

# ISLAND COUNTY CORONER'S OFFICE

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Coroner

2021 ANNUAL REPORT

*Let us not forget that every statistic documented within this report represents the loss of someone's loved one and a valued member of our community.*

## Establishment Of the Office

The Island County Coroner's Office was established with jurisdiction coextensive with the boundaries of Island County. It shall be the duty of The Island County Coroner's Office to determine the cause and manner of any death reported as having been killed by violence; has suddenly died under such circumstances as to afford reasonable grounds to suspect or infer that death has been caused or occasioned by the act of another by criminal means; has committed suicide; and to determine the cause of all deaths as to which applicable state law provides for the coroner to take jurisdiction over remains (RCW 68.50.010)

The Island County Coroner's Office is currently staffed by one elected Coroner and one Chief Deputy Coroner. Two Forensic Pathologists are utilized on a contractual basis to perform autopsies and external examinations and one Autopsy Technician on an as needed basis. The office is committed to providing professional services to the community and all staff are dedicated to increasing their professionalism while maintaining a high degree of compassion, integrity, and thoroughness.

The Island County Coroner's Office responds to calls for death investigation 24 hours a day. As an overview of the office, when a call is received reporting a death and the death falls under the coroner's jurisdiction, the investigating coroner is dispatched to the location and conducts a medicolegal death investigation into the circumstances surrounding the death. The decedent is transported by the investigating coroner to the morgue facility where an autopsy or external examination is conducted to determine the cause and manner of death. The investigating coroner generates a preliminary report which is provided to the forensic pathologist prior to the autopsy/examination. If an autopsy is conducted, an autopsy report will be generated. Following the autopsy, the decedent is released to the families chosen funeral home.

## Mission/Vision

### Mission statement

The Island County Coroner's Office determines the cause and manner of reported deaths by conducting professional medicolegal death investigations while ensuring that everyone who has suffered a loss is treated with dignity, respect, and compassion.

### Vision Statement

1. The Island County Coroner's Office is accessible to the public, media, and other elected officials.
2. The Island County Coroner's Office strives to increase the proficiency and professionalism of all staff members through training.
3. The Island County Coroner's Office endeavors to develop and strengthen partnerships with the public safety community.

## Jurisdiction

Island County is comprised of Whidbey and Camano Islands. Towns on Whidbey Island include Oak Harbor, Coupeville, Greenbank, Freeland, Langley, and Clinton. According to the 2020 census report, Island County had a population of 86,857 with a racial makeup of 84.8% Caucasian, 5.3% Asian, 3.3% African American, 1.0% American Indian and Alaskan Native, 0.5% Pacific Islander, and 5.2% from two or more races. Those of Hispanic or Latino made up 8.7% of the population.

The Island County Coroner's Office conducts parallel/independent death investigations with all the law enforcement agencies in the county:

Island County Sheriff's Office (ICSO)

Oak Harbor Police Department (OHPD)

Langley Police Department (LPD)

Coupeville Marshalls

Washington State Patrol (WSP)

Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS)

## Service

The Island County Coroner's Office responds to calls for death investigation 24 hours a day. Shifts are covered by either the Coroner (full time) or the Chief Deputy Coroner (full time).

The cause and manner of death is determined by conducting a medicolegal death investigation. This includes responding to scenes and:

1. Interviewing public safety personnel, those present on scene and family members.
2. Documenting the scene with photographs, sketches, and measurements
3. Documenting the decedent with diagrams and photographs
4. Performing a complete physical examination of decedents to locate/document all signs of trauma/injury.
5. Transport to morgue facility
6. Obtain medical records.
7. Draw biological samples.
8. Fingerprint decedents
9. Locate/notify next of kin.
10. Positively identify the decedent
11. Complete a comprehensive yet objective written report for use by the pathologist and other agencies.

Decedents are transported to The Island County Coroner's Office morgue facility where they are secured. If an autopsy is warranted a thorough examination will be conducted, biological samples will be drawn and sent to the toxicology laboratory for testing.

Following the completion of an autopsy, decedents are released to the families chosen funeral home where final disposition arrangements can be made.

