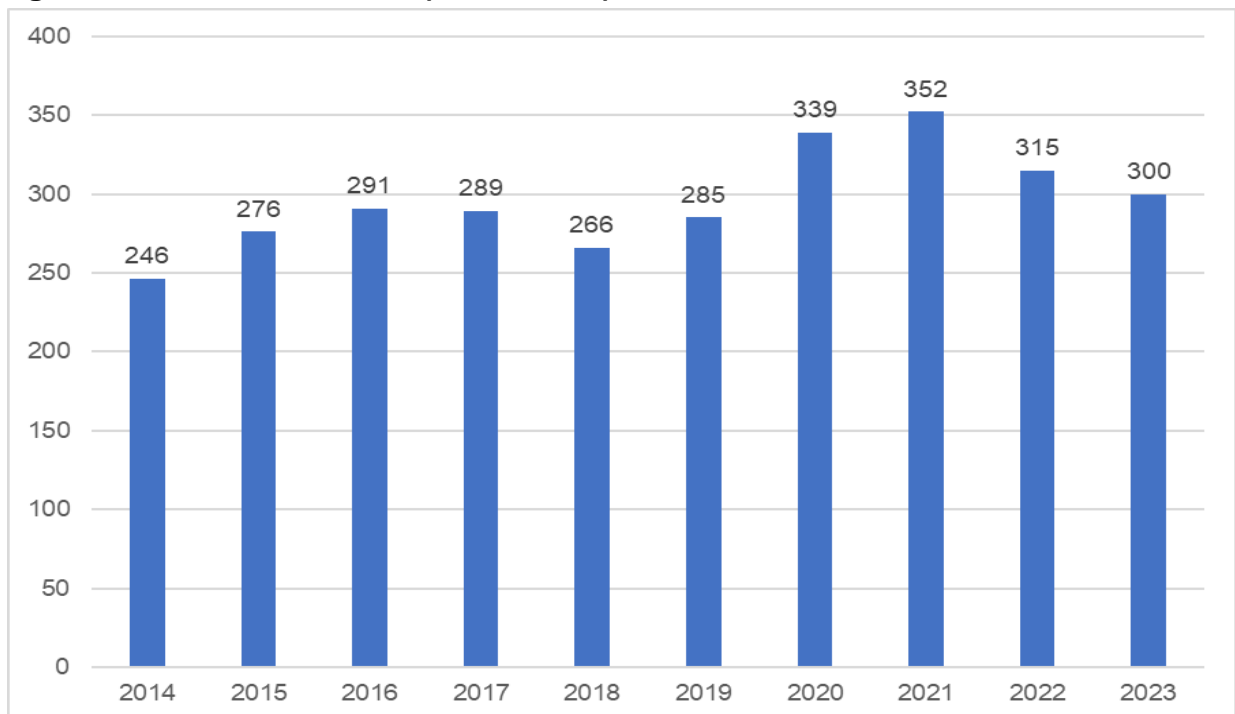


Figure 28. Children/Deaths by Race / Ethnicity 2023

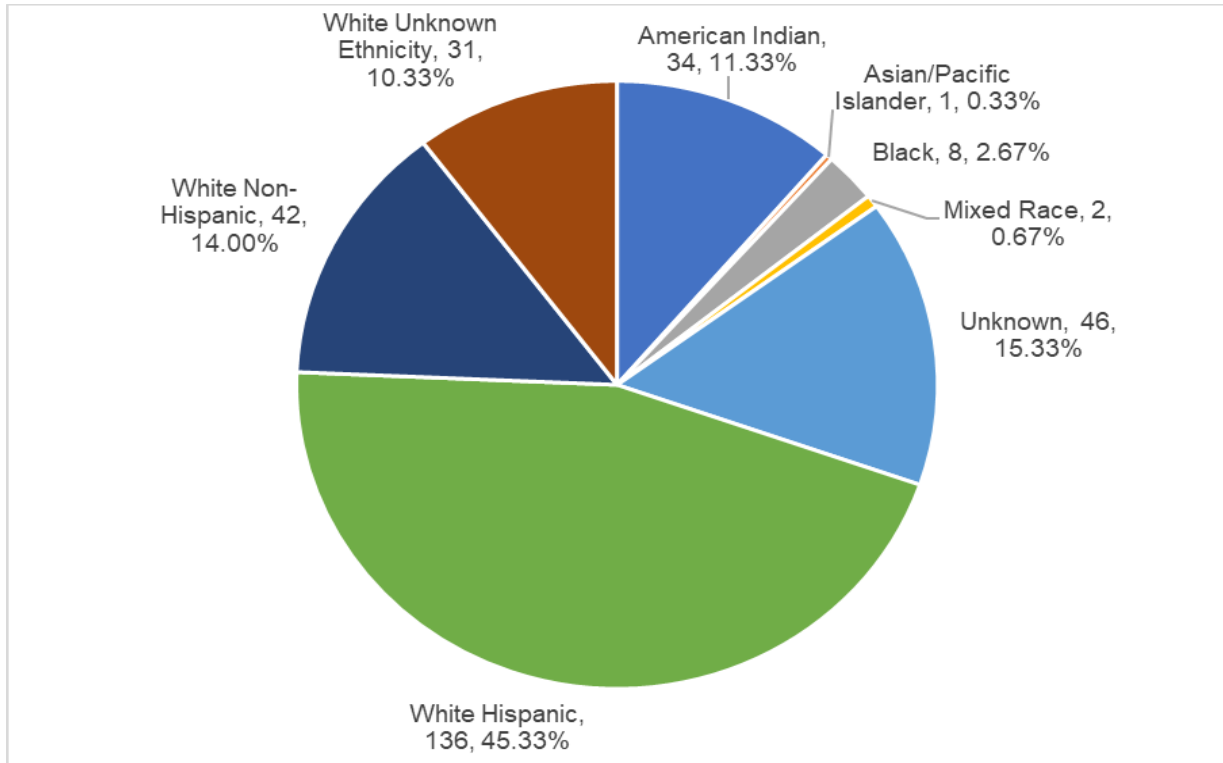


Figure 29. Children / Deaths by Age and Gender 2023

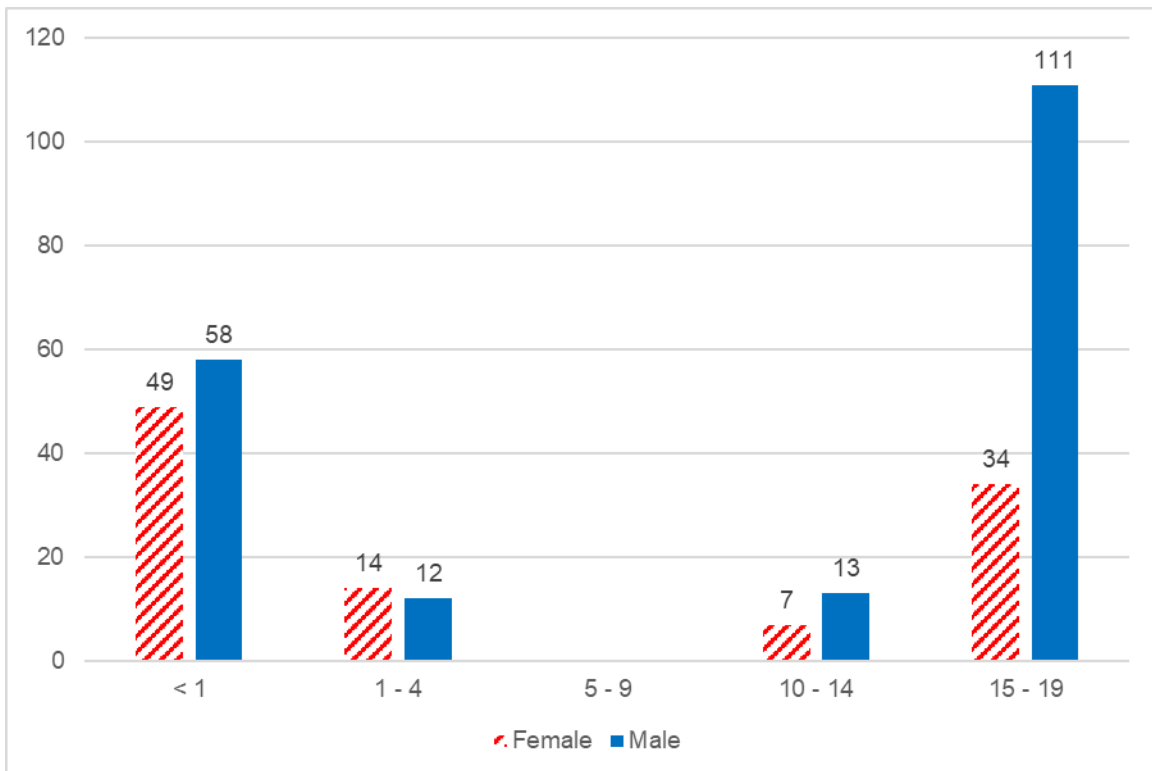
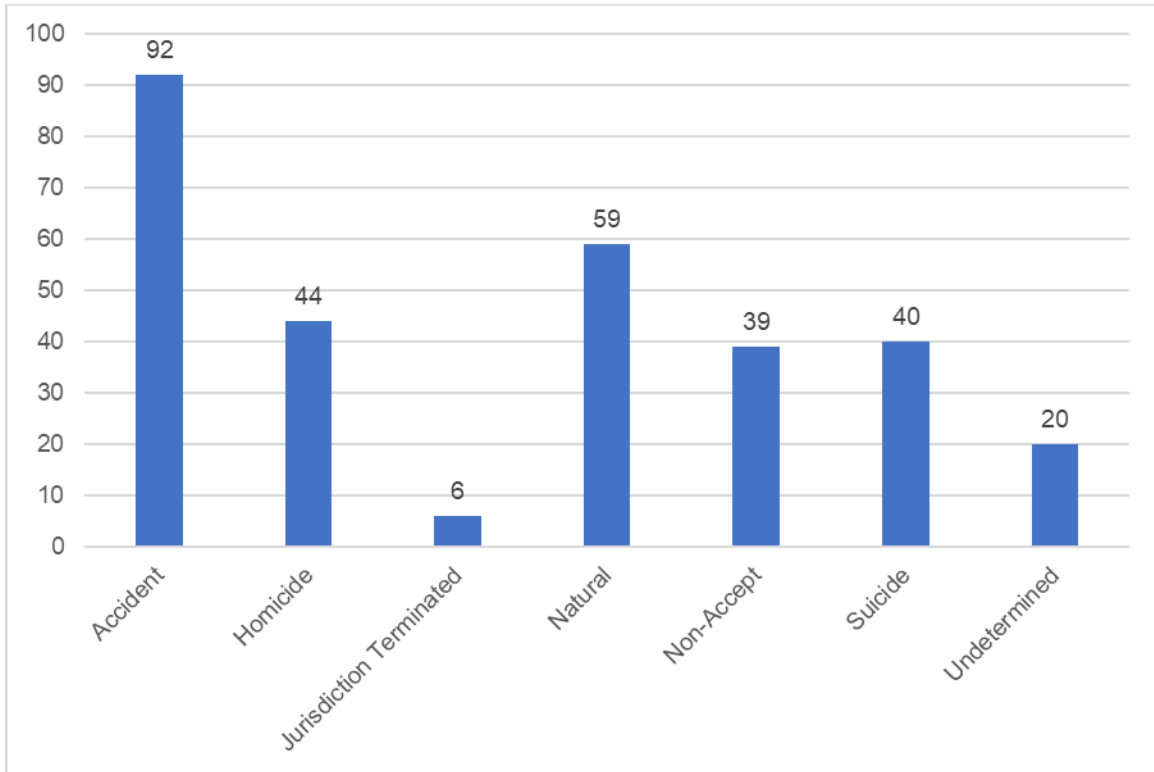


Figure 30. Children / Deaths by Manner of Death 2023



Overview – Children by Manner of Death (Natural Deaths)

Figure 31. Children / Natural Manner of Deaths (2014 - 2023)

