

Office of the Coroner Skagit County



Hayley L. Thompson, D-ABMDI
Coroner
2020 Annual Report

The Skagit County Coroner's Office is an independent agency who serves the residents of Skagit County by investigating the facts and circumstances concerning the deaths of those who have died suddenly, violently, or unexpectedly while in apparent good health within the geographic boundaries of the county. The goal of this office is to serve the citizens of Skagit County with the highest degree of compassion, professionalism, and integrity regarding those who have died within Skagit County.

The Skagit County Coroner's Office works diligently to assure our daily work is directed at assisting the families who survive the loss of a loved one.

While our work is centered about sudden, violent and traumatic death situations, the driving mission of our Office is centered about service to the living family and friends who are the victims of a tragic loss. Service directed at understanding the truth about how and why their loved one died; and, Service directed at revealing and enacting any means of preventing future, similar deaths with our County.

To achieve this mission, the Skagit County Coroner's Office will:

- * Treat decedents and their personal effects with dignity and respect and without discrimination.
- * Conduct investigations and autopsies professionally, scientifically, and conscientiously.
- * Provide honest information to family members compassionately and courteously, with sensitivity to cultural differences.
- * Complete reports expeditiously with regard for the concerns of family members, the criminal justice system, and public health and safety.
- * Research and implement new procedures to better investigate death scenes.
- * Promote and maintain adequate staffing levels in order to provide all mandated services.
- * Promote and maintain an emotionally and physically healthy and safe working environment for all Coroner staff.
- * Promote and provide adequate equipment, training, and support to all Coroner staff.
- * Provide assistance, training, and education to all agencies requesting our services.
- * Provide a statistical annual report of deaths within the county.
- * Prepare and plan for mass casualty incidents.
- * Provide for disposition of unclaimed, indigent citizens in accordance with RCW 36.39.030.
- * Strive to increase proficiency and professionalism of all Coroner staff members.

The Skagit County Coroner's Office has an important public health role in bringing causes and manners of deaths to the attention of the public and many involved agencies. The Coroner's Office works with community partners to adopt a proactive approach to reducing preventable deaths such as drug-related deaths as well as suicides.

Introduction

A Description of Skagit County and its Population

Skagit County encompasses an area over 1,920 square miles which consists of coastal, agricultural and mountain areas. Towns include: Mount Vernon, Burlington, Anacortes, Guemes Island, La Conner, Bow, Alger, Sedro Woolley, Lyman, Hamilton, Concrete, Rockport, and Marblemount. There are also three Native American Tribes in the county: Swinomish Tribe, Upper Skagit Tribe, and Sauk Suiattle Tribe.

Skagit County is home to approximately 129,205 people (per the United States 2019 Census). This was a 10.5% increase in growth since April 2010. Skagit County's population is made up of 74.1% Caucasian, 18.9% Hispanic or Latino, 2.7% American Indian/Alaska Native, 2.3% Asian, 1.1% African American, 0.4% Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander, and 3.2% identifying with two or more races (United States 2019 Census).

As of July 2019 (US 2019 Census), Skagit County had 21.5% of the population under the age of 18. And 21.5% of the population was 65 years and over.

Skagit County has three hospitals:

- * Skagit Valley Hospital (137 bed) level III Trauma Center. This hospital offers a full range of services including surgical services, renal dialysis, and advanced diagnostics. The hospital also offers advanced heart and vascular care.
- * Peacehealth United General Hospital located in Sedro Woolley, WA is a 25 bed critical access hospital serving those in Burlington, Sedro-Woolley, Bayview, Samish Island, Concrete, Marblemount, Clear Lake, and areas of Mount Vernon.
- * Island Hospital in Anacortes WA is a level III trauma center and has 43 beds.

Jurisdiction and State Statutes

Jurisdiction is assumed only on deaths that occur within the geographical boundaries of the county. This is regardless of whether the decedent is a resident of the county. Those Skagit County residents who die in another county do not fall under the jurisdiction of the Skagit County Coroner.

The Skagit County Coroner's Office assumes jurisdiction on all sudden, violent, traumatic, or unexpected deaths that occur within Skagit County. This includes deaths from apparent "natural diseases", but only when the individual had no recent physician of record or documented history of an existing medical condition that could credibly have caused the sudden death. Under these circumstances, it becomes the Coroner's responsibility to determine how and why a person died. Those who die of natural causes in a hospital, care facility, or under hospice care are not required by law to be reported to this office.

In accordance with the Revised Code of Washington (RCW 68.50), the following categories of deaths fall under the Coroner's jurisdiction:

- * Sudden death of an apparent healthy person with no known or significant medical history
- * Suspected natural deaths in which there is no current physician to certify the death
- * Deaths in which there are abuse or neglect concerns (Adult Protective Services or Child Protective Services involvement)
- * Violent or suspicious circumstances
- * 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 an injury or fracture that either was directly or contributory to decline to death, this includes those injuries that occurred years earlier.
- * Deaths due to an undiagnosed or possible contagious disease that may be a public health hazard
- * Indigent or unclaimed bodies

Only the Coroner can certify a death that is not considered to be natural (accident, suicide, homicide, or undetermined).

The role of the Coroner in such deaths is to investigate the facts and circumstances concerning the death for the purpose of determining the cause and manner of death and whether there is sufficient reason for the Coroner to believe that the death may have resulted from a criminal act or criminal neglect of a person other than the deceased. If the investigation does not provide the necessary information to make this determination, then the Coroner may perform an autopsy.

As part of the death investigation, the Coroner shall determine the identity of the deceased and notify the next of kin of the death. Per standards and office policy, a scientific identification will be done on all homicides as well as whenever a visual identification is not able to be performed or is not confirmatory. Current acceptable methods of scientific identification include: fingerprint comparison, dental comparison, imaging comparison, or DNA comparison.

Coroner's Office Staff and Facilities

The scene, the examination of the body (external examination or internal examination), along with researching the history/background of the decedent all work together to provide the most accurate cause and manner of death. This can only be accomplished with a devoted team of investigators.

In 2020, the Coroner's Office staff included the Coroner, (1) full time Chief Deputy Coroner, (6) on-call part-time deputy coroners, and (1) reserve deputy. The office also had 3-4 interns to assist from time to time. The Coroner or Chief Deputy Coroner, along with an on-call deputy coroner are on duty 24/7/365. The Coroner's Office is contracted with (2) board certified forensic pathologists.

Staff:

Hayley Thompson, D-ABMDI	Coroner
Deborah Hollis, D-ABMDI	Chief Deputy Coroner
Jacquelyn Scheer, D-ABMDI	Part-time Deputy Coroner
Brittanna Flickinger, D-ABMDI	Part-time Deputy Coroner
Ethan Greggerson, D-ABMDI	Part-time Deputy Coroner
Julia Welch	Part-time Deputy Coroner
Dylan Hartwig	Part-time Deputy Coroner
Uziel Gordillo	Part-time Deputy Coroner
Daniel Garcia, D-ABDMI	Reserve Part-Time Deputy Coroner

The office utilizes (2) county vehicles: 2016 Ford Transit Van and 2018 Chevrolet Suburban that can be used in cases where terrain is difficult.

The administrative office is located at 1700 Continental Place in Mount Vernon, WA. The Skagit County Morgue and autopsy suite are located approximately 2 miles away at the Skagit Valley Hospital. This space is shared with the hospital. Morgue capacity is 6 and is routinely at capacity.

The Skagit County Coroner's Office staff are involved in a variety of activities in order to fulfill the required state statutes involving this office. These include responding to and investigating various death scenes, performing postmortem examinations, confirming identification, certifying the cause and manner of death, and providing information and assistance to families. Deputy Coroner's as well as the Coroner and Chief Deputy Coroner work to communicate directly with the families, which includes reviewing the findings and answering the many questions that accompany a sudden or traumatic loss of life.

In all cases, the identification and establishing and locating next-of-kin is necessary. In certain cases, the identification process can be extensive requiring outside assistance from an odontologist, pathologist, or out of state lab to analyze DNA. Finding the next of kin can be complicated as some individuals may have died leaving no next of kin or next of kin cannot be located. The Skagit County Coroner's Office ensures that all leads regarding next of kin are exhausted before establishing the case as indigent. This can be very time consuming but ultimately rewarding.

Occasionally there are individuals who pass away in Skagit County where the next of kin cannot be located or the next of kin declines responsibility for the decedent. In these situations, the Coroner's Office takes possession of the decedent and arranges for a cremation. The cremains of unclaimed individuals are kept by the Coroner's Office for a minimum of one year, after which the cremains are interred in a crypt donated to the county unless a family member or interested party come forward to claim the cremains. Claiming cremains after the County has taken responsibility for disposition requires a fee of \$600 in order to compensate the county for the cost of the cremation. Those unclaimed cremains who are veterans are released and transported down to the Tahoma National Cemetery where they are honored and interred.