## **Statistics**

### Case type:

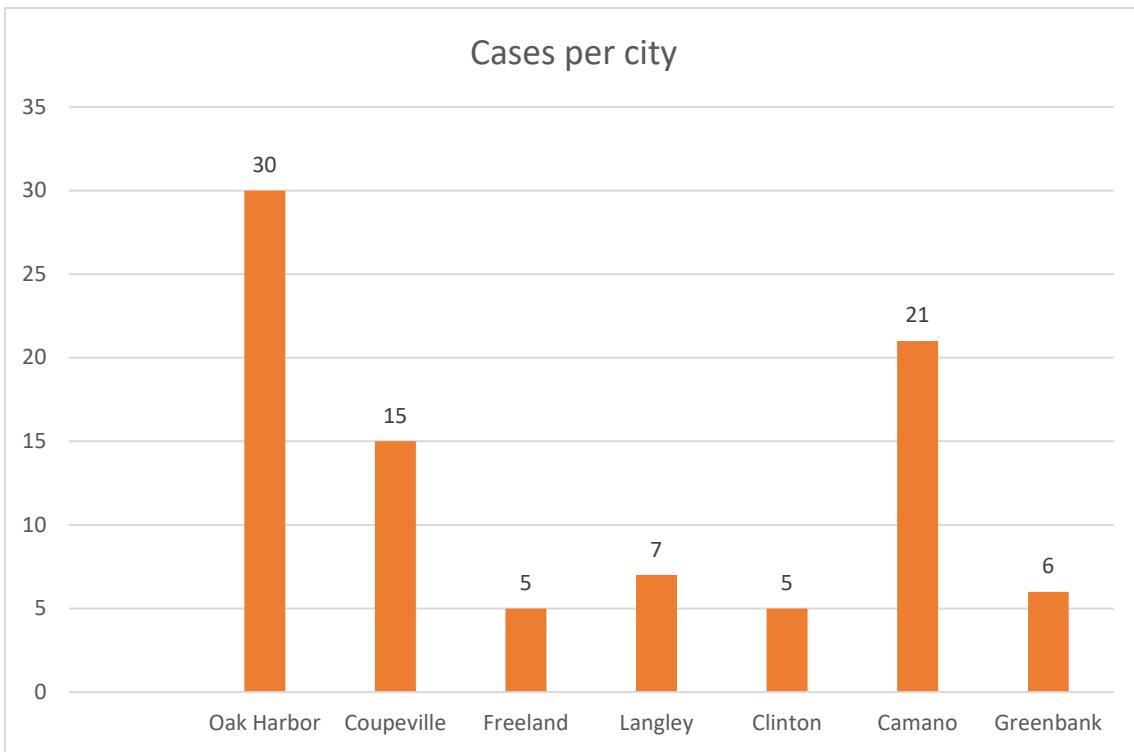
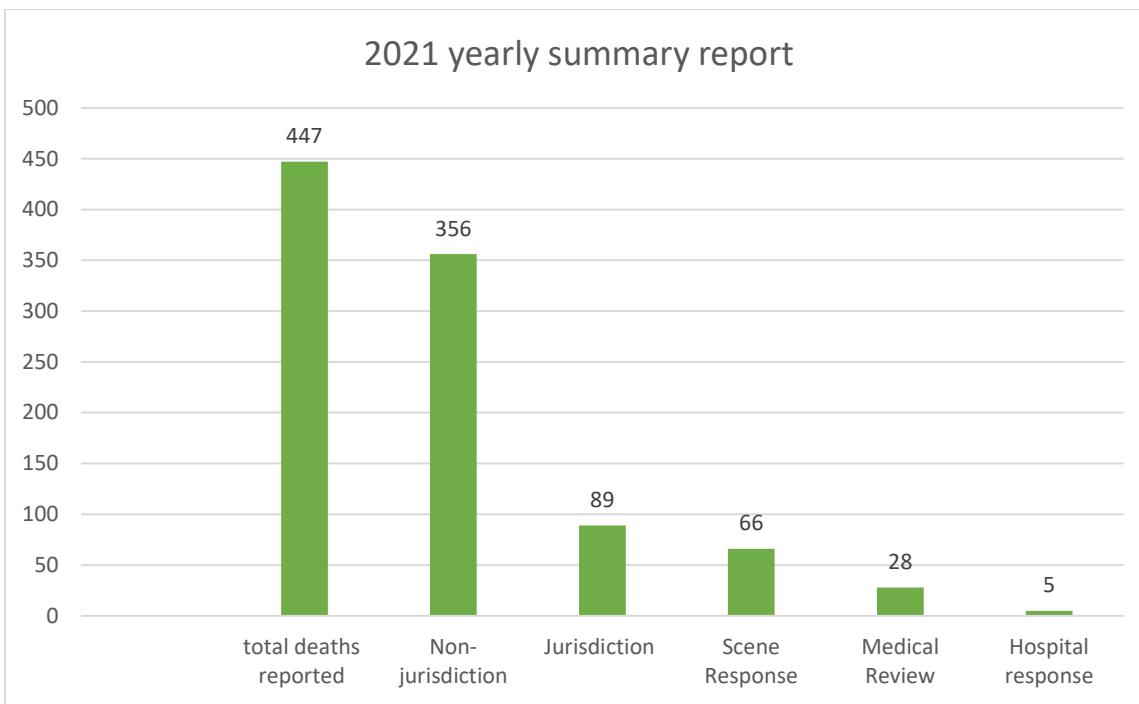
Coroner case: deaths that fall under jurisdiction of this office and are investigated.

