

Waukesha County
Office of the Medical Examiner

Strategic Plan

2026 - 2028



Table of Contents

 [Jump to Strategic Objectives](#)

Table of Contents

Readers Guide: How to Read the Strategic Plan	3
Executive Summary	5-7
Mission Statement & Standards of Service Excellence	5
County Pillars & Department Statement of Purpose	6
Overview & Strategic Departmental Objectives	7
Strategic Objectives	8
Objective 1	8
Objective 2	9
Objective 3	10
Objective 4	11
Appendices	12-18
Appendix A: Environmental Scan	12

Reader’s Guide: How to Read the Strategic Plan

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Thanks for reading Waukesha County Medical Examiner’s Office Strategic Plan.

This plan provides an overview of what Waukesha County leadership aims to achieve over the next three years and how this Department aims to meet those goals.

Note: Consider this Strategic Plan a high-level look at problem-solving initiatives. As such, a reader may not encounter data on all departmental activities (as found in an Operational Plan). We [welcome your questions and feedback](#) any time!

What’s an Objective?

In this Strategic Plan, an Objective is a milestone to be reached. It must be **specific**, **measurable**, **attainable**, **realistic**, and **time-bound** (aka **SMART**).

Each objective appears in two places: In a list that shows all of our goals in one place, and on its own page (example below, right).

Owner: The member of our team that is accountable for this Objective.

Feel free to contact Waukesha County to discuss any objective – just ask for the person listed here. We do the very same!

Strategy: What must be accomplished in order to achieve our objective?

A company that sells fruit snacks may set an objective to “increase sales.” One of their strategies is to pioneer new points of sale beyond supermarkets and vending machines, like commercial air travel, pizza delivery, and pro sporting events.

Like each Objective, a Strategy has an **owner** who guides efforts for its completion and success. Find this in the center column.

In the right-hand column, please find the **timeframe** for each strategy. This represents each strategy’s deadline.

Performance measures:

A graphic or image show the progress and status of each Objective’s success.

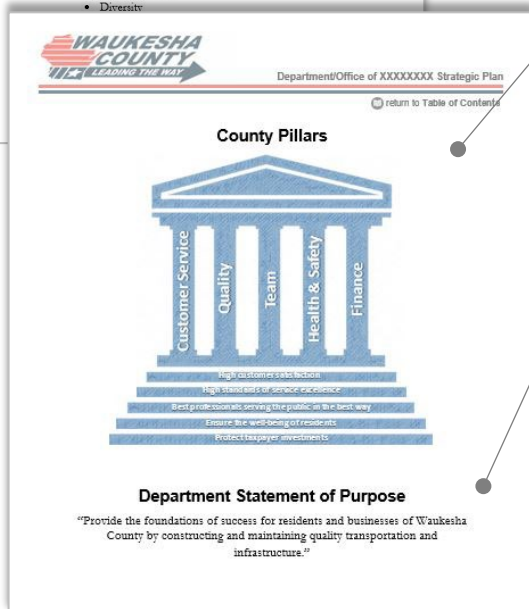
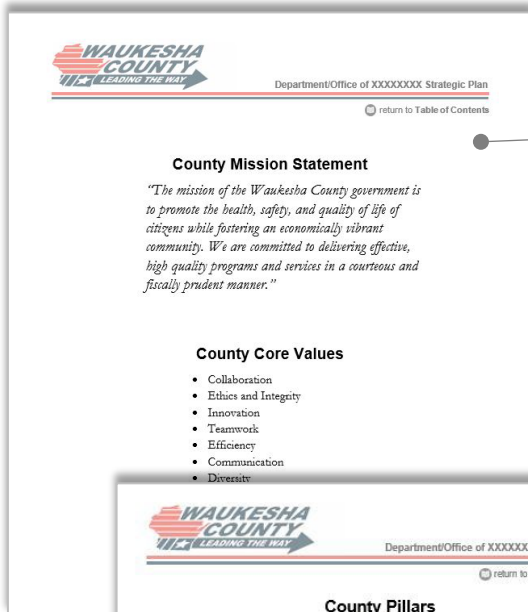
STRATEGY	STRATEGY OWNER	TIMEFRAME
Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.
Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.
Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.
Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.
Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.
Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.
Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.
Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.

