



**Boone County Coroner's Office**  
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## **2025 End of the Year Report**

The Boone County Coroner's Office ended 2025 with the highest number of death investigations in our history. This year saw substantial growth and change with our office as we moved into Boone Counties first purpose-built coroner's office. Through the year we operated in a state of change and demonstrated adaptability that allowed us to meet the needs of our community while remaining within our budget.

### **Organization**

For the first part of 2025 we continued the same organization model with some minor adjustments to enhance service and organizational efficiency. Due to the move of location midway through the year the office was required to grow. This year we had two (2) budgeted part-time administrative deputy coroners. With the occupy date for the new building shifted several times, I elected to utilize one of the positions in the pre-move phase. We started the second position during the period immediately preceding the move to allow for the additional workload of maintaining operations and moving.

As a 24/7 365 investigative agency, we operate through a hub and spoke system. Open during normal business hours Monday through Friday, this brand-new facility is the base of our operation. During the nights and weekends, we utilize per-diem investigators who cover 12 hours on call shifts. These investigators manage field investigations during their shifts. Due to the irregular nature of their work, in most cases the office takes over the investigation the next business day. Through cloud-based case reporting, the transfer of care from one part of the team to the next is seamless and allows for improved documentation and the depth of our investigations has improved.

One of my objectives from day one has been to improve the quality of our forensic investigations and to enhance our independence from other agencies. This has been a steady process of learning and implementation. This year, we launched the implementation of our evidence management system through Safe Evidence. This software, which is used by major agencies across the country, has been a law enforcement system. Through discussion and collaboration with their programmers, we were able to make coroner's office specific additions to the program. This allows us to track decedents and their property through their time in our

office in a way that meets modern evidence standards. It also allows the administration in real time to see where any piece of property is stored inside our facility. This program has enhanced our capabilities as well as improved liability management.

## **Administration**

Through a multi-year planning program and steady implementation, our office now operates as a fully functional government agency. Our administrative team consists of the Coroner (chief administrator) , Chief Deputy (day to day operations), Administrative Deputy Coroner (office administration), Administrative Deputy Coroner (evidence & finance), and two field supervisor deputy coroners.

This framework is designed to ensure that proper span of control is achieved while building redundancy that allows for continuity of service. Implementation of this process has been one of the most service enhancing processes during my term. This is constantly evaluated for efficiency in all aspects of our service.

## **Operations**

The Boone County Coroner's Office 2025 End-of-Year Operations Report highlights our continued commitment to serving the community with transparency, professionalism, and compassion. Our mission remains focused on providing accurate and timely death investigations while treating every decedent and their loved ones with dignity and respect.

Throughout the year, the office worked to improve operational efficiency, strengthen professional training, and enhance collaboration with partner agencies. These efforts ensured our services continued to meet the highest medicolegal standards while responding effectively to the needs of Boone County residents.

In 2025, the Coroner's Office investigated deaths classified as natural, accidental, suicide, homicide, and undetermined. Each case was handled in accordance with state law and nationally recognized medicolegal practices.

Staffing remained stable and consisted of part-time medicolegal death investigators, administrative staff, and contracted forensic pathology services. In addition, the office is in the process of bringing on three additional Deputy Coroners, who are currently completing required training and are expected to be fully operational in the coming months. This expansion will strengthen coverage, improve response times, and help manage increasing caseload demands.

All staff members completed ongoing training aligned with American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators (ABMDI) guidelines, including death scene investigation, evidence handling, and mental health awareness.

Strong partnerships remained essential to our work. The office collaborated closely with local law enforcement, emergency medical services, fire departments, public health officials, hospitals, funeral homes, and state forensic laboratories. These partnerships enhanced coordination, reduced response times, and supported public safety across the county.

During the year, the office invested in facility improvements, security upgrades, enhanced case management systems, and modernized personal protective equipment and documentation tools. These investments improved both staff safety and service delivery.

Community outreach continued to be a priority in 2025. The Coroner's Office participated in the Suicide and Overdose Fatality Review (SOFR) and the Quick Response Team (QRT). Information gathered through these programs contributes to a reduction in overdose deaths and suicides in Boone County, increases community awareness, and reinforces public trust in local public safety initiatives.

