

Mesa County Coroner's Office Annual Report

2024





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This report provides a summary and statistical analysis of the deaths that were investigated by the Mesa County Coroner's Office in the year 2024. Mesa County encompasses an area over 3300 square miles, which consists of desert, agricultural, and mountain areas. Mesa County is home to approximately 159,681 people in 12 communities. The largest of these is Grand Junction, followed by Fruita and Palisade. Other towns and unincorporated areas of the County include Clifton, Fruitvale, De Beque, Collbran, Mesa, Mack, Loma, Gateway, Glade Park and Whitewater.

The Coroner and/or Deputy Coroner are on duty 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The Coroner's mission is to satisfy the legal requirements of the office in a thorough and expeditious manner. The primary task of the Coroner's Office is to determine the cause and manner of death of those who have died in Mesa County or in those whose traumatic event originated in Mesa County. An autopsy may be required depending upon the circumstances of the death.

The Coroner's Office investigates sudden, unexpected deaths, especially those that occur under violent or suspicious circumstances. Those deaths to be reported to the Mesa County Coroner's Office include all deaths occurring in Mesa County as outlined below regardless of where or when the initial injuring event occurred. In addition, all deaths as outlined below shall be reported that occurred outside of Mesa County but the initiating injuring event occurred in Mesa County.

- From disease which may be hazardous or contagious or which may constitute a threat to the health of the general public
- From external violence, an unexplained cause, or under suspicious circumstances
- Where no physician is in attendance, or where, though in attendance, the physician is unable to certify the cause of death
- From thermal, chemical, or radiation injury
- From criminal abortion
- While in the custody of law enforcement officials or while incarcerated in a public institution
- When the death was sudden and happened to a person who was in good health
- From an industrial accident or any death suspected to involve the decedent's occupation
- When death occurs in a hospital less than 24 hours after admission to a hospital or after any invasive procedure
- Any death suspected to be due to alcohol intoxication or the result of exposure to drugs or toxic agents
- Any death due to neglect or suspected neglect
- Any stillbirth of 20 or more weeks gestational age unattended by a physician
- Any maternal death to include death of a pregnant woman regardless of the length of the pregnancy, and up to six weeks (or one year) post-delivery, even where the cause of death is unrelated to the pregnancy
- Any death of an infant or child where the medical history has not established a significant pre-existing condition

Staff

Dean Havlik, MD	Forensic Pathologist & Coroner
Julia Stern, D-ABMDI	Deputy Coroner
Masey Pratt, D-ABMDI	Deputy Coroner
Ginger Sprague	Deputy Coroner
Emma Fox	Deputy Coroner
Kassandra Salvati, BA	Support Coordinator
Alexis Prall, D-ABMDI	Deputy Coroner
Atlantis McGowen	Deputy Coroner

General Statistics

(Including deaths transferred to the county of origin)

Mesa County population in 2024 (2023 census)	159,681 compared to 158,636 in 2023
Total Mesa County deaths	2,445 compared to 2,050 in 2023
Percentage of Mesa County citizens who died in 2024	1.5% compared to 1.3% in 2023
Number of deaths reported to MCCO	736 compared to 771 in 2023
Scene Investigations	390 compared to 381 in 2023

Investigations by Investigator

Alexis Prall	140	Julia Stern	177
○ Natural		○ Natural	
■ Facility	47	■ Facility	58
■ Scene	40	■ Scene	72
○ Accident		○ Accident	
■ Facility	29	■ Facility	12
■ Scene	15	■ Scene	16
○ Suicide		○ Suicide	
■ Facility	1	■ Facility	3
■ Scene	7	■ Scene	12
○ Homicide		○ Homicide	
■ Facility		■ Facility	
■ Scene		■ Scene	
○ Undetermined		○ Undetermined	
■ Facility		■ Facility	
■ Scene	1	■ Scene	
Masey Pratt	167	Atlantis McGowen	94
○ Natural		○ Natural	
■ Facility	42	■ Facility	30
■ Scene	72	■ Scene	39
○ Accident		○ Accident	
■ Facility	27	■ Facility	10
■ Scene	8	■ Scene	8
○ Suicide		○ Suicide	
■ Facility	1	■ Facility	
■ Scene	13	■ Scene	
○ Homicide		○ Homicide	
■ Facility	1	■ Facility	
■ Scene	3	■ Scene	
○ Undetermined	0	○ Undetermined	
■ Facility		■ Facility	
■ Scene		■ Scene	