Learn More:

Jump to supporting resources found in this Strategic Plan’s appendices, on WaukeshaCounty.gov, or elsewhere!

Reader’s Guide Continued

[Return to Table of Contents](#)



The origin of each Objective

In each of Waukesha County’s Departmental Strategic Plans, a pair of pages bears the principles and promises that guide our Objectives:

- Waukesha County’s [Mission Statement](#). The big picture.
- County [Standards of Service Excellence](#), the principles we observe on our path to completing our mission.
- Waukesha County’s [Five Pillars of Success](#), our framework for identifying core priorities and establishing program goals.
- Department’s [Statement of Purpose](#). Each department completes a Strategic Plan. Each declares its own “mission” here.

How is the objective shaped by the “environmental scan”?

Environmental scan (n): Monitoring of an organization’s internal and external environments for detecting early signs of opportunities and threats that may influence its current and future plans.

Find environmental scan data summarized in this document’s [Appendix](#) sections.

Executive Summary: Mission Statement & Standards of Service Excellence

 [Return to Table of Contents](#)

County Mission Statement

“The mission of the Waukesha County government is to promote the health, safety, and quality of life of citizens while fostering an economically vibrant community. We are committed to delivering effective, high-quality programs and services in a courteous and fiscally prudent manner.”

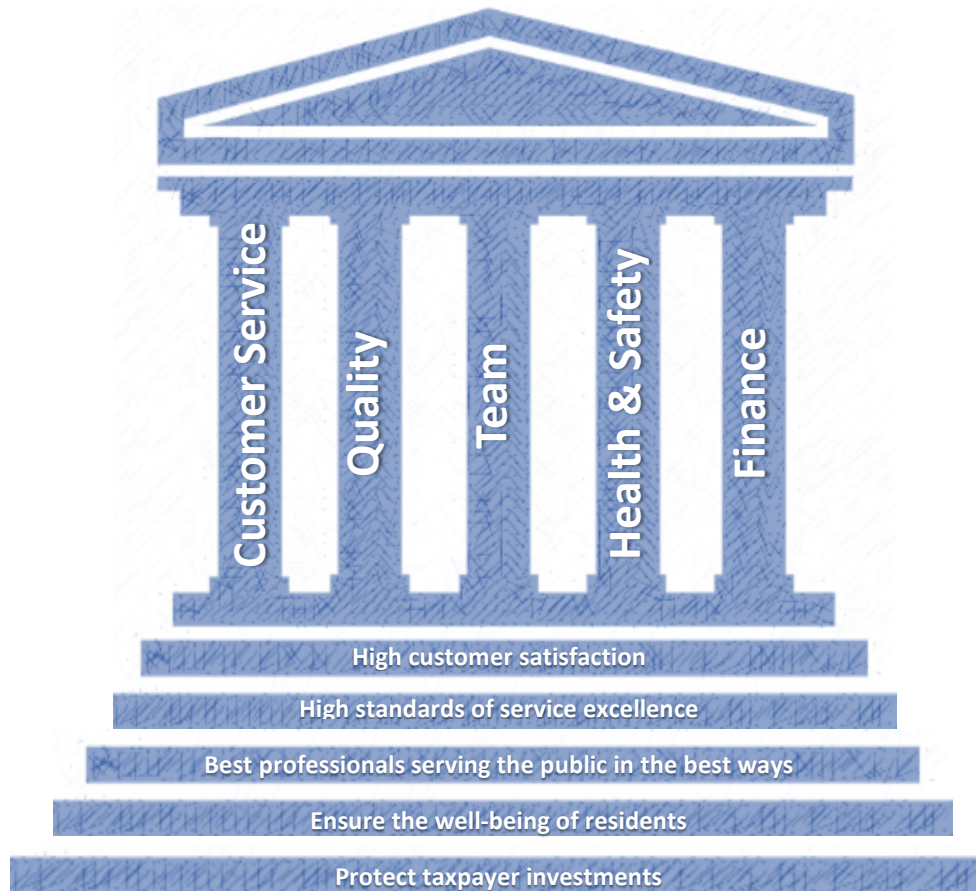
County Standards of Service Excellence

- Teamwork & Collaboration
- Innovation
- Efficiency & Cost Savings
- Communication
- Ethics & Diversity
- Well-being