The Boone County Coroner's Office remains dedicated to continuous improvement, accountability, and compassionate service to the community. We are grateful for the trust placed in us and look forward to continuing to serve Boone County with integrity and professionalism in the year ahead.

## **Fiscal Responsibility**

Throughout my time in the role of Coroner, operating with data driven fiscal responsibilities has been a hallmark focus of the office. This is accomplished through comparative analysis of recent and historical data sets, organizational needs, and data driven planning.

The 2025 budget was reflective of this analysis and represented a two part strategy for the year. Case volume in 2024 saw a substantial decrease from 2023 (-27.7%), as well as the 5 year average (-21.4%), which was well outside the anticipated standard deviation (+/- 3%). During our Council budget hearings for 2025 this was discussed and based upon this, a reduction to the request for the Autopsy Fee line (.430.431.0.0719) from \$166,150 (2024 Approved budget) to \$122,244.11 for 2025 was submitted. The second portion of our budget planning for 2025 we had to navigate a move into our first stand alone facility. This new building would bring much needed positive change for our office and the families we serve. With this, there were additional cost that would now fall on our agency for the first time (biohazard waste disposal, medical cleaning, ect.). Through due diligence, we were able to identify anticipated cost for this portion of the budget.

One of the unique challenges of our work is the unpredictability of things. We compensate for that by evaluating trends across a multi-year data set and applying a standard deviation towards analysis, in our case always planning for the positive deviation. While this has historically served our planning purposes well, 2025 proved to be a data outlier.

Very quickly in the year it became apparent that our case volume in 2025 was far exceeding the previous year and there were indicators that we would be likely surpassing previous record case volume. At the completion of the year we saw a year to year increase of +40.1869% and a +13.4644% above the 5 year average. With that substantial, and unprecedented change we understood the challenges this placed on completing the year inside our planned budget. As a result, the administration conducted a series of budget degradation planning meetings to attempt to solve the issue through re-appropriation and avoiding additional fiscal request.

By September we were required to implement our first degradation effort to sustain service. We identified areas inside our budget that we could freeze/reduce for the remainder of the year (state meetings, training, travel expenses, biohazardous waste removal [permissible due to a delayed move into the new building], and printing). These actions moved \$19,056 into the autopsy line. On September 18<sup>th</sup> I notified the Council of the filed reappropriation.

Through the next few months the case volume only continued to remain elevated. Despite the autopsy rate of cases remaining on target (autopsies v total case load hovers in the middle 40%), we had depleted the initial degradation plan. On December 8<sup>th</sup>, I issued our second degradation plan. This was permissible largely in part by the move in date being later than initially planned for. In this plan we re-appropriated \$31,980.32 and carried us through the end of the year.

Although not ideal, through our budget process and fiscal management plan we were able to absorb the impacts of this unprecedented increase in case load and operate, without reduction in front line service without seeking additional taxpayer funding. Through both micro and macro analysis I believe that 2025 was likely an outlier and our 2026 budget is funded in a way that should meet our need as authored.

## **Grant Funding**

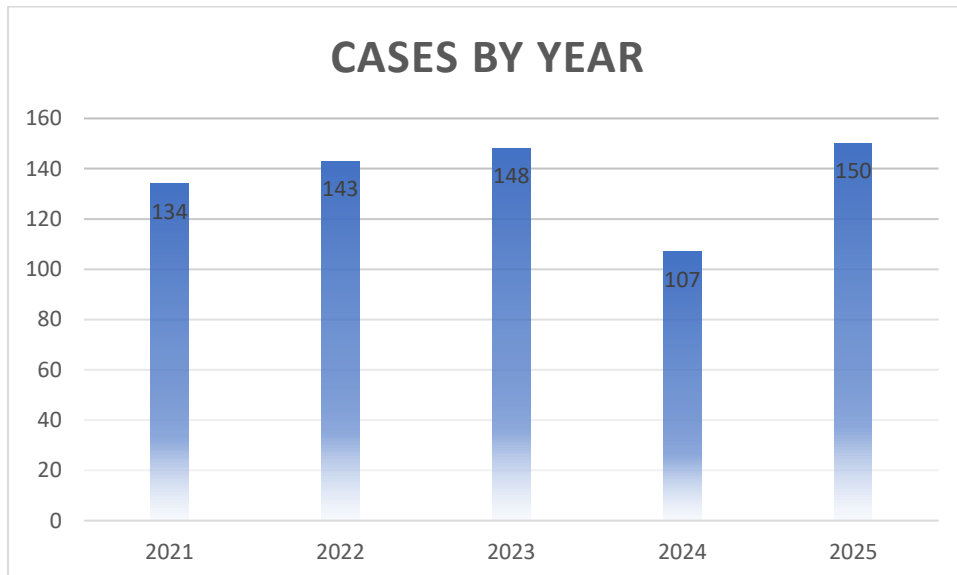
**O**ne of my goals as an organization is to find ways to supplement our budget with alternat funding sources. Over the last four years we have been fortunate to apply and receive Indiana State Department of Health grants. These were crucial for our development as we grew. They also allowed us to expand our resources for investigations and personal protective equipment. These grants were crucial to us early on. Unfortunately, this grant opportunity did not come open during FY25.