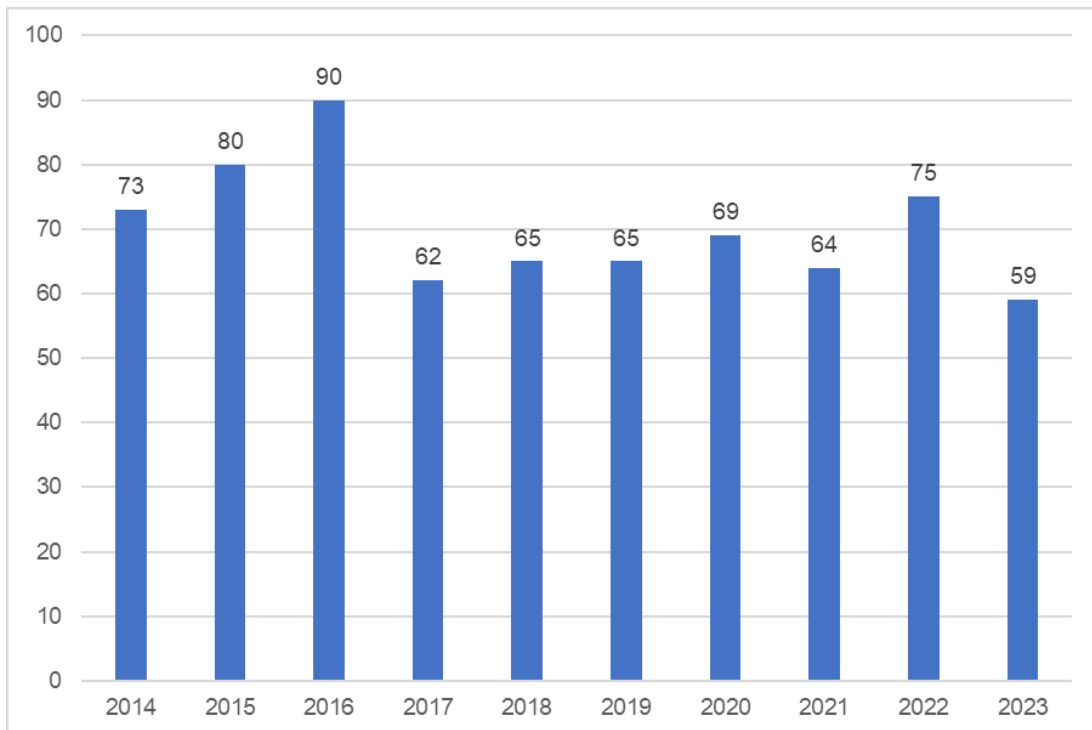


Figure 32. Children/Natural Deaths by Race / Ethnicity 2023

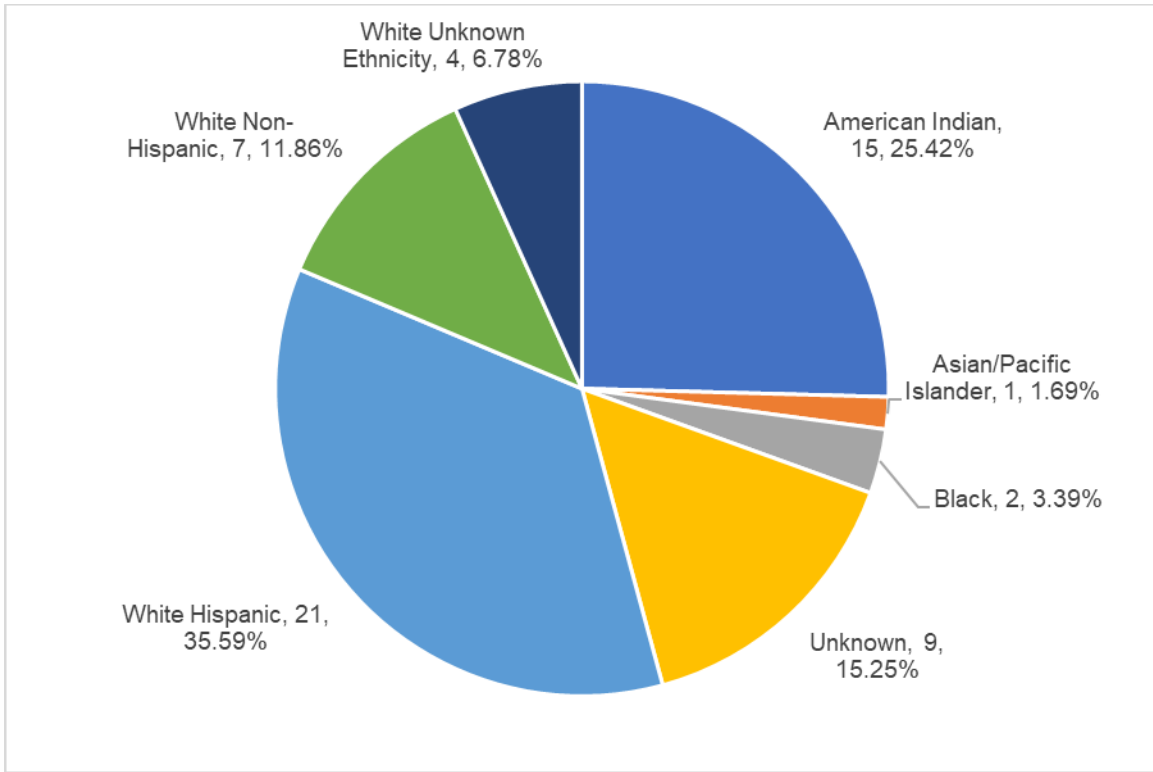
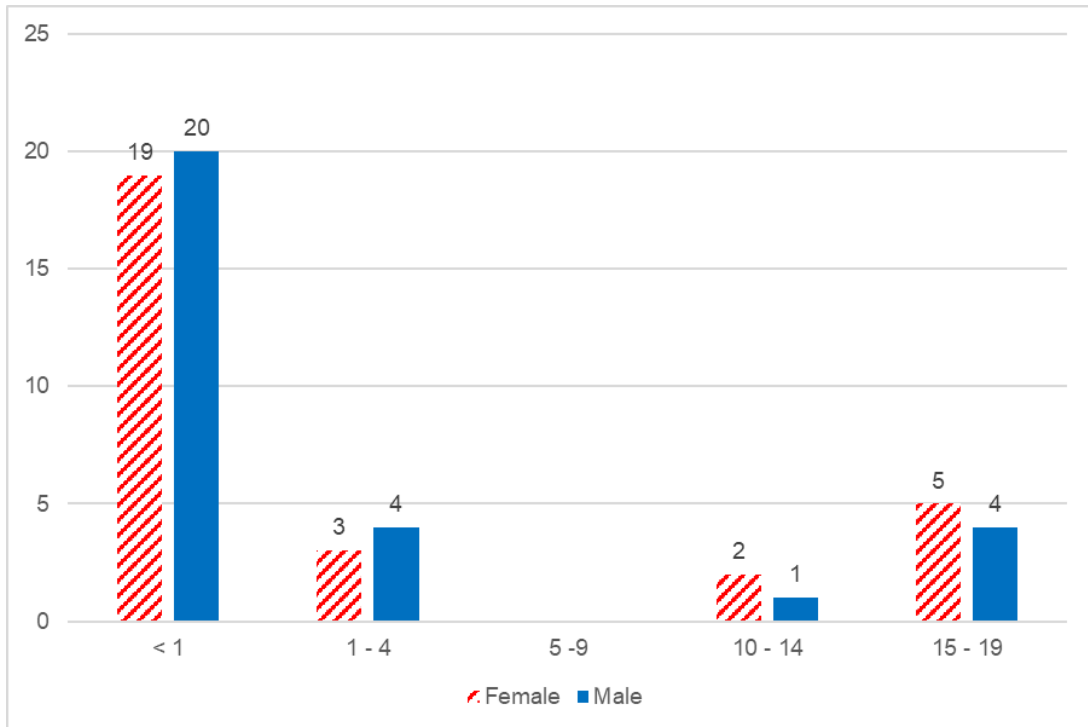


Figure 33. Children / Natural Deaths by Age and Gender 2023



Overview – Children by Manner of Death (Accidental Deaths)

Figure 34. Children / Accidental Deaths (2014 - 2023)