All autopsies are performed by a contracted board certified forensic pathologist at the direction of the Coroner. These pathologists work under the standards set forth by the International Association of Coroners and Medical Examiners (IACME). If an autopsy is required in order to determine the cause and manner of death, then various body fluids (blood and vitreous), tissues for microscopic and toxicological analysis will be taken in addition to the anatomical examination. Photographs are taken during autopsy and are essential to the case and the pathologist. Autopsy reports and related data from individual investigations are provided to law enforcement agencies, prosecuting attorneys, and other agencies such as Occupational Safety and Health Administration, Federal Aviation Administration, National Transportation Safety Board, Board of Consumer Product Safety, and Labor and Industries if they are involved in the case.

The Coroner provides information to local law enforcement and medical personnel as well as various community groups on a regular basis regarding the role and function of the Coroner's Office. In addition, the Coroner's Office collects and analyzes data on various cases to assist the community with prevention. Media releases regarding cases of interest as well as up-to-date statistics are posted on the Coroner's website.

Strategic Goals of the Coroner's Office

The Skagit County Coroner's Office was awarded a \$250,000 grant through the National Institute of Justice in late September of 2020. The grant money as well as additional funds from the County will be used towards the improvement of the Skagit County Coroner's Office to include a modernized morgue and autopsy suite in the same building as the current administrative office. This project is to be completed by September of 2022 and requires the Coroner's Office to apply and achieve accreditation through the International Association of Coroners and Medical Examiners (IACME) by 2022. The Skagit County Coroner's Office has identified the following goals and objectives necessary for the Coroner's office to continue to provide timely and legally defensible death investigations:

- * All part-time on-call staff will be certified with the American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators (ABMDI) by 2022.
- * Shifts will be staffed to handle the daily caseload with little to no effect on the devised budget.
- * 100% of the decedents under the Coroner's jurisdiction will be stored in a modern refrigerated County Morgue by 2022.
- * Post-mortem examinations will take place in a well-ventilated and sterile autopsy suite by 2022.
- * Achieve accreditation with the International Association of Coroner and Medical Examiner's (IACME) by 2022.
- * Improve communication by providing monthly up-to-date death statistics on the Coroners website every month.
- * Annual report to be completed and displayed on the Coroners website before the end of June each year.
- * Expand and continue to provide communication throughout the community regarding the role and functions of the Coroner's Office.

Death Investigations- An Overview

Death Investigations are categorized into 2 different categories: non-jurisdictional and jurisdictional. Non-jurisdictional cases are natural deaths that are reported to the Coroner’s Office when the death is unattended (excludes hospital, care facilities, and in-home hospice), but the decedent is under the care of a physician who has knowledge and awareness of the decedent’s health 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.

Table 1. 2020 Statistical Summary

Reported Cases	465
Non-jurisdictional Cases	183
Jurisdictional Cases	282
Natural Causes	297
Accidental	132
Suicide	21
Homicide	2
Undetermined	4
Skeletal Remains	3
Full Autopsies	75
Partial Autopsies	2
External Examination Only	55
Toxicological Tests Performed	138
Scene Responses	125
Unidentified Bodies	0
Exhumations	0

2020 CERTIFIED MANNER OF DEATH BY CORONER

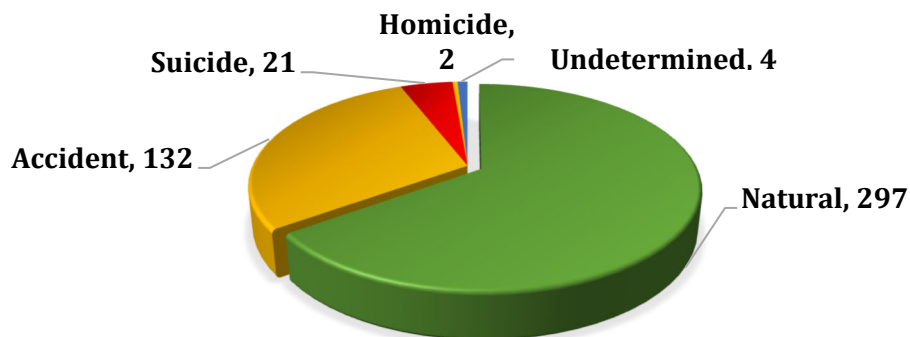


Figure 1. 2020 Skagit County Manner of Death

For the year 2020, there were 1,324 deaths in Skagit County. This was an increase from the year 2019 (1,260 deaths) as well as the year 2018 (1,237 deaths). The Skagit County Coroner's Office conducted 465 death investigations and assumed jurisdiction on 282 cases. The cause and manner of death as well as the decisions for non-jurisdictional and jurisdictional cases are often a matter of judgment and strict comparisons across years are not valid. In review of deaths over the past 3 years (2018-2020), there has been a gradual increase in the number of death investigations conducted by the Coroner's Office. In addition, there was a marked increase in the number of Coroner cases, scene responses, and autopsies performed in 2020 as illustrated in Figure 2. 2020 Skagit County Reported Cases and Coroner Involvement 2018-2020.

In the year 2020, there were 134 post-mortem examinations conducted by the Coroner's Office. Of these 134 examinations, 77 required an autopsy to confirm or determine the cause and manner of death and 57 cases required an external examination of the body for documentation purposes. Toxicological testing was performed on all of these cases unless no samples could be obtained due to the circumstances of the case or the preservation of the decedent. There was a notable increase (33%) in the number of full and partial autopsies conducted in 2020 compared to previous years (55 autopsies in 2019 and 77 autopsies in 2020). Possible explanation of this increase can be attributed to the types of deaths for 2020 (increase in drug overdoses and unexplained deaths). Additionally, the Coroner's Office made adjustments in the policies and procedures regarding guidelines for autopsy to coincide with the standards set forth by the International Association of Coroners and Medical Examiners (IACME). This change resulted in performing autopsies on cases that would have undergone an external examination in the past.