In our continued forward leaning posture towards innovation in this field, this year we applied for a Department of Justice competitive grant. The FY2025 Paul Coverdell Forensic Science Improvement Competitive Grant Program is designed to address critical challenges in medicolegal death investigations. Our application covered 22 pages and mapped out our plan to continue to grow and meet the needs of our community. Our request would bring x-ray and on site toxicology testing capabilities. It also focused on additional PPE and training to bring our office up to an accredited state. Our total funding request was \$172,327.

With the end of the year government shut down we are still awaiting award notification. However, I feel as though we provided a compelling application that met the spirit of the grant program and am optimistic that for next year I will report positive news on this.

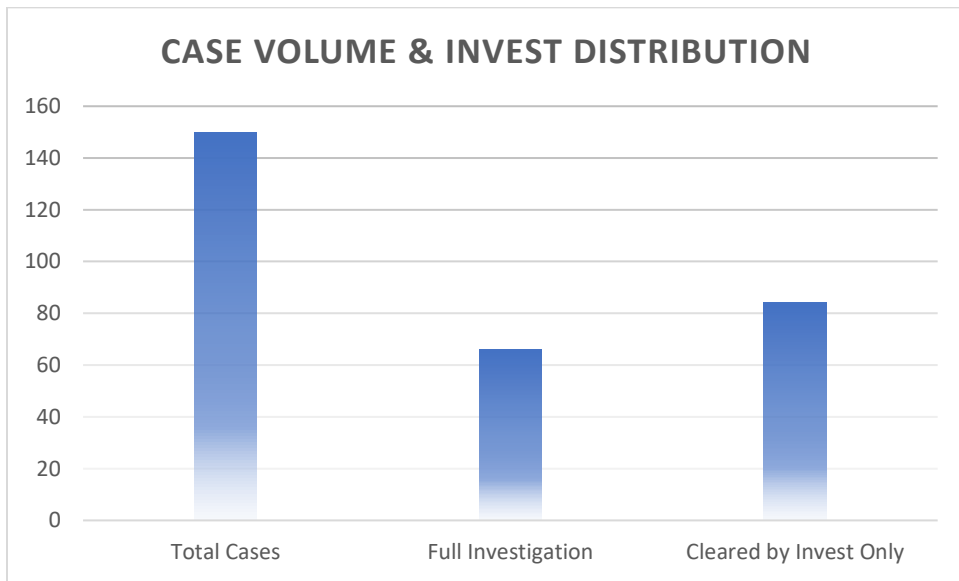
## Statistics

2025 ended as the busiest year in BCCO history with 150 completed investigations. This was the largest single year change (positive or negative) in the last 7 years with a + 40.18% increase over 2024 (107 cases).