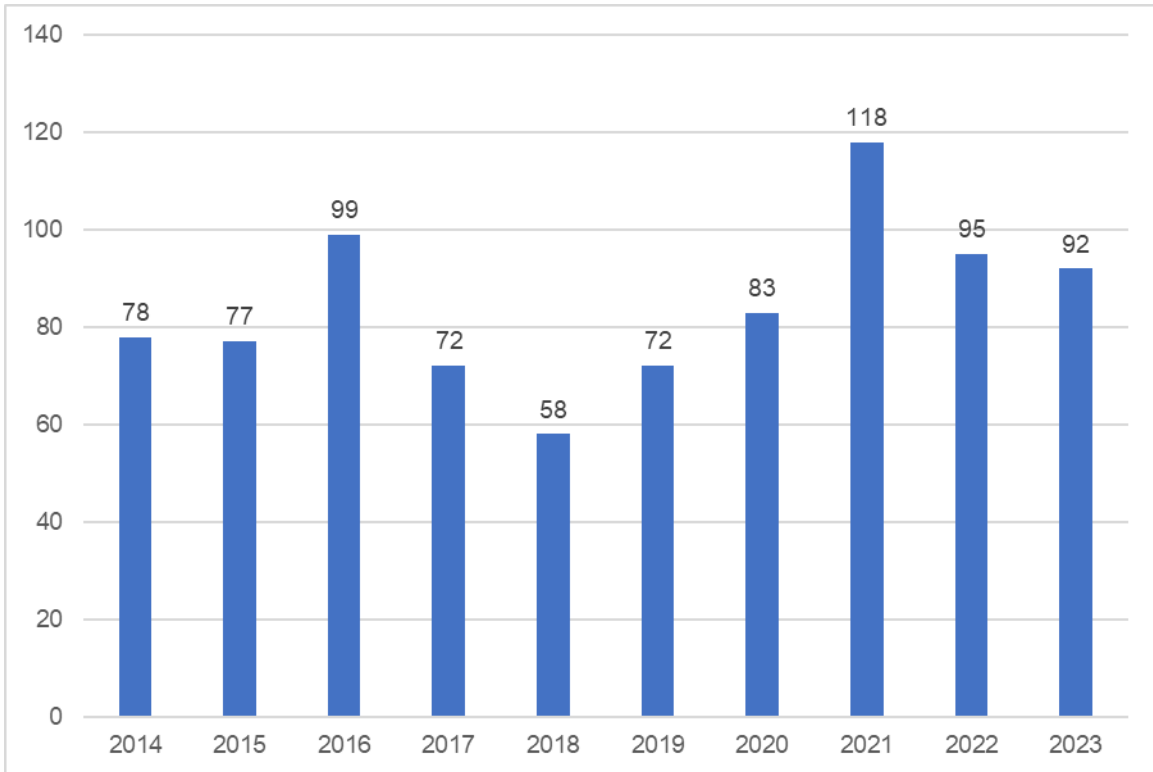


Figure 35. Children / Accidental Deaths by Race / Ethnicity 2023

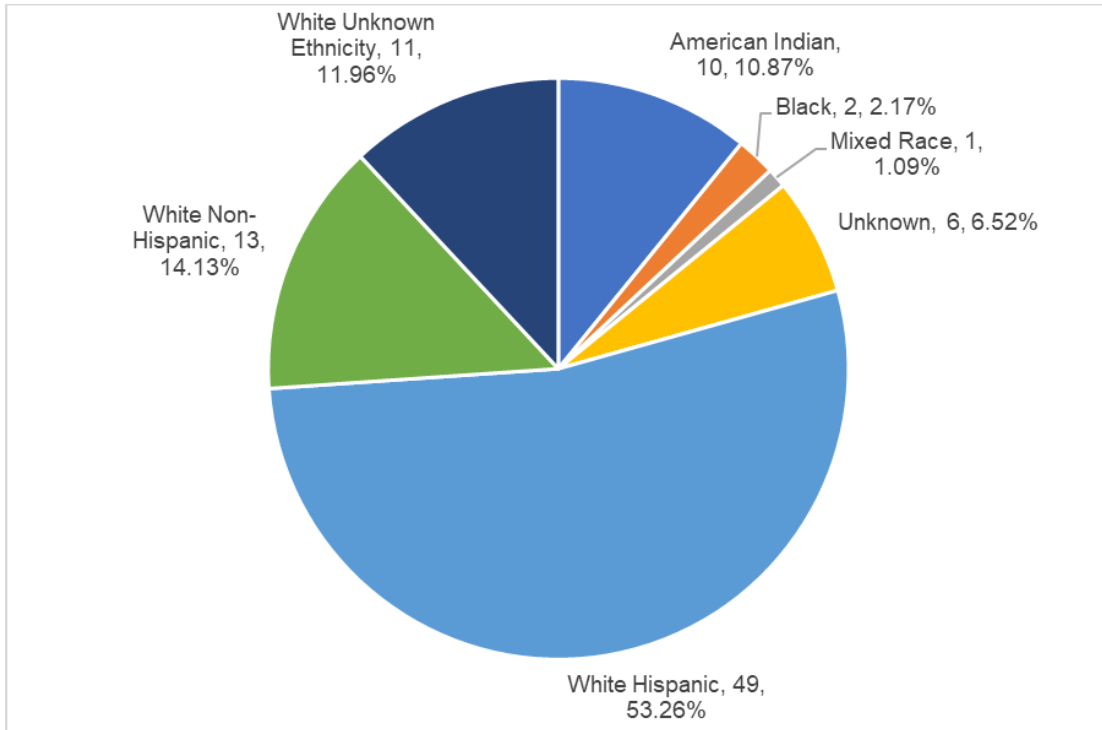


Figure 36. Children / Accidental Deaths by Age and Gender 2023

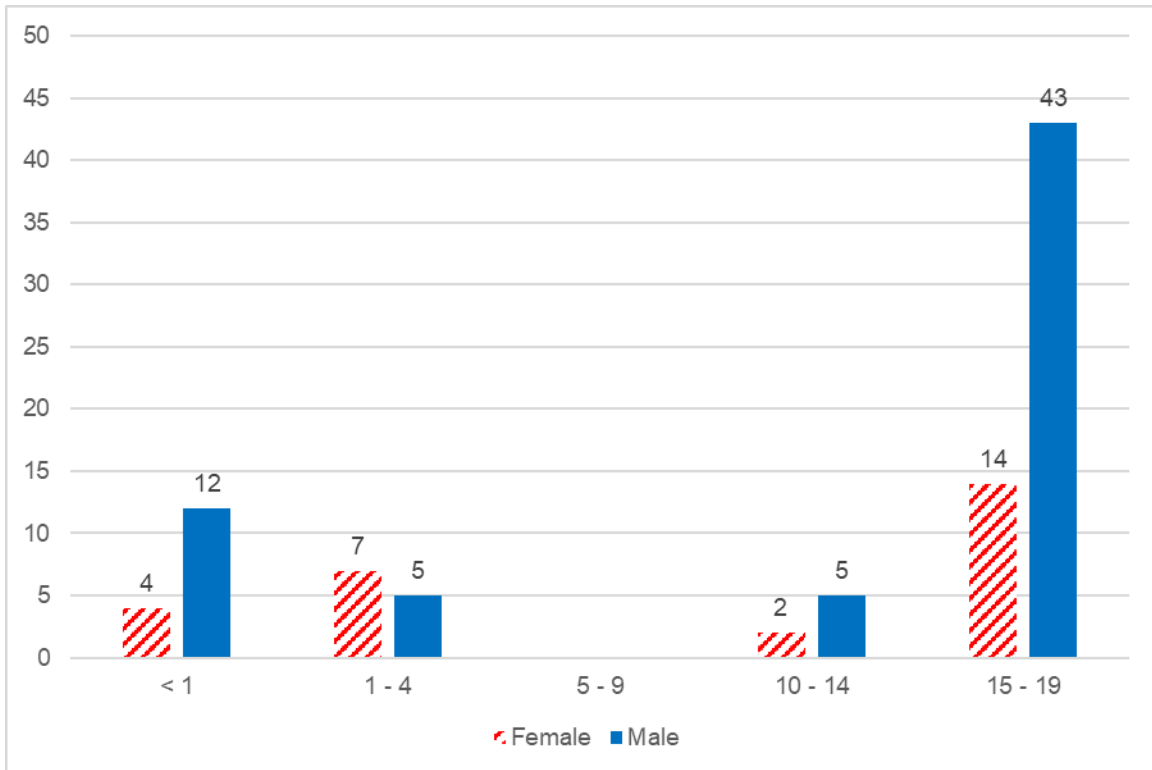


Table 12. Children / Accidental Deaths by Cause 2023

Cause of Death	Cases
Multiple injuries (fractures, lacerations to internal organs)	29
Substance intoxication (drug, poison, alcohol, etc.)	28
Asphyxia (suffocation, strangulation)	11
Carbon monoxide intoxication (smoke and soot inhalation)	6
Drowning	5
Thermal injuries (burns)	3
Exposure	3
Head and neck injuries (cervical, cranio-, cerebral)	2
Pneumonia (bronchitis)	1
Gastrointestinal hemorrhage (gastroenteritis, ulcers, diverticulitis)	1
Prematurity	1
Dehydration (hyperthermia, heat stroke)	1
Epilepsy (seizure disorder)	1
Grand Total	92

Overview – Children by Manner of Death (Suicide)

Figure 37. Children / Suicide Deaths (2014 - 2023)