Executive Summary: County Pillars & Statement of Purpose

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

County Pillars



Department Statement of Purpose

The Waukesha County Medical Examiner's Office investigates deaths as mandated by Wisconsin State Statute 979 to ensure the safety, health, and welfare of the community. The office provides investigation, documentation, and medical evaluation of reportable cases. We achieve these goals by applying knowledge and experience in the field of death investigation and forensic pathology to the performance of comprehensive, professional investigations.

Executive Summary: Overview & Strategic Objectives

 [Return to Table of Contents](#)

Strategic Planning Overview

Waukesha County has successfully used strategic planning tools for well over a decade. County Departments hold stakeholder focus groups, conduct environmental scans, and work with departmental strategic planning coordinators to perform major updates to their plans on a three-year basis and provide annual updates as needed.

Through strategic planning, the County has established links between our Standards of Service Excellence, business functions, and measurable program outcomes across all departments which results in an atmosphere of continuous improvement and better service delivery.

To help guide our strategic planning process and identify priorities, the County established a cross-departmental Strategic Planning Executive Committee which holds meetings and trainings with planning coordinators and has worked with outside consultants to provide expert guidance to ensure that each new generation of our strategic plan is better than the last.

Strategic Objectives at a Glance:

- [Objective 1](#) Workflow Enhancements
- [Objective 2](#) Policy & Procedure Review
- [Objective 3](#) Employee Wellness
- [Objective 4](#) Digital Case Status Board

County Pillar: Customer Service

 [Return to Strategic Objectives](#)

Objective 1:

By December 31, 2028, implement workflow enhancements to support projected case volume growth while maintaining consistent case completion turnaround time.

Owner:

WCMEO Leadership Team & Departmental Executive Assistant

Performance Measure:

By December 31, 2028, 90% of all reports will be finalized within 90 calendar days of the date of autopsy, aligning with national standards.

Strategy:

Conduct a baseline assessment, workload and staffing analysis and implement process improvements.

Strategy	Strategy Details	Owner	Timeframe
Baseline assessment and data collection	Establish current performance metrics, report completion data, projected workload.	ME Operations Supervisor, Dept. Executive Assistant	By end of June 2026
Workload and staffing analysis	Evaluate workload distribution across pathologists, investigators, pathology assistants and administrative staff; analyze staffing capacity relative to projected case growth and identify staffing gaps. Develop staffing model aligned with anticipated caseload demand.	ME Operations Supervisor, DME Supervisor	By end of June 2027
Workflow optimization and resources alignment	Identify bottlenecks and implement process improvements based on analysis.	MEO Leadership Team	By end of April 2028
Monitoring and continuous improvement	Establish a quarterly review process to monitor progress.	MEO Leadership Team	By end of October 2028

Learn More:

- [NAME Accreditation Checklist 2024-2029](#)

County Pillar: Quality

 [Return to Strategic Objectives](#)

Objective 2:

By September 30, 2028, conduct a comprehensive review of all departmental policies and procedures to identify gaps and ensure alignment with current best practices and professional standards, and establish a framework for annual review thereafter.

Owner:

Operations Supervisor, DME Supervisor, Departmental Executive Assistant

Performance Measure:

A comprehensive review of all departmental policies and procedures is completed, and an annual review framework is established by September 30, 2028.

Strategy:

Establish review team, framework and conduct full policy review.

