Dear Community Members:

Welcome to the 2017 Coconino County Public Health Services District (CCPHSD) Medical Examiner’s Office Annual Report. The information contained in this report highlights the activities of the CCPHSD Medical Examiner’s Office and reflects ever changing patterns of disease and trauma within our community.

The CCPHSD Medical Examiner’s Office strives to promote safe and livable communities by certifying the cause and manner of death for all homicides, suicides, accidents and sudden/unexpected natural deaths in Coconino County. The Medical Examiner’s Office staff provide related forensic services, assistance and education to families of the deceased, as well as to public and private agencies. In addition, the Medical Examiner’s Office works to identify unknown deceased individuals, participates in research, and provides court testimony.

Our team is committed to meeting the needs and expectations of our community with professionalism, respect, cultural sensitivity and compassion. This responsibility is taken very seriously as we understand the results of the Medical Examiner’s Office investigations provide valuable information to family and friends of decedents, public health and criminal justice personnel and other concerned parties.

Each case in this report represents the death of a person whose absence is grieved by friends and relatives. As the agency responsible for investigating these deaths, we appreciate the trust that has been placed with our office.

Marie Peoples, PhD
Chief Health Officer
Dear Community Members:

The Coconino County Public Health Services District Medical Examiner’s Office serves the living by investigating and studying sudden, violent, unexpected and suspicious deaths. The office staff recognizes the tragedy surrounding untimely death, and performs its investigations, in part, to assist the grieving family. A complete investigation provides for the expeditious settling of insurance claims and estates as well as for implementing civil and criminal action. Information gathered helps determine changing patterns important to public health and safety, as well as risk factors for premature deaths. The Medical Examiner’s Office strives to acquire as much information for each case as resources allow.

The medical investigation of violent death is frequently required in civil or criminal adjudication. Although criminal death investigations constitute a small portion of deaths investigated by the Medical Examiner, these deaths are studied in great detail because of the issues and legal consequences involved. Current case categories or cohorts of study include child fatalities, domestic violence fatalities and drug overdose fatalities.

The public health dimension of the Medical Examiner’s function is designed to isolate and identify causes of sudden, unexpected death. Reportable deaths include infectious deaths, work related deaths, opioid deaths and consumer product related deaths. Information may be shared and used by CCPHSD, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Arizona Department of Health Services, State Department of Labor and Industry, private insurance companies, Consumer Product Safety Commission, etc.

The Medical Examiner’s Office partners with many area Universities. Our proximity to Northern Arizona University allows for an active internship program. The internship program provides students with a unique experience and gives valuable support to the Medical Examiner’s Office.

The Medical Examiner’s Office provides a voice for those who can no longer speak for themselves.

Larry Czarnecki, D.O.
CCPHSD Chief Medical Examiner
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INTRODUCTION

The Coconino County Public Health Services District (Health District) Medical Examiner’s Office (MEO) investigates any death in Coconino County that falls under the jurisdiction of the MEO. Death investigations include sudden, violent, unexpected, or deaths in which the cause of death is unknown. This report is a statistical review of the types of cases processed by the office over calendar year 2017 that fell under the jurisdiction of the MEO. In 2017, there were 914 deaths in Coconino County that were under MEO jurisdiction; of these, 642 (70%) were reported to the MEO for investigation and 350 (38%) received death certification. In addition to this, 46 deaths were brought in from non-jurisdictional regions of the state.
OVERVIEW

Reportable Deaths

Arizona Revised Statute §11 – 593 delineates 9 circumstances in which a death is reportable to the MEO:

1. Death when not under the current care of a health care provider (physician, nurse practitioner, physician assistant) for a potentially fatal illness or when an attending healthcare provider is unavailable.

2. Death resulting from violence.

3. Unexpected or unexplained death.

4. Death of a person in a custodial agency as defined in section 13-4401.

5. Unexpected or unexplained death of an infant or child.

6. Death occurring in a suspicious, unusual or non-natural manner, including death from an accident believed to be related to the deceased person’s occupation or employment.

