

Division: Health Officer

Program Characteristics:

Program Description

Multnomah 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 responsible for investigating all deaths in the county, except natural deaths occurring directly under physician care after greater than 24 hours in a hospital or hospice setting. As most deaths investigated by the State and County Medical Examiner 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.

MEO 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. Many of the individuals served are from under-resourced or marginalized populations and may lack consistent access to formal healthcare, including those experiencing mental health crises or substance use disorders. Deaths that occur under active medical care are not typically investigated by the MEO, which can result in these populations being disproportionately represented in MEO caseloads.

Equity Statement

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, substance use disorder, 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.

Revenue/Expense Detail

	2026 General Fund	2026 Other Funds	2027 General Fund	2027 Other Funds
Personnel	\$2,816,822	\$0	\$3,113,842	\$0
Contractual Services	\$94,627	\$0	\$97,750	\$0
Materials & Supplies	\$22,994	\$0	\$75,589	\$0
Internal Services	\$349,502	\$0	\$575,803	\$0
Total GF/non-GF	\$3,283,945	\$0	\$3,862,984	\$0
Total Expenses:	\$3,283,945		\$3,862,984	
Program FTE	17.00	0.00	19.00	0.00
Program Revenues				
Fees, Permits & Charges	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total Revenue	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0

Performance Measures

Performance Measure	FY25 Actual	FY26 Estimate	FY27 Target
Number of in-person scene responses, as required in ORS 146	1,331	1,650	1,550
Number of external exams performed, as dictated by State Medical Examiner	550	500	600