Ginger Sprague	95	Emma Fox	23
○ Natural		○ Natural	
■ Facility	41	■ Facility	9
■ Scene	28	■ Scene	11
○ Accident		○ Accident	
■ Facility	13	■ Facility	2
■ Scene	3	■ Scene	1
○ Suicide		○ Suicide	
■ Facility	2	■ Facility	
■ Scene	6	■ Scene	
○ Homicide		○ Homicide	
■ Facility	1	■ Facility	
■ Scene		■ Scene	
○ Undetermined		○ Undetermined	
■ Facility		■ Facility	
■ Scene		■ Scene	

Dean Havlik	1	Kassandra Salvati	13
○ Natural		○ Natural	
■ Facility	1	■ Facility	47
■ Scene		■ Scene	40
○ Accident		○ Accident	
■ Facility		■ Facility	29
■ Scene		■ Scene	15

Investigations involving multiple investigators 26

■ Natural	17
■ Accident	6
■ Suicide	3

Percentage of total deaths investigated 30%

Number of deaths originating in other counties/states 66

Number of deaths declined for jurisdiction 28

Number of postmortem examinations (Mesa County) 166

■ Percentage of all deaths in Mesa County having an examination	6.8%
■ Percentage of deaths reported to office having an examination	22.6%
○ Complete Autopsies	144
○ Partial Autopsies	5
○ External Examinations	17

Toxicology performed (Mesa County)

- Total cases tested 134 (80.1% of postmortem examination cases)
- Axis 125
- Community Hospital 9
- Axis & Community Hospital 0
- No toxicology performed 32

Pathologists who performed examinations

- Dean Havlik, MD 152 cases (130 complete, 6 partial, 16 external)
- Brent Davis, MD 14 cases (all complete)

Gender of those deaths investigated (2024 Total Cases)

- Males 445
- Females 291

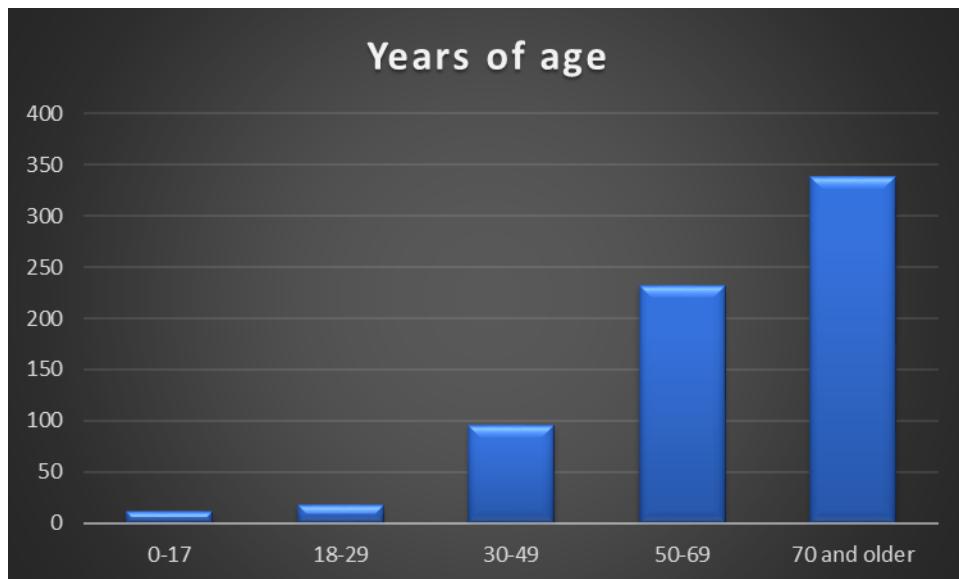
Race of those deaths investigated (2024 Total Cases)

- Caucasian 690
 - Females 281
 - Males 409
- Hispanic 35
 - Females 10
 - Males 25
- Native American 4
 - Females 0
 - Males 4
- Black 2
 - Females 0
 - Males 2
- Asian 2
 - Females 0
 - Males 2
- Other 3
 - Females 0
 - Males 3

Additional Information (2024 Total Cases)

- Decedents transported 385
- Unidentified bodies 0
- Organ and Tissue referrals 7
- Unclaimed bodies 0
- Exhumations 0

The following information pertains only to deaths that were not transferred back to the county of origin



