

# Washoe County Regional Medical Examiner's Office – Operational Update

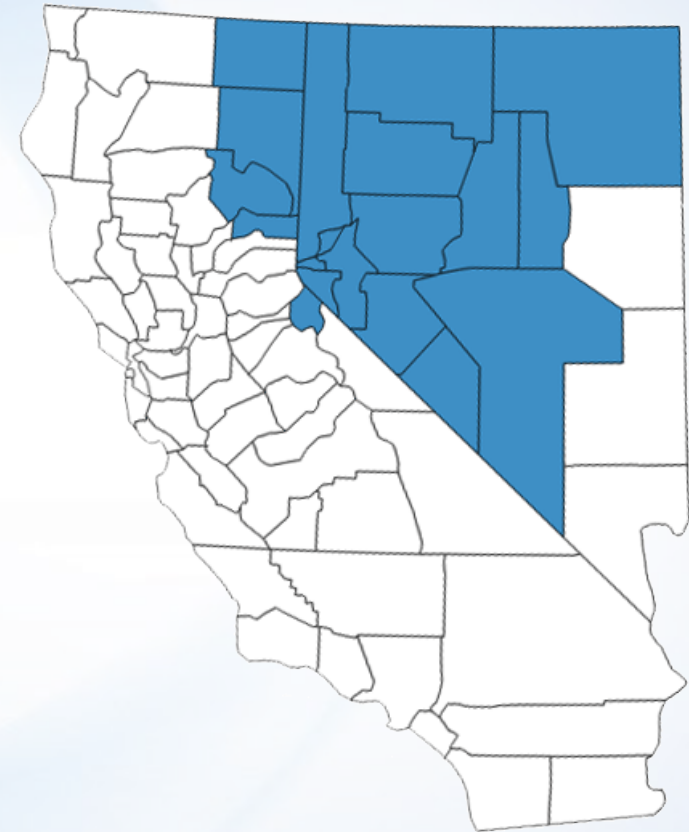
Dr. Laura Knight  
Chief Medical Examiner  
& Coroner





## Regional Center of Excellence in Death Investigation

- Statutory jurisdiction is Washoe County
  - NRS 259, WCC 35
- Serve 19 counties in NV and CA, by interlocal agreements
  - Smaller and rural counties cannot sustain their own ME Office
- \$1.6 million in annual revenue from these agreements