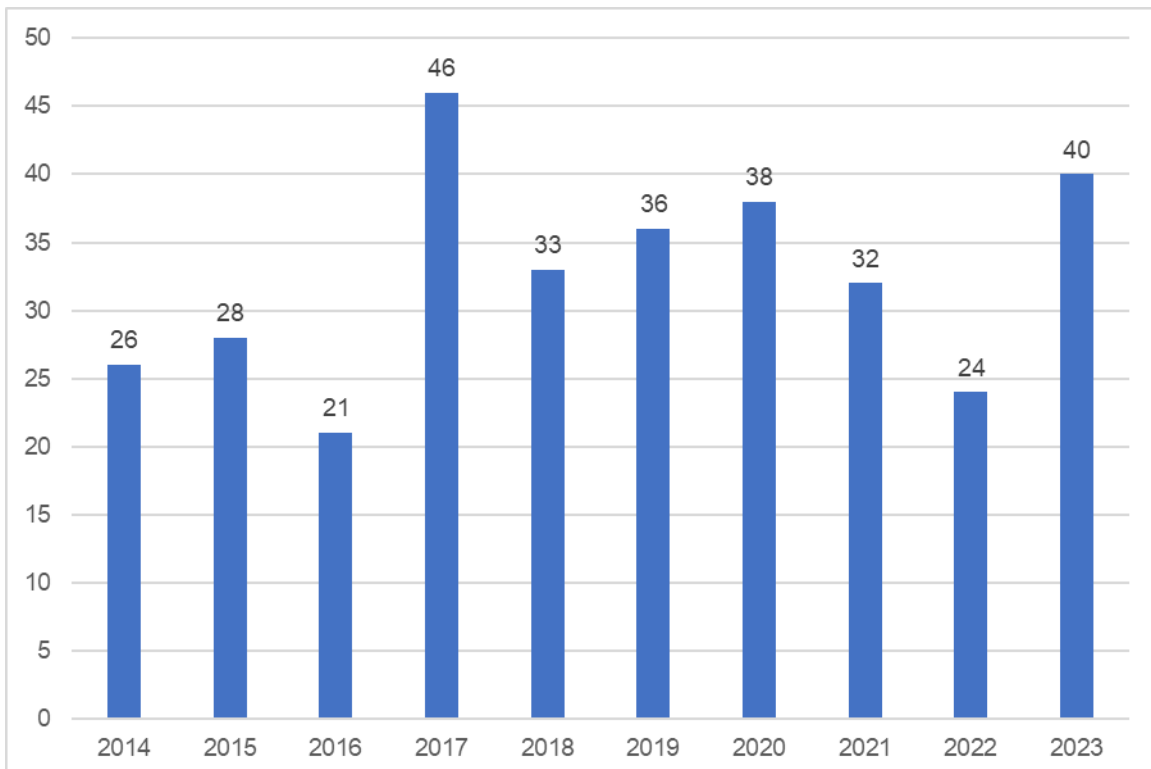


Figure 38. Children / Suicide Deaths by Race/Ethnicity 2023

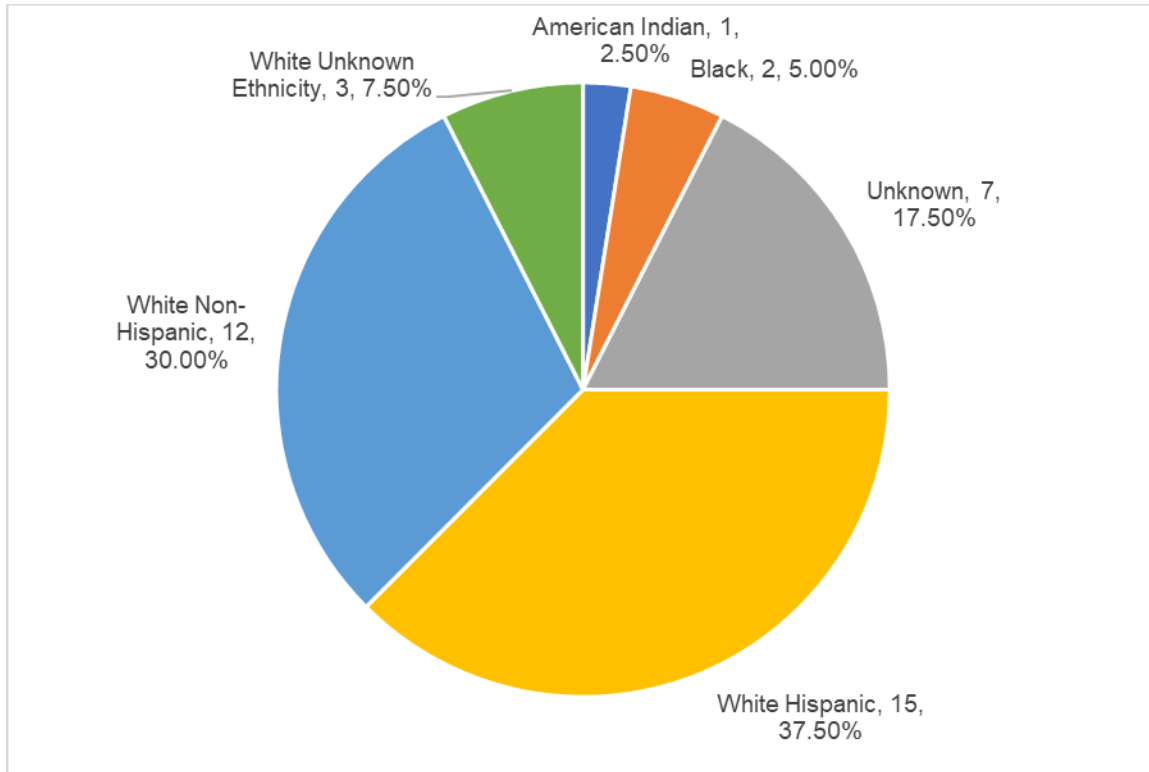


Figure 39. Children / Suicide Deaths by Age and Gender 2023

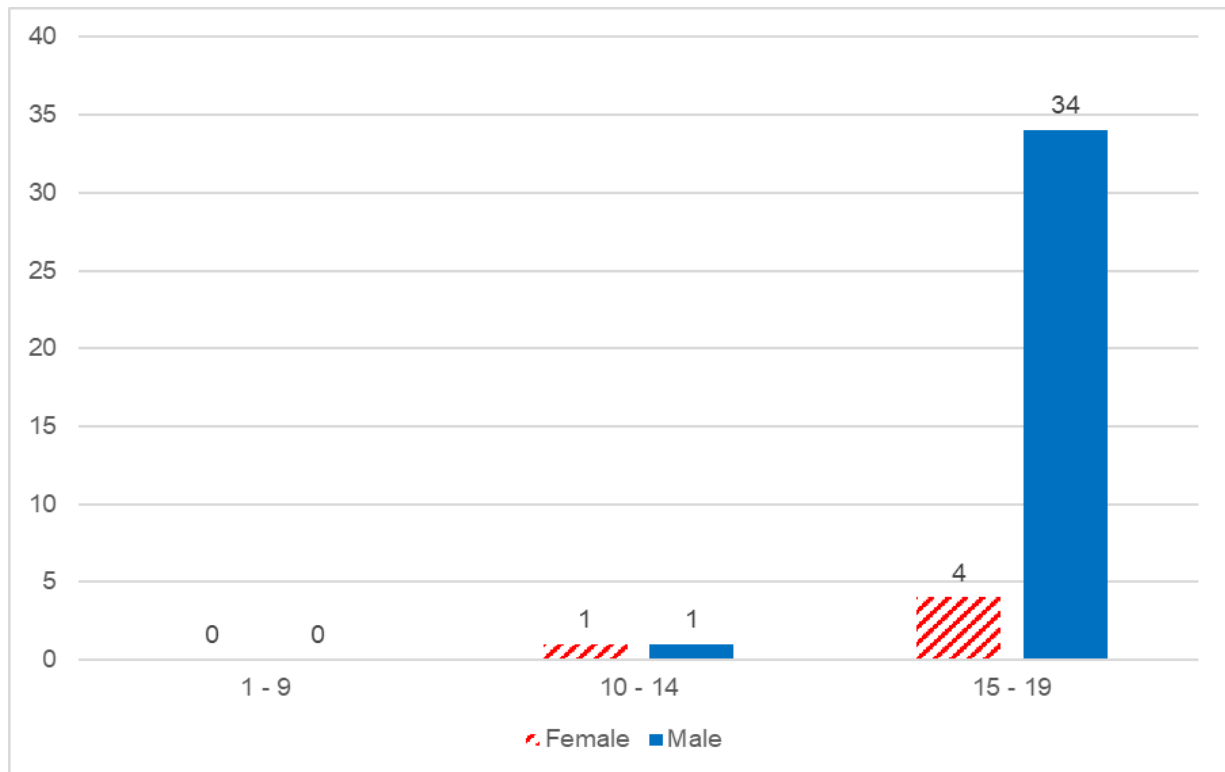


Figure 40. Children / Suicide Deaths by Month 2023

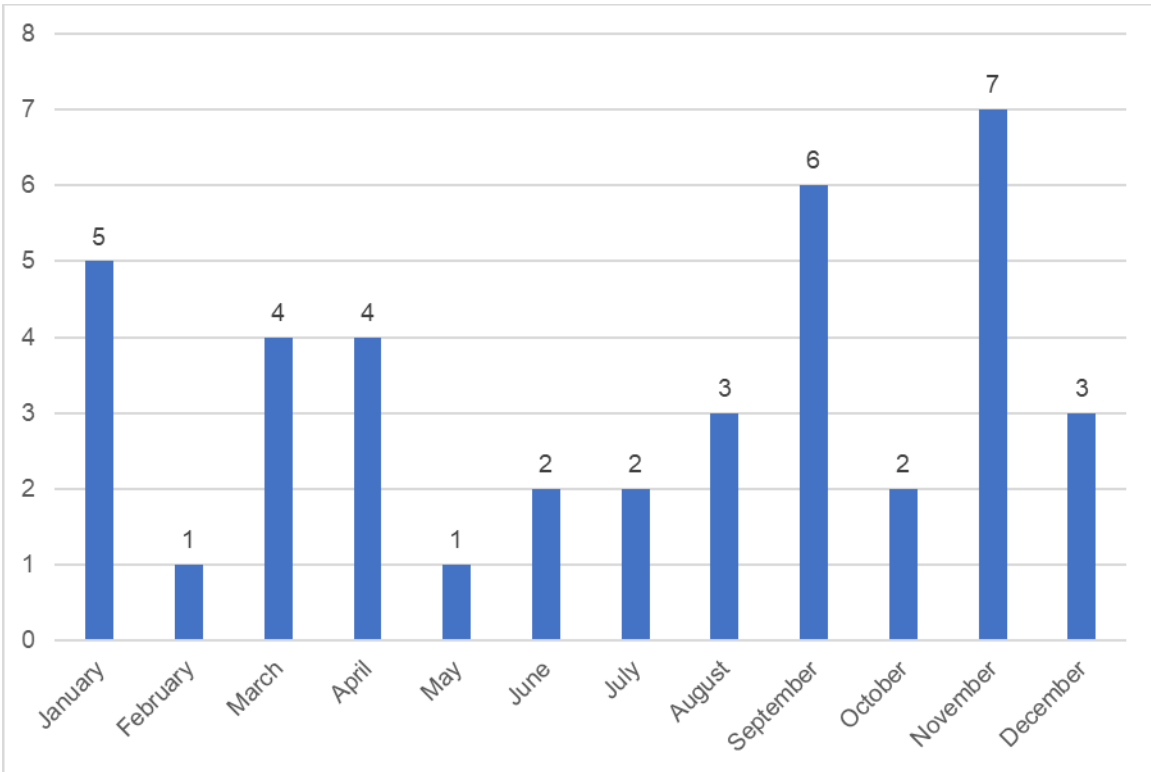


Figure 41. Children / Suicide Deaths by Day of Week 2023

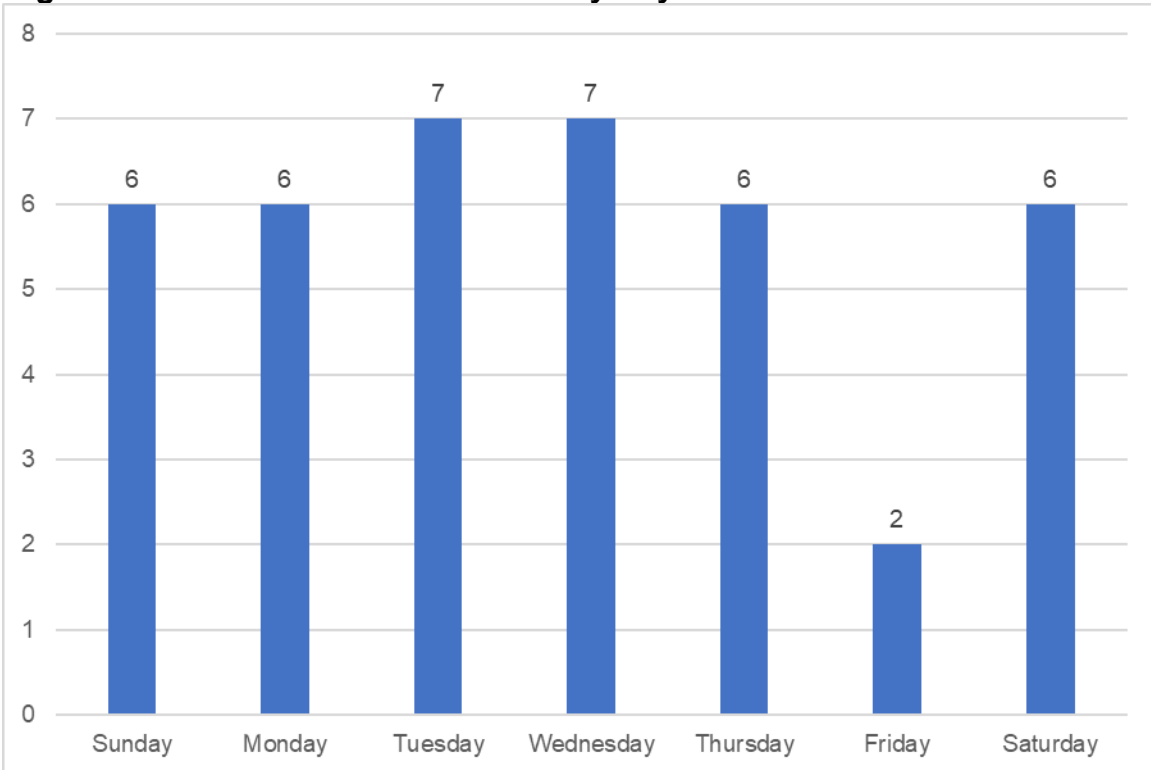


Table 13. Children / Suicide Deaths by Cause 2023

Cause of Death	Cases
Gunshot wound(s)	26
Hanging	6
Multiple injuries (fractures, lacerations to internal organs)	3
Substance intoxication (drug, poison, alcohol, etc.)	2
Asphyxia (suffocation, strangulation)	2
Head and neck injuries (cervical, cranio-, cerebral)	1
Grand Total	40

Overview – Children by Manner of Death (Homicide)

Figure 42. Children / Homicide Deaths (2014 – 2023)