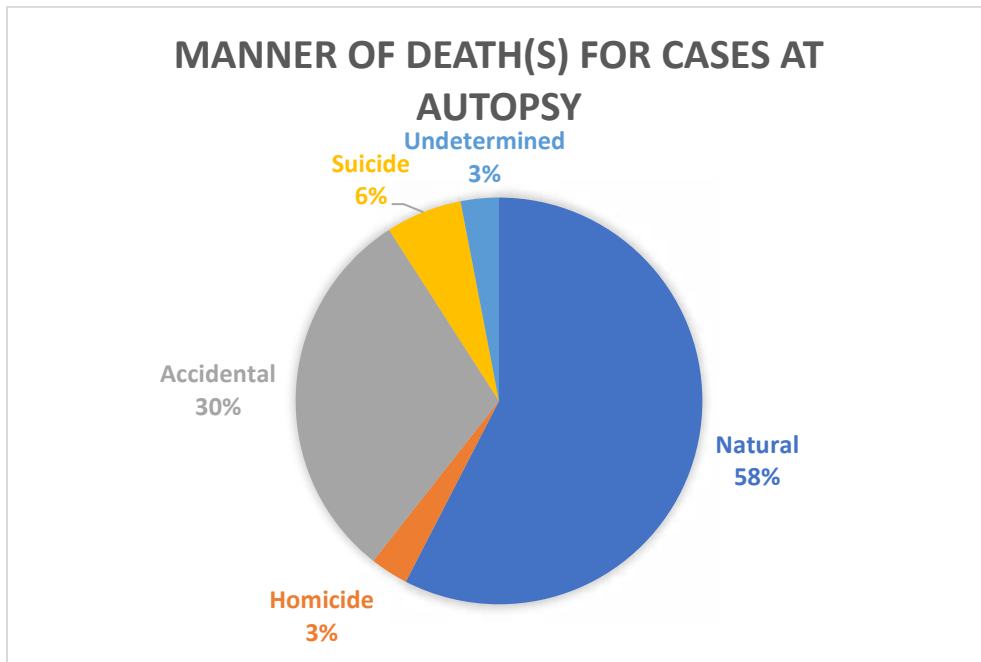


Cases are referred to the Coroner's Office for a multitude of reasons to meet the legal requirements of our office. All cases are screened by our investigators and are evaluated for inclusion or exclusion for further investigation. For 2025, of the 150 cases referred to our office

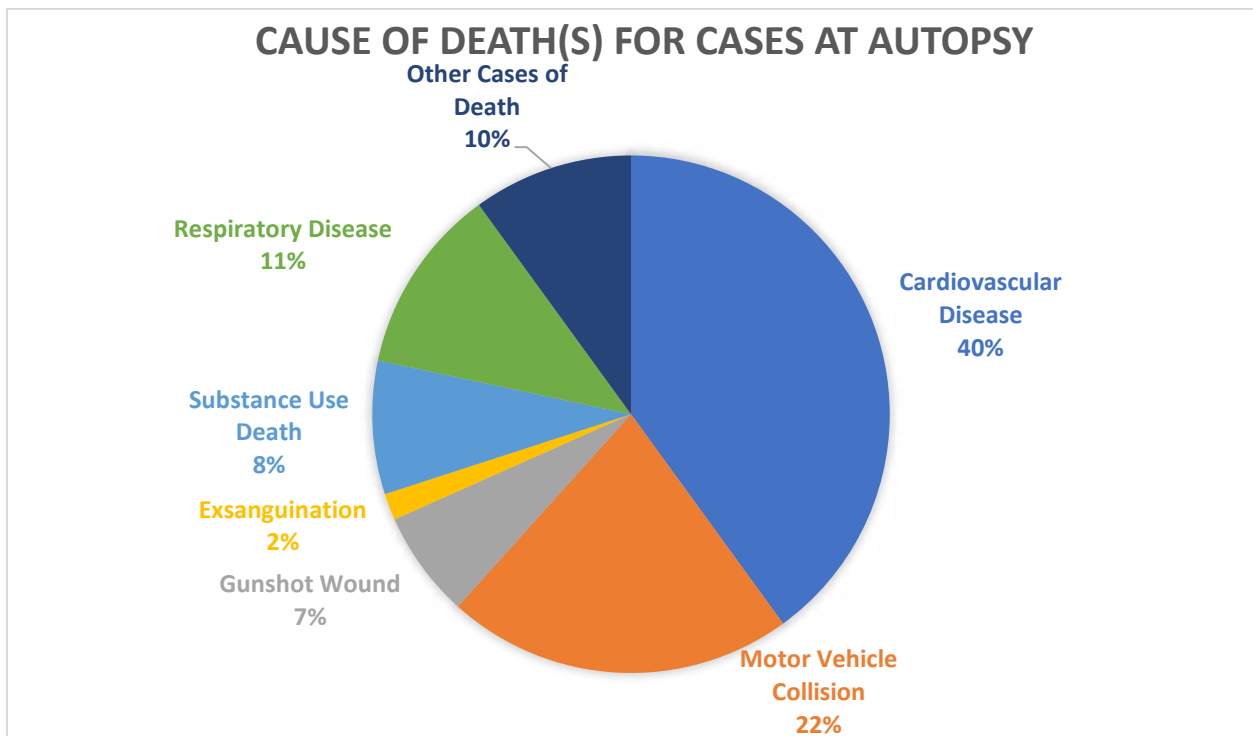
for investigation, 84 were completed by investigation or screened out as cases not inside the legal criteria of the Coroners Office. 66 cases were required to be full investigations requiring forensic examination. This equates to a 44% autopsy rate for all referrals to our office. This data point has stayed relatively steady over the last few years and is markedly down from when I first took office. It is my opinion that this number reduced as our training level and investigative competency increased.