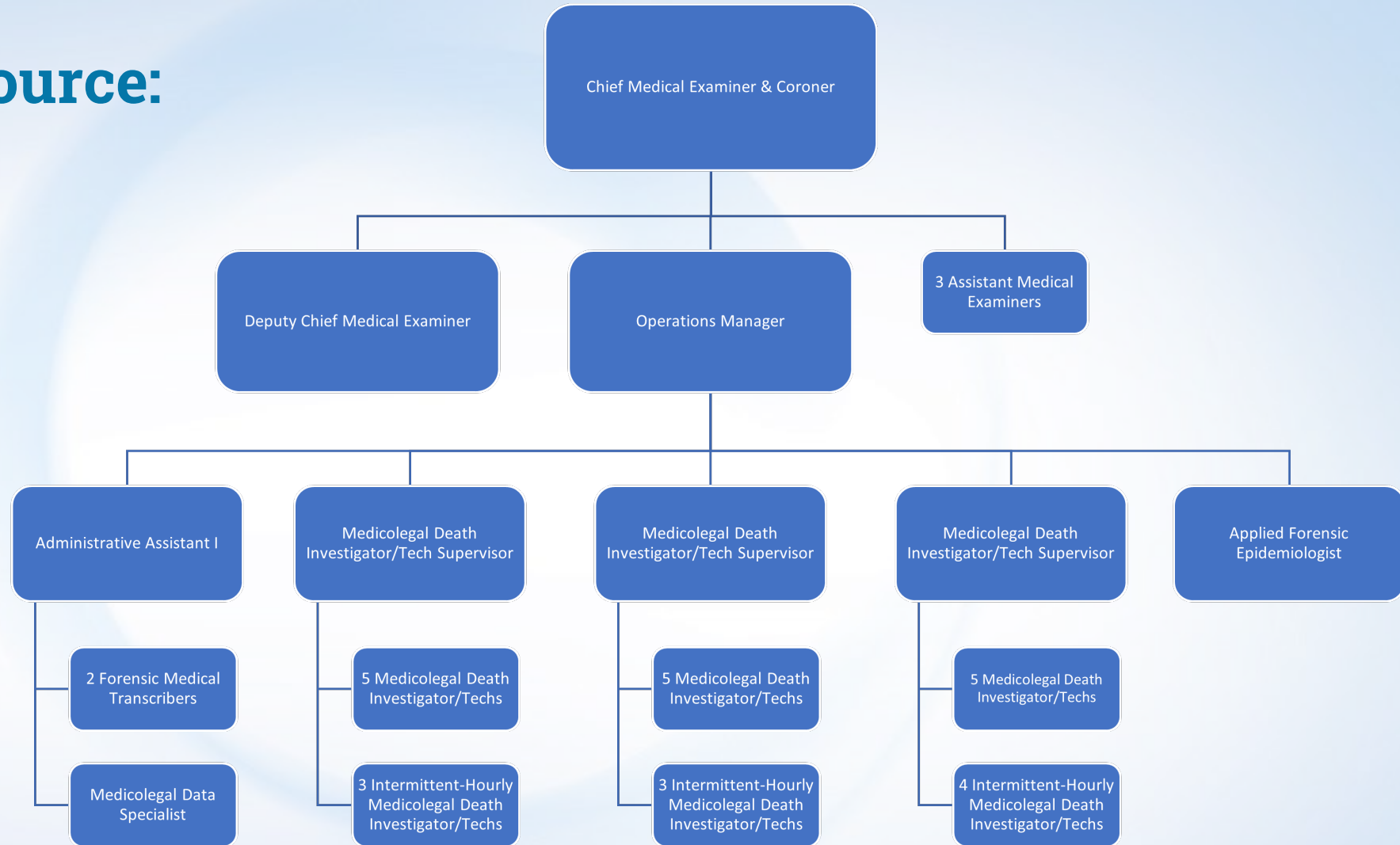
## Regional Center of Excellence in Death Investigation

- State of the art facility, opened in January 2017
- Fleet:
  - 5 scene response vehicles, including one of the county's first EVs
  - 6 mass fatality trailers
- Meeting industry benchmarks:
  - >90% of autopsy reports finalized within 60 days
- National Accreditation (NAME) pending on-site inspection





## Most Valuable Resource: Our 39 Employees



## What We Do

- Investigate all sudden deaths, deaths by violence or trauma, and others
- 24/7/365 death scene response
- Next-of-kin notification
- Scientific identification
- Perform autopsies & other specialized postmortem examinations including x-rays
- Operate independent of any parallel investigation by law enforcement







## What We Do

- Certify cause & manner of death for all non-natural & some natural deaths in Washoe County
- Provide critical data for death prevention efforts
- Produce an annual report on deaths in the county and the region, and additional specialized reports (such as Substance Abuse)