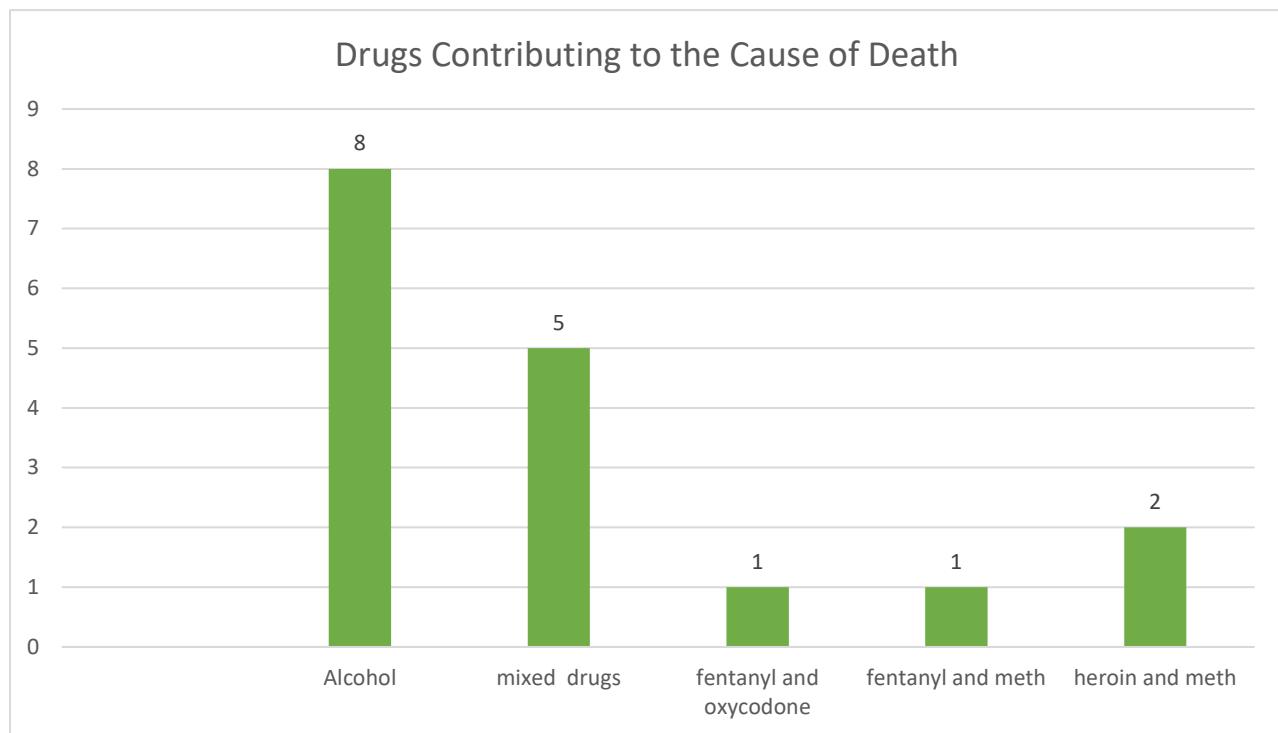
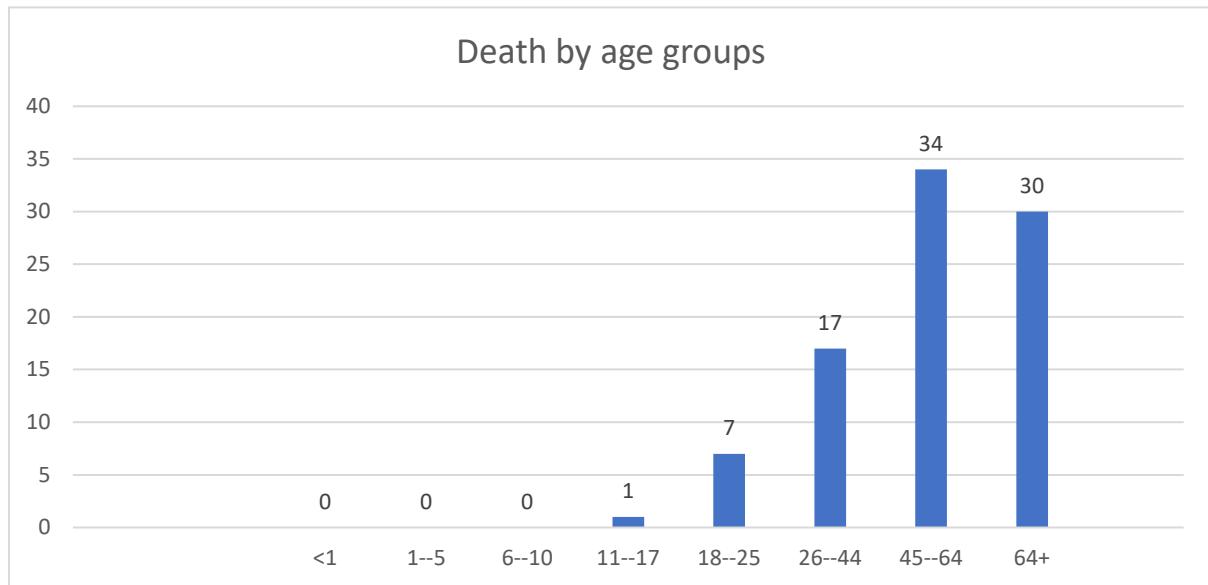
- Sudden death of an apparent healthy person with no known or significant medical history.
- Suspected natural death in which there is no current physician to certify the death.
- Death in which there are abuse or neglect concerns.
- Violent or suspicious deaths
- Traffic-related deaths
- Suicides
- All child deaths
- All premature births and still births over 20 weeks gestation.
- All accidental deaths (falls, industrial, recreational)
- Deaths attributed to drug overdose or drug related.
- Deaths that occur while in legal/court/jail/prison custody.
- Deaths due to unforeseen complications of therapy, surgery, or diagnostic procedures.
- Deaths due to injury or fracture that either was directly or contributory to decline to death, this includes those injuries that occurred years earlier.
- Deaths due to contagious disease that may be a public health hazard.
- Indigent or unclaimed remains.

