

**Department:** Health Department

**Program Contact:** Richard Bruno

**Program Offer Type:** Operating

**Program Offer Stage:** Adopted

**Related Programs:**
**Program Characteristics:**

### Program Description

The County is required to perform death investigations, and those services are housed within the Health Department. The State Medical Examiner's Office (SMEO) is the lead agency for death investigations in Oregon operating within the Oregon State Police. The County Medical Examiner's Office (MEO) is involved in all deaths in the county, with the exception of natural deaths occurring directly under physician care greater than 24 hours in a hospital or hospice setting. As most deaths investigated by the Medical Examiner (ME) are sudden and unexpected, the MEO is in a unique position to identify unusual and emerging causes of death and injury, and to contribute to preventive public health interventions. While the SMEO is part of the Oregon State Police in a legally focused investigative position, the County MEO is housed within the Health Department. This remains a close connection between public health, public safety and fatalities, and identification of the leading causes of death and prevention efforts.

ME staff work directly with community/family members to investigate deaths that fall under County jurisdiction to provide support and crucial information regarding the cause and manner of death. The MEO strives to provide in-person investigations, to minimize the number of scenes in which law enforcement is the sole agency present. This provides increased public service, often to those most underserved.

The MEO works diligently with the community and external partners to provide equitable services to all impacted communities. Frequently, these are underserved, underrepresented people that do not have direct connections to formal healthcare and those facing mental health crisis and addiction, as those individuals that die while under medical care are not typically investigated by the MEO. Investigations conducted by the MEO provide critical data trends that shape the Department's work in addressing health inequities in preventable causes of death. This provides information to inform and shape programs for those experiencing chronic medical illnesses, homelessness, addiction, mental health crisis, weather impacts like extreme heat and cold, gun violence, and traffic fatalities, among some of the more notably preventable causes of death.

### Performance Measures

| Measure Type | Performance Measure                                                        | FY24 Actual | FY25 Budgeted | FY25 Estimate | FY26 Target |
|--------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|---------------|---------------|-------------|
| Output       | External examinations performed by County                                  | 450         | 400           | 400           | 500         |
| Outcome      | Deputy Medical Examiner arrives on-scene within one hour for 90% of calls  | 66          | 85            | 85            | 80          |
| Outcome      | The number of in-person scene responses with a death investigator on scene | 1,370       | 1,650         | 1,800         | 1,650       |

### Performance Measures Descriptions

Measure 1: Number of on-scene medicolegal death examinations performed by Multnomah County. 2: Percentage of calls in which the Deputy Medical Examiner arrives on-scene within one hour. Measure 3: Number of investigations in which the death investigator is on-scene.

## Legal / Contractual Obligation

ORS 146 specifies responsibilities and authorities for the Office (i.e. deaths requiring investigation; responsibility for investigation; notification of death; removal of body; authority to enter and secure premises; notification of next of kin; authority to order removal of body fluids; autopsies; disposition of personal property; unidentified human remains). ORS 146 also establishes a hybrid State/County program structure that limits the County's authority over operations, procedures, and technical functions.

## Revenue/Expense Detail

|                        | Adopted<br>General Fund | Adopted<br>Other Funds | Adopted<br>General Fund | Adopted<br>Other Funds |
|------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| Program Expenses       | 2025                    | 2025                   | 2026                    | 2026                   |
| Personnel              | \$2,541,019             | \$0                    | \$2,816,822             | \$0                    |
| Contractual Services   | \$118,526               | \$0                    | \$94,627                | \$0                    |
| Materials & Supplies   | \$23,169                | \$0                    | \$22,994                | \$0                    |
| Internal Services      | \$355,815               | \$0                    | \$349,502               | \$0                    |
| <b>Total GF/non-GF</b> | <b>\$3,038,529</b>      | <b>\$0</b>             | <b>\$3,283,945</b>      | <b>\$0</b>             |
| <b>Program Total:</b>  | <b>\$3,038,529</b>      |                        | <b>\$3,283,945</b>      |                        |
| <b>Program FTE</b>     | 17.00                   | 0.00                   | 17.00                   | 0.00                   |

| Program Revenues        |            |            |            |            |
|-------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Fees, Permits & Charges | \$0        | \$0        | \$0        | \$0        |
| <b>Total Revenue</b>    | <b>\$0</b> | <b>\$0</b> | <b>\$0</b> | <b>\$0</b> |

## Explanation of Revenues

## Significant Program Changes

**Last Year this program was:** FY 2025: 40052 Medical Examiner

Significant changes are related to a fully realized increase in work load and decreased capacity. The Medical Examiners Office (MEO) has continued to have an increased volume of required scene death investigations. In FY 2025, there was an increased budget for 2.00 FTE of Mediolegal Death Investigators to account for both an expected continued increase in volume and a newly increased workload resulting from the State's shift of full death investigations from their responsibility to the County's, which was fully realized in FY 2025. Over the course of FY 2025, the impacts of higher volume and greater workload continued, and as a result, the County saw an increase in response times to arrive on-scene at death investigations. Additionally there was an increase in staffing leaves of absence, partially driven by the increased expectations and workload, further adding to the gap between demand and resources.