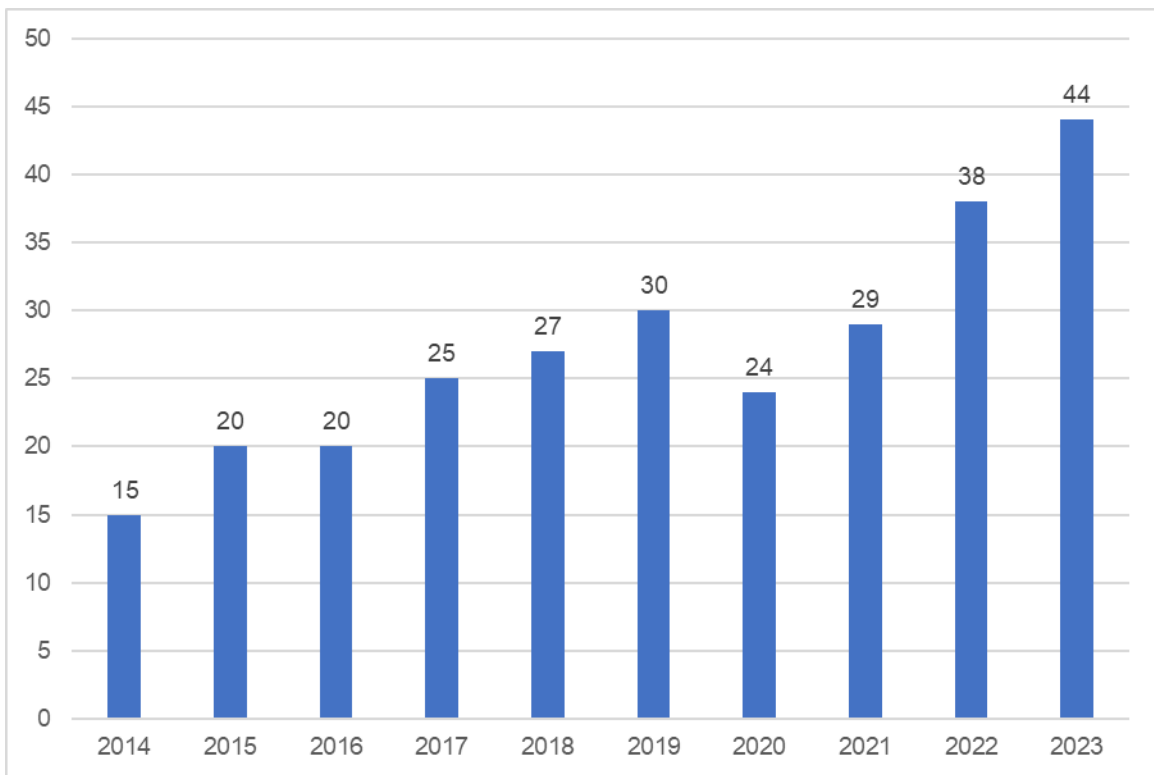


Figure 43. Children / Homicide Deaths by Race/Ethnicity 2023

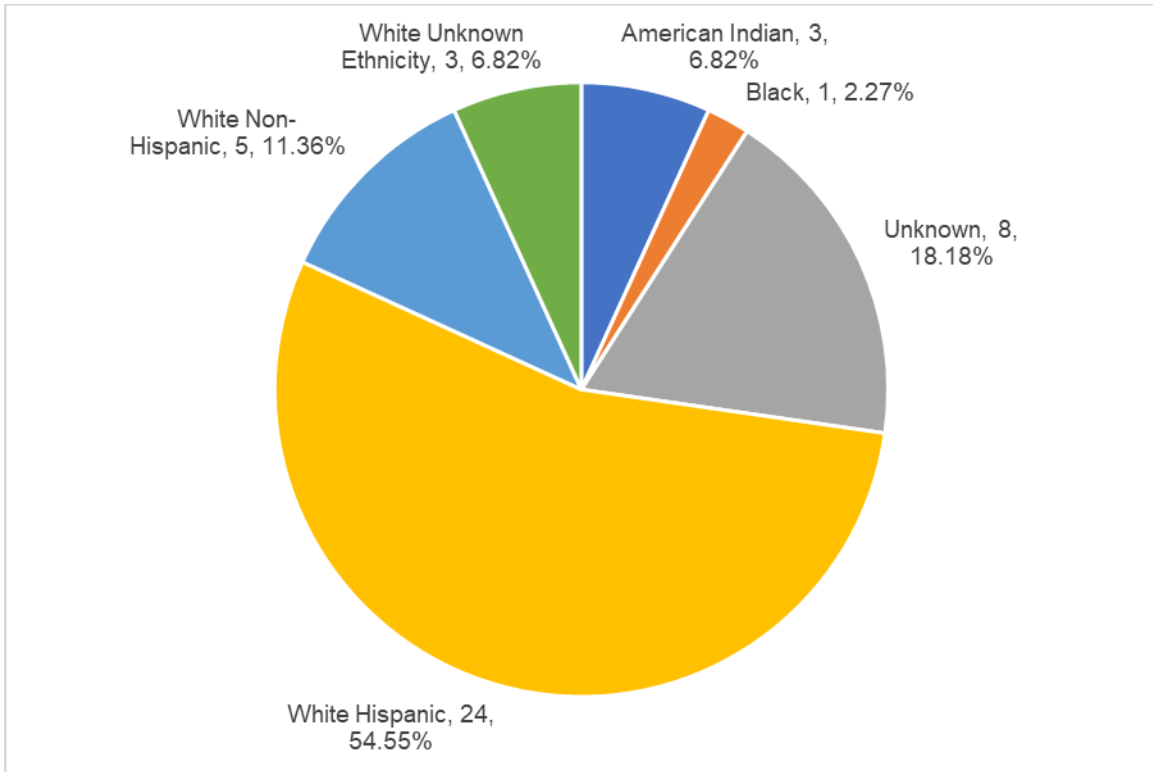


Figure 44. Children / Homicide Deaths by Age and Gender 2023

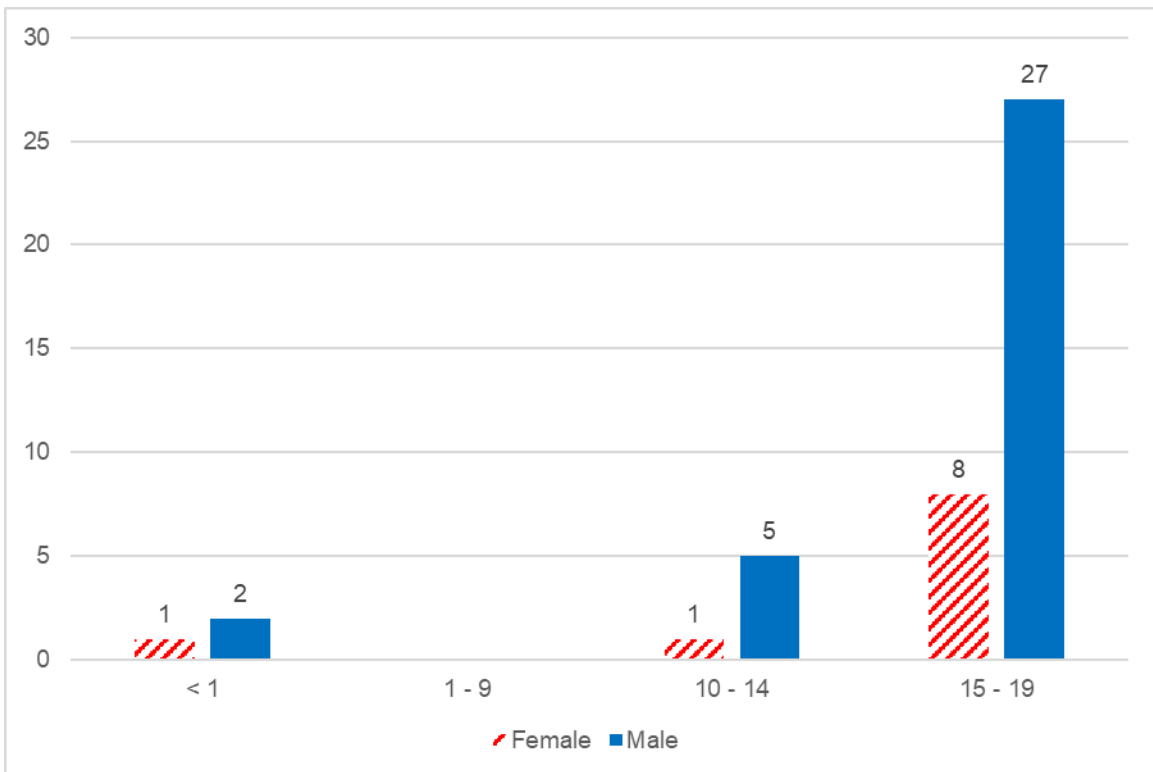


Table 14. Children / Homicide Deaths by Cause 2023

Cause of Death	Cases
Gunshot wound(s)	40
Substance intoxication (drug, poison, alcohol, etc.)	1
Head and neck injuries (cervical, cranio-, cerebral)	1
Asphyxia (suffocation, strangulation)	1
Dehydration (hyperthermia, heat stroke)	1
Grand Total	44

Overview – Children by Manner of Death (Undetermined)

Figure 45. Children / Undetermined Manner Deaths (2014 – 2023)

