



## Autopsies Performed by the North Carolina Medical Examiner System

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### OVERVIEW

The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) investigates all suspicious, violent, unexpected, and sudden deaths in North Carolina, including all suspected drug-related or poisoning deaths. The OCME collects data from autopsy reports, death certificates, investigation reports, and toxicology reports on all deaths investigated by the medical examiner system in North Carolina. The data collected by the OCME can be used to identify trends relating to deaths in North Carolina, inform public health initiatives, and develop prevention strategies.

### OCME TOXICOLOGY LABORATORY

The OCME Toxicology Laboratory is accredited by the American Board of Forensic Toxicology (ABFT) and performs toxicology testing on all drug-related deaths in North Carolina to assist the pathologist in determining cause and manner of death. The OCME Toxicology Laboratory screens for more than 600 compounds. The number of novel compounds detected during screening has risen dramatically in the last two years.

### SUMMARY

North Carolina has experienced a substantial increase in the number of poisoning deaths in recent years, which has placed additional strain on OCME staff and resources.

In 2000, there were a total of 3,707 autopsies performed by the medical examiner system. Of these, 13.4% were poisoning deaths.

In 2010, 29.1% of autopsies performed by the medical examiner system were poisoning deaths. This represents an increase of 93.6% from 2000.

In 2015, 38.4% of autopsies performed by the medical examiner system were poisoning deaths. This represents an increase of 26.7% from 2010 and 145.2% from 2000.

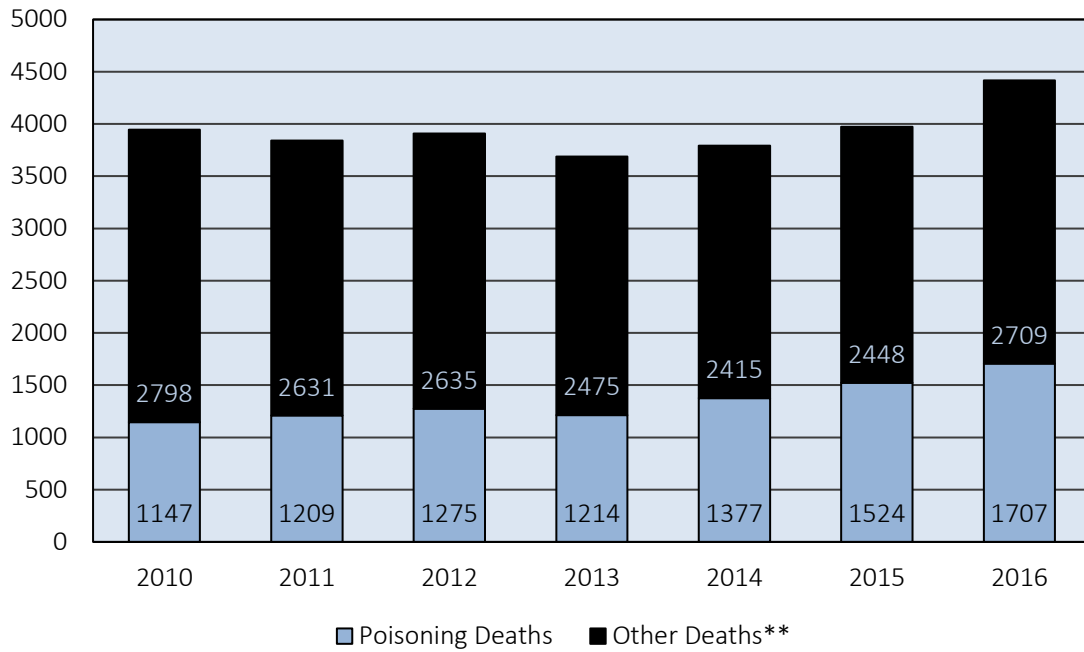
Based on provisional data, the total number of autopsies performed by the medical examiner system increased by 11.2% from 2015 to 2016.

In April 2017, there were a total of 138 autopsies performed at the OCME in Raleigh. Of these, 50.0% were suspected overdose deaths.

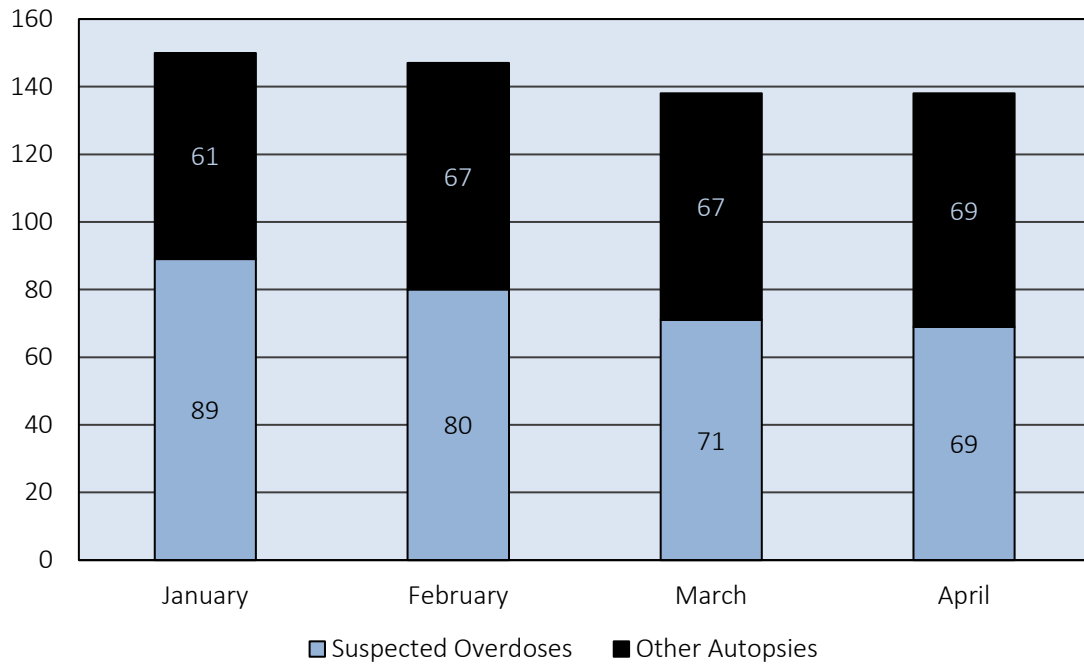
**Source: Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME).**



**Figure 1 Autopsies Performed by the North Carolina Medical Examiner System, 2010 – 2016\***



**Figure 2 Autopsies Performed at the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, January – April 2017**



\*2016 is considered provisional and is current as of May 4, 2017. The number of poisoning deaths may increase as cases are finalized.

\*\*Pending cases are included in this category.