Reported Cases and Coroner Involvement 2018-2020

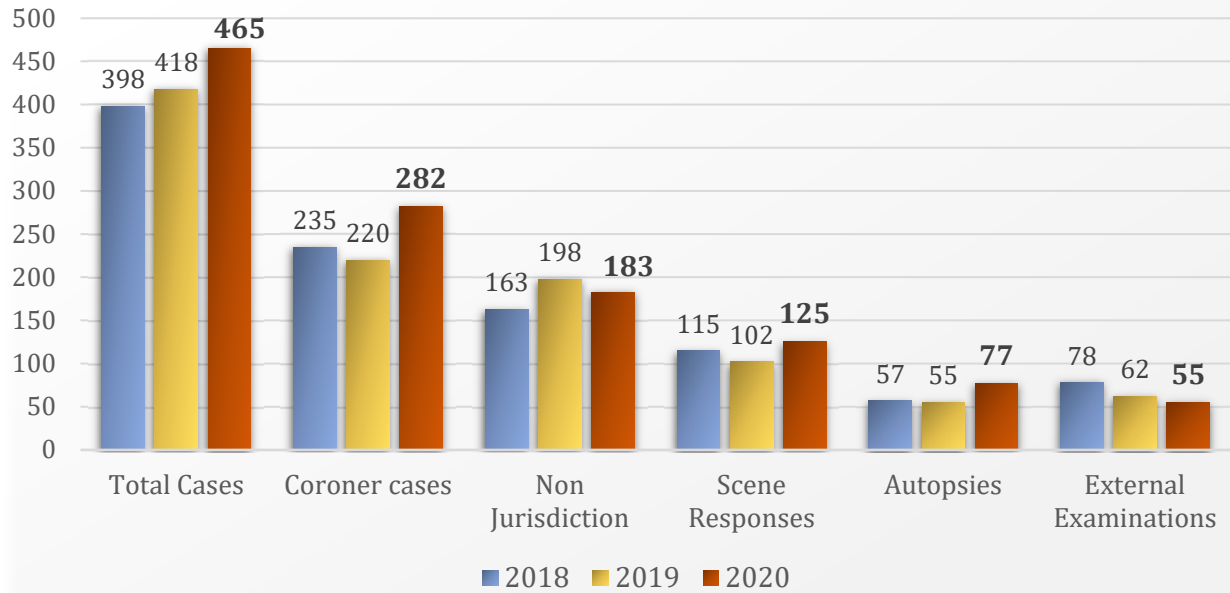


Figure 2. Skagit County Coroner Reported Cases and Coroner Involvement 2018-2020

2020 Coroner Casework by Quarter

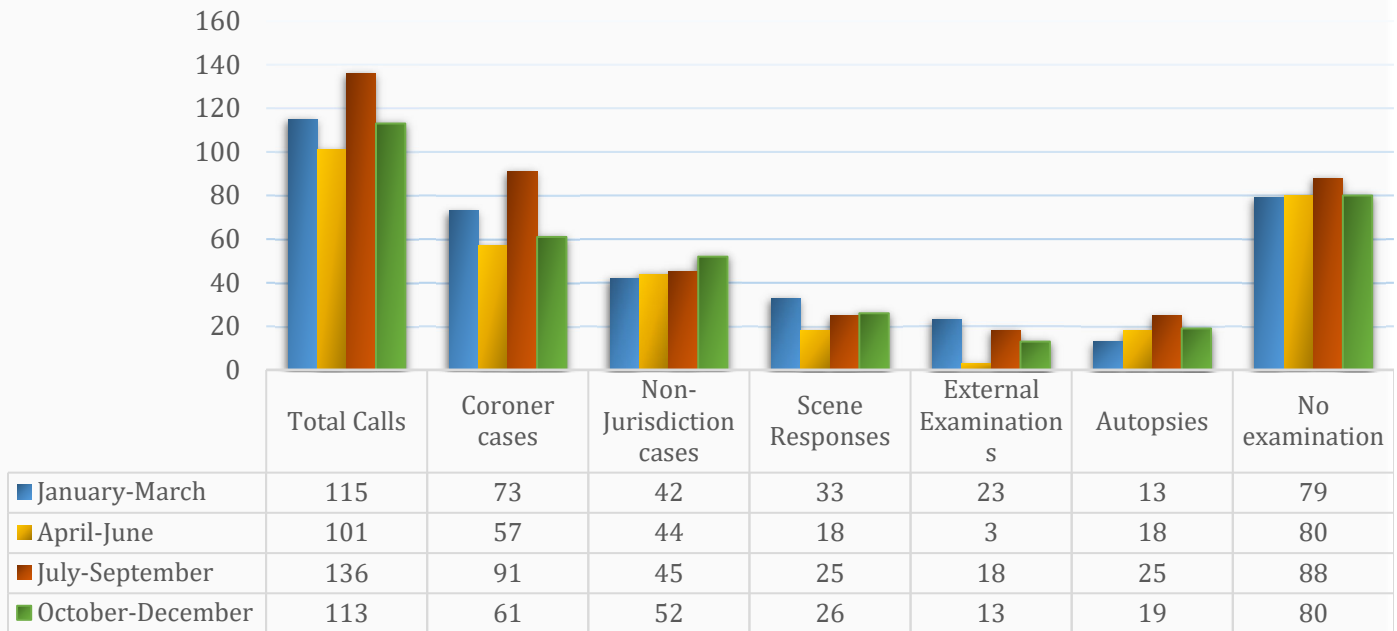


Figure 3. 2020 Skagit County Coroner Quarterly Casework

2020 Manner of Death by Age Group

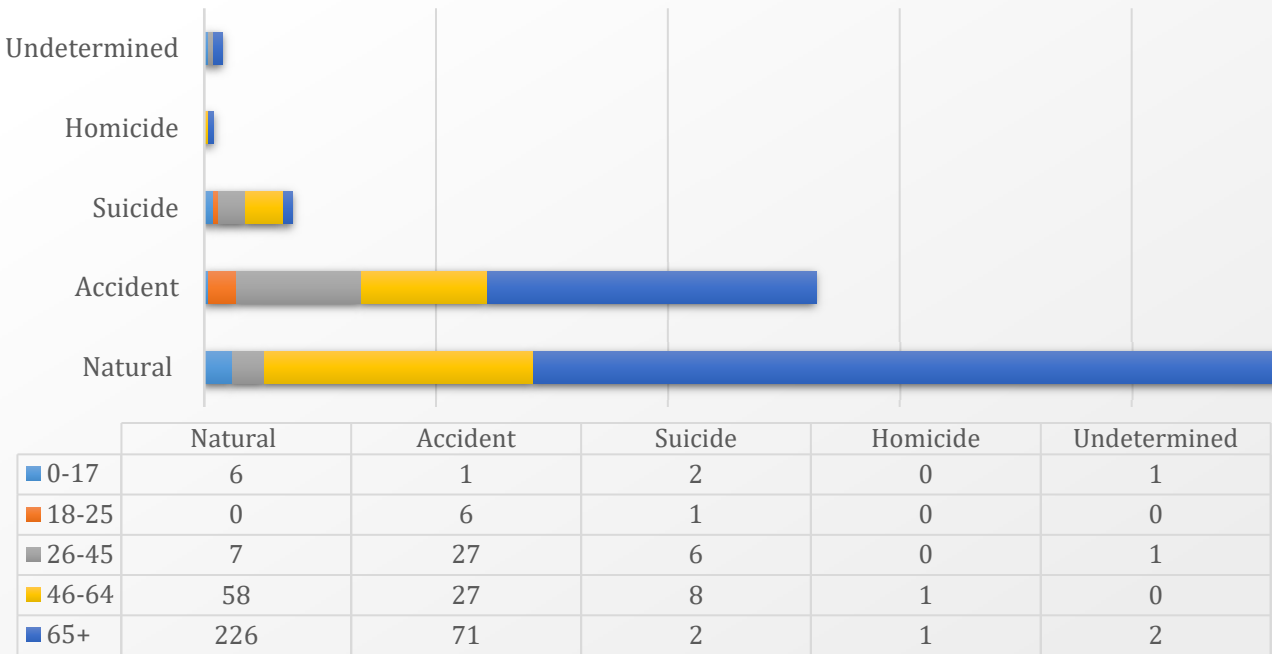


Figure 4. 2020 Skagit County Manner of Death by Age Group

Manner of Death: Natural

The Coroner may certify natural deaths under many circumstances. These include a sudden and unexpected death in an apparently healthy individual, when there is no physician able or willing to certify the death, when there is no next of kin, or when there are suspicious circumstances surrounding the death.

In 2020, there were 297 natural deaths investigated by the Coroner’s Office accounting for 63% of the total deaths reported to the Coroner’s Office. A total of 43 cases (14%) were certified by the Coroner’s office. Of these 43 deaths, the primary cause of death was cardiac-related (25/43, 58%) followed by pulmonary (4/43), and chronic alcoholism (4/43). One of these deaths was an infant who died as a result of problems related to Trisomy 21 Mosaicism and associated congenital anomalies. With regards to the types of examination performed on these cases, 14 underwent an autopsy with toxicological analysis, 19 had an external examination as well as toxicological analysis, and the remaining 10 cases were certified through review of medical records.

2020 Natural Deaths Investigated

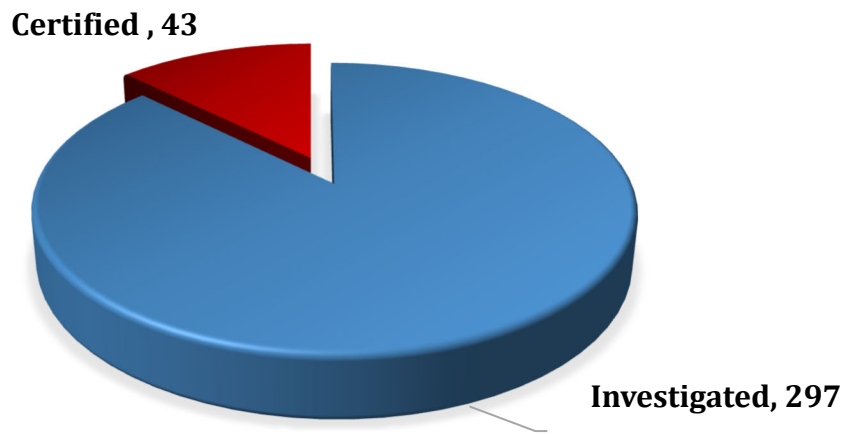


Figure 5. 2020 Skagit County Certified Natural Causes of Death

2020 Coroner Involvement on Natural Deaths Investigated

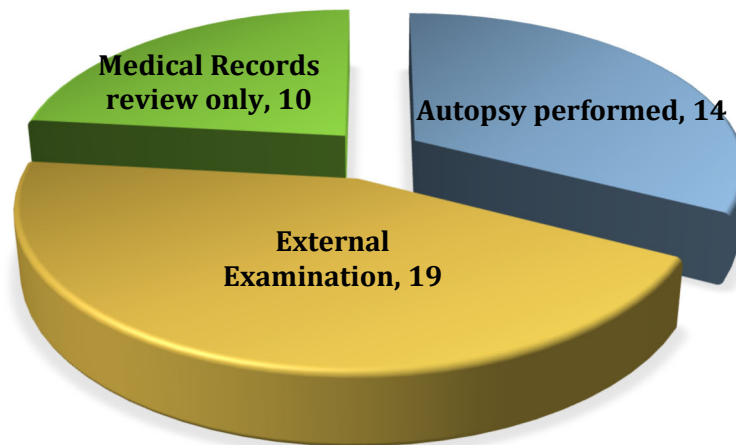


Figure 6. 2020 Skagit County Coroner Involvement on Reported Natural Deaths

The Skagit County Coroner’s Office provides reports on all violent deaths to the Washington State Violent Death Reporting System. This includes all deaths where the manner of death was determined to be a homicide, accident, or suicide. Accidents are the second most common manner of death after natural deaths for Skagit County. Accidental deaths include all motor vehicle accidents, falls, industrial accidents, drownings, and drug overdoses.

Manner of Death: Accident

The Coroner certified 132 deaths as accidental in 2020 accounting for 28% of the total deaths reported to the Coroner’s Office (46% of jurisdiction assumed cases). Of these 132 accidental deaths, 30% were due to drug overdose (40/132). Falls resulting in trauma including those deaths in which elderly patients had fallen resulting in trauma accounted for 46% of accidental deaths (62/132). Motor vehicle accidents made up 12% of accidental deaths (16/132). In 2020, there were 3 cases in which were caused by choking on food, 2 drowning accidents, and 4 deaths related to fire/burns. Accidents included in the *other* category were: (2) crushed/pinned accidents, (2) hypothermia/exposure accidents, and (1) firearm related accident. Since all accidental deaths are theoretically preventable, each such death is investigated for public health purposes.