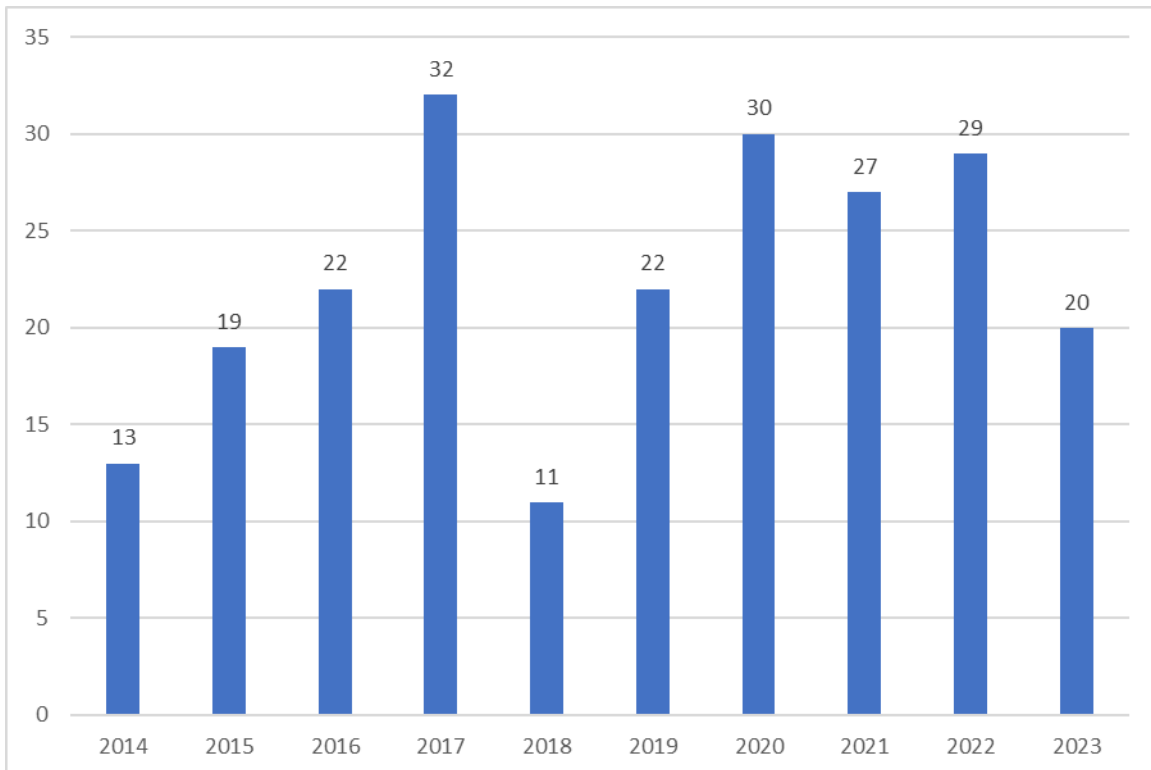


Figure 46. Children / Undetermined Deaths by Race / Ethnicity 2023

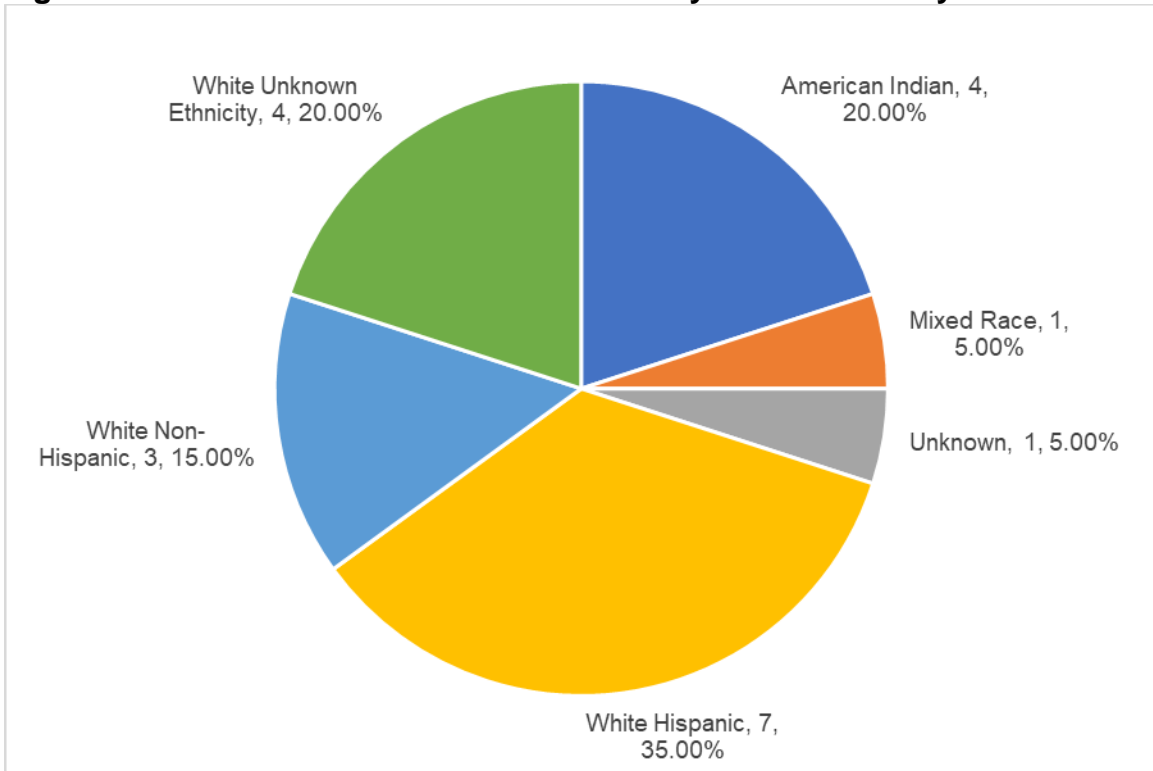


Figure 47. Children / Undetermined Deaths by Age and Gender 2023

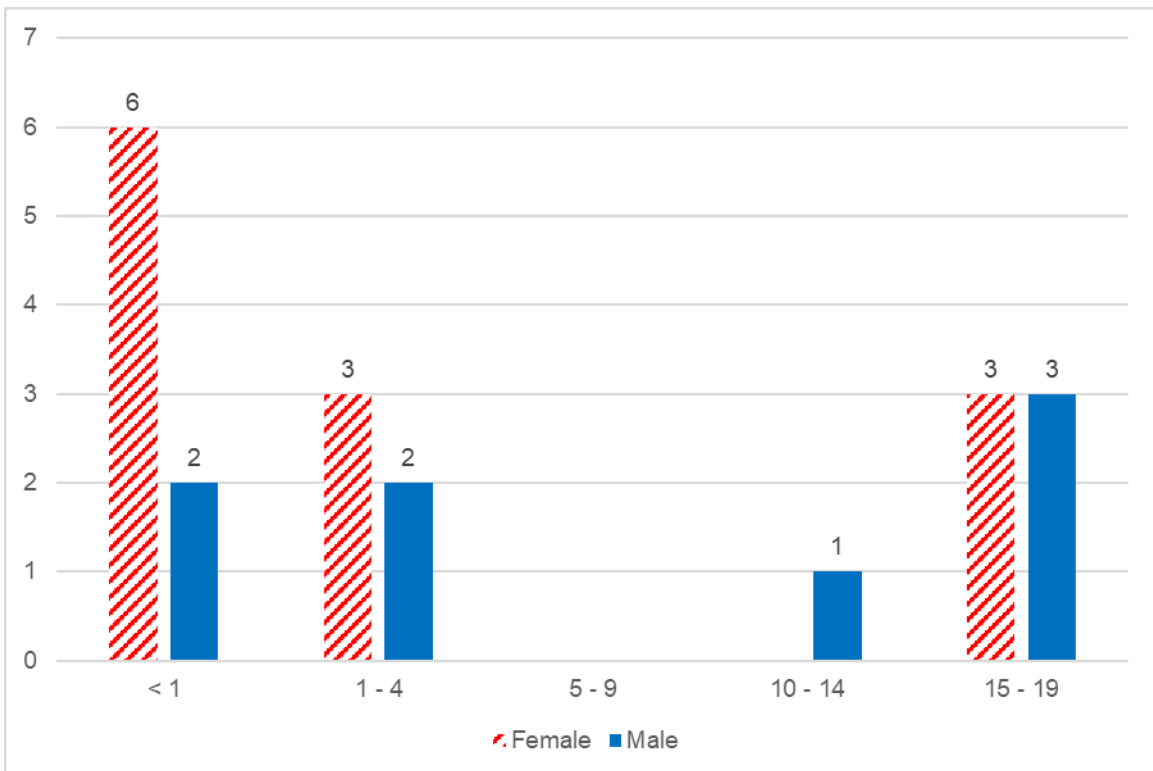
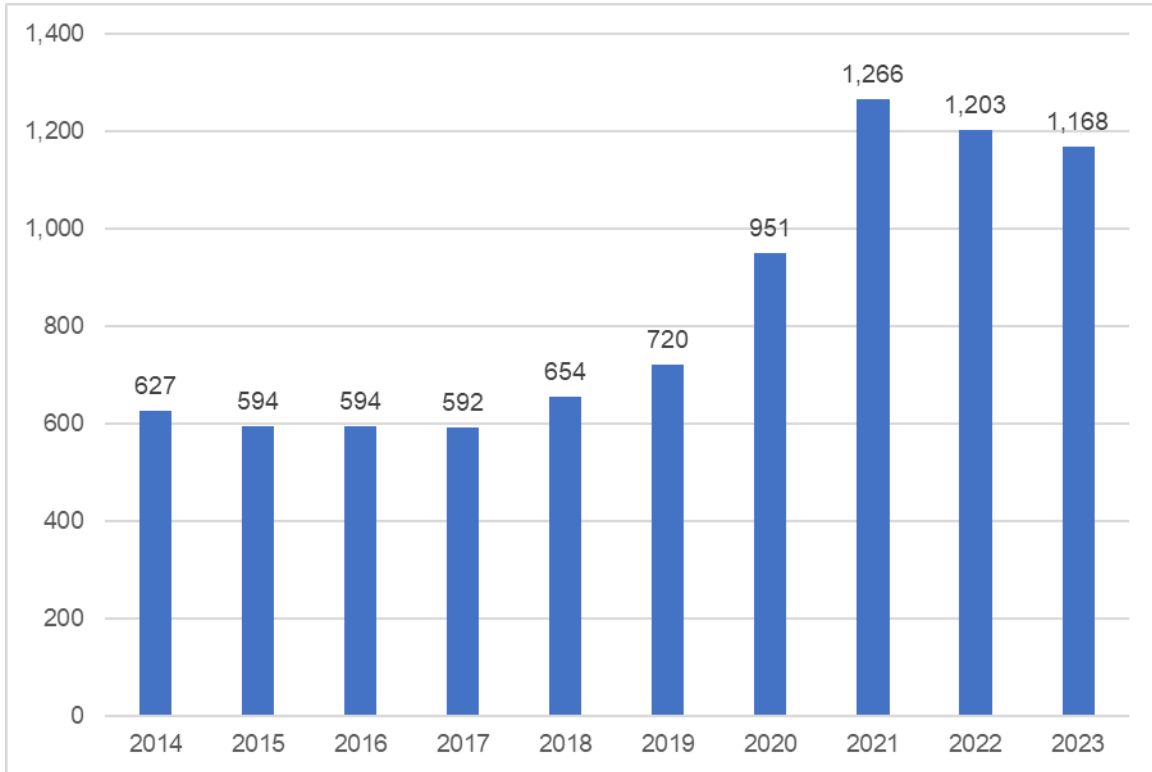


Table 15. Children / Undetermined Deaths by Cause 2023

Cause of Death	Cases
Undetermined	11
Substance intoxication (drug, poison, alcohol, etc.)	3
Thermal injuries (burns)	2
Gunshot wound(s)	1
Multiple injuries (fractures, lacerations to internal organs)	1
Head and neck injuries (cervical, cranio-, cerebral)	1
Prematurity	1
Grand Total	20

Drug-Caused Deaths

Figure 48. Drug-Caused Deaths (2014 - 2023)



Drug-Caused Deaths – Overview

Drug overdose deaths continue to be a problem in New Mexico. A wide variety of drugs, both illegal and prescription, contributed to the 1,168 drug-caused deaths. There was a 2.91% decrease in overall Drug-Caused deaths from 2022 to 2023. Many decedents had more than one drug present at the time of death. The most drug-caused deaths being seen in males ages 35-44 years (25.00%). The OMI designation of ‘drug-caused deaths’ includes both intentional (suicide, homicide) and unintentional (accidental) drug overdoses.

Figure 49. Drug-Caused Deaths by Race / Ethnicity 2023

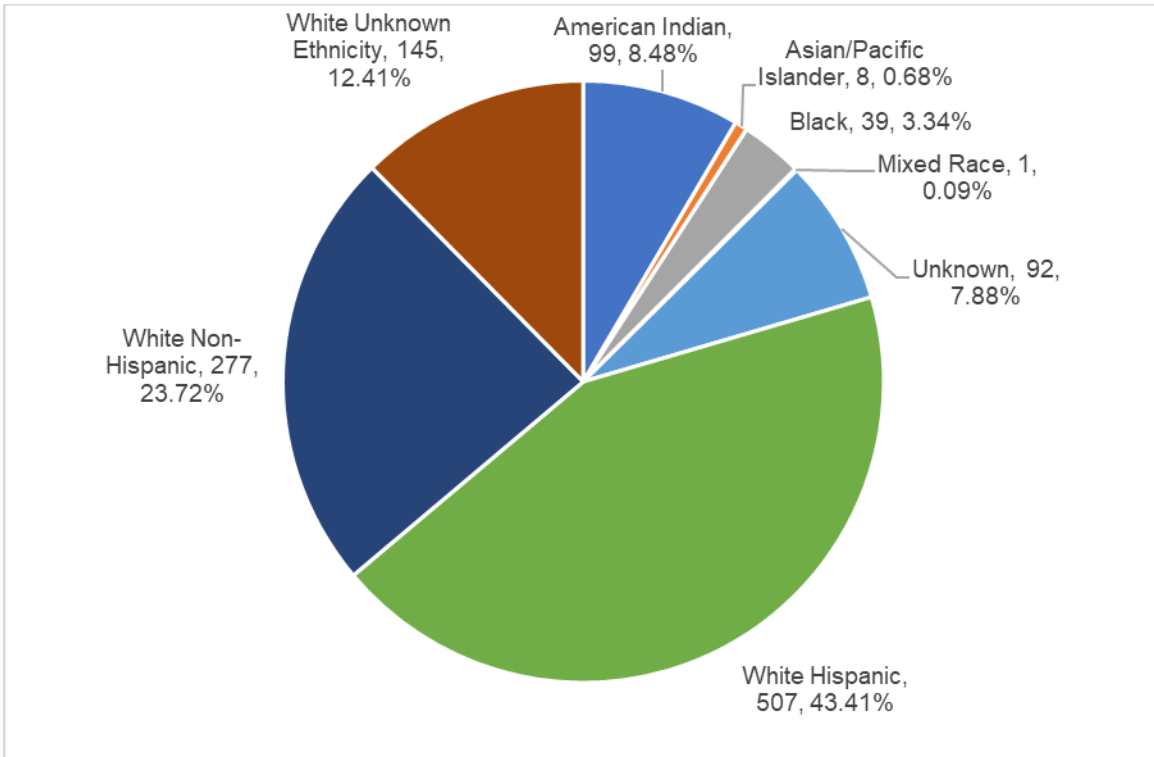


Figure 50. Drug-Caused Deaths by Age and Gender 2023

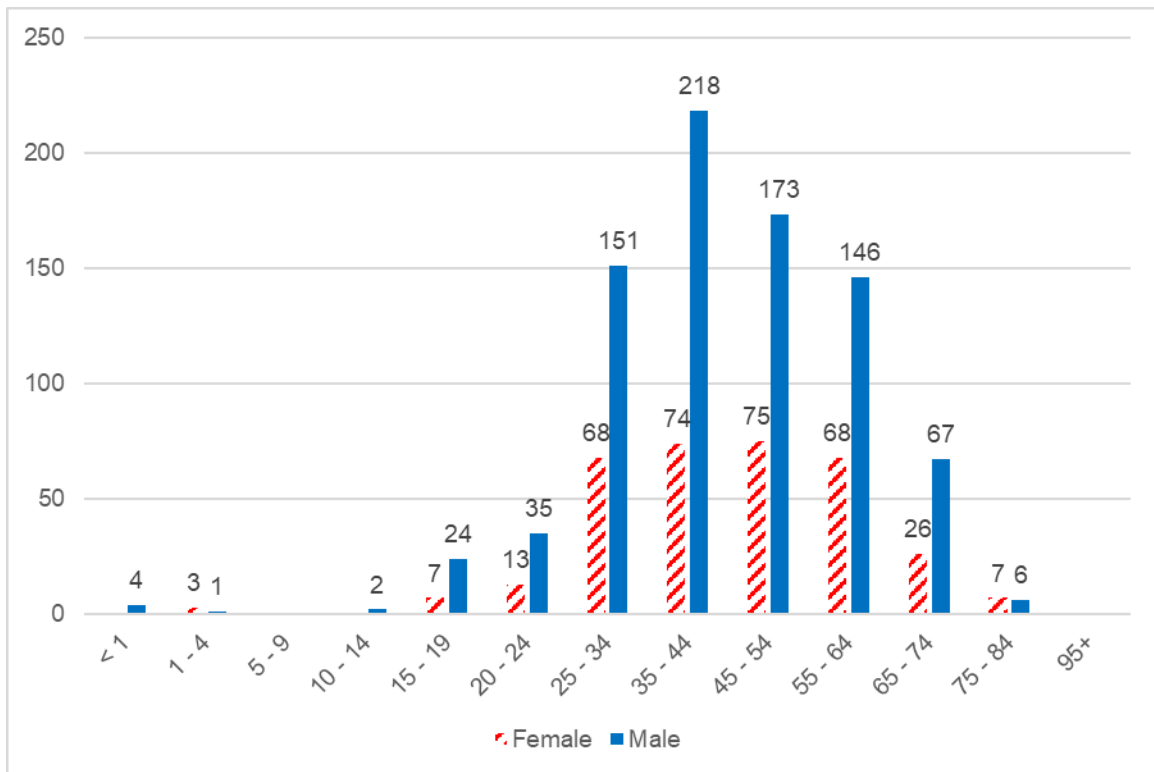
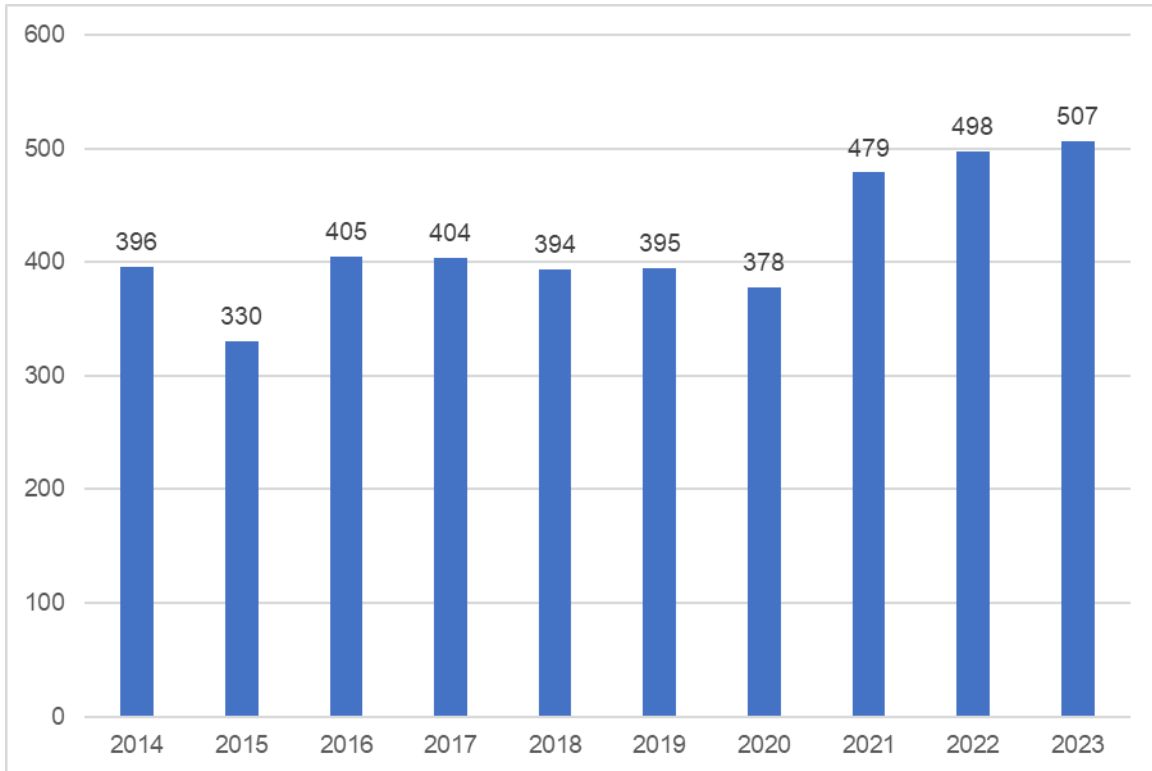