Age	Total	Male	Female
0-17	11	6	5
18-29	18	14	4
30-49	95	69	26
50-69	232	154	78
70 or older	339	180	159

Deaths under the age of 18

Age 0-17					
	Accident	Suicide	Homicide	Natural	Undetermined
Male	3	1	0	1	0
Female	4	0	1	0	0
Total	7	1	1	1	0

** In the 0 to 17 years old group there were 10 total deaths, which included five males and five females. There was just one natural death in this age group which was determined to be due to a seizure disorder from a genetic abnormality. The 7 accidental deaths included three infants that died of asphyxia due to an unsafe sleep environment, one premature infant that was exposed to methamphetamine in-utero, one toddler that died of head injuries from a fall from a bed, one 17-year-old due to drowning and one 17-year-old due to a motor vehicle collision. The suicide death was that of a 13-year-old boy by hanging. The homicide was that of a teenager that had been missing since the year 2005 and was found dead in January 2024.

Infant deaths (deaths of those 1 year or younger)

- Total deaths: 4 deaths (2 males and 2 females)
- Of the 4 deaths all were Accidents (3 due to unsafe sleep environment and 1 premature infant that was exposed to methamphetamine in-utero)
- Of the 4 deaths, 3 of them underwent autopsy (premature infant not autopsied)

Manner of Death

Manner	# of cases	# of postmortem exams	% receiving a postmortem exam
Natural	512	44	8.6%
Accident	124	60	48%
Suicide	50	50	100%
Homicide	10	10	100%
Undetermined	1	1	100%

Manner of death age 18 and over

Age	Natural	Accident	Suicide	Homicide	Undetermined
18-29	6	9	2	1	0
30-49	43	25	21	6	0
50-69	184	27	18	2	1
70 & over	275	56	8	0	0
Total	508	117	49	9	1

Natural deaths age 18 and over

Age	Male	# of postmortem exams	% having postmortem exam	Female	# of postmortem exams	% having postmortem exams
18-29	5	3	60%	1	1	100%
30-49	28	9	32%	15	6	40%
50-69	118	15	12.71%	66	4	6.06%
70 & over	145	4	2.76%	130	2	1.53%

Of the 508 total natural deaths investigated in individuals over 18 years of age, the majority of the deaths were cardiovascular related (267 deaths, 53%). Deaths due to cardiovascular causes include myocardial infarcts (heart attacks), heart arrhythmias, strokes and aneurysms, among others. There were 25 deaths related to infectious causes (predominantly pneumonia in elderly individuals; 2 of these deaths were due to COVID-19 respiratory infection), 52 cancer related deaths, 32 deaths related to chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (emphysema) due to cigarette smoking, 57 deaths due to effects of chronic alcoholism and 30 deaths related to complications of dementia. The remaining 45 deaths were primarily from complications of other long-standing disease processes.

Accidental deaths age 18 & over

Accident						
Age	Male	# of postmortem exams	% having postmortem exams	Female	# of postmortem exams	% having postmortem exams
18-29	7	7	100%	2	2	100%
30-49	20	17	85%	5	4	80%
50-69	20	15	75%	7	5	71.4%
70 & over	28	3	1.07%	28	1	3.57%
Total	75	42	56%	42	12	28.5%

There were 117 total accidental deaths in individuals age 18 and over. Of the 63 accidental deaths in which no postmortem examination was performed, all were individuals who were hospitalized for an extended period of time and the injuries were well documented in the hospital and/or care facility and a majority of these deaths were elderly individuals who fell from a standing height resulting in injuries, primarily a hip fracture.

Accidental deaths (all ages)

Total investigated = 124

Type	Number of deaths
Motor vehicle (MV) collisions (including motorcycles and ATV's)	17
Falls	51
Drug intoxication (including acute alcohol intoxication)	27
Pedestrian struck by motor vehicle	5
Drowning	3
Other	21