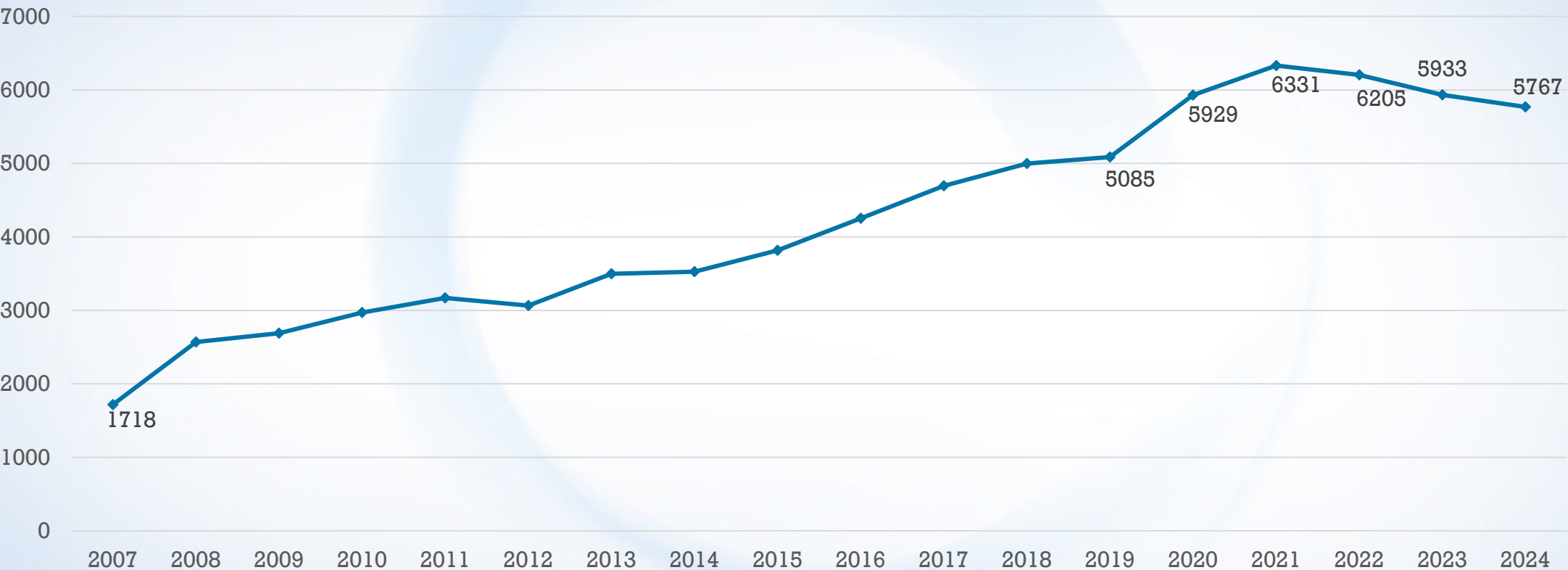


## What We Do

- Manage unclaimed decedents
- Facilitate & authorize organ, eye, & tissue donation
- Expert court testimony for criminal and civil cases
- Frequent media interaction
- Provide education/training to sheriff-coroners, law enforcement, medical students, and many others
- Plan, resource, educate & exercise for mass fatality



