

**DISTRICT 23 MEDICAL EXAMINER'S
OFFICE**

2025 Annual Report

Promoting Excellence in Death Investigation

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Introduction

The District 23 Medical Examiner's Office (D23MEO) is located at 4501 Avenue A in St. Augustine, Florida. We are responsible for determining the cause and manner of death in people who die in the counties of St. Johns, Flagler, and Putnam that fulfill the criteria of Florida Statute 406.11. This statute empowers the Medical Examiner to perform investigations and examinations deemed necessary based on the following criteria:

When any person dies in the state:

1. Of criminal violence
2. By accident
3. By suicide
4. Suddenly, when in apparent good health
5. Unattended by a practicing physician or other recognized practitioner
6. In any prison or penal institution
7. In police custody
8. In any suspicious or unusual circumstances
9. By criminal abortion
10. By poison
11. By disease constituting a threat to public health
12. By disease, injury or toxic agent resulting from employment

(a) When a dead body is brought into the state without proper medical certification

(b) When a body is to be cremated, dissected, or buried at sea

The office has thirteen employees including a chief medical examiner, two associate medical examiners, an operations manager, two administrative staff, four medicolegal death investigators, and three forensic technicians. We are proud to say that we have implemented a cross-training program for the administrative and the investigative/technical staff which maximizes the employee's versatility and performance, allows reallocation of employees during demand spikes and absences, and overall reduces the cost of hiring additional employees.

The D23MEO continues to comply with national standards, Florida administrative code, and Florida Association of Medical Examiner guidelines. We are proud to be accredited by the National Association of Medical Examiners. The Medical Examiners are board certified by the American Board of Pathology and the operations manager and three investigators are certified by the American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators.

Our mission is to comply with our mandate in a compassionate, respectful, and timely manner, and to provide accurate information to all stakeholders.

County Demographics

According to the United States Census Bureau, the combined population in 2025 of the three counties the D23MEO serves was estimated at 564,422 with St. Johns County accounting for the largest population of the three counties.

The separate population estimates are as follows:

St. Johns County	346,328
Flagler County	140,360
Putnam County	77,734

Facilities and Working Hours

The office consists of an administrative building and a separate building that houses the autopsy suite. While our facility is open from Monday to Friday during normal business hours, medicolegal death investigations are carried out 24 hours a day, every day of the year.

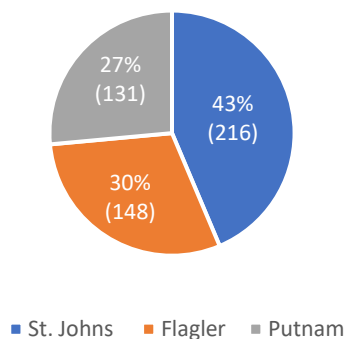
The structure of the D23MEO is 20 years old; based on population increases of the counties we serve, the office has critical space limitations. In 2025, a request for funding to build a new office or expand the existing office was made to address space constraints, increase refrigeration capacity, add physical security, and allow modernization of the autopsy suites. The request was granted and an expansion is programmed to start in 2026 with completion in 2027.

Workload

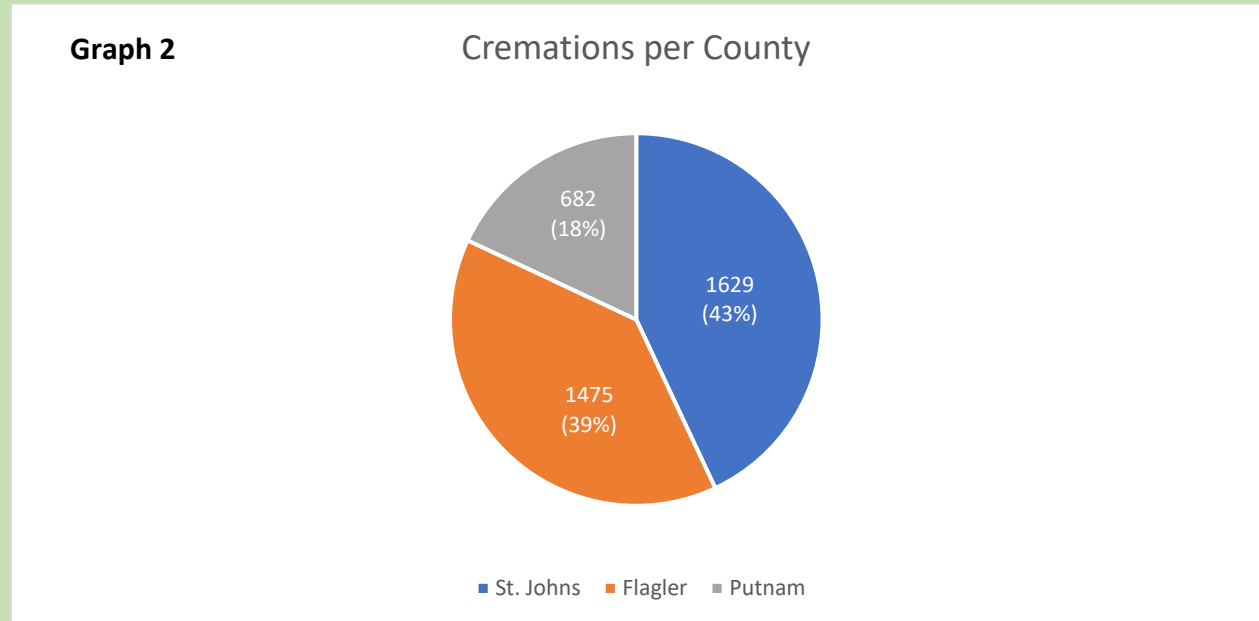
In 2025 a total of 1,076 cases were reported to the D23MEO. Out of these 444 were immediately declined as they did not meet criteria for jurisdiction. Six hundred and thirty-two cases were investigated. Out of those, 3 cases were deemed to be non-human remains, and 137 cases were further determined to not fulfill the criteria established by F.S. 406.11; the latter cases are known as declined jurisdiction. Ultimately, medical examiner Jurisdiction was assumed in 495 cases. The number and percentage of cases by county is depicted in Graph 1.

Graph 1

Percentage of Cases per County

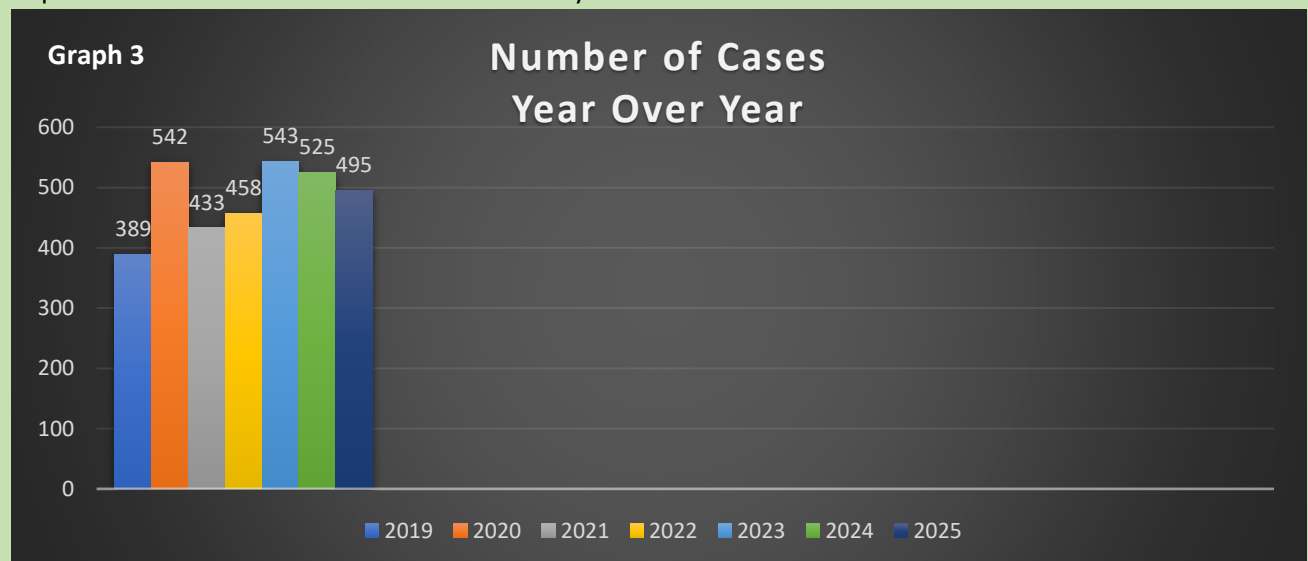


In addition, the D23MEO reviewed the death certificates of 3,786 decedents that were to be cremated, dissected, or buried at sea to determine if any of those fulfilled the criteria of F.S. 406.11. Of the reviewed cases 23 were identified as meeting criteria for medical examiner jurisdiction and their death certificates were re-certified with the appropriate cause and manner of death. The number of cremations by county is depicted in **Graph 2**.