7. Death occurring as a result of anesthetic or surgical procedures.

8. Death suspected to be caused by a previously unreported or undiagnosed disease that constitutes a threat to public safety.

9. Death involving unidentifiable bodies.

Definitions

Autopsy: A decedent is examined both externally and internally for evidence of injury or natural disease which may have caused or contributed to the individual’s death.

External Examination: A decedent is examined externally, without an internal examination.

Chart Review: A review of the medial records, law enforcement reports and any other information that may be necessary to determine the cause and manner of death without physical examination of the decedent.

Cause of Death: A medical opinion, stating the disease or injury (or combination) that initiated the lethal chain of events that brought about a person’s death.

Manner of Death: A description of the circumstances under which a person died. On Arizona’s death certificate, there are 5 manner of death categories: natural, suicide, accident, homicide and undetermined.
Examinations

CCPHSD Medical Examiner’s Office Forensic Pathologists performed 263 autopsies, 26 external examinations, 96 chart reviews, and reviewed 558 death certificates for cremation authorizations in 2017.

MEDICAL EXAMINER (ME) CASES

Medical Examiner (ME) cases are defined as all reportable cases as defined by ARS 11-593 in which jurisdiction is assumed and cause and manner of death are determined. Those cases include autopsies, external examinations and chart reviews. In 2017, for jurisdictional Coconino County and non-jurisdictional regions of Arizona, 263 autopsies were performed, 25 external examinations and 96 chart reviews. Jurisdictional Coconino County alone accounted for 217 autopsies, 26 external examinations and 96 chart reviews.
TOTAL CASES

The CCPHSD Medical Examiner’s Office forensic investigators processed 688 reports of death, 642 from Jurisdictional Coconino County and 46 reports from other entities (Federal Bureau of investigation, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Navajo County Medical Examiner, etc.). Deaths of Native Americans that occur on Tribal Lands (Navajo Nation, Hopi Nation, Hualapai Tribe, Havasupai Tribe and Kaibab Paiute Tribe) within Coconino County do not fall under the jurisdiction of the MEO.
HOMICIDE DEATHS (Jurisdictional Coconino County)

Deaths due to homicides, accounted for 2% of the Jurisdictional Coconino County ME deaths investigated by the CCPHSD Medical Examiner’s Office in 2017. For Jurisdictional Coconino County, homicide victims were most frequently male (70%), white (60%) and between the ages of 20 to 29 (50%) and died as a result of firearms (60%).

- **Firearms**: 60%
- **Blunt Force**: 20%
- **Sharp Force**: 20%

7 out of 10 homicide cases were **Male**
Homicide Victim by Race 2017
Jurisdictional Coconino County

- White: 6
- American Indian: 4
- Black: 0
- Asian: 0
- Eastern Indian: 0

Homicide cases in 2017
Homicide by Age 2017
Jurisdictional Coconino County

- 20 to 29: 5
- 60 to 69: 3
- 1 to 4: 1
- 5 to 9: 1
- Unknown: 0

Homicide by Cause 2017
Jurisdictional Coconino County

- Firearms: 60%
- Sharp Force: 20%
- Blunt Force: 20%
- Other: 0%
ACCIDENTAL DEATHS (Jurisdictional Coconino County)

Deaths due to accidents accounted 19% of the ME deaths investigated by the CCPHSD Medical Examiner’s Office in 2017. Accident victims were most frequently male (71%), between 40-49 years of age (19%), white (65%) and died as the result of a motor vehicle accident (43%).

Accident by Cause 2017

- Motor Vehicle Accident 43%
- Blunt Force Trauma 21%
- Overdose 21%
- Exposure to Elements 4%
- Drowning 5%
- Asphyxia 2%
- Fire Deaths 2%
- Other 2%

5 out of 7 accident cases were Male
SUICIDE DEATHS (Jurisdictional Coconino County)

Suicide deaths accounted for 7% of the ME deaths investigated by the CCPHSD Medical Examiner's Office in 2017. Suicide victims were most frequently males (78%), between 30 – 39 years of age (33%), white (80%) and died as the result of firearms (56%).