### Non-Jurisdiction Assumed (NJA):

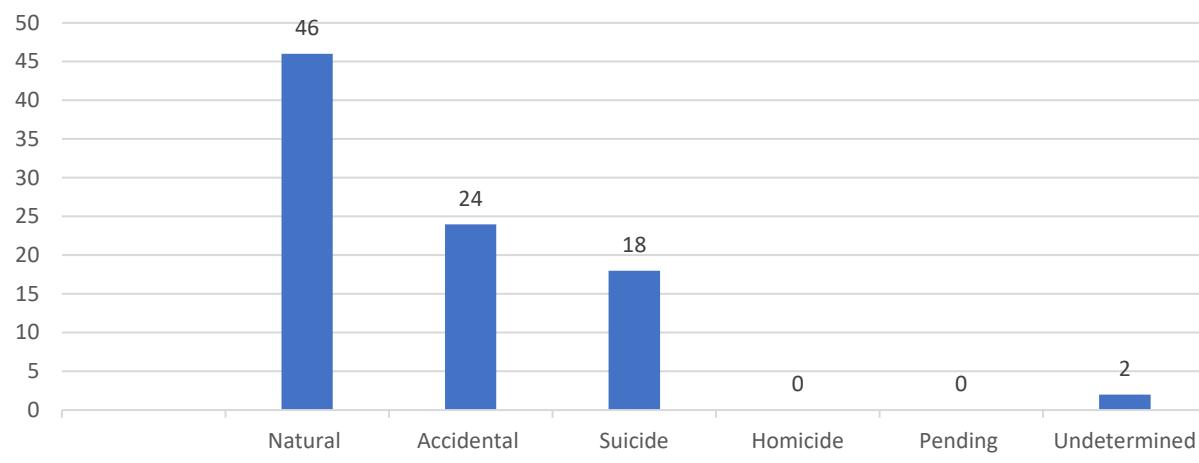
1. Cases that occur under the care of a medical facility.
2. When a decedent is on hospice under a doctor's care.
3. When death occurs over the age of 66 years old with history natural disease that would have contributed towards death.

In 2021 the Island County Coroner's Office assumed jurisdiction of 89 deaths. The following data was collected from those cases.