Strategy	Strategy Details	Owner	Timeframe
Establish review team	Identify staff in all areas of the office to participate in review team	All MEO Staff	By end of July 2026
Establish review framework	Create a structured process for reviewing and updating policies including a timeline.	MEO P&P Review Team	By end of March 2027
Conduct policy review	Perform initial full review of all policies and update policy and procedure manual	MEO P&P Review Team & Leadership Team	By end of June 2028
Staff Communication and Training	Communicate policy and procedure updates to staff and train as needed	MEO Leadership Team	By end of September 2028

County Pillar: Team

 [Return to Strategic Objectives](#)

Objective 3:

Strengthen employee communication and satisfaction by implementing wellbeing, teambuilding, safety and training initiatives by December 31, 2028.

Owner:

WCMEO Leadership Team

Performance Measure:

75% employee participation in the Employee Engagement Survey with overall score of at least 4.6

Strategy:

Implement workgroups to develop and implement initiatives to increase employee engagement and satisfaction

Strategy	Strategy Details	Owner	Timeframe
Establish the Wellbeing, Training & Safety Committee	Establish committee with staff from each area of the office to identify & implement team building and employee recognition activities, along with training opportunities and safety initiatives	Leadership Team	End of September 2026
Create committee framework, goals and meeting schedule	Determine committee framework and objectives	Committee members and Leadership Team	End of December 2026
Facilitate Committee Meetings	Hold meetings to discuss wellbeing, training and safety initiatives	Committee members	End of July 2027
Evaluate operational workflows	Assess operation workflows to identify areas for collaboration among all staff and workgroups	Committee members and Leadership Team	End of December 2027
Quarterly 1:1 Rounding Sessions	Hold quarterly rounding sessions with employees to foster open communication and feedback	Leadership Team	End of July 2028

County Pillar: Quality

 [Return to Strategic Objectives](#)

Objective 4:

To improve efficiency, reduce redundancy and strengthen internal communication, the WCMEO will develop and implement a digital current case-status board to provide a single, real-time view of day-to-day case work operations with data leveraged from our case management system by December 31, 2027.

Owner:

Operations Supervisor and Departmental Executive Assistant

Performance Measure:

Transition to fully functioning digital case-status dashboard

Strategy:

Work with IT to build and implement dashboard

Strategy	Strategy Details	Owner	Timeframe
Identify data and other requirements	Assess and determine necessary information needed for display on dashboard	Operations Supervisor and Departmental Executive Assistant	End of December 2026
Work with IT to design dashboard	Determine data and format requirement	Operations Supervisor and Departmental Executive Assistant	End of December 2027
Create procedure and conduct staff training	Create necessary documentation following creation of dashboard and instructions for future training	Operations Supervisor and Departmental Executive Assistant	End of March 2028

Appendix A: Environmental Scan


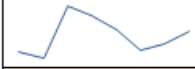
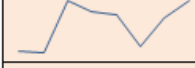
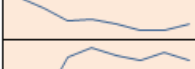

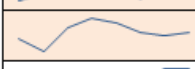






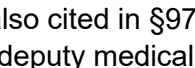
 [Return to Table of Contents](#)

Death Investigations

The WCMEO investigates deaths as guided by mandates referenced in §979.01. Investigations are conducted under the direction of our Medical Examiner and performed by our Deputy Medical Examiner staff members.