Table 16. Drug-Caused Deaths by County of Pronouncement 2023

County	Total
Bernalillo	517
Santa Fe	95
Dona Ana	84
Rio Arriba	73
San Juan	50
Sandoval	44
Otero	31
Valencia	27
Chaves	25
McKinley	25
San Miguel	23
Eddy	22
Taos	22
Lea	21
Curry	16
Cibola	12
Grant	12
Los Alamos	8
Sierra	8
Socorro	8
Lincoln	7
Torrance	7
Colfax	6
Luna	6
Quay	5
Mora	4
Roosevelt	4
Guadalupe	2
Catron	1
De Baca	1
MkKinley	1
Union	1
Grand Total	1,168

Motor Vehicle-Associated Deaths

Figure 51. Motor Vehicle Associated Deaths (2014 - 2023)



Motor Vehicle-Associated Deaths – Overview

In 2023, OMI investigated 507 motor-vehicle associated deaths, 21.70% of all accidental deaths investigated by OMI in 2023. Included in this classification are deaths of drivers and passengers of cars, trucks, and motorcycles, as well as deaths occurring when a motor vehicle struck a pedestrian or a bicyclist. American Indian decedents were over-represented, with 14.20% of motor-vehicle accidental deaths. Males ages 25 - 34 years had the highest number (17.75%) of motor vehicle-associated accidental deaths. November saw the highest number of motor vehicle deaths (9.86%), while March had the lowest number (5.72%). More motor vehicle deaths occurred on a Saturday (20.91%) than any other day of the week.