2020 Accidental Types of Death = 131

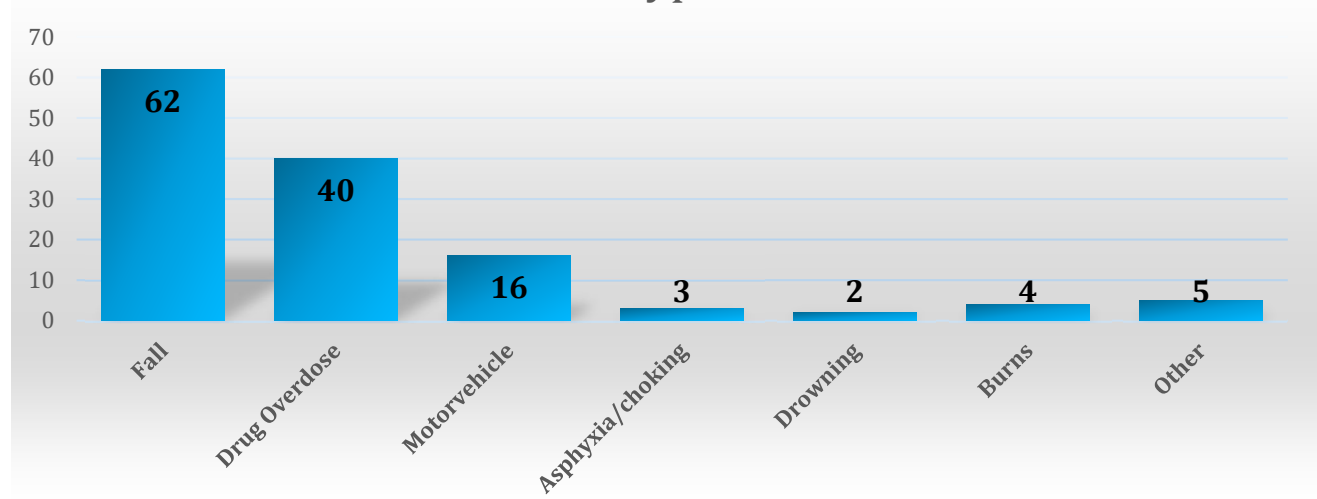


Figure 7. 2020 Skagit County Accidental Deaths
 *Falls include elderly individuals who died from injuries related to falling

2020 Accidental Deaths by Age Group

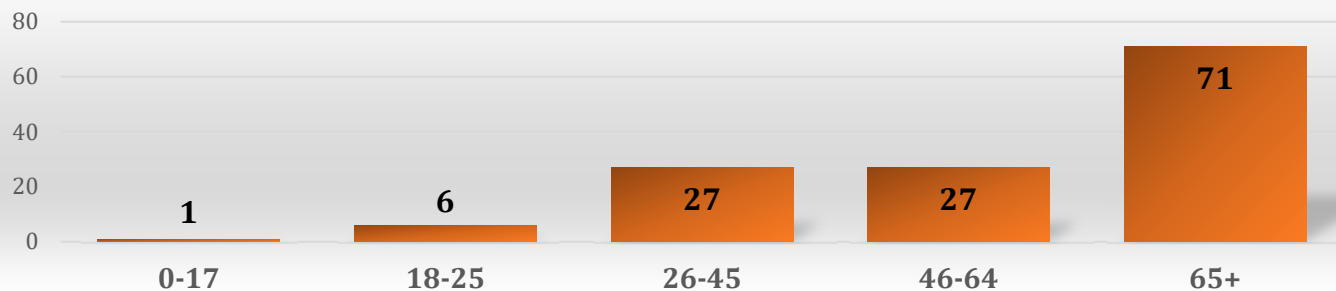


Figure 8. 2020 Skagit County Accidental Deaths by Age Group

Drug Overdose

Drug overdose deaths are extensively investigated. It is important to note that a drug overdose is a diagnosis of exclusion requiring an autopsy to be performed on those who have little to no medical history in order to rule out other causes of death.

The number of drug overdoses classified as accidental in Skagit County for 2020 was 40. This was the second largest group of accidental deaths. The most common drugs seen in Skagit County are heroin, methamphetamine, and fentanyl. Expanded forensic toxicology testing was performed on all suspected drug overdose deaths, allowing confirmation of the cause of death and the identification of both illicit and prescription drug abuse trends in Skagit County.

In 2017, Skagit County had its first fentanyl-related drug death. In 2018, 9 deaths were certified by the Coroner's Office as fentanyl-related drug overdoses. Due to a change in community outreach and support regarding substance abuse, the number of drug overdoses decreased from 24 in 2018 to 18 in 2019. Only 3 of these drug overdoses were fentanyl-related. Unfortunately, the number of overdose deaths involving fentanyl for 2020 rose again to 10 cases (10/40, 25%). Of these 10 cases, 5 involved solely fentanyl and in the other 5 cases, fentanyl was combined with one or more other drugs. In 2020, 13 deaths were certified as methamphetamine overdoses. Only 2 cases involved heroin only. Seventeen (17/40, 42%) deaths were certified as mixed drug intoxication involving more than 1 drug. For example, 5 out of the 40 deaths were certified as methamphetamine and heroin intoxication. Demographic analysis showed males (28/40, 70% of cases) and Caucasians (34/40, 85% of cases) to be mostly represented in drug overdose death statistics in Skagit County. The age range for overdose deaths was 22-69 years with age groups 18-25 (18 cases) and 26-45 (18 cases) having the highest number of deaths (36/40, 90%).

The Skagit County Coroner's Office takes an active role in sharing its data and insights regarding overdose deaths with the county as well as with the Skagit County Opioid Workshop Leadership Team established in July 2016.

