State Medical Examiner

Phone: 515-725-1400
www.iosme.iowa.gov

Promoting & Protecting the Health of Iowans

IDPH Iowa Department of Public Health

For many Iowans, knowledge about what a medical examiner does may be limited to an episode of "CSI" or reruns of "Quincy." While entertaining, these programs don't paint a true picture of the many responsibilities of the State Medical Examiner's Office.

The State Medical Examiner's Office (SME) performs 650-700 autopsies per year, but that's only a small part of what is accomplished. The SME also reviews over 4,500 death investigation reports from Iowa's 99 counties and provides guidelines and 24-hour consultation services to county medical examiners and investigators. In addition, SME staff are responsible for signing about 600 death certificates and 350 cremation permits per year.

While the television version of a medical examiner may appear glamorous, the real-life work of the State Medical Examiner in Iowa is a vital part of Iowa's public health system.

Did you know?

The physicians employed by the State Medical Examiner's Office are all board certified in anatomic, clinical, and forensic pathology.

The Iowa Office of the State Medical Examiner is accredited by the National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME).

Why is the State Medical Examiner's Office important to promoting and protecting the health of Iowans?

- Iowa has more than 28,000 deaths each year. Of these deaths, approximately 5,000 need a death investigation by the county medical examiner, deputy medical examiner, investigators, and/or the state office.
- Approximately 1,500 deaths require autopsy, and of those, between 675 and 725 are performed by the Iowa Office of the State Medical Examiner.
- State Medical Examiner forensic pathologists provide expert witness testimony at depositions, grand juries, and state and federal criminal and civil trials.
- The State Medical Examiner's Office has staff appointed to the state's Domestic Violence Team and Child Death Review Team, providing help and expert advice about forensic pathology questions and concerns.
- The State Child Death Review Team is under the direction of the State Medical Examiner's Office.

Which Iowa Public Health Goals are we working to achieve?

Strengthen the public health infrastructure

What do we do?

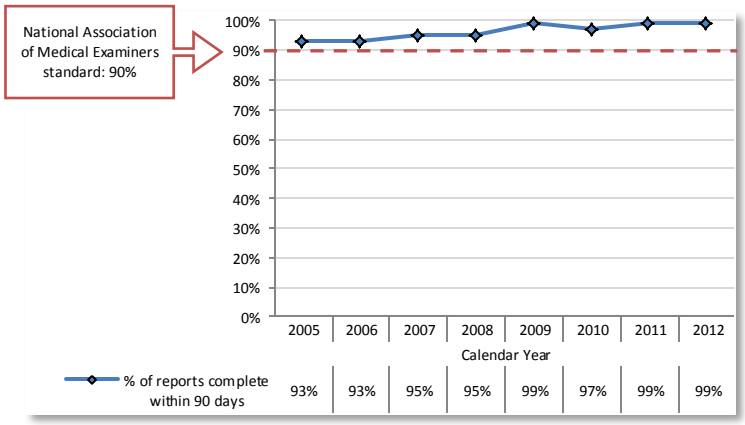
- Provide 24/7 consultation to all counties pertaining to death investigations.
- Perform 675-725 autopsies and review over 5,000 reports annually.
- Provide funding for up to four county medical examiners and/or medicolegal death investigators to attend training.
- Provide lectures, tours, and presentations to schools, professional groups, and other government agencies.
- Provide internships for investigators, radiology technologists, clinical laboratory scientists, and medical office specialists from many schools throughout Iowa.
- Maintain a database of medical examiner cases statewide.
- Forensic pathologists provide more than 40 lectures per year to medical students, residents, mortuary science students, and county medical examiners and their investigators.
- Provide basic death investigation training sessions across the state to county level investigators and medical examiners.
- Provide clinical rotations for medical students.
- Coordinate and lead the state's Disaster Response Team for mass fatality incidents (Iowa Mortuary Operations Response Team [IMORT]).

How do we measure our progress?

❶ **Percent of autopsy reports completed by the State Medical Examiner's Office within 90 days of death.**

Data Source: SME Database. Data are available annually.

How are we doing? In 2012, the IOSME completed 721 autopsies. We completed 99% of all autopsies within 90 calendar days, exceeding the National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME) standard of 90%. Of the total number of autopsies, 92% were completed within 60 days, and 45% were completed within 30 days. Through the third quarter of calendar year 2013, 99% of finalized autopsies were completed within 90 days, 97% within 60 days, and 66% within 30 days.



What can Iowans do to help?

1. Every Iowan can view the Iowa Office of the State Medical Examiner as an independent and objective investigative agency.
2. Iowans can encourage more funding for the office as it continues to grow and takes on more cases statewide.

Expenditures

General fund, federal funds (Postmortem Toxicology Study Grant), intra state receipts (Coverdell Forensic Science Improvement Grant – Governor's Office of Drug Control Policy)*, & retained fees*: K19-1951; 0153-1982/1984

	State Fiscal Year 2012 Actual	State Fiscal Year 2013 Actual	State Fiscal Year 2014 Estimate
State funds	$852,801	$1,094,619	$822,084
Federal funds	$60,678	$27,548	$38,359
Other funds*	$1,797,992	$1,435,064	$2,211,137
Total funds	**$2,711,471**	**$2,557,231**	**$3,071,580**
FTEs	19.88	18.44	11.95

Note: Funding information is intended to provide an overview of funding related to the program area. It does not include all federal and state requirements and/or restrictions for the use of funds. Contact the program area for more detailed budget information.

Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) ◇ Iowa Office of the State Medical Examiner (IOSME)

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