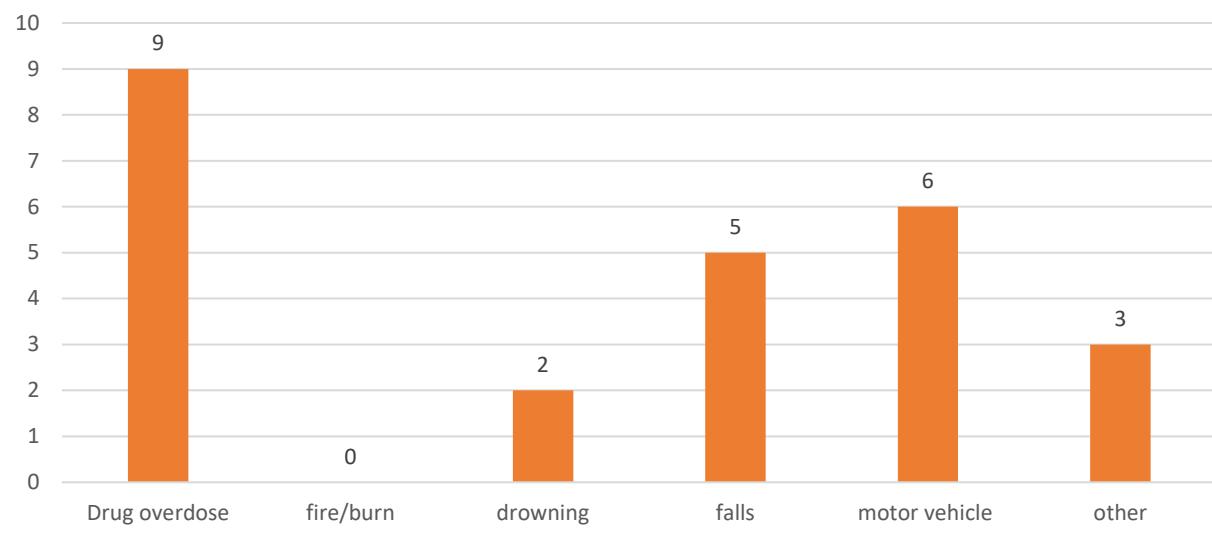


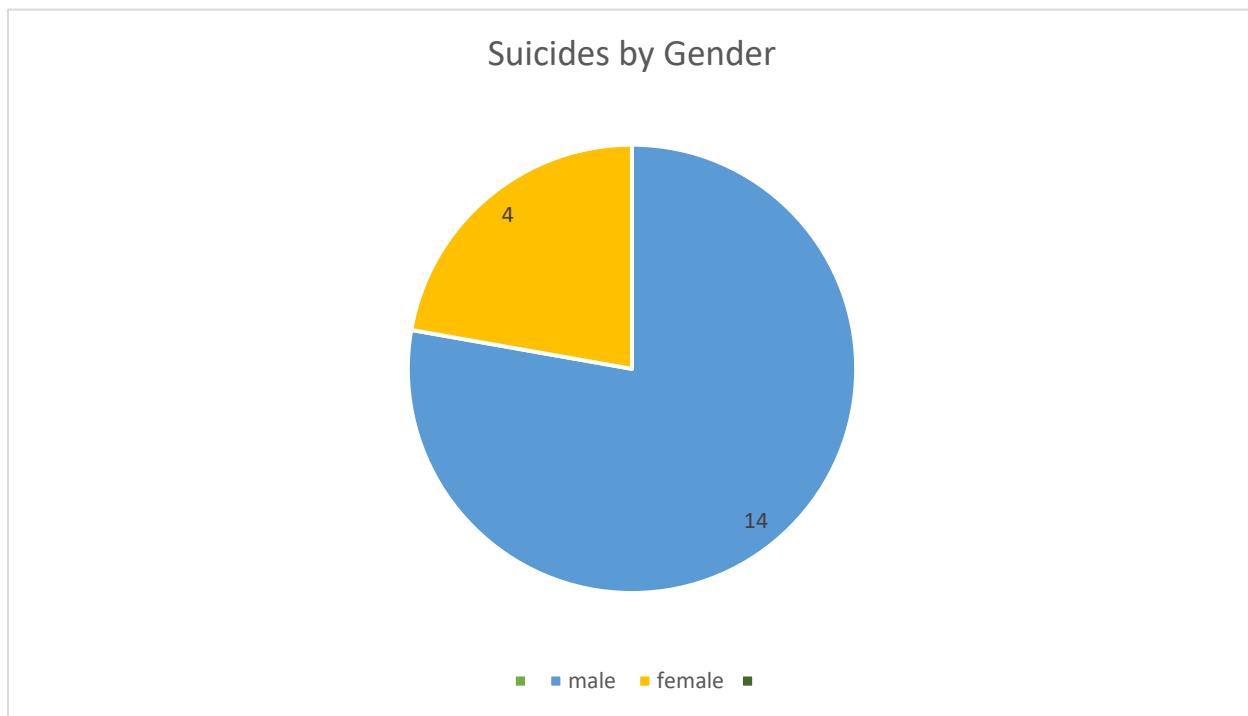