Accidental Drug Overdoses by Year 2017-2020

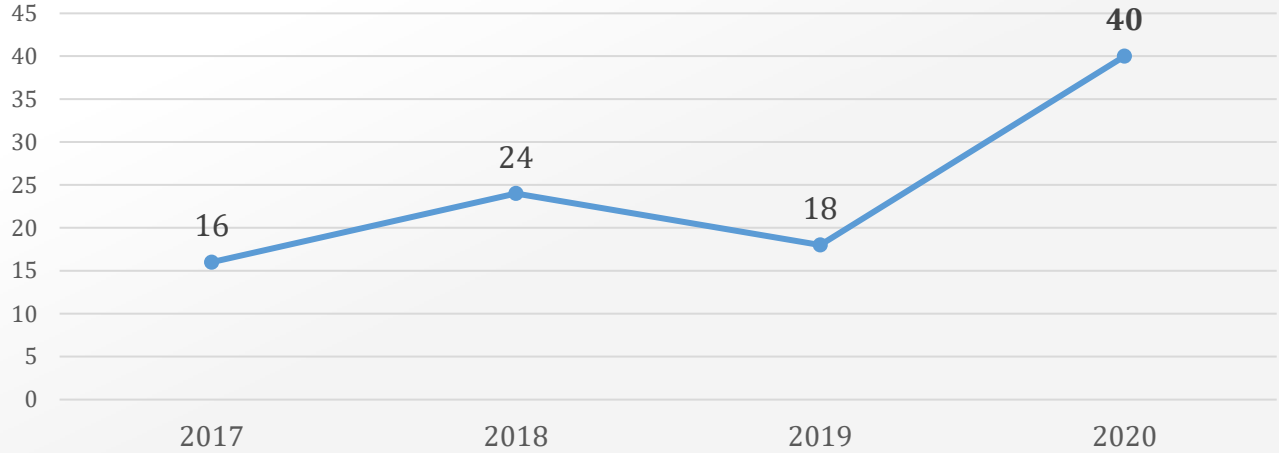


Figure 9. 2017-2020 Skagit County Total Accidental Overdose Deaths

Accidental Drug Overdose Deaths by Quarter 2017-2020

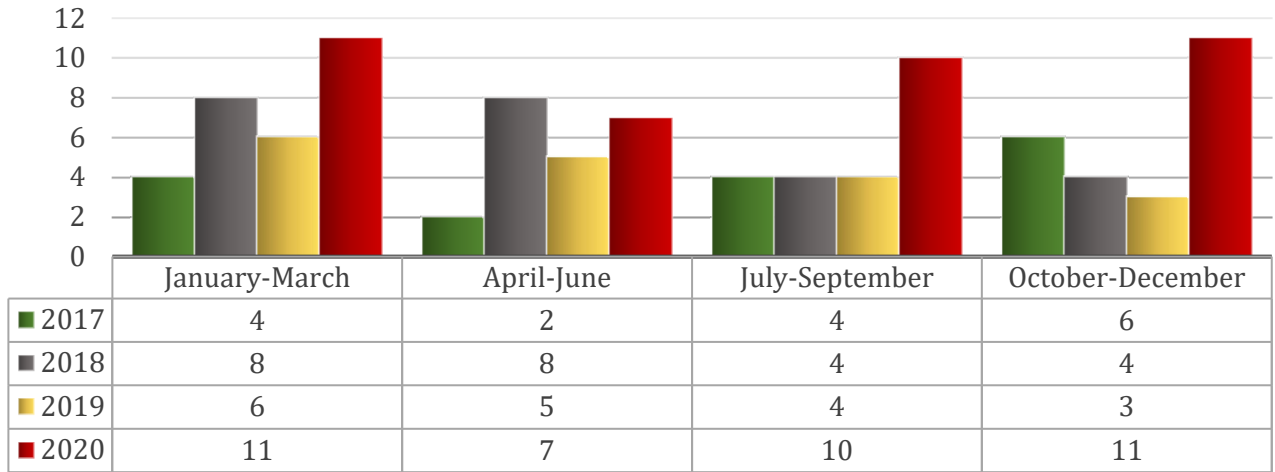


Figure 10. 2017-2020 Skagit County Overdose Death by Quarter

Drug Overdose Deaths by Drugs Present 2017-2020

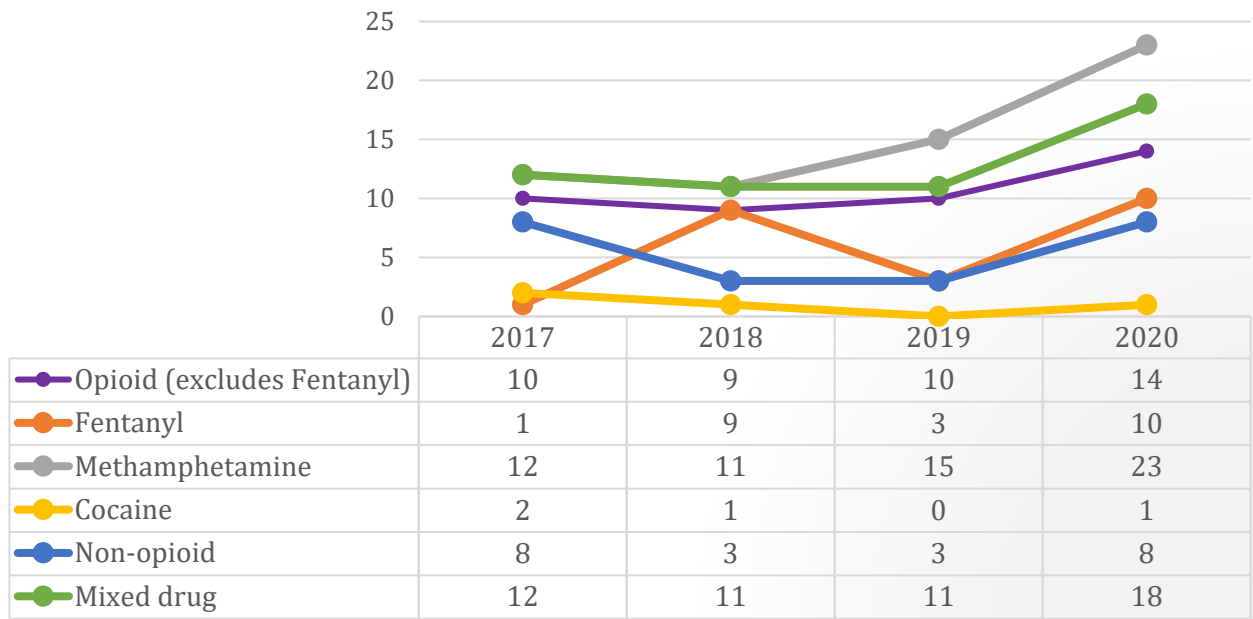


Figure 11. 2017-2019 Skagit County Overdose by Drugs Present

2017-2020 Overdose Deaths by City

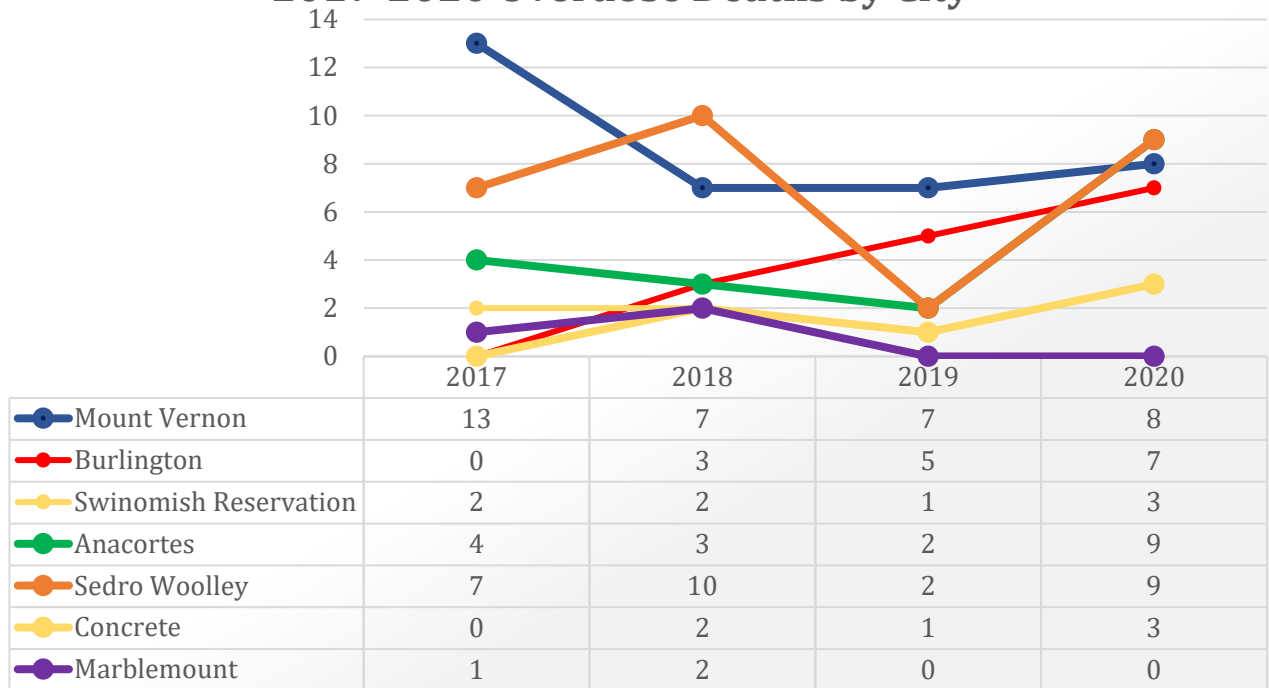


Figure 12. 2017-2019 Skagit County Overdose Death by City

Accidental Drug Overdose by Gender 2017-2020

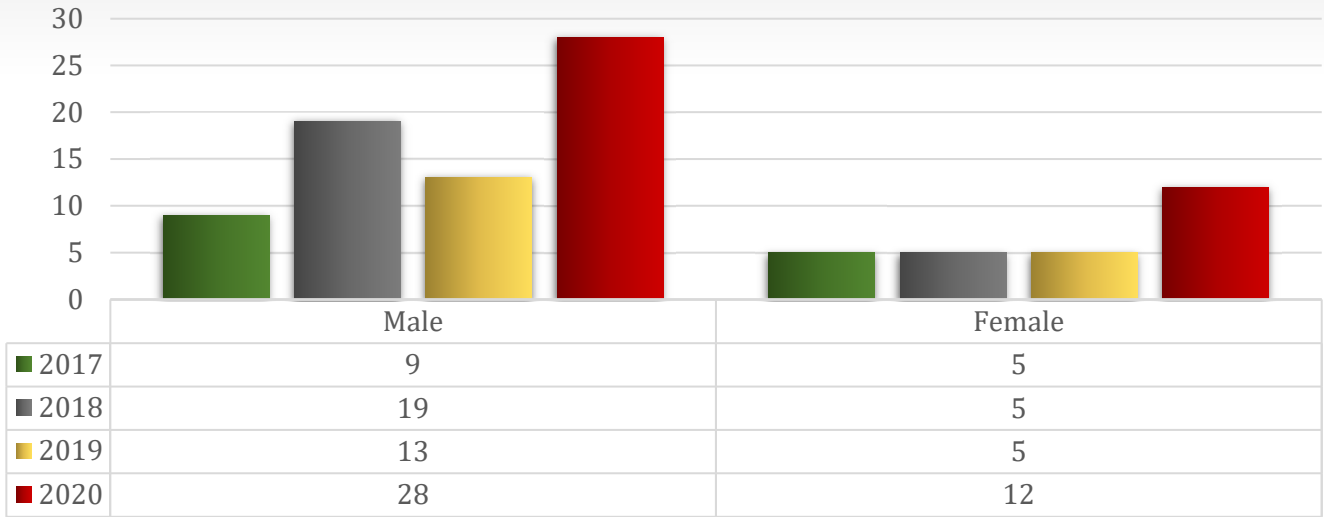


Figure 13. 2017-2020 Skagit County Overdose Deaths by Gender

Accidental Drug Overdose Deaths by Age Group 2017-2020

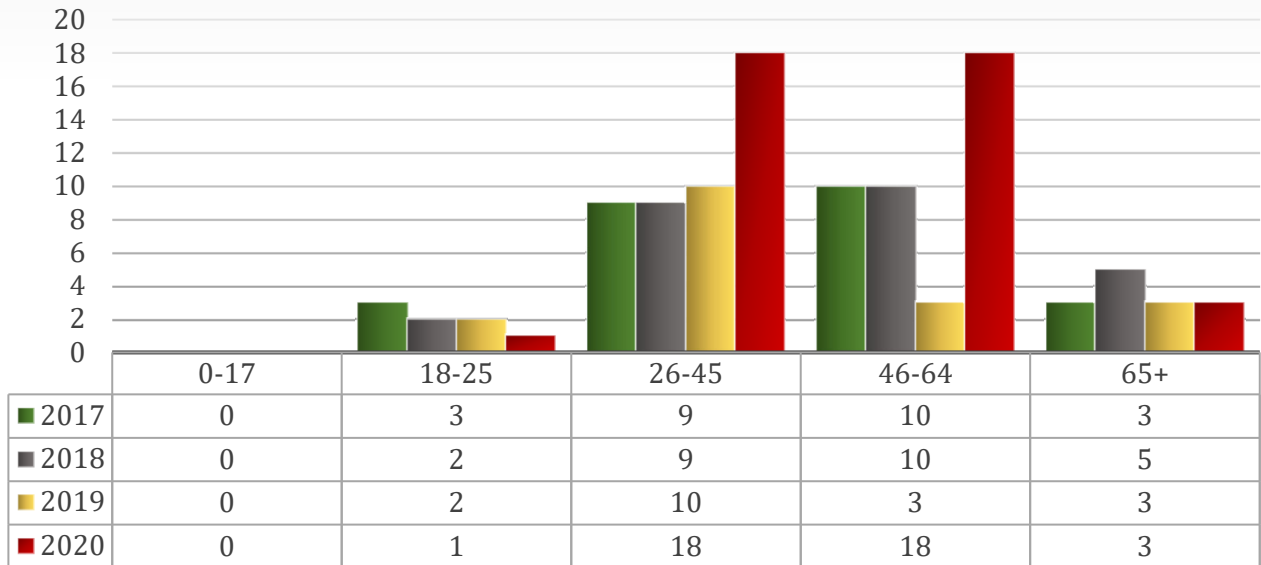


Figure 14: 2017-2020 Skagit County Overdose Deaths by Age Group

2020 Accidental Drug Overdose Reason for Drug Use

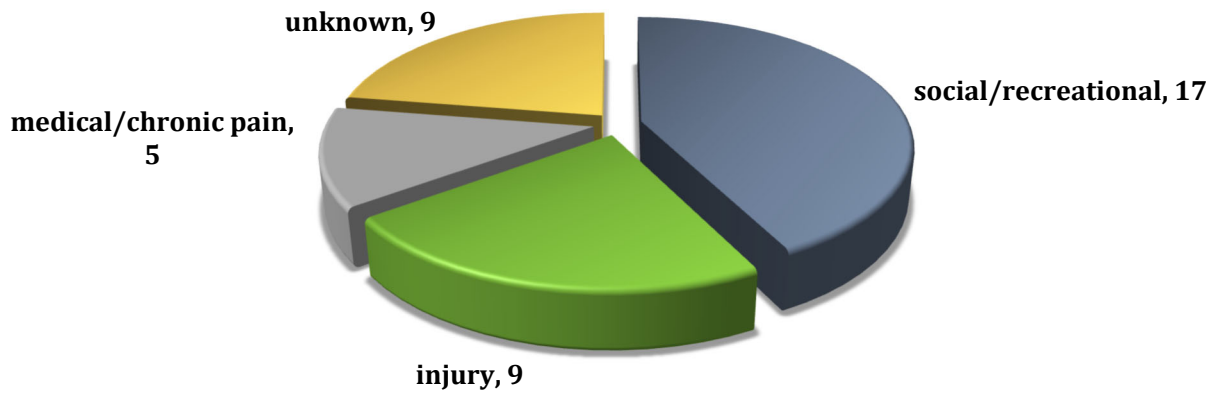


Figure 15: 2020 Skagit County Accidental Drug Overdose Reason for Drug Use

2020 Accidental Drug Overdose Use Alone?

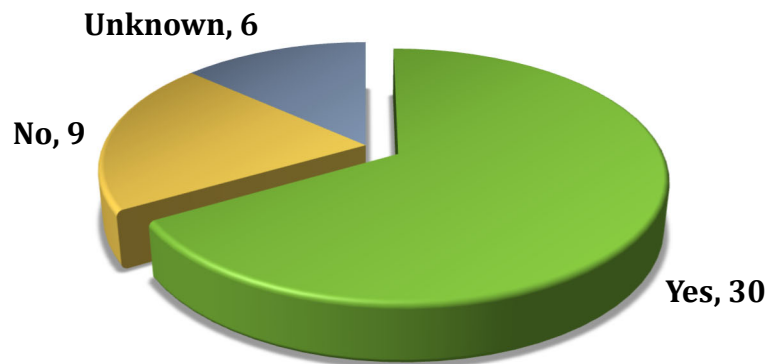


Figure 16: 2020 Skagit County Accidental Drug Overdose Use Alone

Falls

There were 62 falls in 2020 accounting for 46% of accidental deaths. The majority of these falls were in those age 65 years and older (47/62, 75%). Falls were sometimes a direct cause of death, such as when the fall results in head trauma leading to a subdural hemorrhage. Falls were also an indirect cause of death, especially in the elderly. For example, a fall may result in a fracture that requires surgery and the decedent later develops pneumonia or sepsis. Of these 62 deaths, 25 (25/62, 40%) suffered from dementia or Alzheimer's.

Motor Vehicle Accidents