Of the 66 cases that met inclusion criteria for full investigation (autopsy), the manner of death distribution shows some positive change. In our data analysis, we look at manners of suicide, accident, and homicide as ‘preventable’ deaths. This year, our preventable death percentage reached its lowest point ever at 17% of total case volume (150). This marks a second year in a row in which this number has been a record.



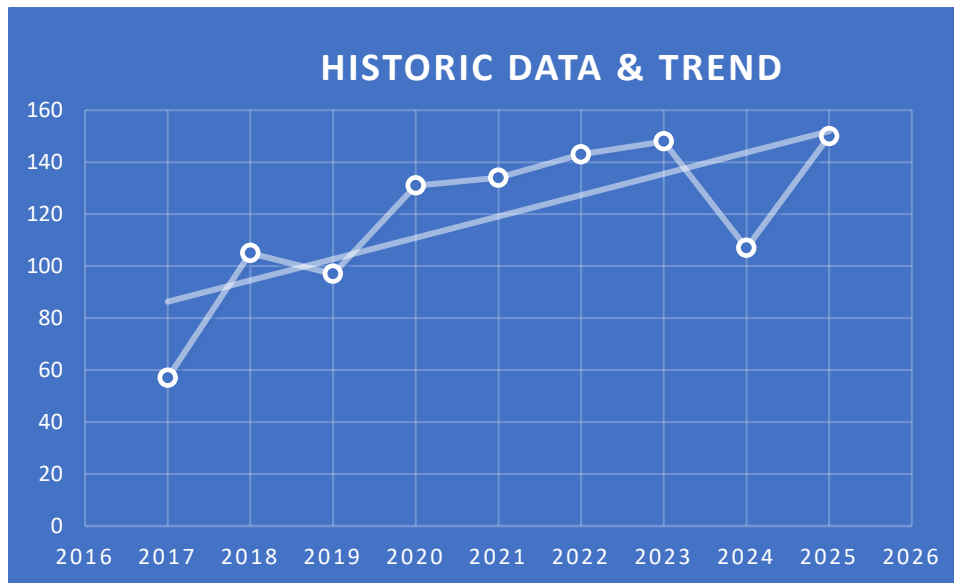
Analysis of the cause of death (mechanism) in 2025 showed cases our office examined stayed predominantly in line with CDC national trends. Cardiovascular disease was determined to be the case in 24 cases with respiratory disease present in 7 instances. Notable, motor vehicle deaths were markedly elevated. This is a somewhat deceiving statistic attributed to the atypical prevalence of multiple deaths in single incidents.



## Data Trends

Understanding why people make it to our office is critical to understanding what is occurring in our community. Data analysis and trend studies are key indicators of future events. Our office works diligently throughout the year maintaining an understanding of where we are in time in relation to this data. This serves as a tool for planning, sustainability, and as a targeted focus for community-based reduction efforts. This is accomplished in both broad analysis as well as cause specific study.