Trends

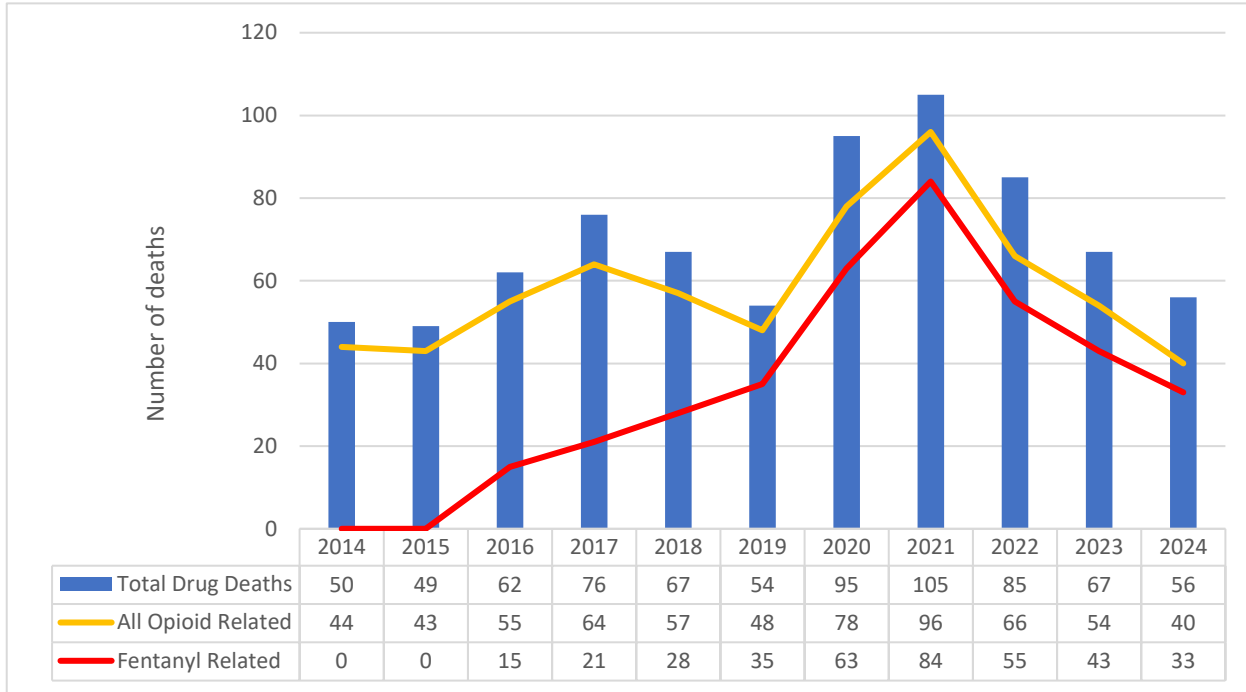
In the past three years our office has seen a brief decline followed by a subsequent rise in the number of death investigations required by our specialized staff. We have identified a few major causes affecting these numbers. There is an overall increase in the population of Waukesha County and the percentage of the population who are age 65 and older is also growing. Consequently, we have seen a significant rise in scene (non-healthcare setting) deaths that fall under our jurisdiction.

Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Trend Lines 2018 to 2025 YE
Waukesha Co. Population	401,446	405,991	406,978	410,769	411,538	412,105	413,728	424,472	
Waukesha Co. Total Deaths	3,608	3,537	4,135	4,015	3,851	3,624	3,708	3842	
Total Cases Investigated	1,452	1,440	1,695	1,639	1,620	1,469	1,607	1,691	
Scene Cases	490	427	364	378	348	319	317	350	
Scene/Phone cases*	--	--	186	231	196	172	209	174	
Phone Cases	962	1,013	1,145	1,030	1,076	978	1,081	1,167	
Autopsies	251	216	282	311	297	270	260	269	
External Examinations	205	206	246	230	274	259	282	284	
Total Examinations	456	422	528	541	571	529	542	553	
Body Transports (Waukesha Cases)	492	464	565	583	623	561	597	594	
Death Certificates Signed	460	427	543	549	568	531	551	559	
Total Cremations	2,230	2,266	2,625	2,706	2,643	2,557	2,665	2,822	
Cremation Views	1,712	1,793	2,061	2,116	2,129	2,101	2,174	2,322	