Motor vehicle accidents accounted for 12% of the accidental deaths in Skagit County for 2020 (16/132 cases). This was the third largest group of accidental deaths. Decedents in the driver's seat accounted for 6 of the 16 deaths. One (1) of these deaths was a passenger, 2 were pedestrians struck by motor vehicle(s), and 5 were motorcyclist fatalities. One (1) fatality involved an ATV. All cases had toxicological testing performed. Of the 16 motor vehicle accidents, 6 (37%) of those were positive for alcohol with 5 having levels above the legal limit of BAC 0.08. Presence of marijuana was found in 1 of the cases and 2 cases had mixed drugs in their system. The remaining 8 (50%) cases had no drugs or alcohol present in their system.

Other Causes of Accidental Deaths

In addition to the accidental deaths listed above, there were 14 *other* deaths classified as accidental. Of these 14 deaths, 2 were attributed to drowning, 2 were from burns and carbon monoxide caused by a structural fire, 3 resulted from choking on food, 2 were from positional asphyxiation, 2 were from hypothermia caused by exposure to cold temperatures, 1 was due to explosion from setting off a firework, and 1 was from an accidental gunshot wound to the leg.

Manner of Death: Suicide

Suicides are those deaths caused by self-inflicted injuries with the evidence of intent to end one’s life. Evidence of intent can include explicit expression such as a suicide note or verbal threat, or an act constituting implicit intent, such as deliberately putting oneself on the train tracks in a roadway or placing a gun to one’s head.

In 2020, there were 21 suicides, accounting for 4.5% (21/465) of the total deaths reported to the Coroner’s Office and 7.4% (21/282) of deaths certified by the Coroner’s Office. Individuals who committed suicide were between the ages of 13 and 68 years. There was a slightly higher number of males (11/21) to females (10/21). The primary method of suicide for 2020 was by way of firearm (9/21, 42%). Intentional drug overdose was the second highest method of suicide (5/21, 23%). There were 3 deaths attributed to hanging (14%), and the remaining 4 suicide deaths were attributed to (1) fire-related, (1) drowning, (1) jump from height, and (1) carbon monoxide poisoning.