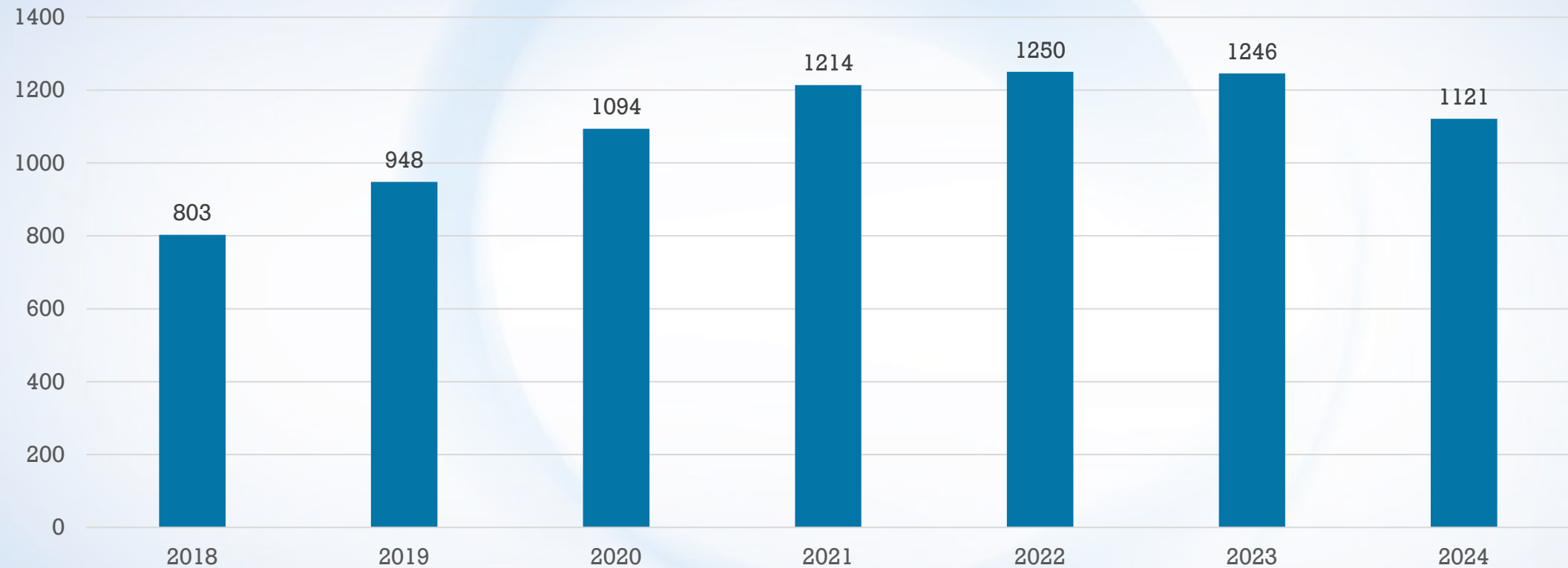
# Annual Deaths Reported to WCRMEO





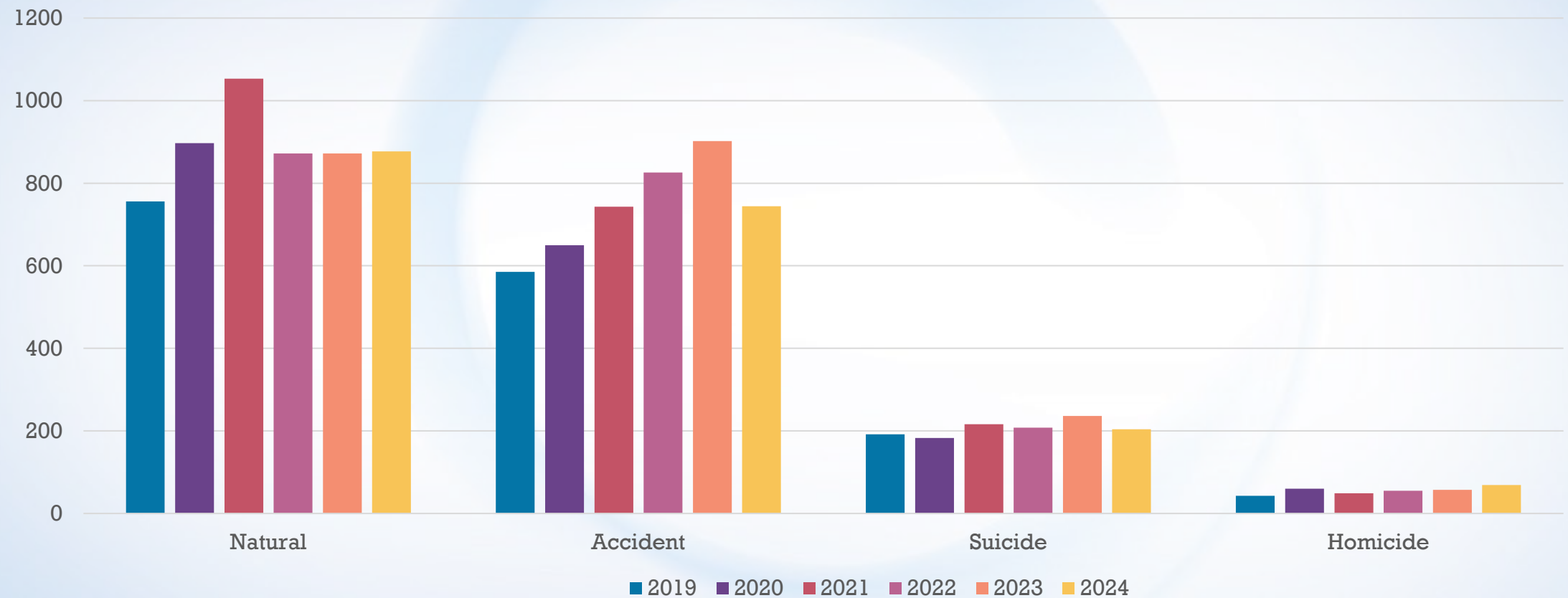


## Death Investigator Scene Responses





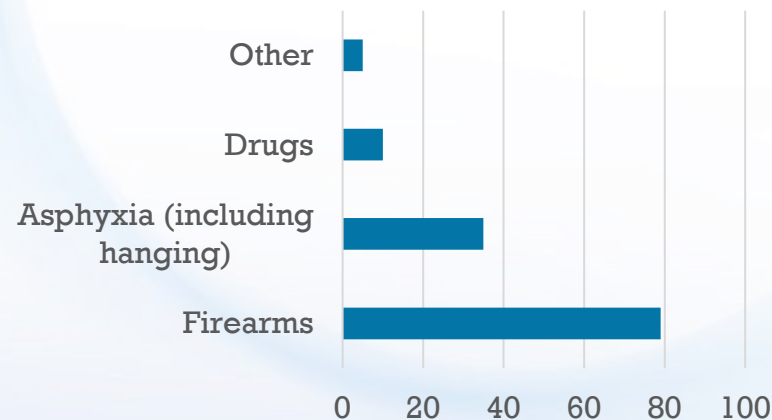
## Manner of Death – WCRMEO Accepted Cases



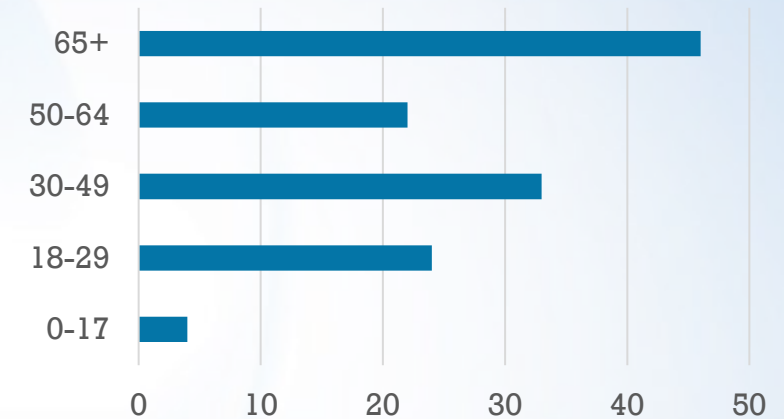
## Washoe County Suicides

- 129 suicides in 2024
- 79% male, 21% female
- Seniors account for 36% of all suicide deaths