Year over Year

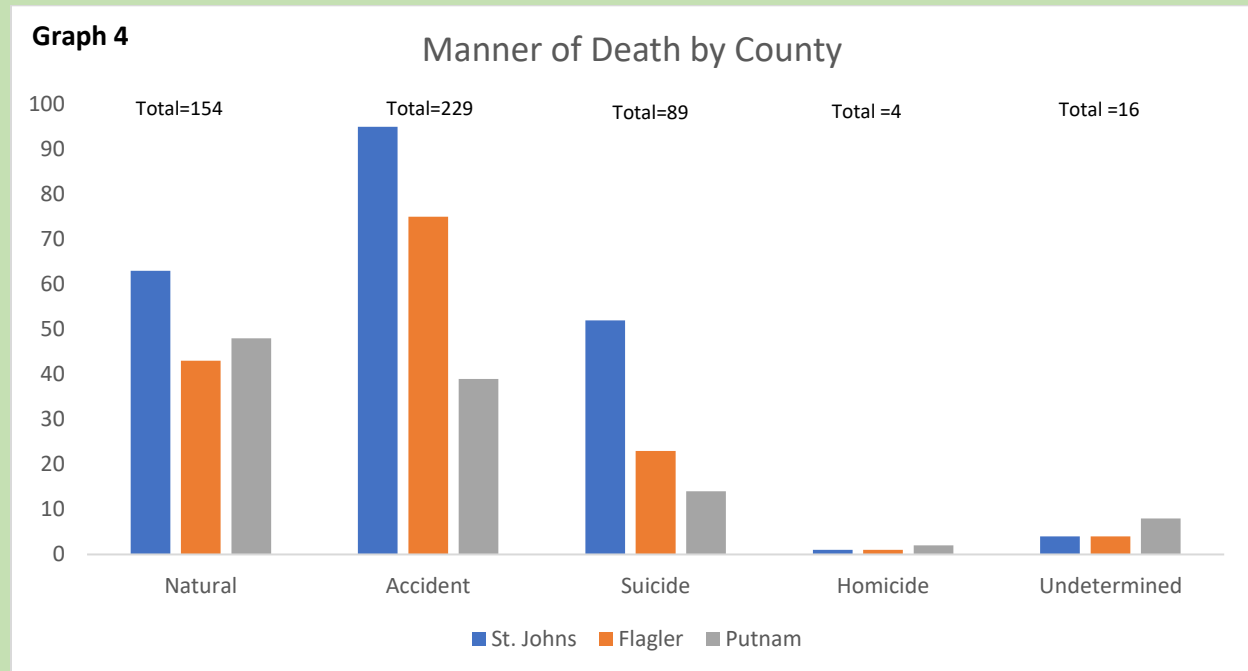
In recent years, St. Johns and Flagler Counties have experienced a rapid increase in population, reflected in the total number of cases in which D23MEO assumed jurisdiction for those years. Sans the accelerated rate in 2020 which was partly due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the increase in the remaining years was secondary to drug overdoses. However, year 2025 yielded a marginal decrease in cases (-31 cases) which reflects a decline in deaths due to drug overdoses, commensurate with the national trend. **Graph 3** depicts the number of ME cases for the last six years.



It is important to note that not all cases in which the D23MEO assumes jurisdiction are transported to the Medical Examiner’s Office. Additionally, not all cases transported to the office are to be autopsied. Decedents not brought to the office include mostly those who suffered falls, complications of a fall, and were under medical care at the time of their death; in those cases, the cause of death is adjudicated based on investigative findings and review of medical records. In 2025, out of 495 cases in which we assumed jurisdiction, 421 were physically brought into the office; out of those, 322 (77%) were autopsied while the remainder underwent external examinations. It bears to say, that in 2025 more cases received full autopsies as compared to 2024 (66%).

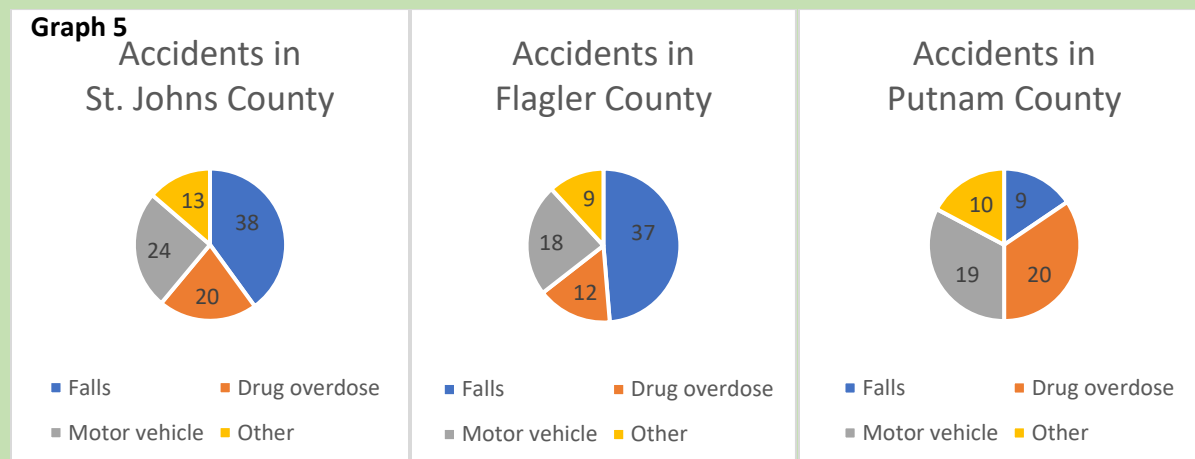
Cause and Manner of Death

Each certificate of death must include a cause and a manner of death. The cause of death is the initiating disease or condition that starts a physiologic pathway culminating in death. The manner of death is how the death came about. The assignment of a manner of death is for public health purposes, although agencies like the State Attorney’s Office and insurance companies may use this determination for their own purposes. The manners of death are natural, accident, suicide, homicide, and undetermined. If a person dies from a natural disease, then the manner is natural. If death is secondary to injury or drug toxicity without evidence that there was intent to harm or cause death, then the manner is accident. Suicides result from injury or drug toxicity that results from an act intended to cause self-harm or death. Homicides are deaths that result from a volitional act committed by another person with the intention to cause fear, harm, or death. In cases in which the manner of death cannot be determined because there is more than one reasonable choice or if there is a high degree of uncertainty, then the manner of death is best listed as undetermined. **Graph 4** shows the proportion of manner of death in 2025 by counties. Note that the total is 492 cases. That is because three sets of human bones investigated were deemed to be archaeological or of no forensic significance.



Accidents

In 2025, accident was the most common manner of death certified at the D23MEO. Accidents include motor vehicle related deaths, drug toxicity, falls, drownings, and other modalities. In 2025 falls associated to the elderly population are overall the most common modality. Notice that in Putnam County, drug overdose is still the most common modality of accidental deaths. **Graph 5** shows the distribution of accidental manner of death per county.



Accidental Drug Overdoses

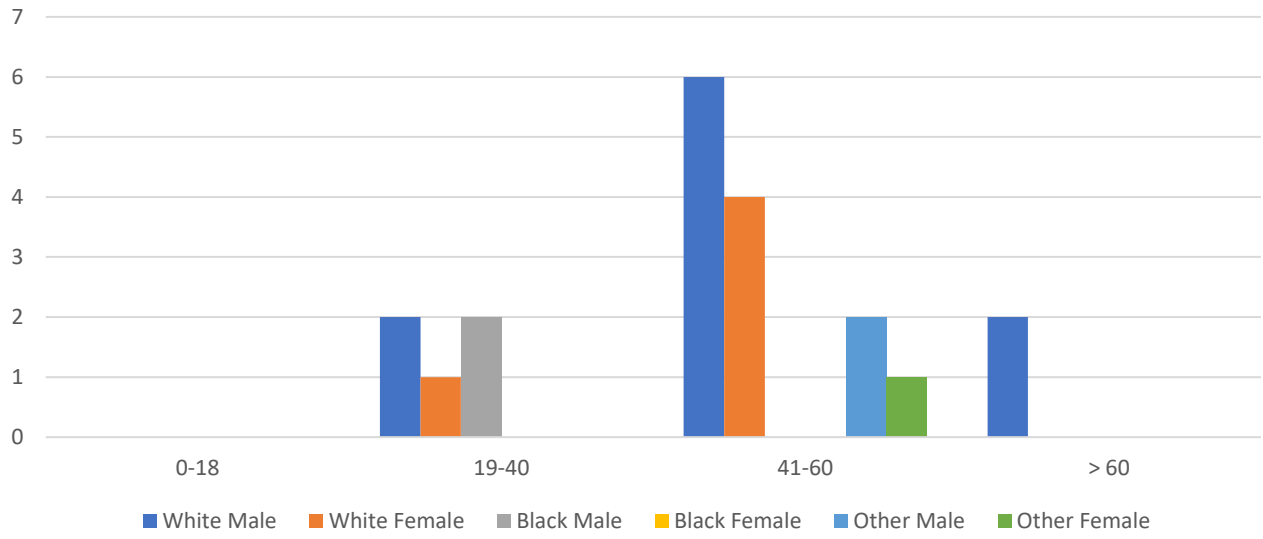
In 2025, the D23MEO certified a total of 52 drug overdoses. By far, the most common drug causing accidental deaths is non-prescribed (illicitly obtained) fentanyl, mostly in combination with stimulants or other drugs. Methamphetamine is the most common stimulant and Acetyl fentanyl is the most common fentanyl analog found in the decedents.