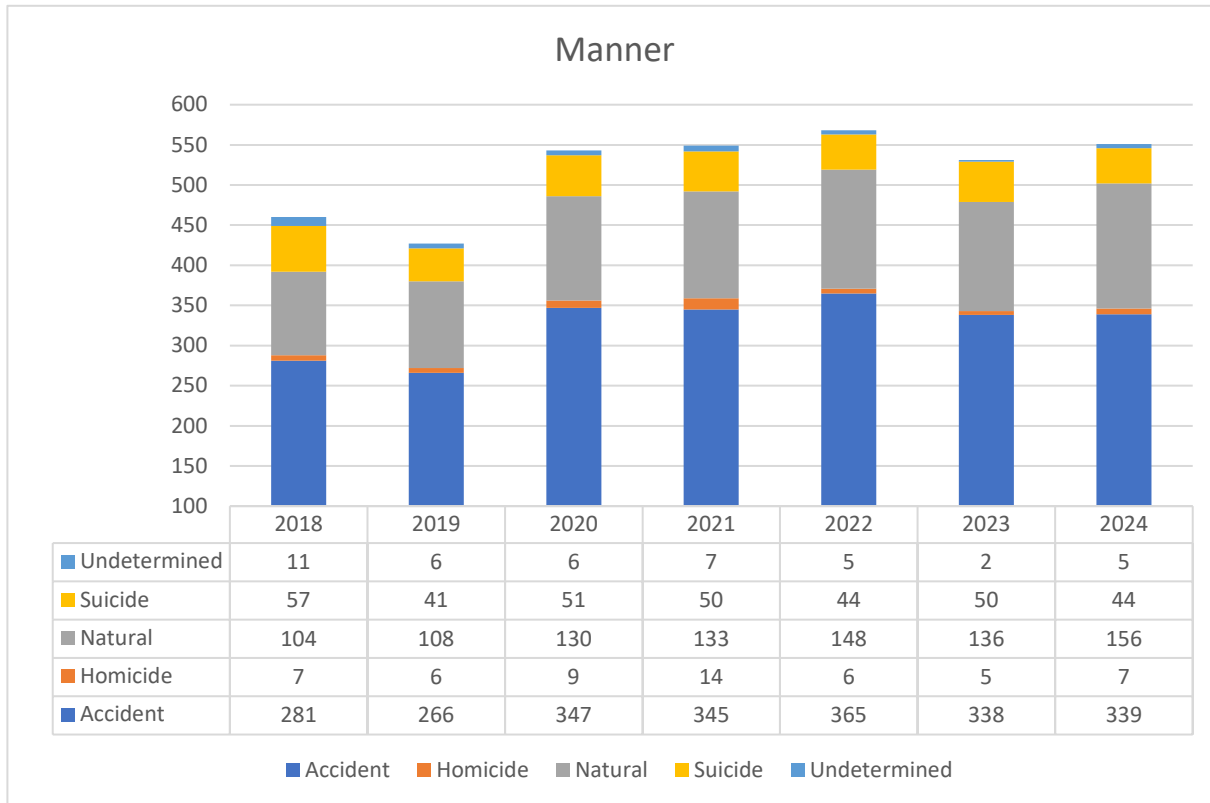
Notes: *Scene/Phone cases are home deaths with no in-person response.

A related but separate element of death investigation is cremation permitting (also cited in §979.01). The issuing of cremation permits is a multi-step process that requires both our deputy medical examiner staff and administrative staff to coordinate with our funeral home partners. Funeral homes are not only located in Waukesha County – several are also in Milwaukee and other neighboring counties in southeastern Wisconsin. We experienced a surge in the number of cremation permits issued between 2020-2022, which have leveled out somewhat in the past three years.

Deaths arising because of the opioid epidemic have greatly increased, driven primarily by the rise of fentanyl. The rise of opioid and other drug related deaths not only affect the total number of cases but also the level of investigation required.



In reviewing manner of death data between 2018 through 2024, we can see that both natural and accidental deaths are on the rise, while the other manners appear to remain steady.



External Stakeholders Analysis

Law enforcement agencies and funeral home personnel are two of our key external stakeholders. Recognizing their integral roles in our operations, we prioritized gathering their feedback through a survey as part of the groundwork for our upcoming strategic plan.

Law Enforcement Survey Overview

Because our office conducts many death investigations in close collaboration with law enforcement agencies across Waukesha County’s 37 municipalities, their insights are essential to ensuring effective, coordinated, and high-quality service.