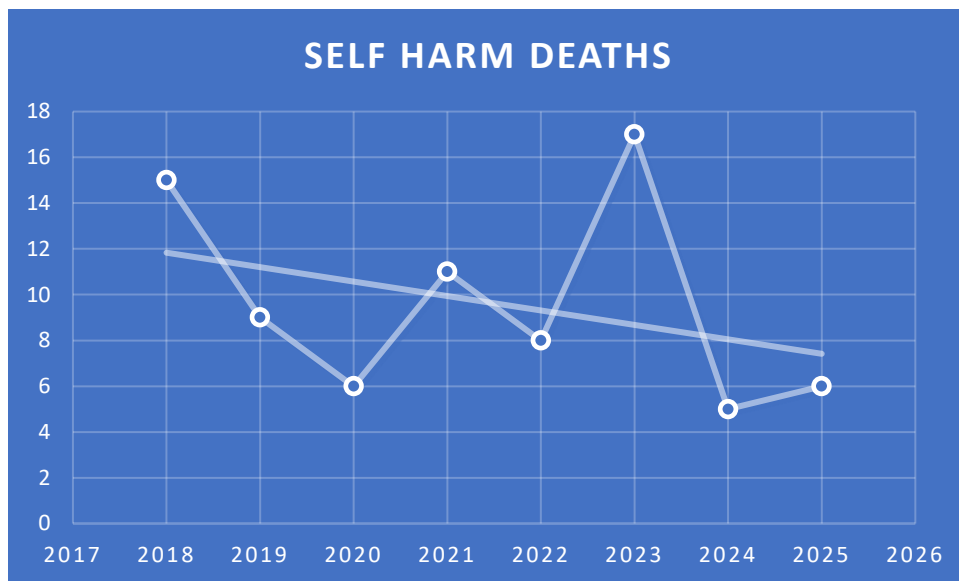
In the broad analysis, looking at case volume over time it's no surprise that the trend line continues to point upward. Our accurate data set tracks back to 2017. This snapshot in local history represents two unique items – rapid growth and the pandemic years. There were a lot of unknowns as to what the pandemic did in terms of community health and its related impacts to our office. We have refined this understanding through micro-analysis of cause of deaths, predominantly substance use and self harm deaths. When the case load reduced drastically in 2024, it was reasonable to ask the question if this change was a related to a 'return to baseline' event for our community. The data supported that question. Case volume between 2019 and 2024 was far more inline with annual change compared to the elevation in the pandemic years. In review of the data, I think this is not the case. 2025 showed a sharp increase back in line with 2023. The statistical change between 2023 and 2025 is 1.351%, which is beyond our expected standard of deviation. Additionally, when manner of death is applied to the overall data, the increase is not of a result of a specific aspect of the population, ie self-harm or substance use deaths.

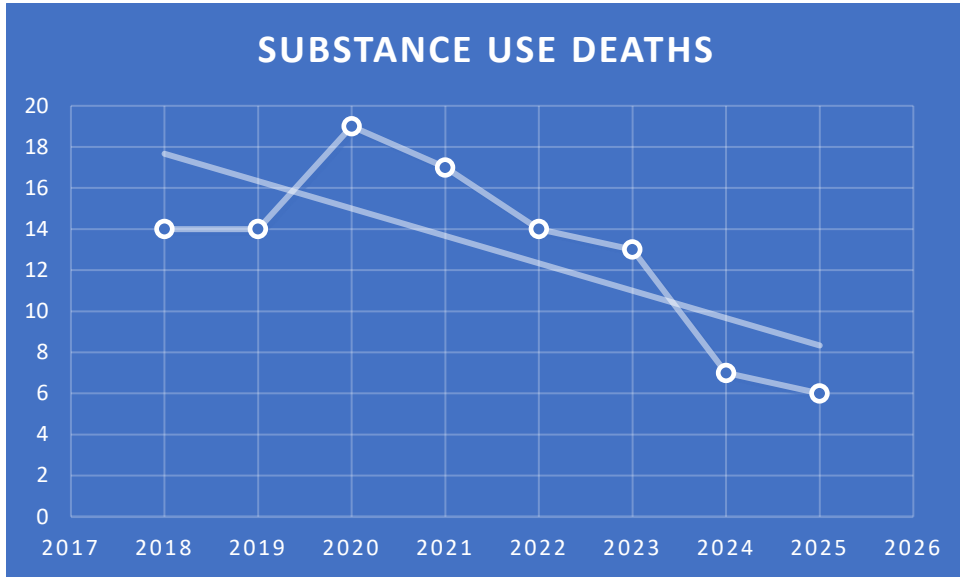


## Self Harm/Substance Use Deaths

Of all of the data contained in this document, this is the section that I am the proudest of. Among all causes of death, these two are in my opinion, the most we as a community can impact the most. When I took over as coroner, this was a giant issue for our community. As we navigated through the COVID era we saw staggering change in both, as time progressed. It was a true barometer of how the population was navigating the challenges.