Table 1 depicts the most common combinations of drugs seen within the three counties.

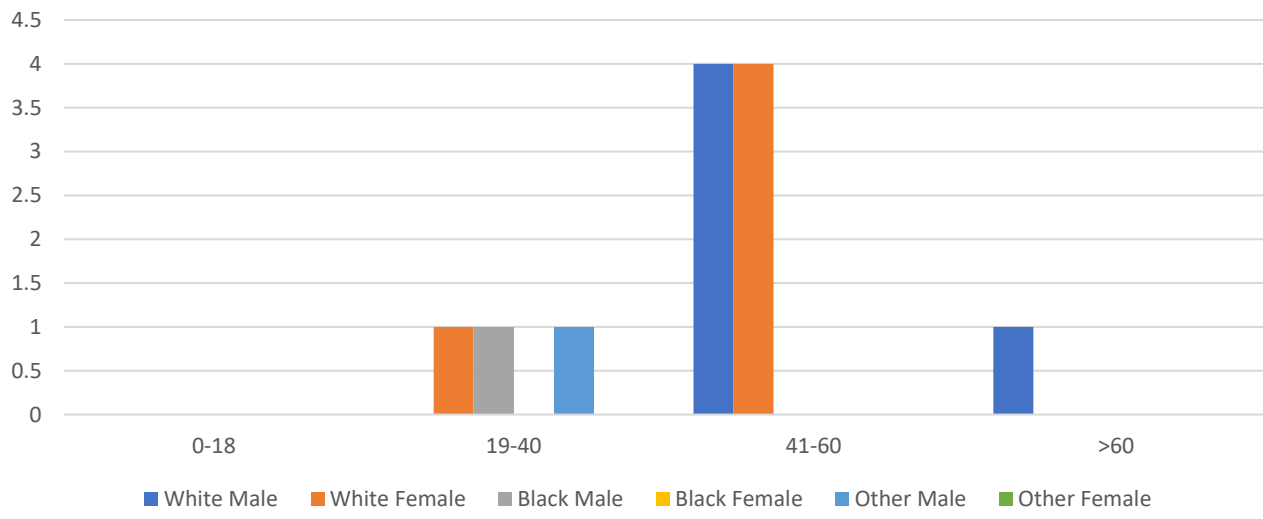
Table 1	Fentanyl	Fentanyl + Fentanyl analog	Fentanyl + stimulant	Fentanyl + Fentanyl analog + stimulant	Fentanyl analog + stimulant	Fentanyl + others	Stimulants	Methadone	Other drugs
County									
St. Johns	2	1	7	1	0	1	6	1	1
Flagler	2	3	1	0	0	1	5	0	0
Putnam	1	1	6	2	0	1	6	0	3

Graphs 6, 7, and 8 show the demographic distribution of drugs by age, gender, and ethnicity within each county.

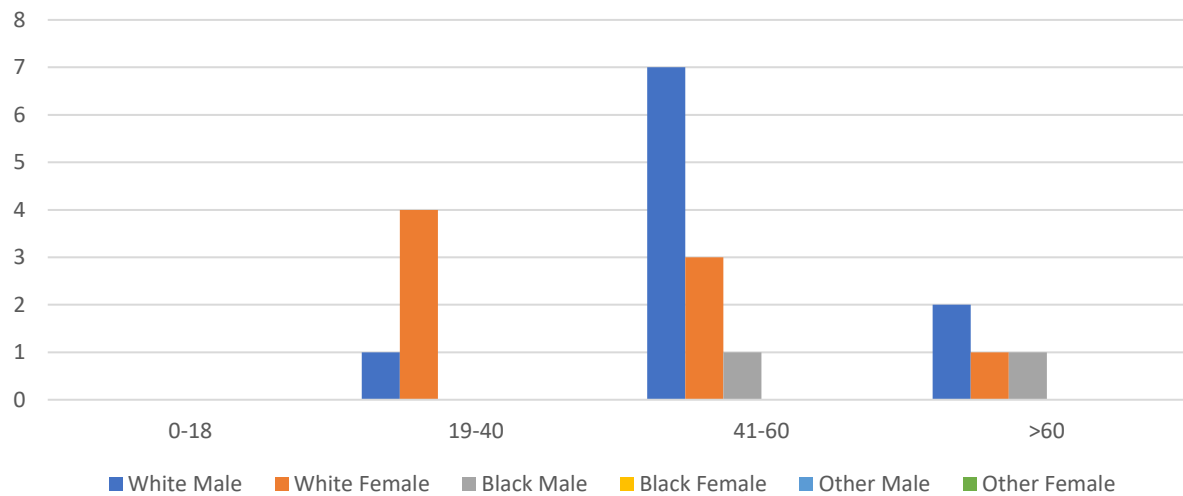
Graph 6 Accidental Drug Overdoses St. Johns County- Demographics



Graph 7 Accidental Drug Overdoses Flagler County- Demographics



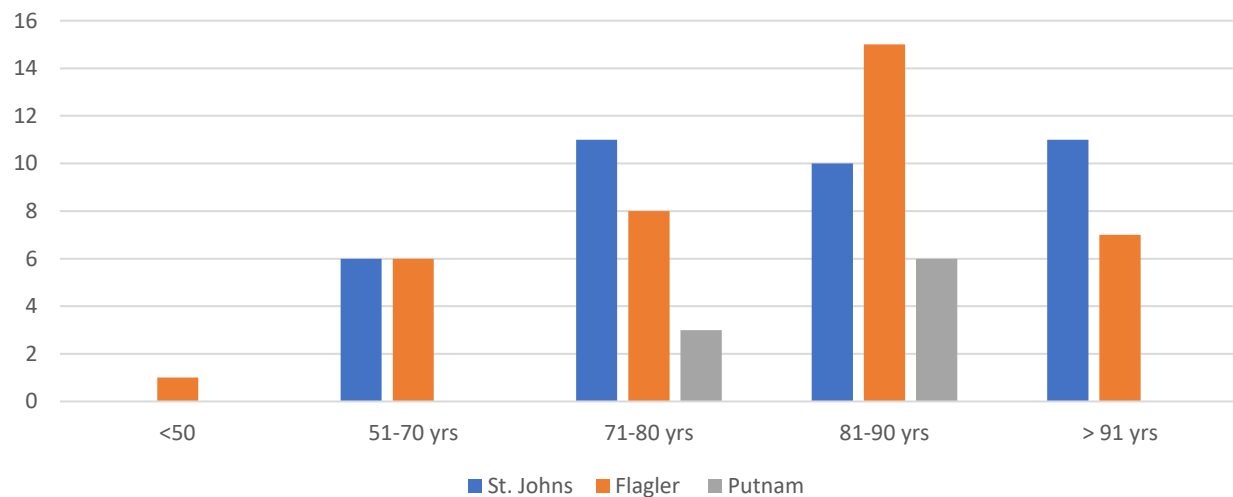
Graph 8 Accidental Drug Overdoses Putnam County- Demographics



Falls

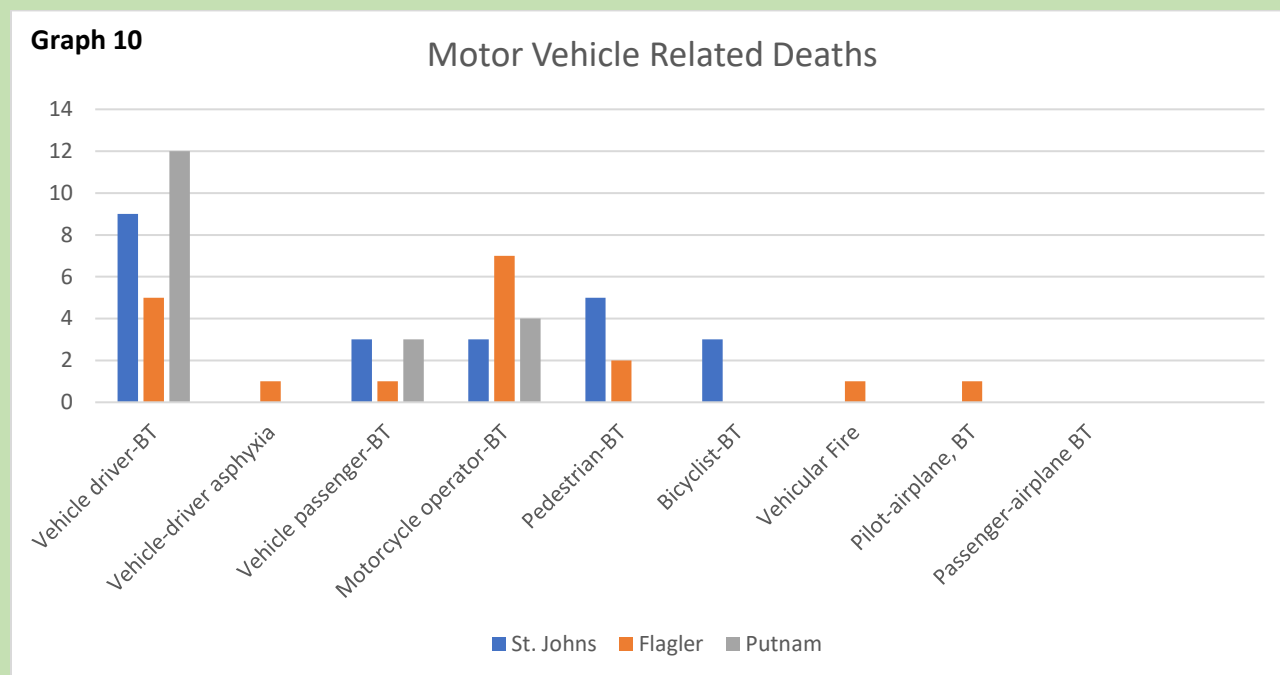
The Medical Examiner Office certified 84 deaths secondary to falls in 2025. The circumstances presented determine if the decedents bodies will be brought to the Medical Examiner’s Office for external examination. Most of these deaths are certified following medicolegal death investigation and review of medical records without physical examination. Eleven out of the eighty three cases were brought to the office, with nine of those cases receiving a full autopsy prior to determination of cause of death. The cause of death on these cases are typically designated as blunt trauma and include intracranial hemorrhages and hip fractures in the elderly population resulting from ground level falls, falls from bed, or falls from wheelchairs. The majority of deaths resulting from falls (58%) occurred in the population over the age of 80 years. **Graph 9** depicts the age range for falls per county.