2017-2020 Suicide by Method

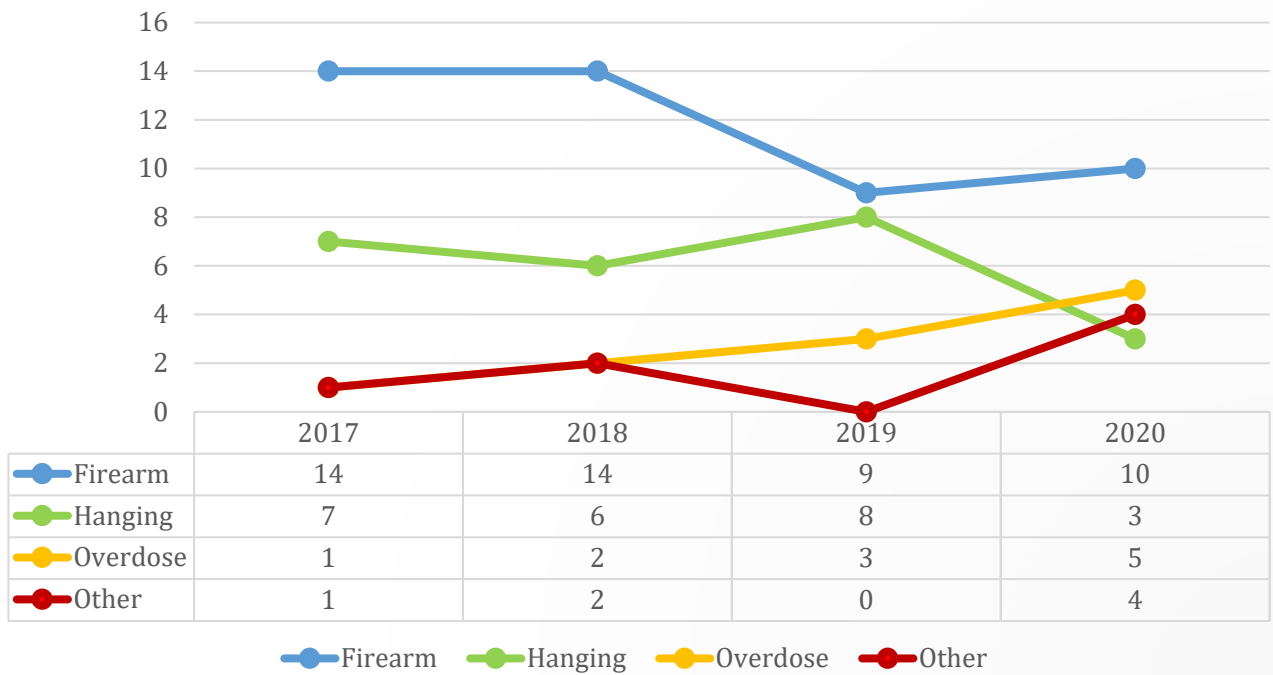


Figure 18. 2017-2020 Skagit County Suicides by Method

2020 Reasons for Suicide

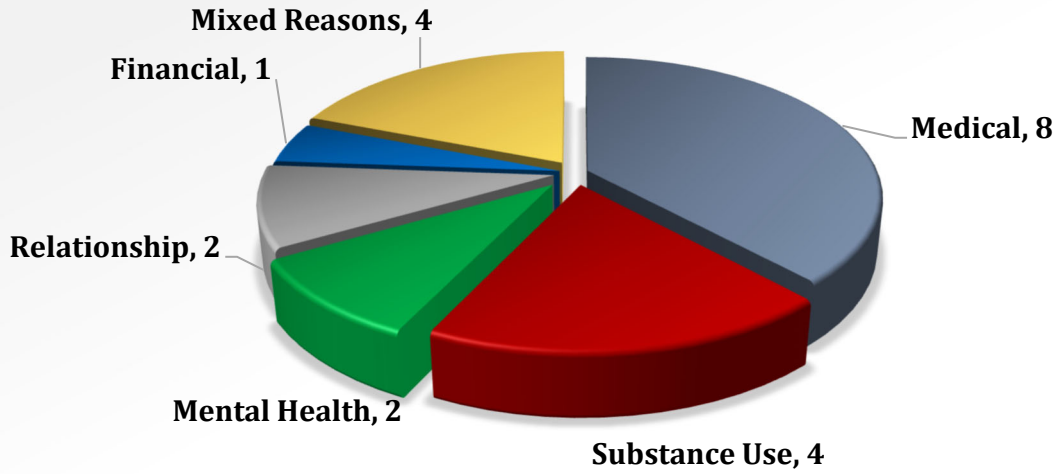


Figure 19. 2020 Skagit County Reason for Suicide

Seventeen (17/23, 73%) suicides in 2020 had a history of mental health disorder. Of those 17, fourteen (14/23, 60%) suffered from depression. Twelve (12/23, 52%) had a history of substance abuse.