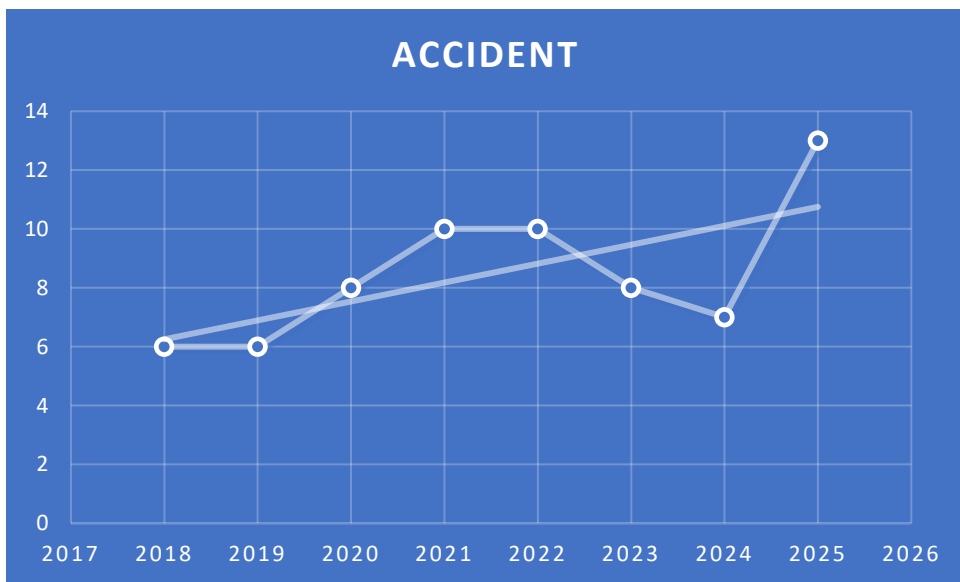
As we have moved past this I have been hyper vigilant of what this has translated to in this field. This is the second year in a row when these have single digit events for each. Self-harm deaths have decreased 64.7% from our 2023 high. Substance use deaths are down 68.4% from 2020 for Boone County. We are doing far better than the National average over the same period which demonstrated a 21% decrease. This is a massive improvement and shows the work that our community has done through enforcement, education, and community impact efforts. I'll speak more to this in the community involvement section.