Graph 9 Age Distribution of Falls by County



Motor Vehicle Related Deaths

Motor vehicle fatalities include deaths in cars, motorcycles, bicyclists struck by vehicles, pedestrians struck or runover by vehicles, and plane crashes. The modalities include deaths from blunt trauma (BT), traumatic asphyxia, drowning, and vehicular fire. In 2025, sixty deaths were recorded in all three counties. The distribution of motor vehicle related death by county is depicted in **Graph 10**.



Forty-five decedents out of the 60 traffic related deaths were operating their vehicles (cars, plane, bicycles, and motorcycles). Twenty five out of the forty five decedents (56%) were positive for alcohol or drugs with five out of the 25 having more than one drug in their system. Drugs included fentanyl, alcohol, stimulants like cocaine and methamphetamines, and marijuana.

Drownings

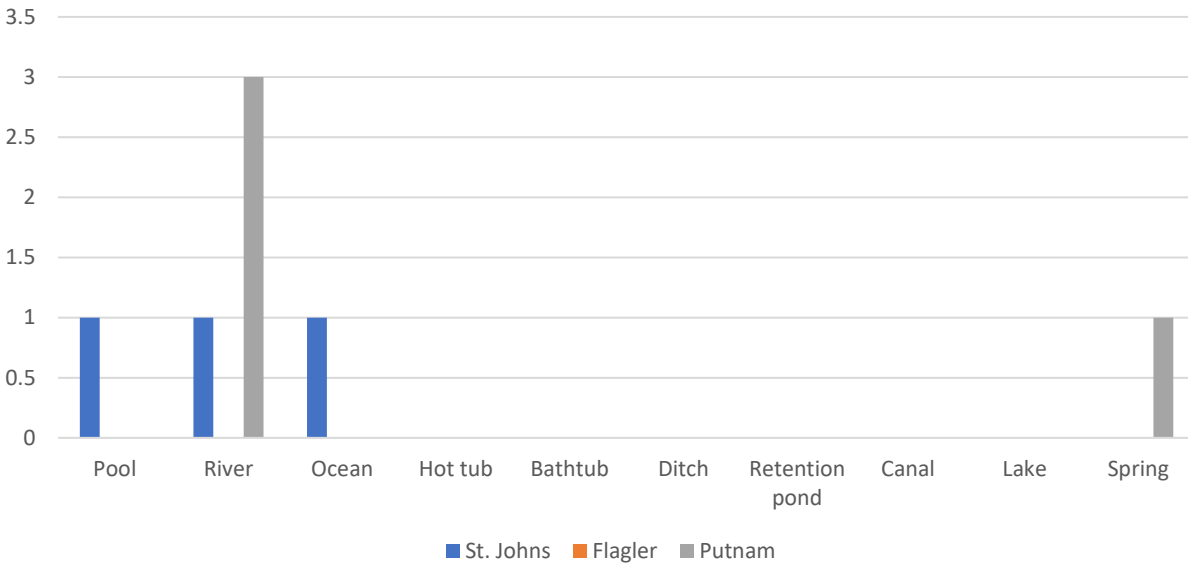
There were 7 drownings in 2025, accounting for approximately 3% of total accidental deaths. Overall, drowning occurs most often in a river. All drownings occurred between the ages of 20 and 80. **Graph 11** depicts the locations of the drownings by county.

Other Accidental Deaths

In 2025, other accidental deaths accounted for 12% of the total accidents. Included amongst those deaths are fire-related deaths, choking, and other types of asphyxia deaths.

Graph 11

Location of Drownings

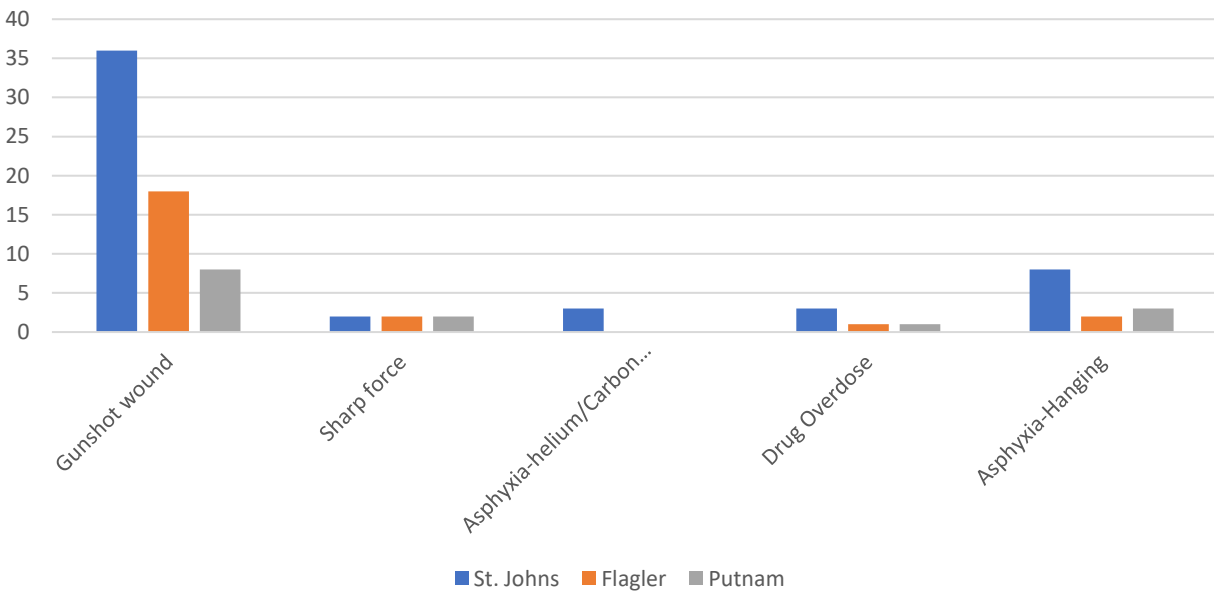


Suicides

In 2025, the D23MEO certified 89 deaths with a suicidal manner. Firearm deaths exceeded hanging, asphyxia by carbon monoxide/helium, and overdoses as the preferred mean to kill oneself. **Graphs 12 through 15** show the distribution of suicides in each county by modality, and age. The suicide male to female ratio in St Johns, Flagler, and Putnam Counties were 3.3:1, 6.6:1, and 3.6:1, respectively. The age of female suicides (total 18 females) ranged from 12 to 73 years, and the male suicides (total 71 males) ranged from 21 to 95 years for all counties.