2017-2020 Suicides by Quarter

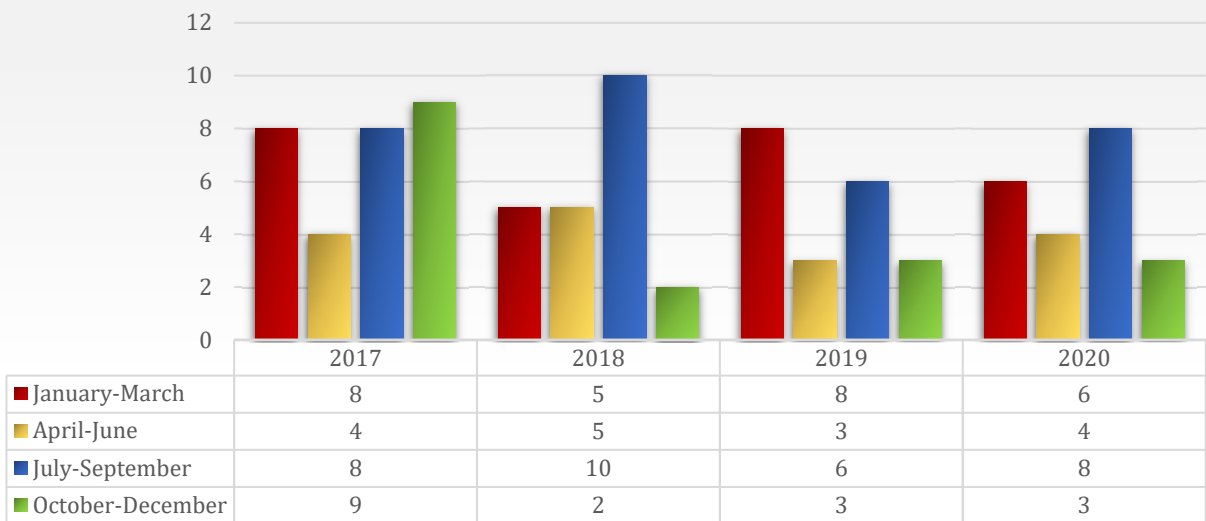


Figure 20. 2017-2020 Skagit County Suicides by Quarter

2017-2020 Suicide by Age Group

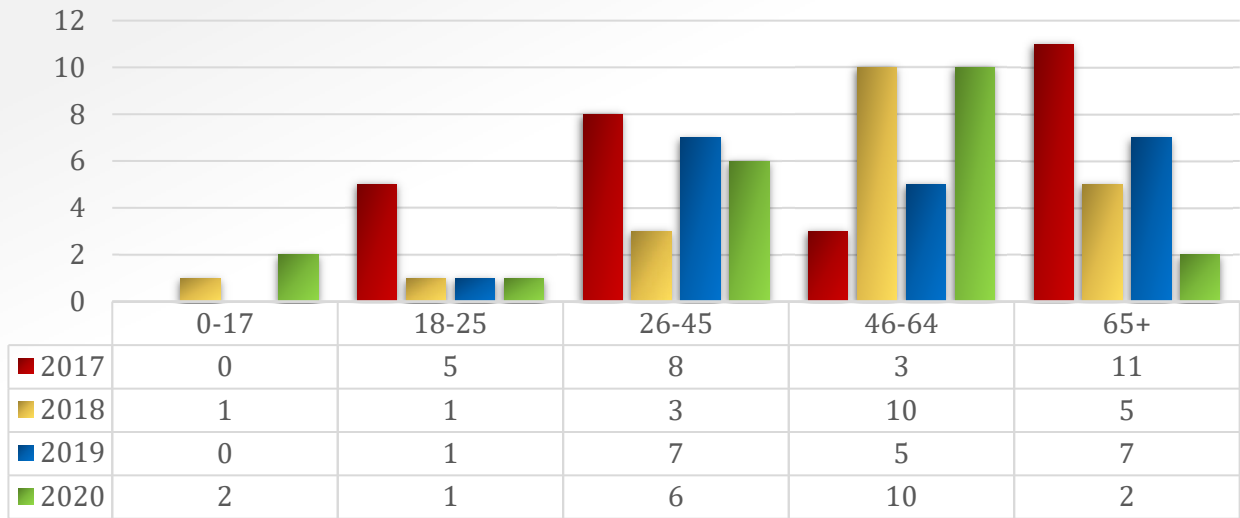


Figure 21. 2017-2020 Skagit County Suicides by Age Group

2020 Method of Suicide by Gender

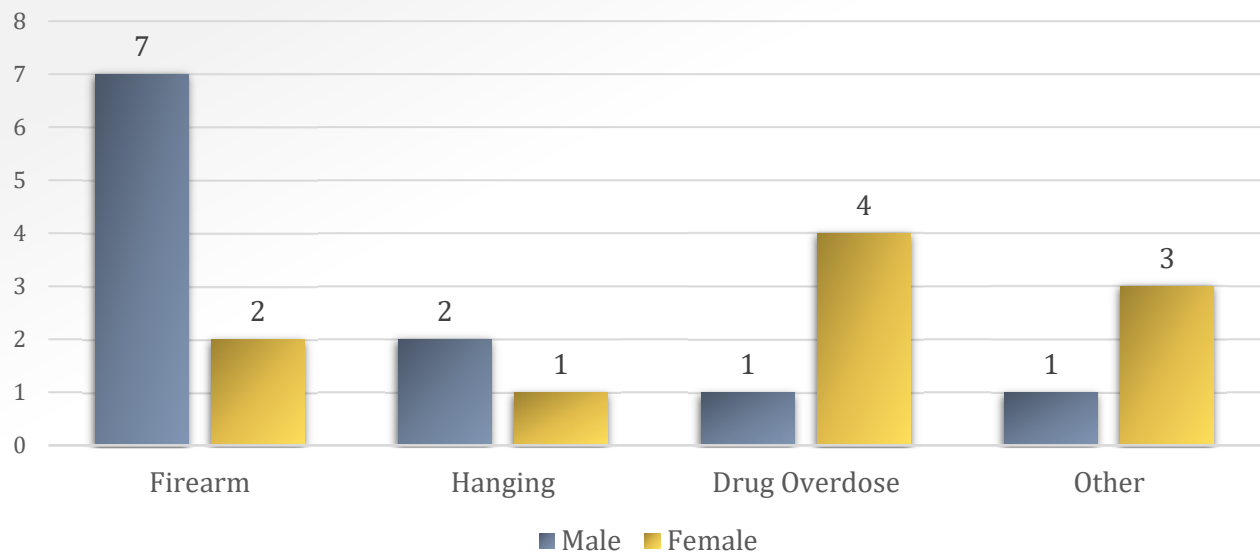


Figure 22. 2020 Skagit County Method of Suicide by Gender

2020 Suicides with Alcohol and/or Drugs Present

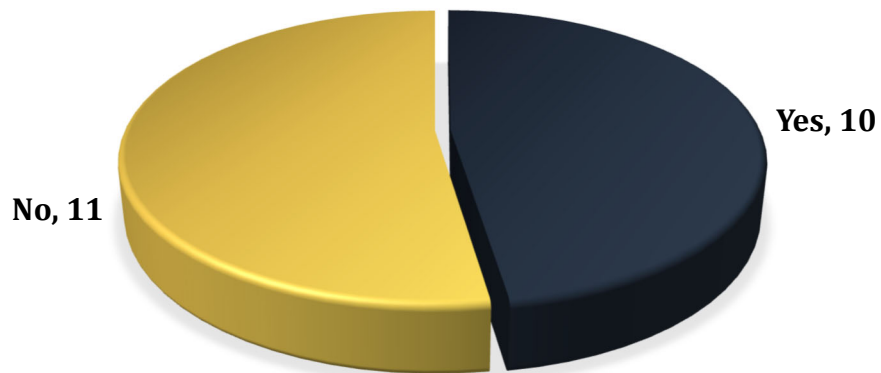
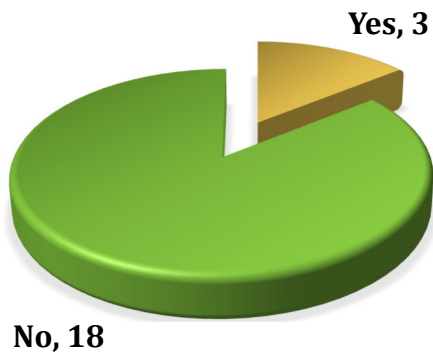


Figure 23. 2020 Skagit County Suicide Presence of Drugs or Alcohol

2020 Suicides with Notes of Intent



2020 Suicides with History of Ideations and/or Attempts

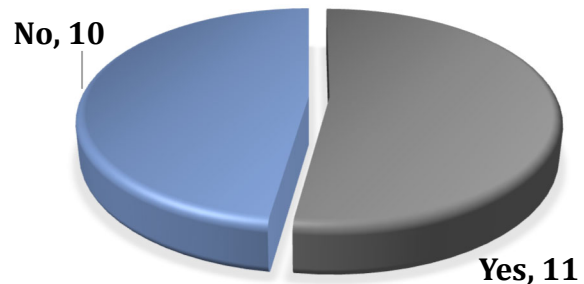


Figure 24. 2020 Skagit County Suicide with Note of Intent and History of Attempts and/or Ideations

Manner of Death: Homicide

Classification of Homicide is determined by the Coroner when the death results from injuries inflicted by another person. This does not imply the existence of criminal intent behind the action of the other person. In 2020, the Coroner classified 2 deaths as a homicide (2/282, 0.7%).

There are cases in which the investigating law enforcement agency will investigate the case as a homicide. It is important to note, that there are certain cases in which this office will certify the death as an accident even though the case is being looked into as a homicide. Traffic fatalities in which a pedestrian is killed and the driver may show negligent behavior, probable intoxication, or fleeing of the scene will be classified as accident even though these causes may meet a legal definition of vehicular homicide. This decision is based on the assumption that there was no intent to kill the individual. Whether or not this type of case meets the legal definition of vehicular homicide, it is better left to the criminal justice system to decide. This goes the same for motor vehicle accidents and deaths resulting from acute drug intoxication. As long as there was no intent to kill the individual, then the manner of death will be classified by the Skagit County Coroner's Office as Accident.

Manner of Death: Undetermined

The Coroner's Office certifies the manner of death as undetermined when available information regarding the circumstances of the case is insufficient to classify the death into one of the four manners of death: natural, accident, suicide, homicide. In some cases, serious doubt exists as to whether the injury occurred with intent or as a result of an accident. The information obtained from the case, may be lacking due to absence of background information or witnesses, or because of the lengthy delay between the time of death and the discovery of the body. If an extensive investigation and autopsy cannot clarify the circumstances, the death is classified as undetermined. If new credible information regarding the case is provided at a later time, then the manner of death can be changed. There were 4 cases in 2020 where the Coroner's Office certified the manner of death as undetermined (4/282, 1.4%). Two (2) of the cases were skeletal remains. *The cause of death* for these 2 cases was listed as *undetermined*. The 3rd case was due to gunshot wound to the head. The 4th case involved a person found unresponsive in a hot tub. A thorough work-up of the case provided no findings related to the death. The cause and manner of death were listed as *undetermined*.

Tissue and Cornea Donation

The Skagit County Coroner’s Office are adamant supporters of facilitating donation within the Skagit County Community. The Coroner’s Office is proud of its partnership with SightLife and LifeNet Health. In late 2017, the Coroner’s Office upgraded its case reporting system to a national case management system that is linked to the Organ Procurement Organizations (OPO’s). This has allowed the Coroner’s Office to automatically notify the OPO’s of all potential organ, tissue (skin, long bones, heart for valves), and cornea donation cases regardless if the person died in the hospital or at another location. It is important to note, that there is specific criteria that qualifies cases for donation. The time interval between the last known alive time and the time of death as well as the decedent’s age and social history (drug use) are three main determining factors. In 2020, Skagit County Coroners Office and local hospitals referred 451 cases for tissue and cornea donation.

Cornea Donation

For 2020, Skagit County had 46 cornea donors potentially helping 92 men, women, and children see again. Of these 46 cornea donors, 22 of them were authorized by the Skagit County Coroner’s Office and the 24 remaining were referred by 2 of the local hospitals: Skagit Valley Hospital and Peacehealth United General Hospital.

Tissue Donation

In 2020, a total of 397 tissue donation referrals were made from the local hospitals in Skagit County: Skagit Valley Hospital (356) and Island Hospital (41). Of the 397 referrals, 16 became tissue donors. The Skagit County Coroner’s Office referred 54 cases for potential tissue donation. Of those 54 cases, 9 became tissue donors.

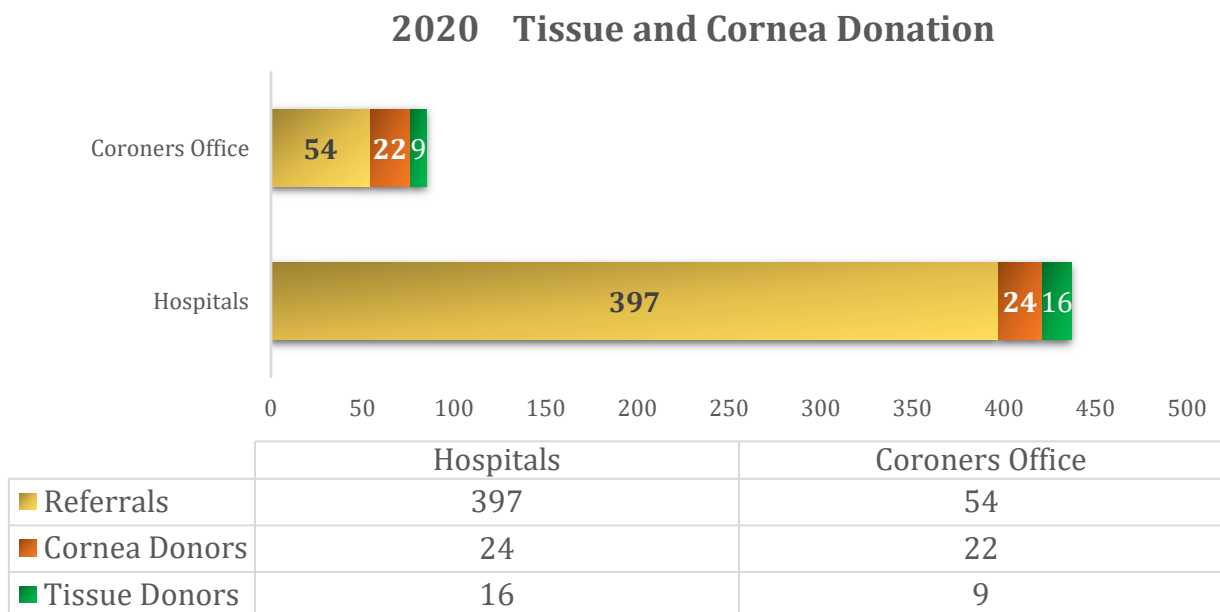


Figure 25. 2020 Skagit County Tissue and Cornea Donation