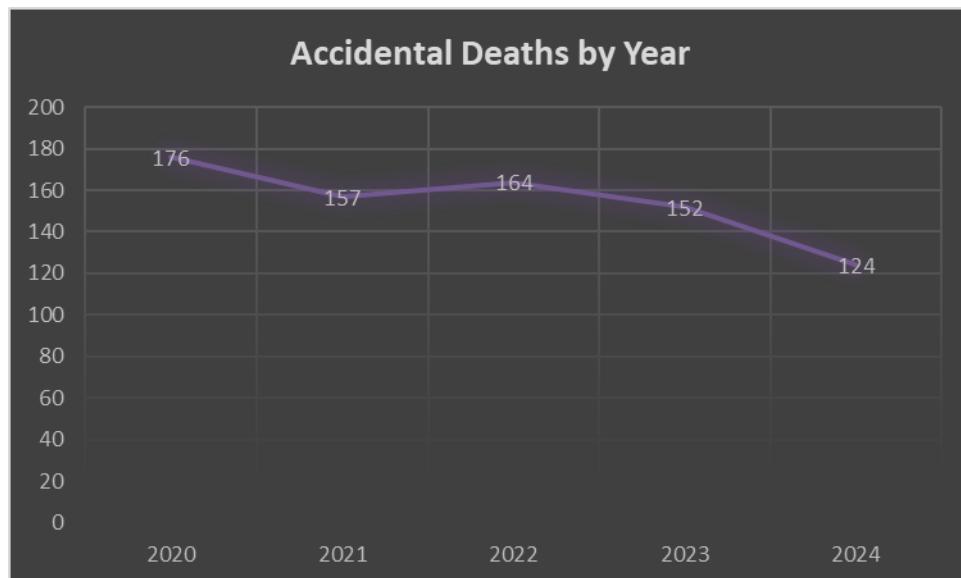
The 17-motor vehicle collision-related deaths displayed the following characteristics:

- Automobile decedents
 - Automobile accidents where decedents were drivers – 7
 - Automobile accidents where decedents were passengers – 3
 - Automobile accidents where it was unclear if the decedent was driver or passenger – 1
- Motorcycle/ATV helmet
 - Motorcycle/ATV wearing a helmet – 2
 - Motorcycle/ATV without a helmet – 4
 - Motorcycle/ATV unknown if wearing a helmet – 0
- Seatbelt
 - Automobile accidents where decedent was wearing a seatbelt – 3
 - Automobile accidents where decedent was not wearing a seatbelt – 6
 - Automobile accidents where it is unknown if wearing a seatbelt – 1
- Alcohol and /or drugs involved in at least 12 of the deaths (70% of cases)
 - Alcohol only in 3 deaths
 - Drugs only in 3 deaths
 - Alcohol and drugs in 6 deaths
 - Unknown if alcohol and drugs involved in 3 deaths

The drownings consisted of:

- 1 death in an irrigation canal
- 1 death in a bathtub
- 1 death while paddle boarding on the CO river

Total accidental deaths by year



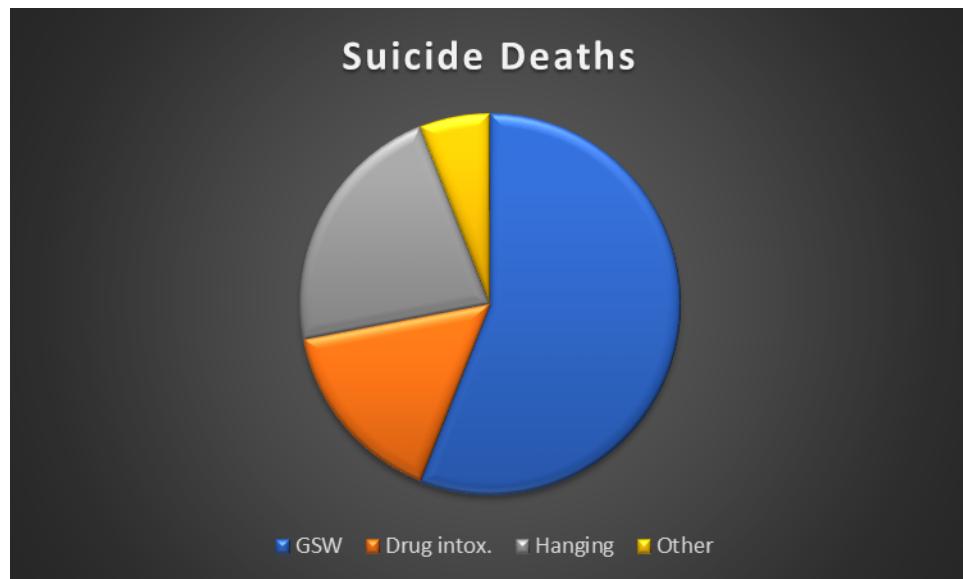
Total suicide deaths

Total reported to office: 53

Total in which the incident originated in Mesa County (true Mesa County deaths): 50

The below information only pertains to deaths where the incident originated in Mesa County