Suicides by Method



Suicides by Age



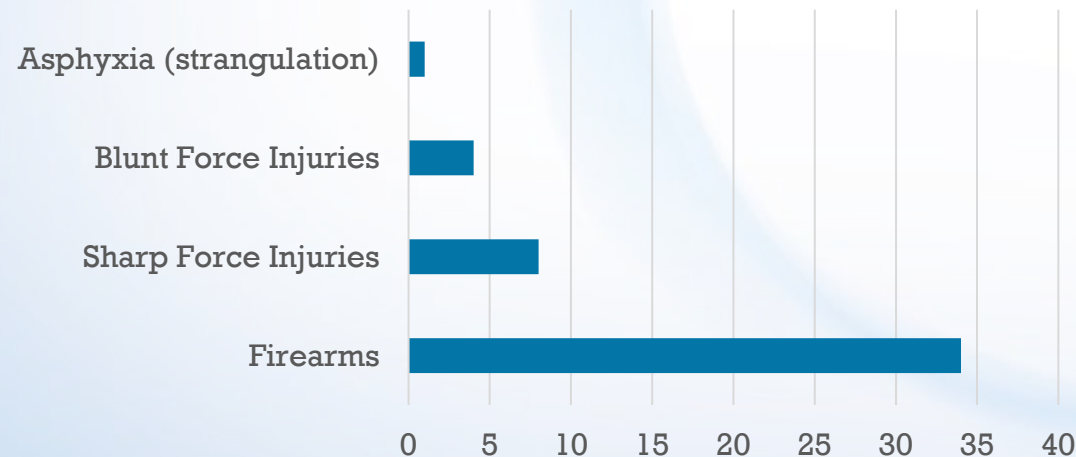




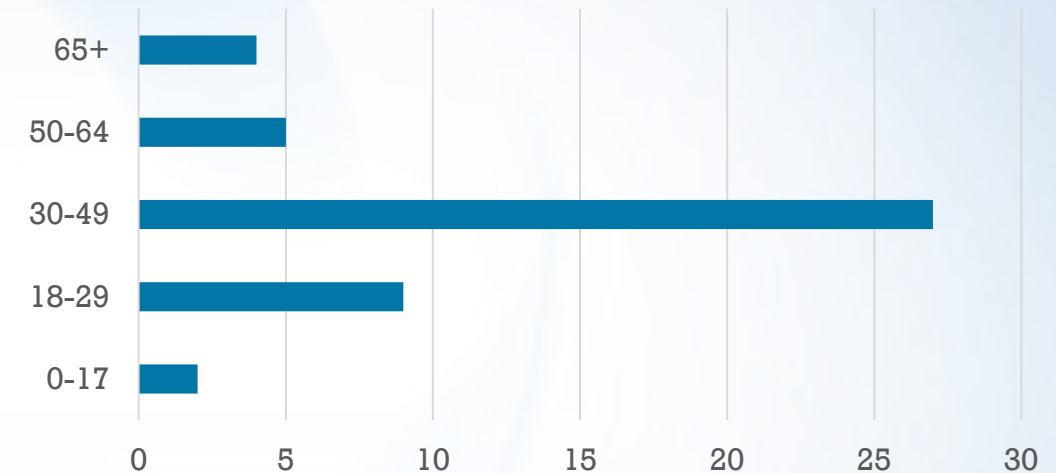
## Washoe County Homicides

- 47 homicides in 2024
- 83% male, 17% female

### Homicides by Method

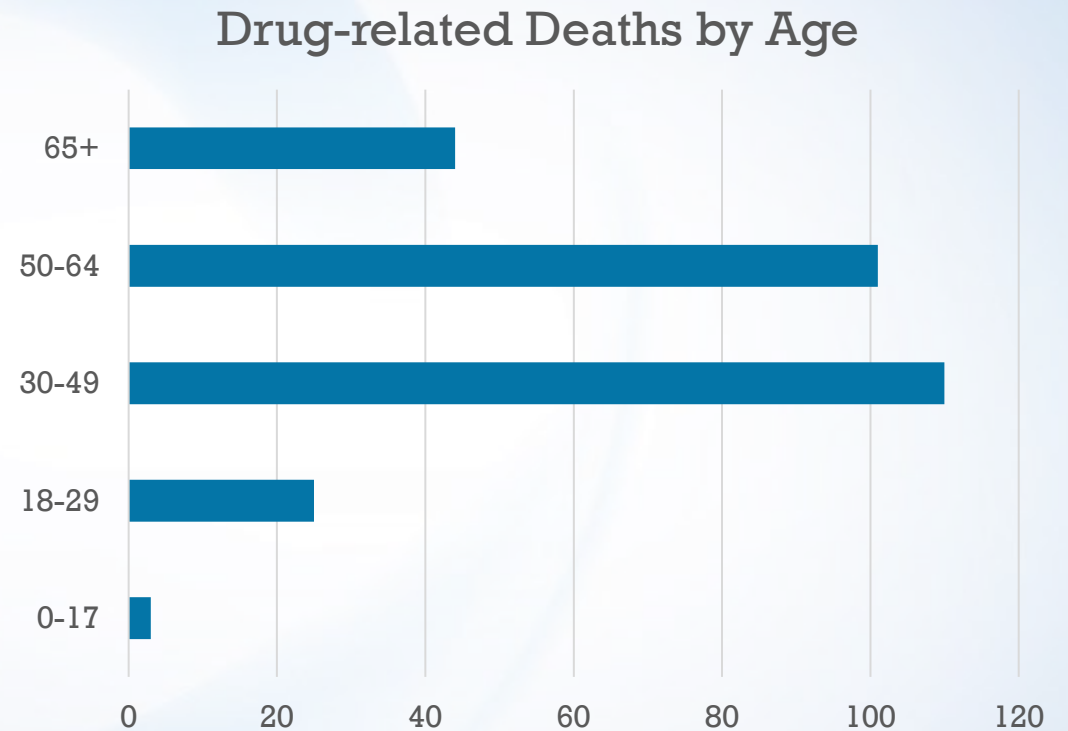


### Homicides by Age



## Washoe County Drug-Related Deaths

- 283 drug-related deaths in 2024
  - Down from a high of 360 deaths in 2023