![Diagram showing suicide methods and gender distribution](image)
## Suicide Deaths by Race 2017

**Jurisdictional Coconino County**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Indian</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Suicide by Cause 2017

**Jurisdictional Coconino County**

- **Firearms**: 56%
- **Hanging**: 20%
- **Overdose**: 11%
- **High Level Fall**: 7%
- **Sharp Force Injury**: 4%
- **Train**: 2%

- **Other**: 1% (3 suicides)
NATURAL DEATHS (Jurisdictional Coconino County)

Natural deaths accounted for (70%) of the ME deaths investigated by the CCPHSD Medical Examiner’s Office in 2017. Individuals who died from natural causes were most frequently male (58%), between the ages of 70-79 (24%), white (65%) and died from cardiovascular disease (36%).
Natural Death by Race 2017
Jurisdictional Coconino County

- White: 289
- American Indian: 148
- Black: 4
- Asian: 3
- Eastern Indian: 2
- Other: 3

Natural Death by Cause
Jurisdictional Coconino County

- Cardiovascular Disease: 36%
- Chronic Alcohol: 14%
- Pulmonary: 13%
- Malignancy: 11%
- Infectious: 8%
- Diabetes: 8%
- Other: 10%
Details in which the manner of death was undetermined accounted for 2% of the deaths investigated by the CCPHSD Medical Examiner’s Office in 2017. The manner of death is classified as undetermined when there is an insufficient degree of certainty required to certify the manner as accident, suicide, homicide or natural. There are occasions where the cause and manner of death are classified as undetermined. Individuals who died with an undetermined manner were most frequently males (64%), between the ages of 30 to 39 (55%), white (80%) and died of blunt force injuries or an overdose.
Undetermined Manner of Death by Race
Jurisdictional Coconino County

Undetermined Manner of Death by Cause 2017
Jurisdictional Coconino County

Blunt Force Injuries 36%
Overdose 36%
Undetermined 10%
Other 18%
OVERDOSE DEATHS (Jurisdictional Coconino County)

Overdose deaths accounted for 6% of the ME deaths investigated by the CCPHSD Medical Examiner’s Office in 2017. Individuals who died from overdose were most frequently male (63%), between the ages of 30-49 (58%), white (76%) and died of a mixed to substance overdose which included an opiate (39%).
7 out of 11 overdose cases were Male

Overdose Deaths by Age 2017
Jurisdictional Coconino County
SUMMARY

The CCPHSD Medical Examiner’s Office Annual Report reflects the activities associated with the investigation of the cause and manner of death of cases occurring in jurisdictional Coconino County and cases referred to the office for examination. This report presented an analysis of the different manners of death investigated and the demographics in which they occurred.

In 2017, there were 914 deaths in Coconino County that were under the CCPHSD Medical Examiner’s Office jurisdiction. Of these cases, 642 (70%) were reported for investigation and 350 (38%) received death certification by the Medical Examiner’s Office. In addition, 46 decedents were referred to the CCPHSD Medical Examiner’s Office from non-jurisdictional regions of the state for examination.

CCPHSD Medical Examiner’s Office Forensic Pathologists performed 263 autopsies, 26 external examinations, and 96 chart reviews. For jurisdictional Coconino County, there were 10 homicides (60% involved firearms), 127 accidental deaths (43% involved a motor vehicle), 45 deaths by suicide (54% involved firearms), and 549 deaths due to natural causes (36% were due to cardiovascular disease). There were also 38 drug overdoses of which 39% were from mixed substances including an opioid.

The data contained within this report provides information to help guide the development of Public Health policies. In turn, these policies can be used to reduce the number of preventable deaths and improve the overall health of the community we serve.