Figure 52. Motor Vehicle Accident vs. Non-Motor Vehicle Accidents 2023

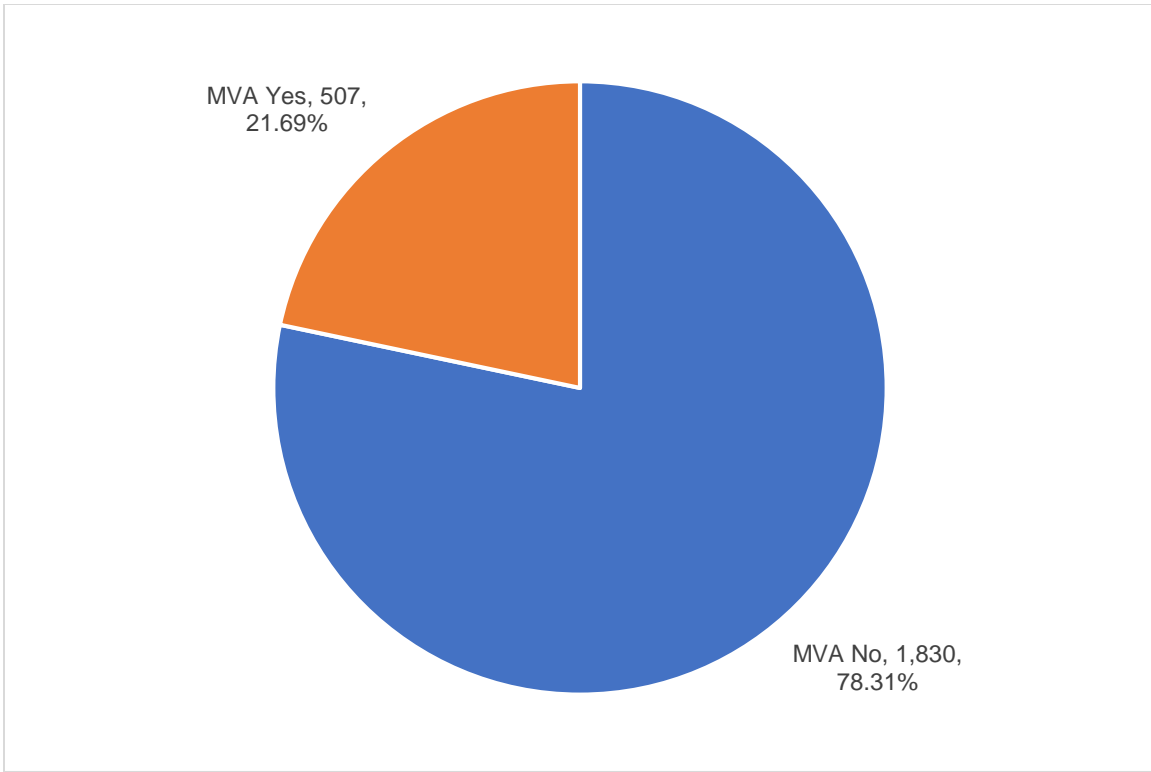


Figure 53. Motor Vehicle-Associated Deaths by Race / Ethnicity 2023

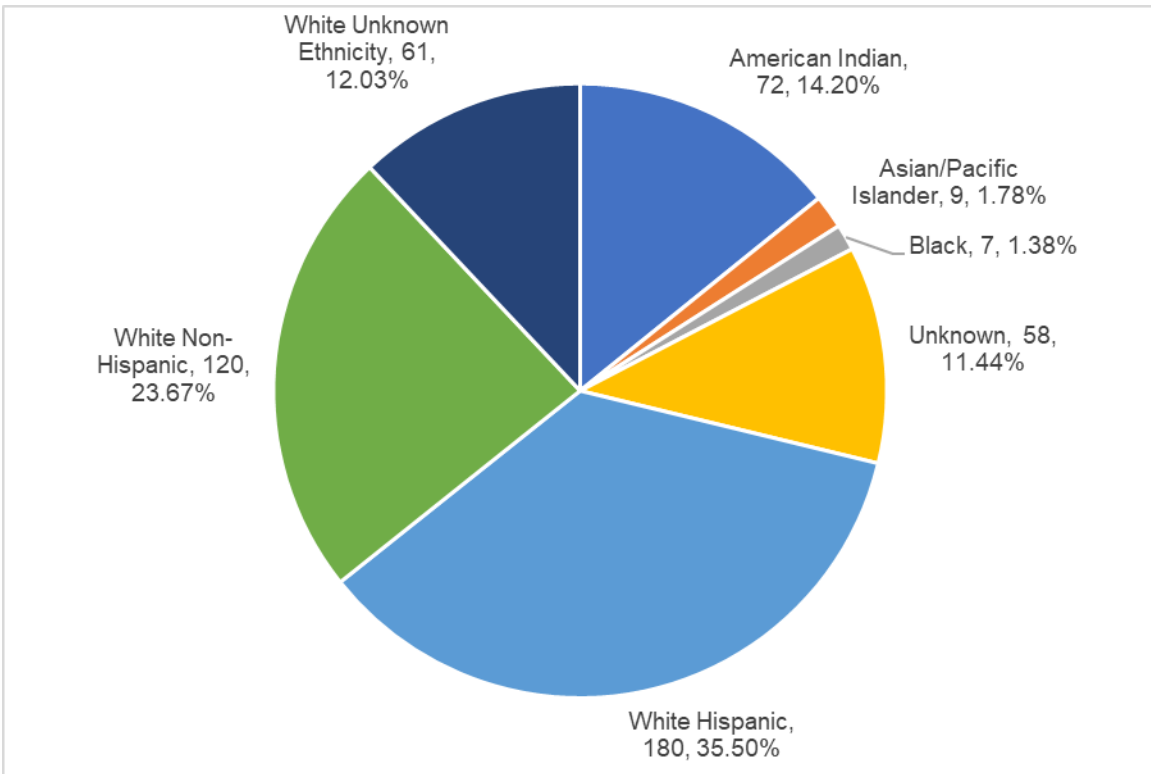


Figure 54. Motor Vehicle-Associated Deaths by Age and Gender 2023

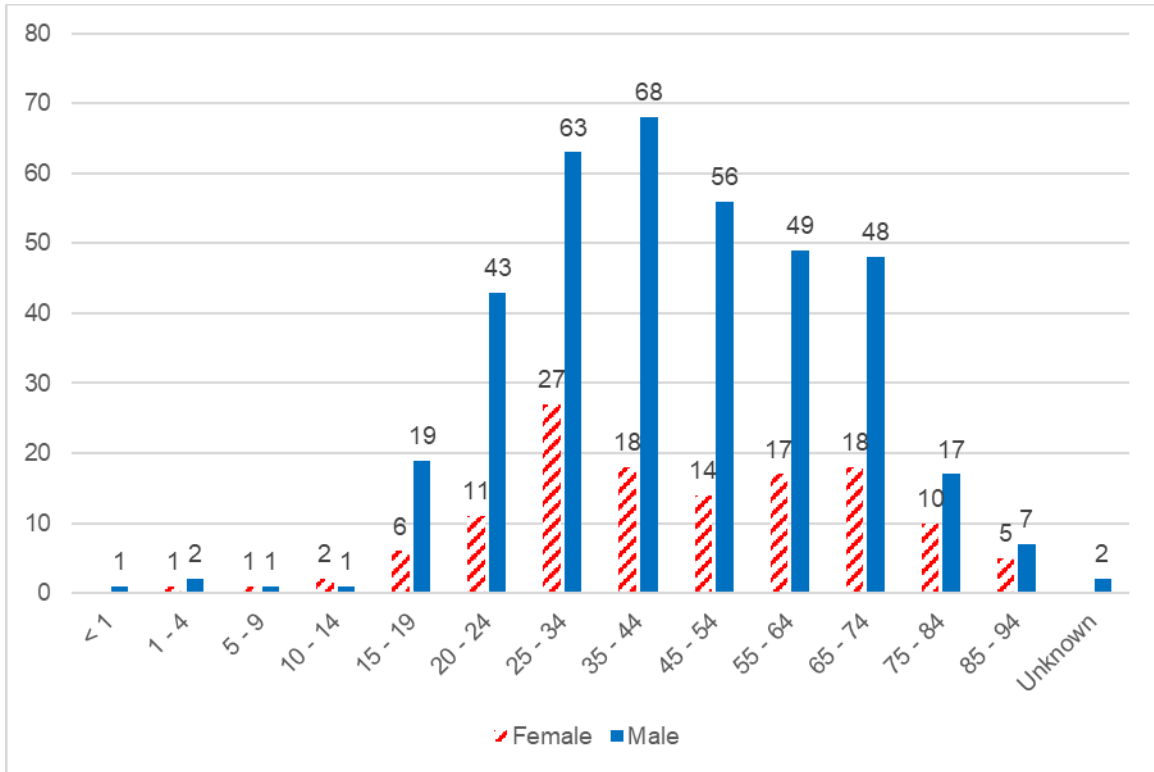


Figure 55. Motor Vehicle-Associated Deaths by Month 2023

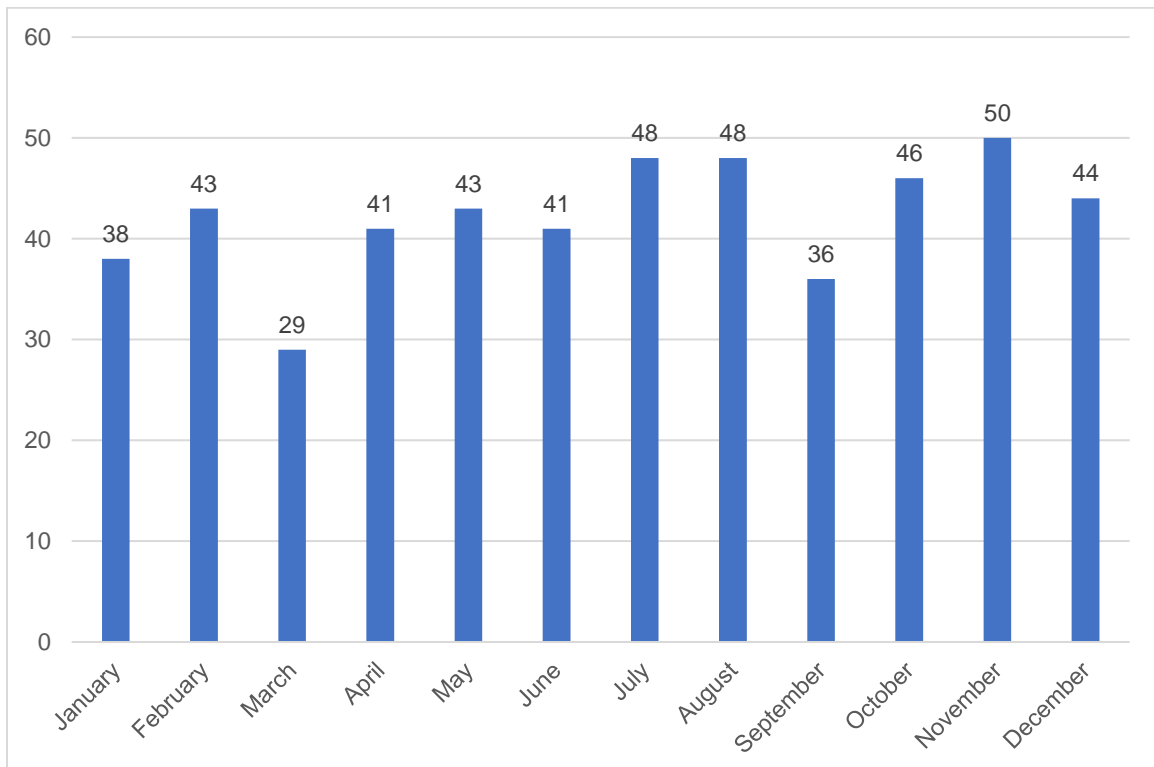


Figure 56. Motor Vehicle-Associated Deaths by Day of Week 2023

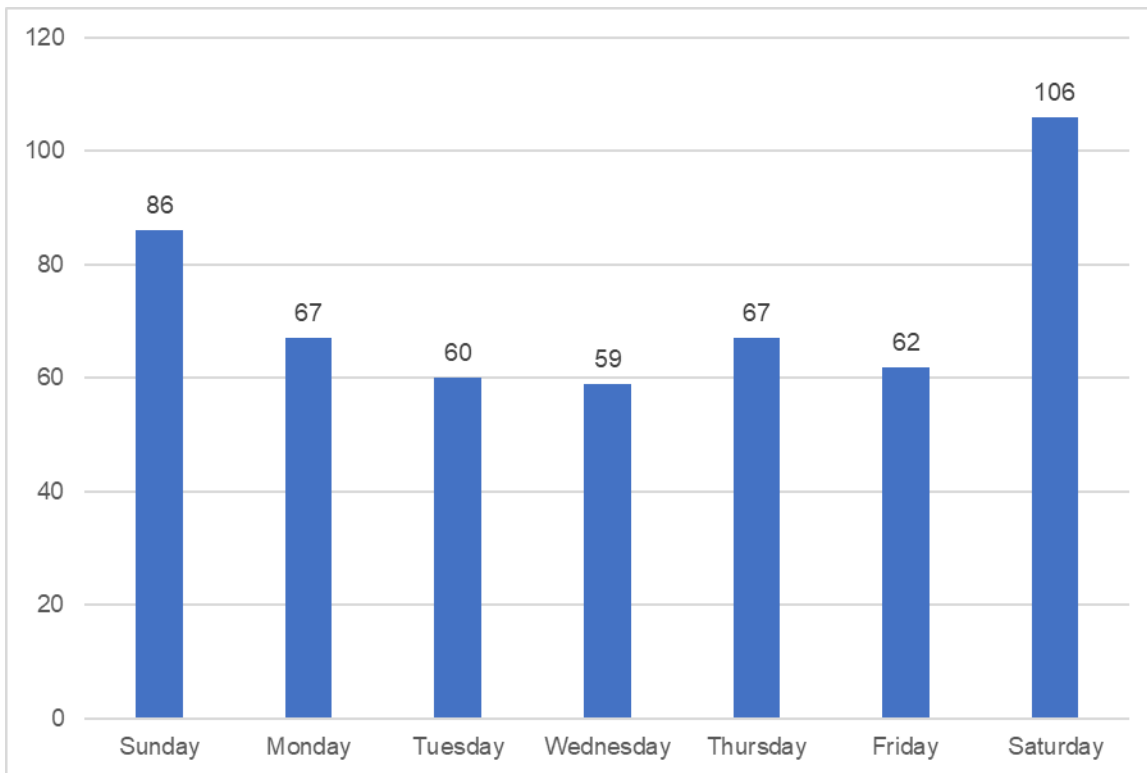
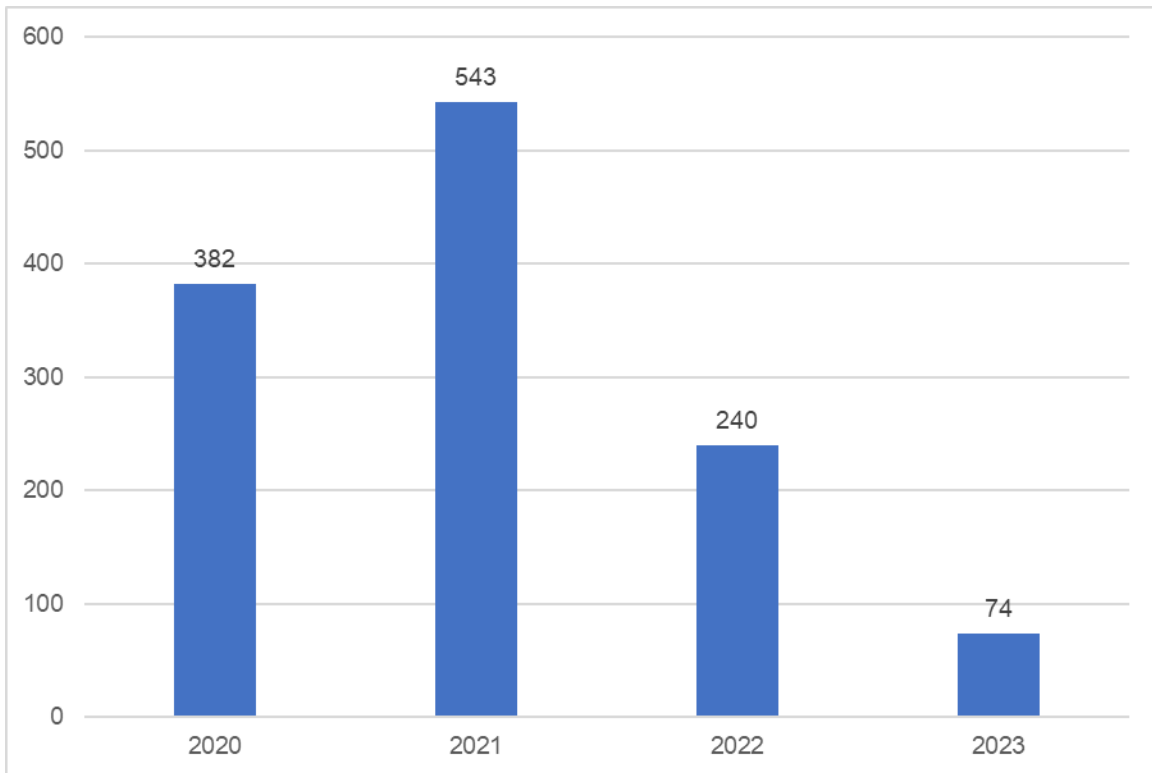


Table 17. Motor Vehicle-Associated Deaths by County of Pronouncement 2023

County	Total
Bernalillo	168
Dona Ana	32
McKinley	32
San Juan	28
Lea	20
Santa Fe	19
Eddy	18
Otero	16
Cibola	15
Sandoval	14
Luna	13
Torrance	13
Rio Arriba	12
San Miguel	11
Socorro	11
Valencia	11
Chaves	9
Lincoln	9
Curry	8
Guadalupe	8
Quay	8
Grant	7
Sierra	6
Colfax	5
Taos	4
Mora	3
Catron	2
Harding	1
Hidalgo	1
Los Alamos	1
Roosevelt	1
Union	1
Grand Total	507

Overview - Coronavirus Deaths (COVID)

Figure 57. COVID Deaths 2020 - 2023



Coronavirus (COVID) cases for the years 2020 - 2023 are listed above for comparison. These include both deaths that were either directly or indirectly caused by COVID. This is not a comprehensive representation of all cases in the state rather only those cases that fell within the OMI jurisdiction with assigned manner of death by an OMI Forensic Pathologist.

Glossary

Accident – The *manner of death* used when, in other than *natural deaths*, there is no evidence of intent.

Autopsy – A detailed postmortem external and internal examination of a body to determine *cause of death*. An autopsy may be either ‘full’, with complete dissection and examination of internal structures, or ‘partial’, dissecting only a select portion of the body, such as the brain or abdomen.

Cause of Death – The agent of effect that results in a physiological derangement or biochemical disturbance that is incompatible with life. The results of postmortem examination, including autopsy and toxicological findings, combined with information about the medical history of the decedent serves to establish the cause of death. The cause of death can result from different circumstances and manner of death. For example, the same cause of death, drowning, can result from the accidental immersion of a child in a swimming pool or from the homicidal immersion of a child in a bathtub.

Children – Individuals 19 years of age or younger. (Normally this is 18 years of age or younger, but to keep with industry standard age divisions, 19 year-olds are included in our tables.)

Circumstances of Death – The situation, setting, or condition present at the time of injury or death.

Consultation – Autopsies paid for by families, hospitals or investigating agencies, such as the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI); these autopsies are not under OMI jurisdiction and are done by request and payment.

County of Pronouncement – The county where the decedent was pronounced dead.

Deputy Medical Investigator – An investigator, not necessarily a physician, appointed by the *State Medical Investigator* to assist in the investigation of deaths in the *jurisdiction* of the OMI.

External Examination – A detailed postmortem external examination of a body, conducted when a full or partial autopsy is determined to not be required.

Drug-Caused Death – A death caused by a drug or combination of drugs. Deaths caused by *ethanol*, poisons and volatile substances are excluded.

Ethanol – An alcohol, which is the principal intoxicant in liquor, beer, and wine. A person with an alcohol concentration in blood of 0.08 grams/100 milliliters (0.08 g/100mL) is legally intoxicated in New Mexico.

Ethanol Present – Deaths in which toxicological tests reveal a reportable level of *ethanol* (0.005% or greater) at the time of death.

Homicide – The *manner of death* in which death results from the intentional harm of one person by another.

Intrauterine Fetal Demise (IUFD) - the medical term for a fetus that dies after the 20th week of pregnancy. IUFD is also known as stillbirth.

Jurisdiction – The extent of the Office of the Medical Investigator’s authority over deaths. The OMI authority covers reportable deaths that occur in New Mexico, except for those occurring on federal reservations (American Indian and military) and in hospitals. New Mexico Statute 24-11-5NMSA 1978 and descriptions in the OMI policy manual define reportable deaths. The OMI may be invited to consult or investigate cases over which it has no jurisdiction.

Jurisdiction Terminated – Jurisdiction terminated cases are reported to OMI, which is statutorily obligated to review the cases. However, after review proves that there was no foul play and if the decedent’s physician agrees that the death was an expected natural death, the case is then assigned a *cause* and *manner* of death by their physician. The OMI is still obligated to make sure the decedent’s remains are properly cared for.

Field External Examination – An investigation and external examination conducted at the scene to determine cause of death, with no autopsy conducted but under OMI jurisdiction.

Manner of Death – The general category of the condition, circumstances or event, which causes the death. The categories are *natural, accident, homicide, suicide* and *undetermined*.

Natural – The *manner of death* used when solely a disease causes death. If death is hastened by an injury, the *manner of death* is not considered natural.

Non-accept – Non-accept cases are decedents who have died under the care of a physician, but are reported into the OMI to verify that there is no statutory obligation to investigate the case.

Office of the Medical Investigator – The state agency in New Mexico that is responsible for the investigation of sudden, violent or untimely deaths. The Office of the Medical Investigator was created by legislation in 1973 to replace the county coroner system (see also, *Deputy Medical Investigator*).

Pending – The *cause of death* and *manner of death* are to be determined pending further investigation and/or toxicological, histological and/or neuropathological testing at the time of publication.

State Medical Investigator – The head of the *Office of the Medical Investigator*. The State Medical Investigator must be a licensed physician licensed in New Mexico and may appoint Assistant Medical investigators, who must be physicians and *Deputy Medical Investigators*.

Undetermined – The *manner of death* for deaths in which there is insufficient information to assign another manner.