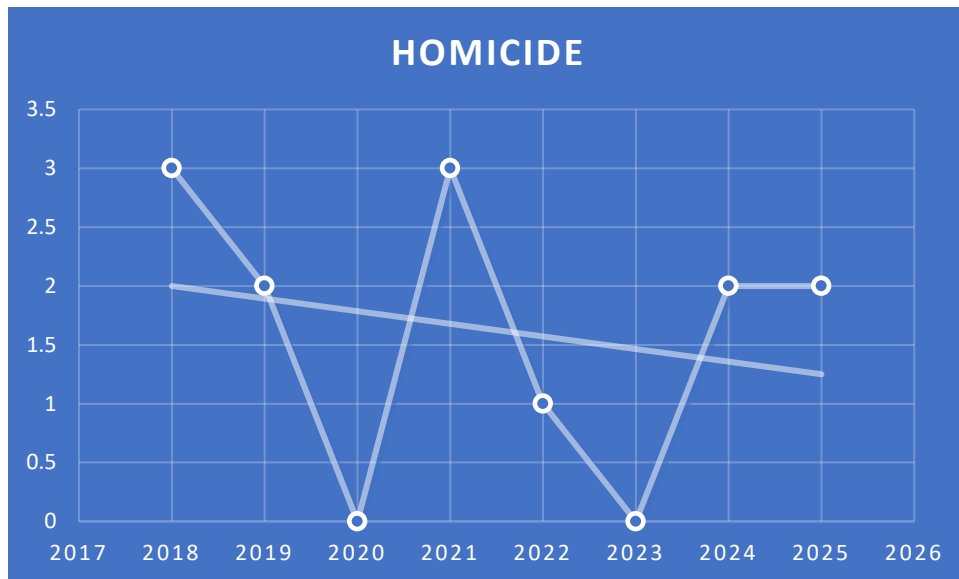
## Accidental Death Trends

Accidental deaths (traumatic injuries) this year saw a sharp rise in totals marking a record number for our office. While this certainly made me turn my head, there is a rational explanation for this spike. While the number of people who died in the manner are elevate, the overall instances of occurrence are not. This year we faced three separate events in which multiple fatalities occurred. This is atypical for our community, and I expect that this number should become more in line with the 7 year trend line.



## Homicide Trends

We are extremely fortunate to live in a very safe community. The homicide trend line demonstrates a downward trend across the historic data set. I think it's important to note that in our work the word homicide does not delineate between criminal and non-criminal homicides. In this data set, all homicides are aggregate data. My overall take on this data set is that it shows a downward trend and is otherwise relatively not useful. If I had to make one statement it is that we have had a very wavy pattern in which we have two years of having homicides, then a year where we do not. If the pattern continues like this, we should have a zero year. I acknowledge 'off the wall' predictability of that, but we will see how this trend continues.



## Community Impact Efforts

### Risk Reduction Efforts

Our office continues to operate with an emphasis on community risk reduction. These projects have all been data driven with the primary objective of reducing the number of deaths that come through our office.

In 2021 I launched our counties Suicide and Overdose Fatality Review Team (SOFR). This team consists of public and private agencies that meet every other month to review deaths in our community. These deaths are analyzed from birth to death and attempt to identify points and

opportunities for our community to change to save lives. Over the last five years, this program has been pivotal at doing just that. Self harm deaths have decreased 64.7% from our 2023 high. Substance use deaths are down 68.4% from 2020 for Boone County. We are doing far better than the National average over the same period which demonstrated a 21% decrease.

In 2025, I was selected to attend the National Overdose Fatality conference in Portland, OR. This grant funded opportunity allowed me to spend time with our federal partners as well as communities from across the country to discuss and innovate on ways to continue to tackle this problem. Ideas from this conference have already been put into motion in our community.

Additionally, our office continues to conduct the Quick Response Team along side our mental health professionals at Integrative Wellness. This program takes us to homes where people have had a non-fatal mental health or substance use emergency. We provide a follow up with a friendly face and the resources to make sure they have the tools they need to stay well. This program sees success frequently and I think it is a valuable utilization of time and resources.

### **Educational Outreach Program**

One of the parts of this job that I wasn't expecting was the level of interest of internships in our office and the field of forensic science. Since my first year we have hosted interns each year. As word has gotten out, the level of demand has increased substantially. Each semester we host one intern from a local high school or career center. This year, our Intern comes to us from the Avon School system. Interns come 3-5 times a week and spend their time between classroom lecture, hands on training, and real world forensic experiences.

## For 2026

2026 is an extremely exciting year for our office. This will be the first full year we operate our own building. While the first months of this process have went well, having the year to continue to operate, learn, and adjust our flows is paramount to dialing in all aspects of our operation.

We have a wonderful thing going in the methods we apply our work. I have a talented team, we are well organized, and we have the tools we need to operate in today's environment. We believe that our system has adapted to the challenges of the increased case load. My time in this office has demonstrated to me that growth is the path forward. Our planning focus for this year is evaluating how we grow into the future. It's amazing to live in a community that is thriving. With that, we have to be prepared not for linear growth, but for exponential growth over the next ten years.

This year we will continue to evaluate our processes in every matrix. With the knowledge learned and supported by data we will develop a strategic plan that will keep the BCCO in the forefront of the forensic death investigation field.

Thank you to every community member who supports us in this endeavor. My sincere appreciation to the Boone County Commissioners and the County Council for their open ears and support as we work to carry out this sacred responsibility to those who have gone.

Faithfully Serving,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sparks". The signature is stylized with a large, looping initial "S" and a horizontal line underlining the name.

Justin R. Sparks,  
Boone County Coroner

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Shane L. Daugherty". The signature is highly stylized and cursive, with a large initial "S" and "D".

Shane L. Daugherty,  
Chief Deputy