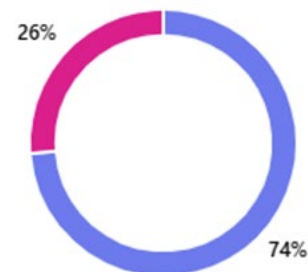
To gather this input, we distributed an anonymous survey to all 24 law enforcement agencies in Waukesha County. We received 42 responses, offering both quantitative feedback and qualitative insights.

Survey Highlights

- **Communication Quality:**
 - 74% *strongly agree* and 26% *agree* that Medical Examiner staff communicate clearly and are understandable, pleasant and courteous.

1. Medical Examiner staff communicates in a way that is clear and understandable, pleasant and courteous

● Strongly Agree	31
● Agree	11
● Neutral	0
● Disagree	0
● Strongly Disagree	0



- **Scene Investigation Efficiency:**
 - 71% *strongly agree* and 29% *agree* that death scene investigations are performed efficiently.

Positive Feedback: What’s Working Well

Open-ended responses emphasized the professionalism and strong working relationships our office has established with law enforcement. Some responses included:

- “Great communication and partnerships both at the scene and during autopsy.”
- “Excellent follow-up communication with LE agencies and officers regarding findings and cause of death.”
- “All staff has been professional and courteous in our interactions.”
- “Continue with the excellent service you already provide.”

Opportunities for Improvement

Survey respondents also offered constructive suggestions to enhance service delivery.

These included:

- **Body Removal Process:**
 - Concerns about law enforcement personnel being asked to assist with body removal.
 - A recommendation to consider using powered or more efficient mortuary cots to improve the process.
- **Timeliness of Reports and Communication:**
 - Requests for prioritizing reports in cases where criminal charges are pending.
 - A suggestion to issue cause of death letters for all cases, not just on request, to ensure consistent communication.
- **Email Communication:**
 - Challenges with accessing encrypted emails were noted.
 - A recommendation to streamline or simplify communication for routine, non-sensitive matters.

Funeral Home Survey Overview

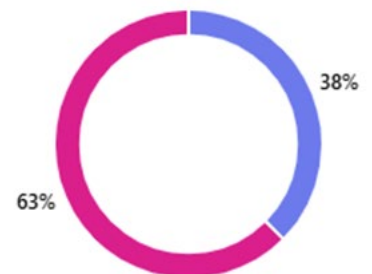
Funeral homes represent another key stakeholder group with whom we interact regularly. To better understand their experiences and identify areas for improvement, we distributed a survey to 70 funeral homes across Waukesha County and neighboring counties. We received 8 anonymous responses

Survey Highlights

- **Staff Availability:**
 - 63% *strongly agree* and 38% *agree* that Medical Examiner staff is available in a timely manner during and outside of normal business hours.

3. Medical Examiner staff is available in a timely manner during and outside of normal business hours

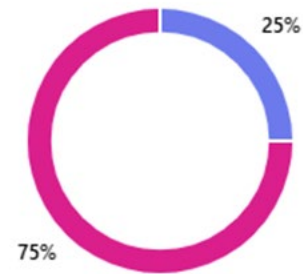
● Strongly Agree	3
● Agree	5
● Neutral	0
● Disagree	0
● Strongly Disagree	0



- **Communication Quality:**
 - 75% *strongly agree* and 25% *agree* that Medical Examiner staff communication is pleasant and courteous.

2. Medical Examiner staff communication is pleasant and courteous

● Strongly Agree	2
● Agree	6
● Neutral	0
● Disagree	0
● Strongly Disagree	0



Positive Feedback: What’s Working Well

Respondents highlighted strengths in communication and the cremation viewing process, noting:

- “Quick viewing process, good communication.”
- “Cremation views sometimes same day submitted, coming with permit in hand when possible!”

Opportunities for Improvement

- **Cremation Permit Workflow**
 - Some confusion was reported regarding the process for requesting cremation permits or cremation view requests, indicating a need for clearer guidance and streamlined procedures.
- **Pending Status and Death Certificate Finalization:**
 - Delays in signing death certificates as “pending” slow the ability of funeral homes to request official death certificates on behalf of families.
 - Funeral homes expressed that receiving pending results to finalize death certificates takes longer than desired, impacting family services.