    - Up from 170 deaths in 2018
- 71% male, 29% female
- Methamphetamine most common, followed by fentanyl (& often seen together)

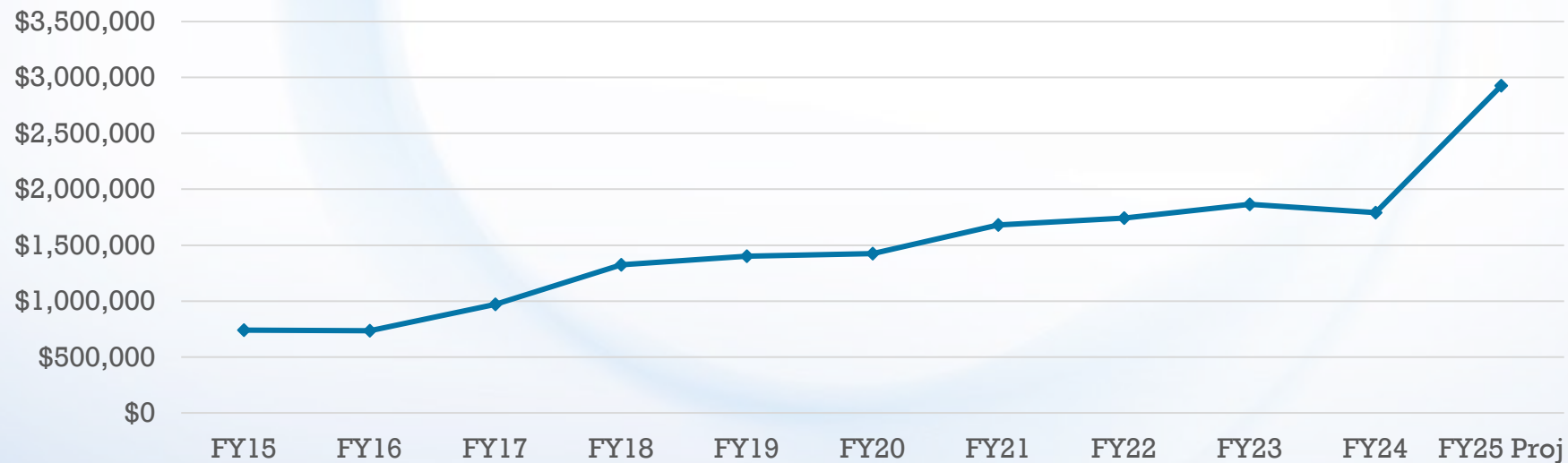


## Grants & Revenue

- Sustainable and self-supporting, wherever possible

FY25 Budgeted Revenue:

- Coroner county interlocal agreements: \$1,619,103
- Multiple grants: \$1,061,591
- Nevada Donor Network partnership: \$245,040