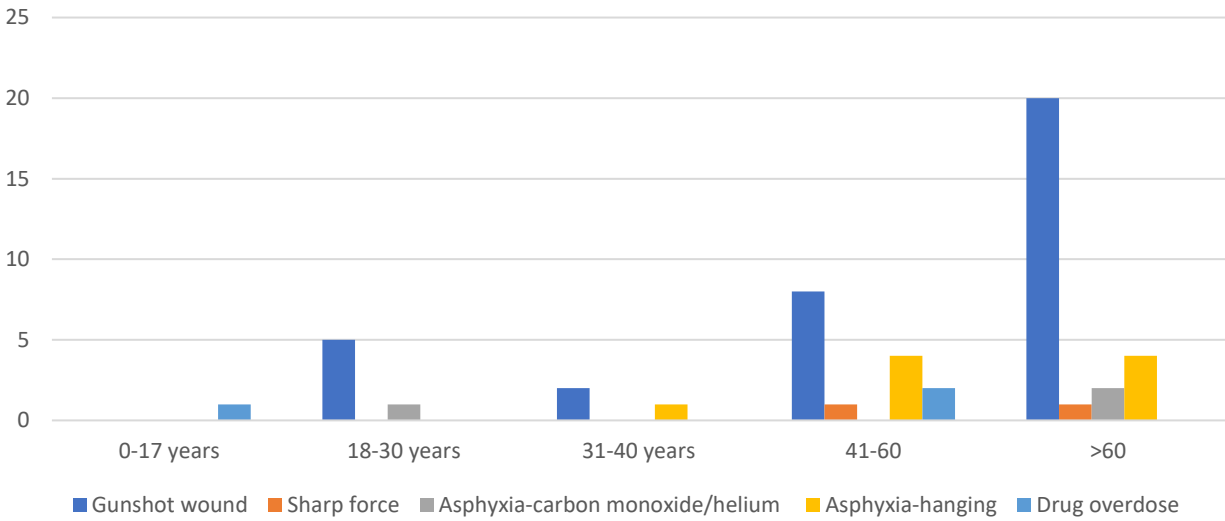
Graph 12

Suicide Modalities



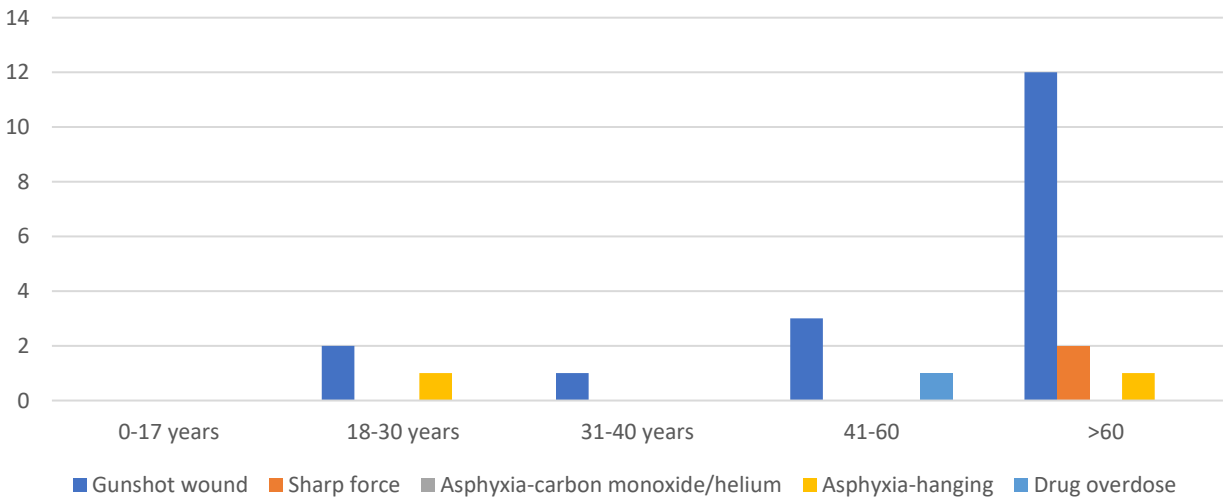
Graph 13

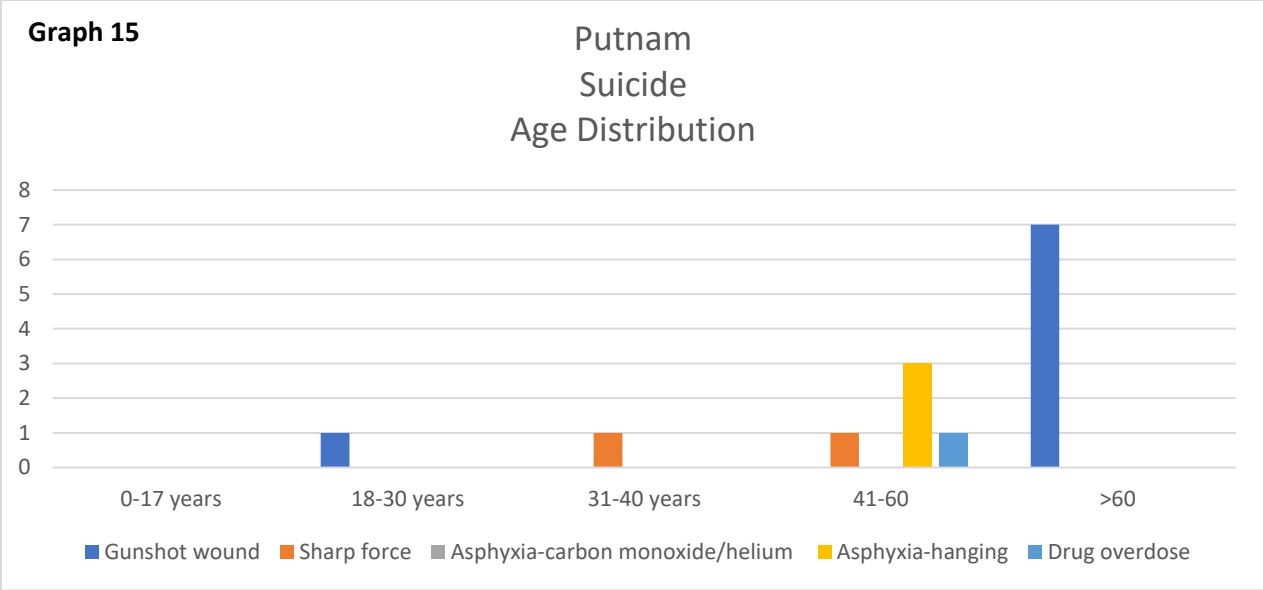
St. Johns
Suicide
Age Distribution



Graph 14

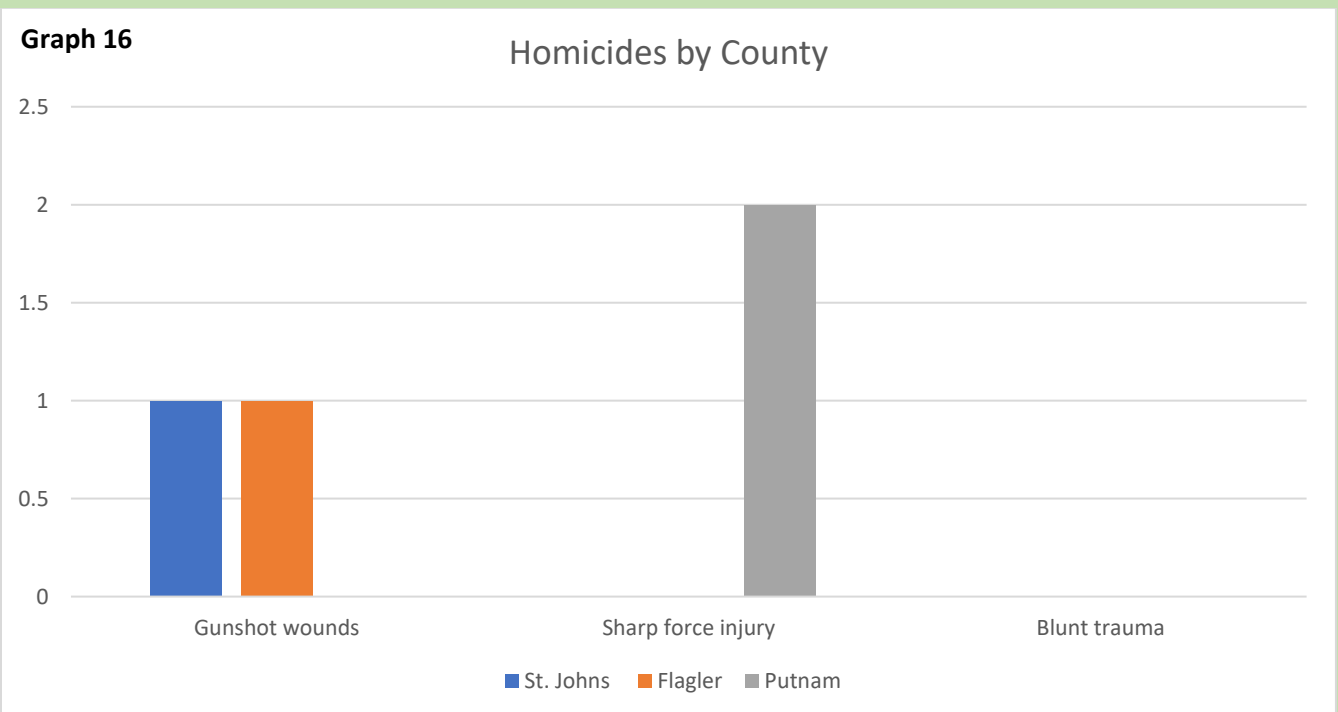
Flagler
Suicide
Age Distribution

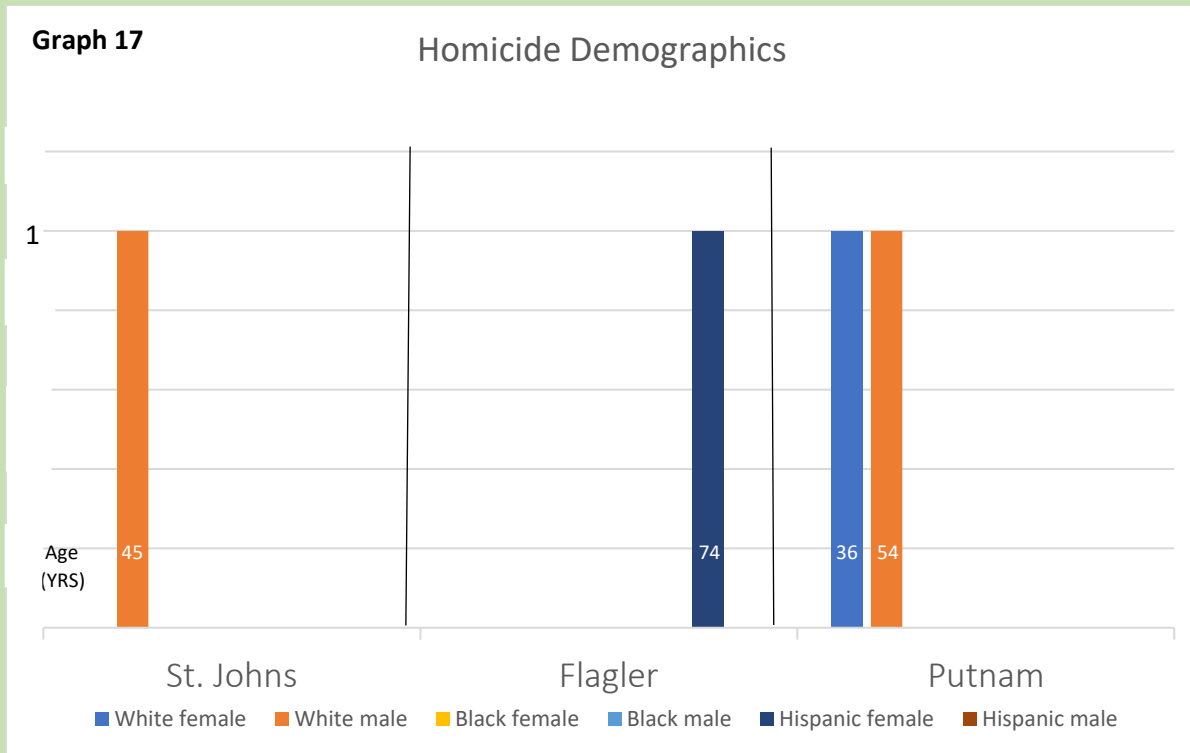




Homicides

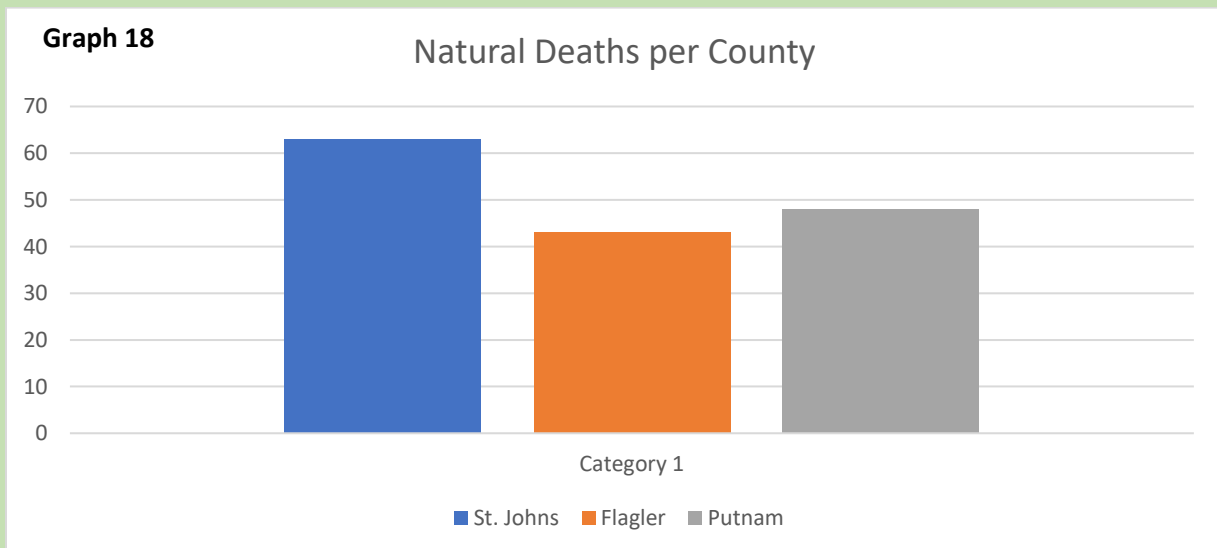
It bears reminding that for the purposes of death certification, the classification of homicide is a “neutral” term and neither indicates nor implies criminal intent. Year 2025 yielded 4 homicides, a total **55% decrease** in homicides for all counties as compared to year 2024. **Graph 16** depicts the