Summary

The feedback from both law enforcement and funeral home stakeholders affirms the Medical Examiner’s Office’s strong reputation for professionalism, communication, and collaboration. At the same time, the insights highlight meaningful opportunities for operational improvements, especially in areas of timeliness, process efficiency, and communication methods. These findings will directly inform the development of strategic priorities and initiatives in the upcoming planning cycle.

Workforce- Internal Analysis

We held internal staff focus groups to include team members from each work area. Feedback from these sessions revealed key themes centered on internal communication, training and professional development, and the efficiency of systems and workflows.

Over the past year, our office has experienced significant organizational changes due to staff retirement, internal promotions, and departures due to promotional opportunities at other county medical examiner offices. This has necessitated the recruitment of new Deputy Medical Examiner Death Investigators to meet operational demands. A recurring theme in the focus groups was the need to expand staffing levels in response to increasing case volume and workload.

These discussions underscored the importance of maintaining strong employee compensation, engagement, development opportunities, and overall wellbeing as essential factors in attracting and retaining high-quality employees. Additionally, we are emphasizing the need to collect and analyze workforce data to ensure staffing levels remain aligned with workload demands and industry standards.

The Medical Examiner’s Office has always prioritized staff training to assure proficiency and continued education in the forensic/medical fields. We are supporting the investigative staff in achieving and maintaining accreditation by the American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators (ABMDI). We are additionally encouraging non-technical staff development training to improve knowledge of skills in areas of customer service, supervision and team building.

In reviewing and revising our policies and procedures, we are looking to best practices, guidelines, and standards that have been developed and supported by forensic professional societies such as the American Academy of Forensic Sciences (AAFS), National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME) and the American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators (ABMDI).

Economic

Due to legislation revolving around the Wisconsin Funeral and Cemetery Aid Program (WFCAP), Coroner and Medical Examiner offices are limited to revenue increases no higher than the prior year consumer price index (CPI) rate. Additionally, we are required to write off fees for services rendered to decedents who qualify for the WFCAP program. These mandates have and continue to impact our revenue capabilities.

Write Offs	2021	2022	2023	2024
Cremation Permit	80	71	63	52
Death Certificate	15	19	16	13
Transport	-	20	15	16

In the past few years our office has also seen a rise in the number of Indigent or unclaimed decedents. These situations require our office to bear the responsibility of arranging and funding final arrangements to ensure these decedents are respectfully laid to rest.

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025 YE estimate
ME funded final disposition	3	0	2	3	8	3	1	4

Technology

As a conclusion to our previous Environmental Scan (Fall 2022), our office successfully completed the development and implementation of our web-based case management system in 2023 (MED). The system was a positive and process-efficient technological advancement for our office, with marked improvement of internal office-wide information sharing and access.

In conjunction with the Medical Examiner remodel project, we will be acquiring a CT scanner. This has become a standard adjunct imaging tool for forensic death investigation. This imaging can provide rapid and detailed non-invasive information to guide, supplement and document autopsy procedures. In some cases, it may be used in lieu of autopsy, where there are objections or restrictions.

Feedback provided in the survey we sent out to our law enforcement partners suggested the benefits of hydraulic cots for decedent removals from residences, facilities, etc. This was also reflected in comments made during our internal staff focus groups. The recommendations for hydraulic cots stemmed primarily from a safety point of view, not only for our investigators on scene, but for any law enforcement partners who aided removals. In 2026, we plan to look at budgeting opportunities for potentially introducing more effective, weight-bearing cots.

Feedback: Cot Improvement (Law Enforcement Survey)

- “There has got to be more efficient and effective cots and manners to get it [cot with decedent] into the vehicle.”

The Medical Examiner's Office strives for improved quality of death investigations by utilizing available finances for innovation opportunities and technological advancements that are safer and more cost-efficient long term.