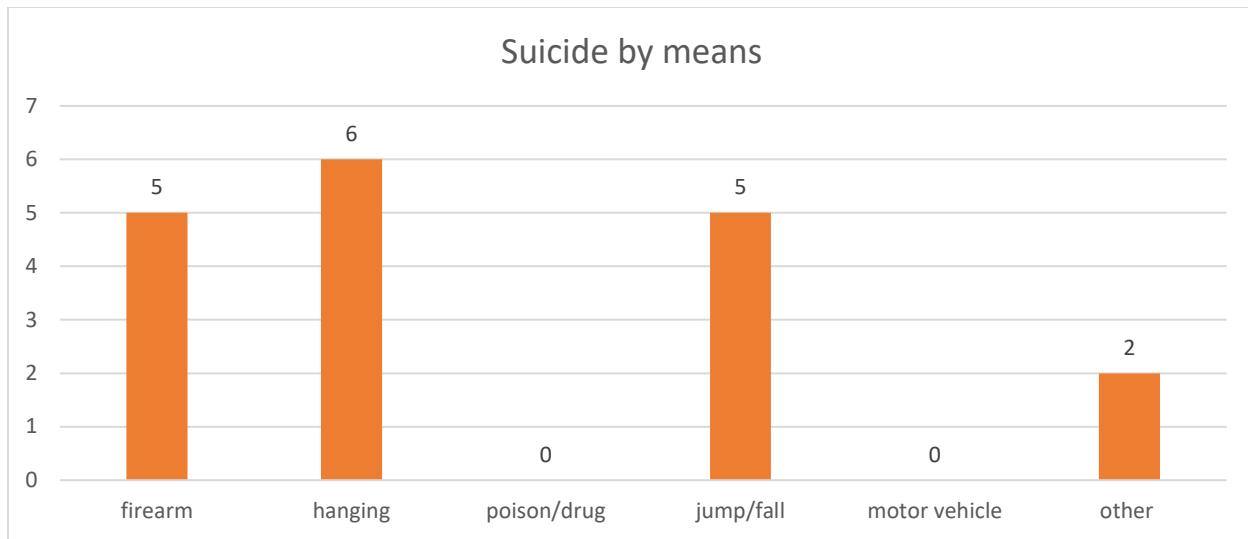