number of homicides by counties and **Graph 17** depicts the homicide demographics by age, ethnicity, and gender. In 2025, homicides by gunshot wounds equaled homicides by sharp force injuries. The single homicide in St. Johns County was classified as non-criminal.





Natural Deaths

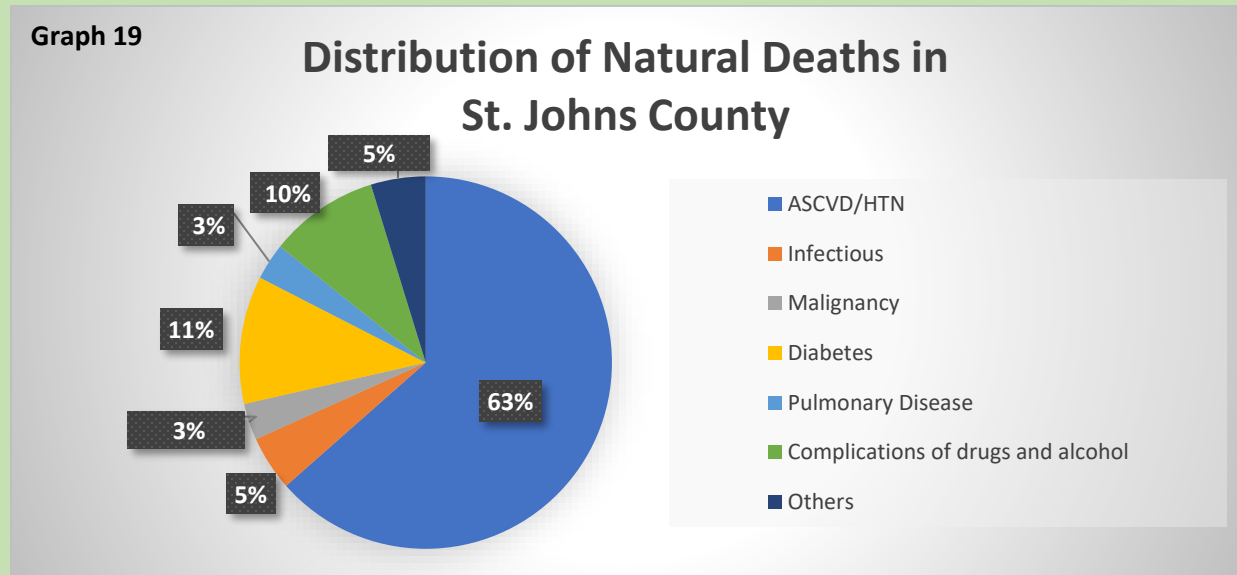
Per Florida Statute, if a person dies while they are not under the care of a medical professional during the 12 months preceding the death, then the medical examiner must take jurisdiction for the purpose of certifying the death. The D23MEO certified a total of 154 natural deaths in 2025. The number of natural deaths per County is depicted on **Graph 18**.