Type	Number of deaths	Male	Female	# of postmortem exams	% having postmortem exams
Gunshot wounds (GSW)	28	26	2	28	100%
Drug intoxication	8	3	5	8	100%
Hanging	11	8	3	11	100%
Jump off cliff (blunt force injuries)	1	0	1	1	100%
Drove car off cliff (blunt force injuries)	1	0	1	1	100%
Sharp force injury	1	1	0	1	100%



Suicide deaths details

Gunshot wound

Age	Male	Female
0-17	0	0
18-29	1	0
30-49	7	1
50-69	12	1
70 and over	6	0

Hanging

Age	Male	Female
0-17	1	0
18-29	0	0
30-49	6	2
50-69	1	1
70 and over	0	0

Sharp force injury

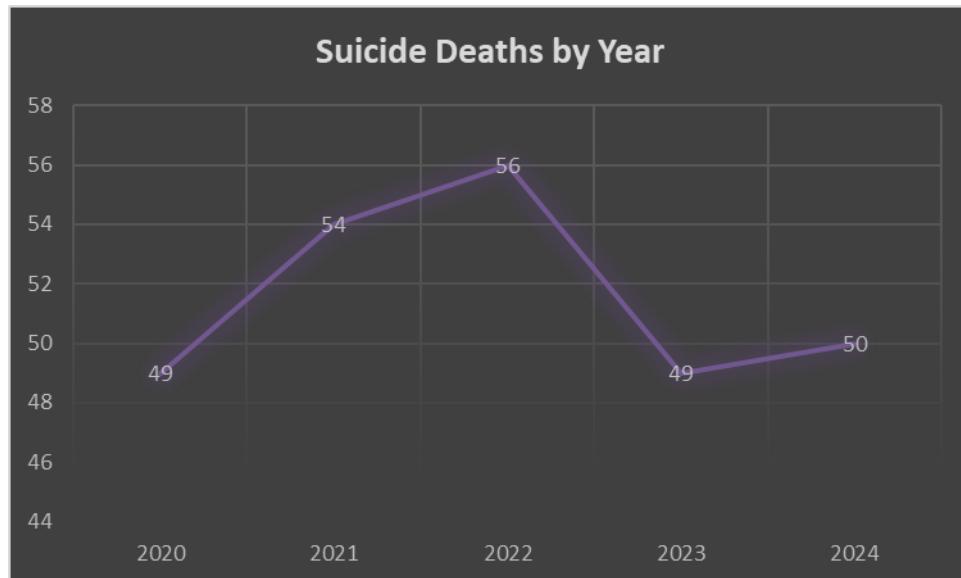
Age	Male	Female
0-17	0	0
18-29	0	0
30-49	0	0
50-69	0	0
70 and over	1	0

Blunt force injuries

Age	Male	Female
0-17	0	0
18-29	0	1
30-49	0	0
50-69	0	0
70 and over	0	1

Drug intoxication

Age	Male	Female
0-17	0	0
18-29	0	0
30-49	2	3
50-69	1	2
70 and over	0	0

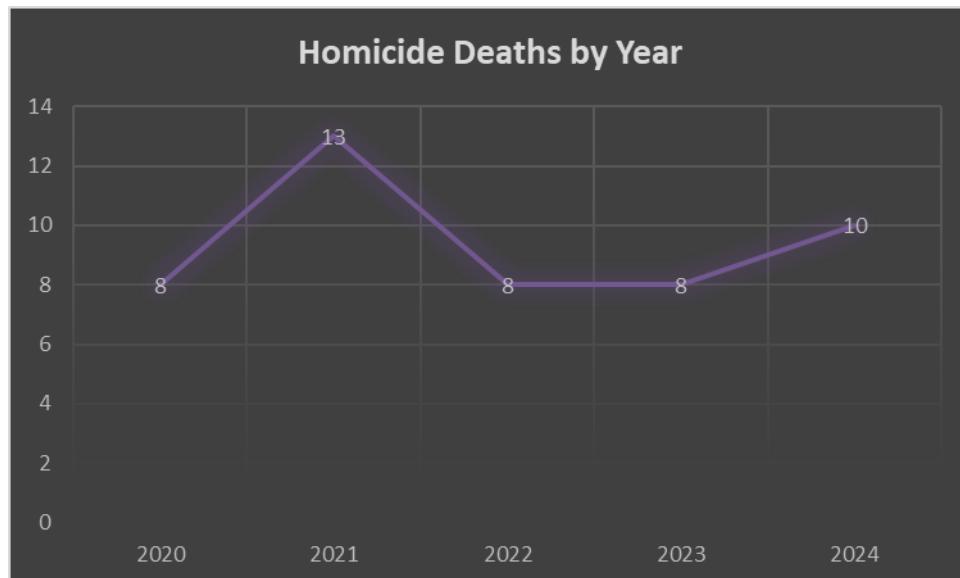
Suicide deaths by year 2020-2024**Homicide Deaths**