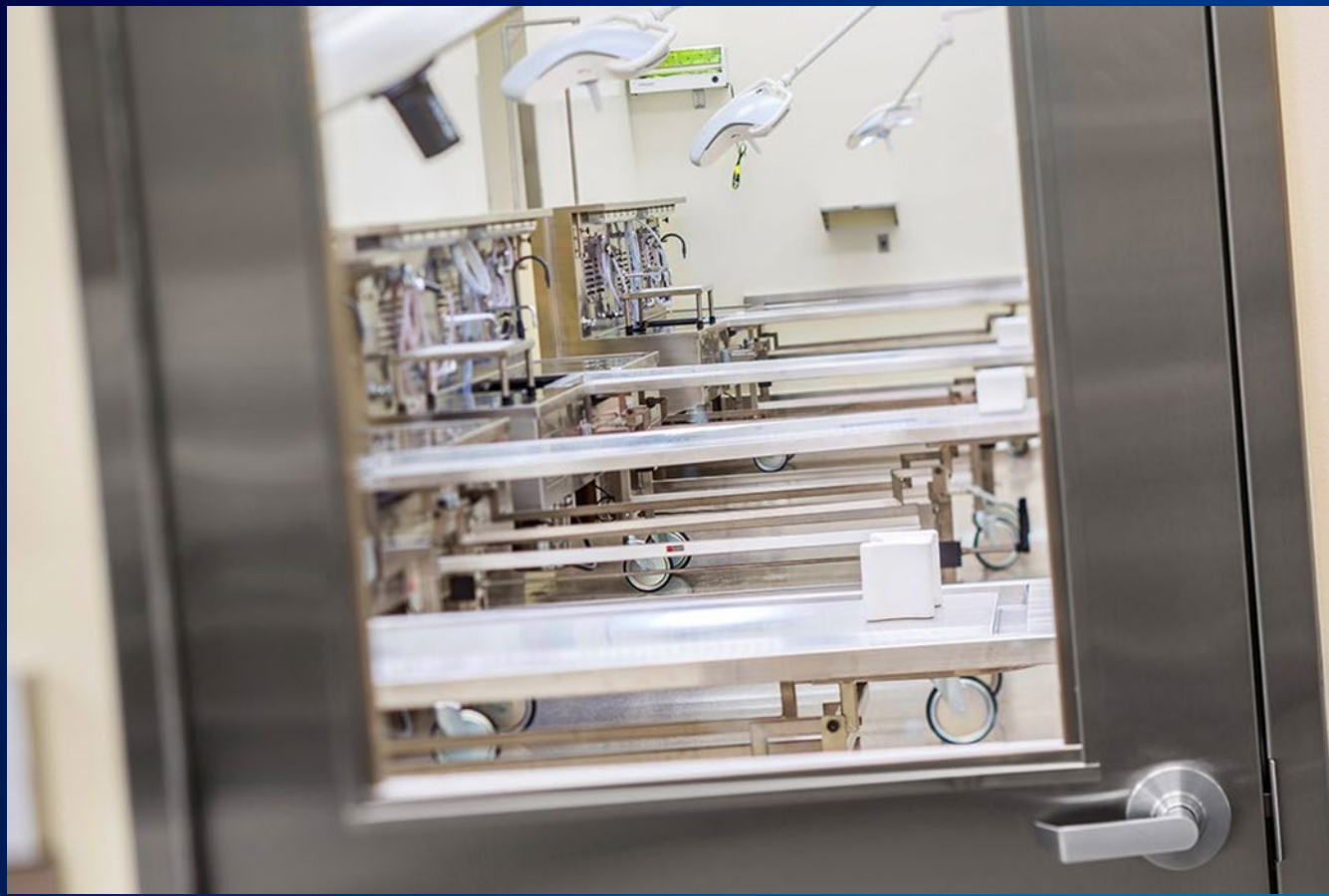
## Innovation, Efficiency, & Collaboration

- LODOX X-ray Scanner added 2018, replaced 2025 – saves approx. 1-2 FTE annually
- Extensive collaboration with data collection programs for drug deaths, suicides, and a variety of state mortality reviews
- Collaboration with UNR
  - Medical Examiners are UNR Med faculty
  - Medical Student rotations, Public Health internships at WCRMEO
  - Research collaborations with UNR Med and UNR Anthropology
  - Future plans: Forensic pathology fellowship program housed at WCRMEO and affiliated with UNR Med

## Organ & Tissue Donation

- Innovative in-house tissue donation program with Nevada Donor Network
  - Ensures all decedents can donate, regardless of where they died, if that was their wish
  - Since 2017, hundreds of lives saved and improved
- 2024 WCRMEO donation cases
  - 42 organ donation cases
  - 227 tissue donation cases
  - 278 ocular donation cases





**Thank you**