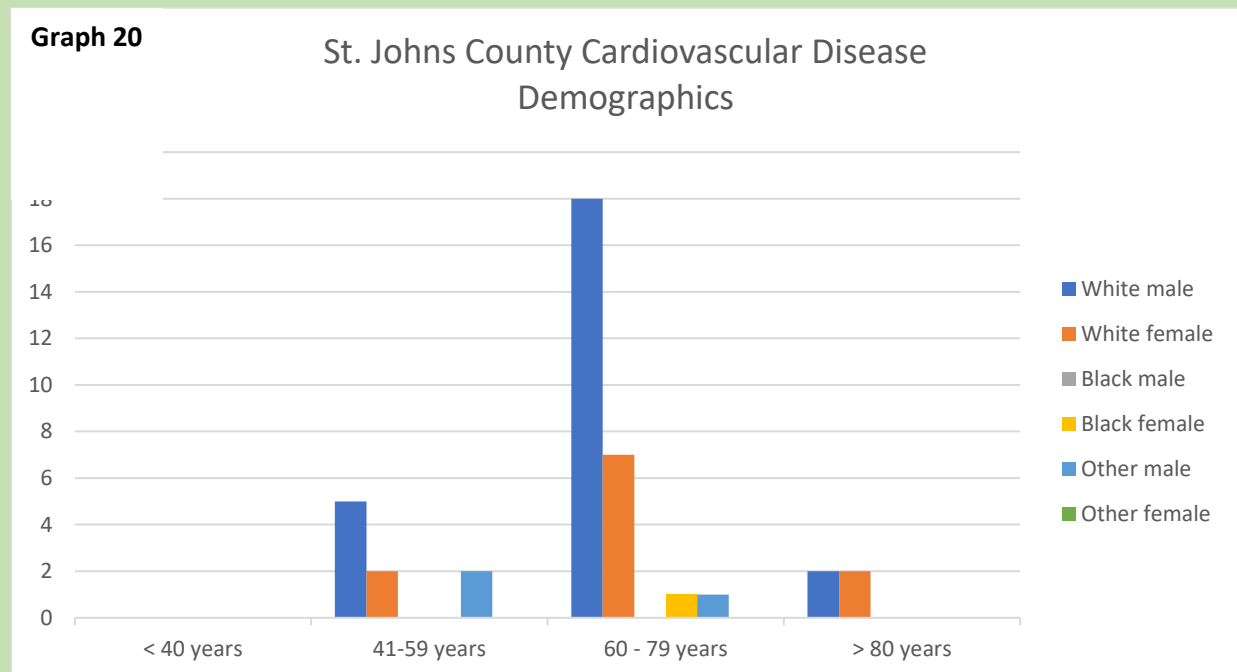
By far the most common natural diagnosis in all counties was related to cardiovascular conditions which includes atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease, hypertension, valvular disease, congestive heart failure, cerebral aneurysm, and cerebrovascular accidents. Other natural deaths stem from infectious conditions,

malignancy, diabetes mellitus, and pulmonary diseases. Complications of drugs and alcohol refers mostly to decedents with findings consistent with end stage liver disease from alcoholism or with chronic complications of drug abuse.

In St. Johns County natural deaths accounted for approximately 29% of the total case load of this county (63 out of 217 cases). The types and percentages of natural deaths are depicted in **Graph 19**.

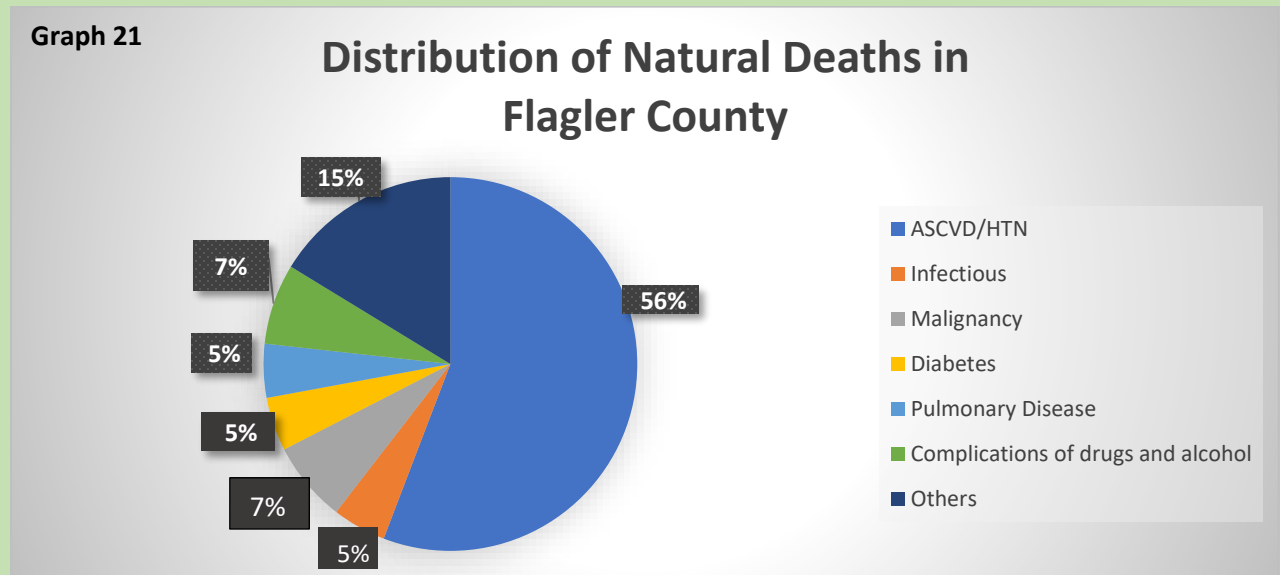


As in 2024, most of the natural deaths in 2025 resulted from cardiovascular conditions. The decedents ages ranged between 60 and 79 years. The overall male to female ratio of 2.3:1 as depicted in **Graph 20**.

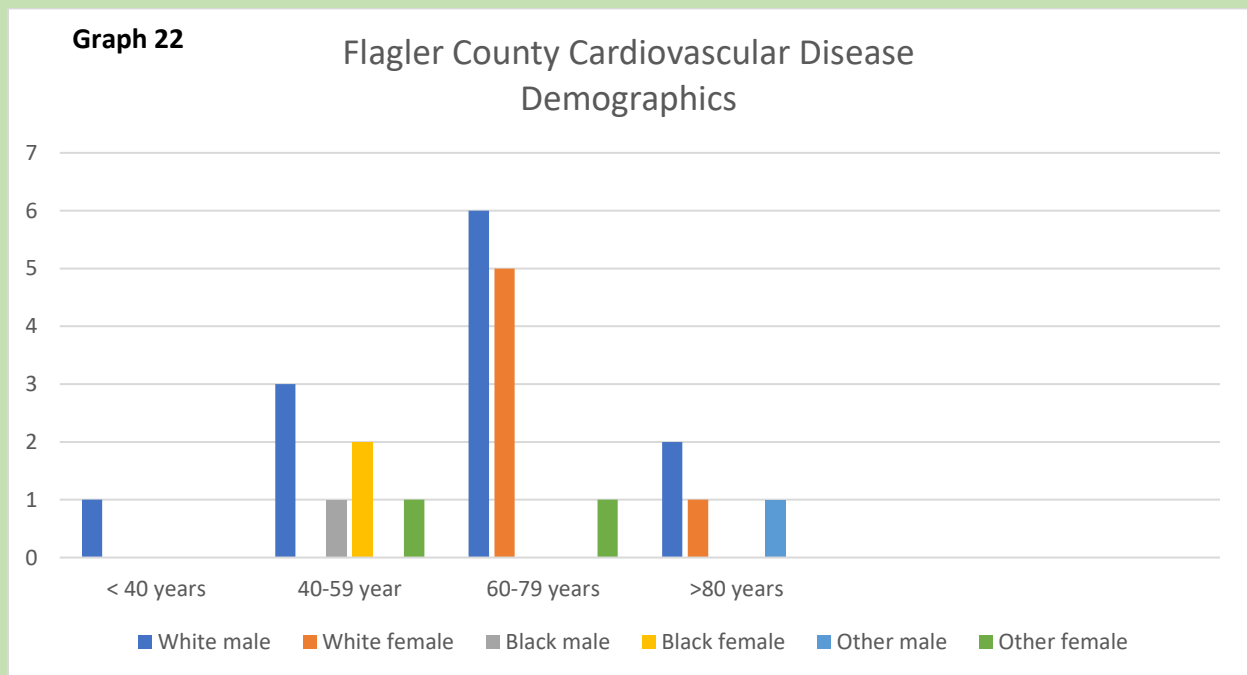


The second most common deaths in St. Johns County fell under the category of others; these include but are not limited to advanced age, dementia, gastrointestinal conditions, and epilepsy to name a few.

In Flagler County natural deaths accounted for approximately 29% of the total case load of this county (43 out of 148 cases). **Graph 21** depicts the types and percentages of natural deaths within the county.



In Flagler County most of the cases that died from cardiovascular conditions were between the ages of 60 and 79 years with a male to female ratio of 1.4-:1 as depicted in **Graph 22**.

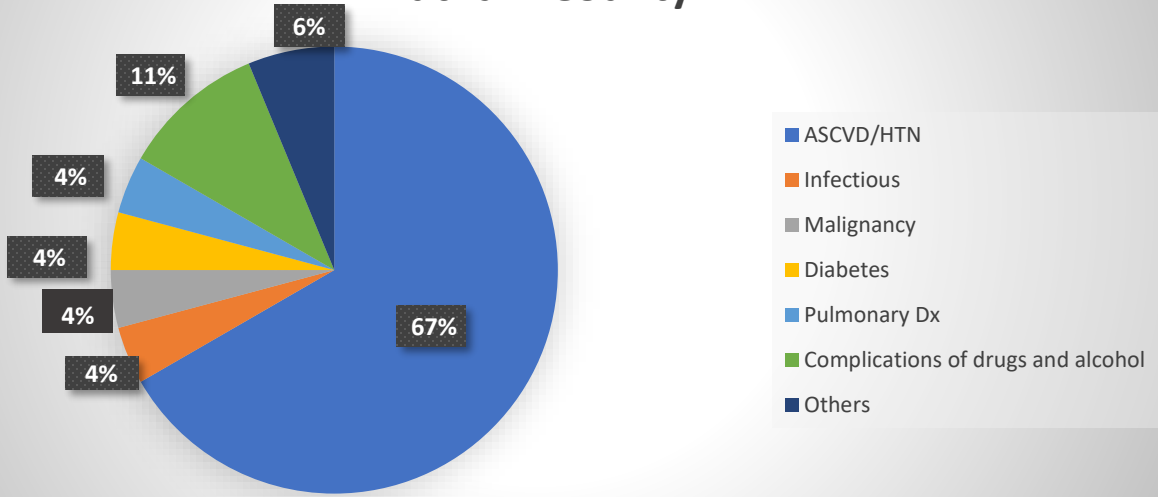


The second most common deaths in Flagler County fell under the category of others which includes natural conditions previously detailed.