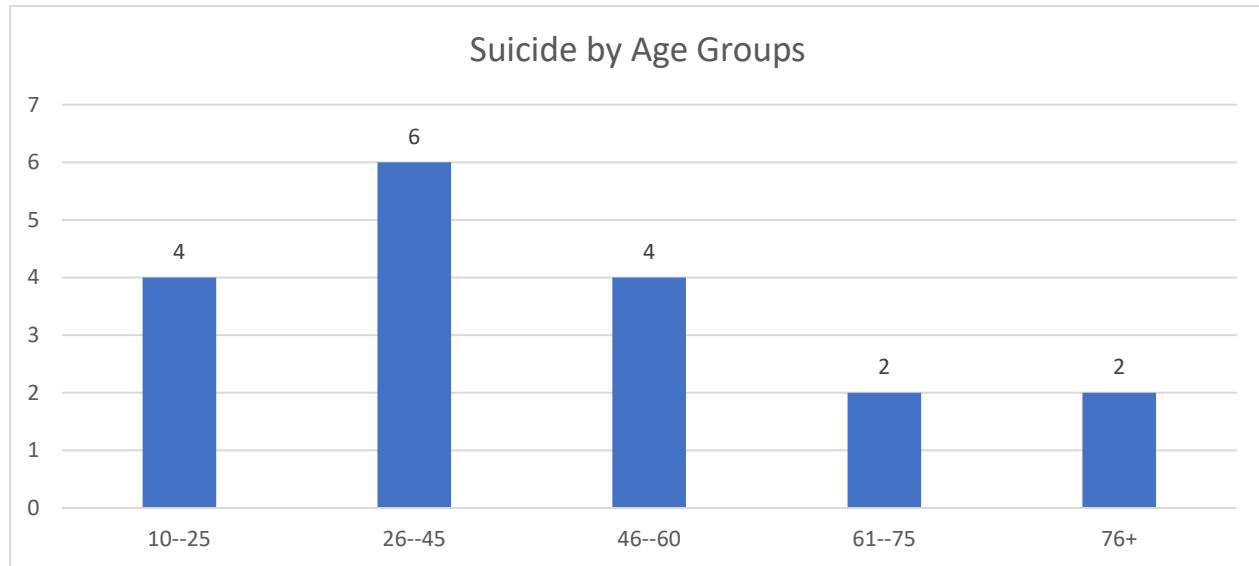
### Manner of death



### Accidental deaths by type







## Death Investigation Overview

Deaths reported to the Island County Coroner's Office are placed into two different categories: non-jurisdictional and jurisdictional. **Non-jurisdictional cases** are unattended deaths that are reported to the Coroner's Office (this excludes hospital, care facilities, and in-home hospice), but the decedent is under the care of a physician who has knowledge and understanding of the decedent's health history and will certify the death certificate. **Jurisdictional cases**, which can be natural or non-natural are deaths where the Coroner certifies the cause and manner of an individual's death. All non-natural (homicide, suicide, accident, undetermined, or pending) deaths must be certified by the Coroner. Below is the yearly statistical graph for all reported deaths in Island County for the calendar year 2021.

2021 yearly Statistical Summary	
Total Reported Cases	447
Non-Jurisdictional Cases	356
Jurisdictional Cases	89
Natural	394
Accidental	30
Suicide	18
Homicide	0
Undetermined	2
Skeletal remains	2
Full Autopsies	62
Partial Autopsies	0
External Examination	0
Toxicology only	0
Scene responses	66
Unidentified	0
unclaimed	0
Indigent Remains	0
exhumation	0

## Goals of the Coroner's Office

Our goal is to provide compassionate care to both decedent and their families through thorough investigation of the circumstances surrounding death.

All Deputy Coroners will be certified with the American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators (ABMDI) within two years of employment to ensure they are qualified and properly educated.