Age	Male	Female	# of postmortem exams	% having postmortem exams	Gunshot wounds	Stab wounds	Blunt force injuries	Strangulation	Thermal injuries	Unknown Cause
0-17	0	1	1	100%	0	0	0	0	0	1
18-29	0	1	1	100%	0	0	0	0	1	0
30-49	6	0	6	100%	2	1	2	1	0	0
50-69	1	1	0	100%	1	0	1	0	0	0
70 & over	0	0	0		0	0	0	0	0	0

The 10 homicides had the following characteristics:

- 3 deaths due to gunshot wounds
- 3 deaths due to blunt force injuries
- 1 death due to a stab wound
- 1 death due to strangulation
- 1 death from thermal injuries from an intentionally set fire
- 1 death in a teenager that had been missing since the year 2005 and was found dead in January 2024 from an undetermined cause due to the decomposed condition of the body

Homicide deaths by year 2020-2024



Undetermined Deaths

Undetermined				
Age	Male	Female	# of postmortem exams	% having postmortem exams
0-17	0	0	0	
18-29	0	0	0	
30-49	0	0	0	
50-69	1	0	1	100%
70 & over	0	0	0	

The 1 undetermined death had the following characteristics:

- Skeletal remains of a 62-year-old man who had been missing since the year 2020

Drug-related deaths (including acute alcohol intoxication)

There were 36 deaths in which alcohol and/or other drugs caused or contributed to death. This does not include the deaths in which a drug is identified but did not contribute to the death in any way. Of these drug-related deaths, there were 26 males and 10 females for a male to female ratio of 2.6:1 and 30 of the 36 deaths were that of non-Hispanic whites (83% of the deaths). The deaths were Accidents and Suicides. There were no drug-related deaths in 2024 in which the manner of death was Homicide or Undetermined.

Drug-related deaths in Mesa County are due to a variety of drugs including methamphetamine, opioids, cocaine, benzodiazepines, tricyclic antidepressants, antipsychotics and other prescription-type drugs. The deaths in this group also include those related to acute alcohol intoxication but it does not include deaths due to complications of chronic alcoholism such as from cirrhosis, electrolyte abnormalities, alcohol withdrawal or gastrointestinal hemorrhage.

Methamphetamine was the most common drug in Mesa County that caused or contributed to death in Mesa County in 2024. There were 10 deaths related solely to methamphetamine and 9 other deaths in which methamphetamine was mixed with one or more other drugs (19 total cases of the 36 deaths; 53% of the drug-related deaths were due to methamphetamine). These numbers highlight that methamphetamine is far and away above any other drug (besides alcohol) that led to death in Mesa County citizens in 2024, as it has in years past.

The numbers of deaths in Mesa County where acute or chronic alcohol use was a factor leading to death was 62.

Deaths with cause due to or contributed by substance intoxication

Age (years)	0-17	18-29	30-49	50-69	70 & over
Accident	1	4	12	10	1
Suicide	0	0	5	3	0

Drug description in drug-related deaths 2024

Drug(s)	Numbers of deaths
Methamphetamine only	10
Methamphetamine and fentanyl	5
Methamphetamine, fentanyl and gabapentin	1
Methamphetamine and propranolol	1
Methamphetamine and alcohol	1
Methamphetamine, oxcarbazepine and gabapentin	1
Fentanyl only	1
Fentanyl, mitragynine and bromazolam	1
Fentanyl, cocaine, oxycodone and duloxetine	1
Cocaine only	2
Alcohol only	1

Alcohol and amitriptyline	1
Bupropion	1
Hydrocodone and acetaminophen	1
Tramadol	1
Alcohol and oxycodone	1
Methadone and duloxetine	1
Diphenhydramine	1
Oxycodone	1
Quetiapine	1
Alcohol and venlafaxine	1
Olanzapine, hydroxyzine, lamotrigine & propranolol	1