In Putnam County natural deaths accounted for approximately 37% of the total case load of this county (48 out of 131 cases). The types and percentages of natural deaths are depicted in **Graph 23**.

Graph 23

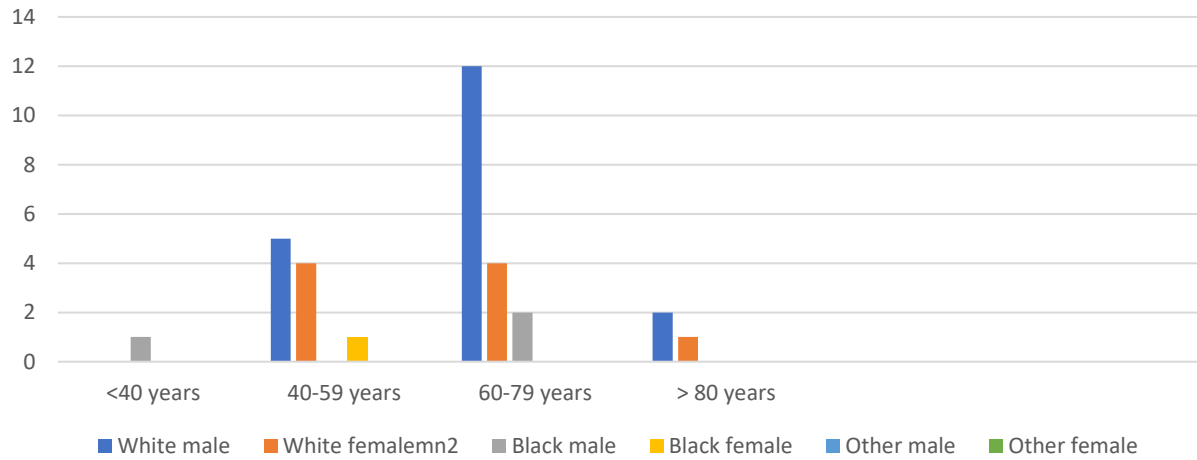
Distribution of Natural Deaths in Putnam County



Consistent with St. Johns and Flagler Counties, in Putnam County, most of the cases that died from cardiovascular conditions were between the ages of 60 and 79 years with a male to female ratio of 2.2:1 as depicted in **Graph 24**.

Graph 24

Putnam County Cardiovascular Disease Demographics



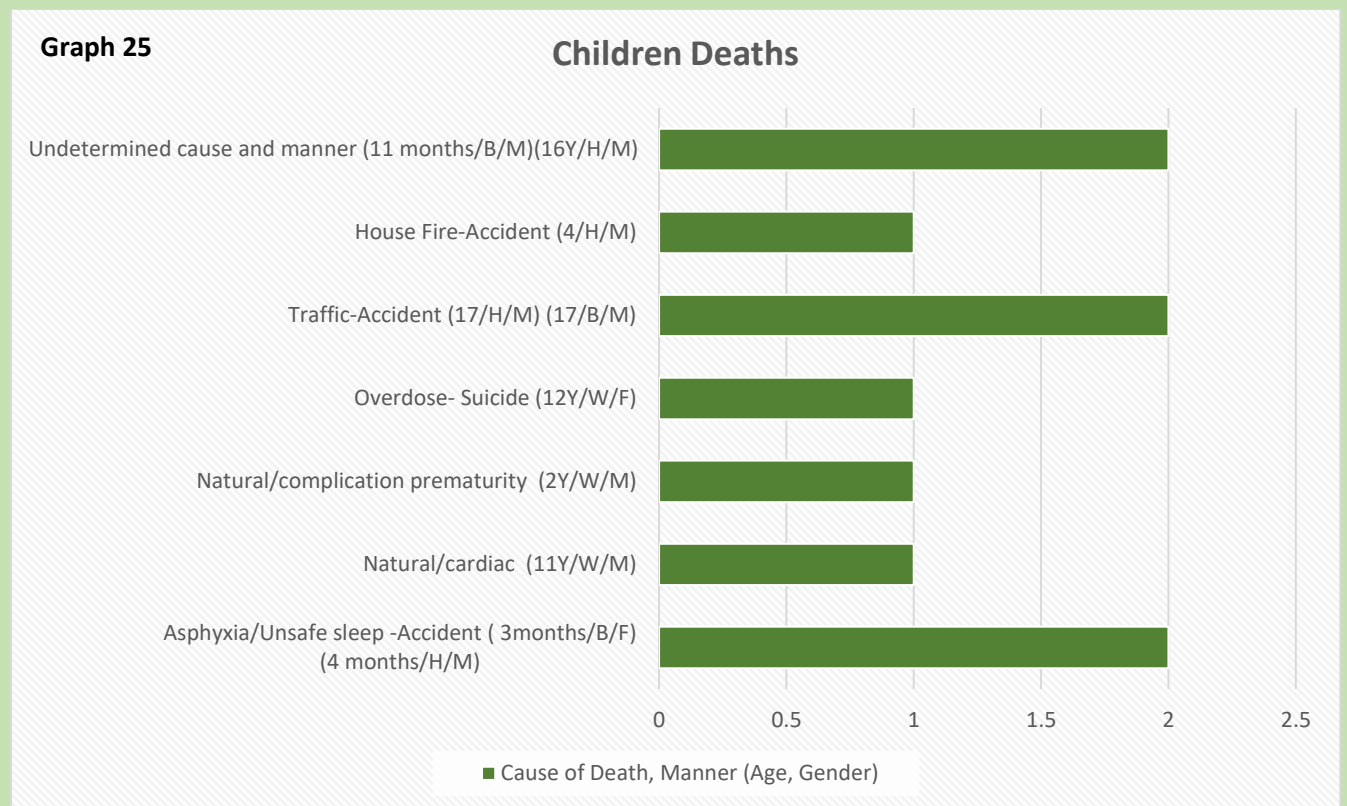
The second most common category of natural disease seen in Putnam County fell under the category of complications of drugs and alcohol, with those conditions previously specified.

Undetermined Cause and/or Manner of Death

Undetermined (could not be determined) can refer to the cause and/or the manner of death. Undetermined is used after thorough investigation, examination, and consideration of all available information does not yield clear information to support a specific cause of death, or when the information pointing to one manner of death is no more compelling than one or more other competing manners of death. In 2025, 16 out of 495 cases (3.2%) were deemed to be undetermined. It is important to know that the cause and/or manner of death may always be reclassified if additional information or circumstances are provided that warrant a change in the opinion of cause and/or manner of death.

Children and Infants

For our purposes, a child death is greater than 1-year, but less than 18 years of age. An infant is less than 1 year of age. By these definitions, 10 child/infant deaths were investigated in 2025. There were 3 St. Johns, 5 Flagler, and 2 Putnam deaths investigated. Amongst the 10 deaths, there was 0 homicide, 1 suicide, 2 accidental motor vehicle related deaths, 0 drownings, 1 fire related death, 2 accidental deaths related to unsafe sleep environment and/or asphyxia, 2 natural deaths, 0 overdoses, and 2 undetermined manner deaths. **Graph 25** depicts all children's deaths with their respective demographics.



Death in Custody

Death in custody are of two broad categories: law enforcement involved and penal institution, as defined by the Florida Medical Examiner Commission. The D23MEO certified 5 deaths under these criteria. Four deaths occurred while in penal institutions; one accidental death in Putnam County resulted from a drug overdose, two deaths in St. Johns County resulted from suicidal hangings, and one death in Flagler County resulted from natural disease. As previously described, one death in custody in St. Johns County was deemed to be of a non-criminal nature.

Organ and Tissue Donation

The Medical Examiner's Office cooperates with all tissue and organ procurement agencies in the area. Cases that fall under Medical Examiner Jurisdiction who are pronounced deceased at a hospital may become organ donors. If the death is certified outside of a medical facility and the bodies are directly transported to the Medical Examiner's Office, then the decedents may become tissue donors. Authorization for tissue or organ donation is required and provided to the Medical Examiner's Office by the tissue or organ procurement agency. In 2025, eleven cases stemming from Medical Examiner Jurisdiction became donors, eight for tissue donation and three for organ donation. The three organ donations yielded 6 organs for transplant: two livers and four kidneys.

Non-Resident Deaths

In 2025, the D23MEO assumed jurisdiction of 70 decedents that died without having a permanent address in our counties to account for 14% of total case load. This data does not include transient/homeless people living in our counties. This number includes out of state visitors and decedents without a county address to include people in transit throughout our roadways.

Report prepared by: Dr. Wendolyn Sneed, Chief Medical Examiner
Sara K. Painter, Forensics Operation Coordinator