



WISCONSIN

# SHEBOYGAN COUNTY

**Christopher A. Nehring**  
*Medical Examiner*

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March 1, 2024

Honorable Members of the Sheboygan County Board and County Administrator Alayne Krause,

I am pleased to submit the 2023 Annual Report for the Medical Examiner's Department.

The Medical Examiner Department is a 24-hour, 7 days a week operation, consisting of one part time employee and three on-call employees. The dedicated staff responds to a variety of calls in the County, as well as trauma hospitals where county residents are transported after injury. These highly efficient employees work tirelessly to assist families and friends in processing difficult events and complete investigative work.

In 2023, the Department underwent a significant transition in forensic pathology services, moving from a contracted pathologist in Sheboygan to a collaborative partnership with the Fond du Lac Medical Examiner's Department. This strategic shift involved close collaboration with the dedicated staff in Fond du Lac and their Chief Pathologist Dr. Covach. While enhancing the quality and efficiency of our forensic procedures, this transition also incurred an increase in transportation costs.

To mitigate some of these expenses, we adjusted death certificate and cremation investigation fees, with the approval of the Sheboygan County Board, in accordance with Wisconsin State Statues. This proactive measure ensures the sustainability of operation while maintaining the high standard of services provided to Sheboygan County.

We appreciate the continued support we receive from the Law Committee, County Administrator, and the County Board in the completion of our mission.

Respectfully Submitted,

Christopher Nehring  
Medical Examiner

## **Mission Statement and Summary of Responsibilities**

*It is the mission of the Sheboygan County Medical Examiner's Department to provide professional death investigation into the deaths reportable to the Sheboygan County Medical Examiner's Department as required by the Wisconsin State Statutes and make a determination into the cause and manner of death.*

The Medical Examiner investigates deaths in Sheboygan County reportable under Wisconsin Statutes 30.67, 346.71, 350, 155, 979.01 & 979.025. A Medical Examiner investigation is required for many reasons, including all homicides, suicides, deaths following an accident or injury, deaths due to poisoning, deaths following abortion, deaths involving airplanes, motor vehicle, snowmobile, all-terrain vehicle, jet skis or a boat, deaths with no physician in attendance in the past thirty days, deaths of a correctional inmate, deaths when after a reasonable time a physician cannot or will not sign the death certificate or in an emergency situation, deaths with unexplained, unusual or suspicious circumstances (including sudden unexplained death at any age), and deaths reportable under individual County policies.

The investigation process includes, but is not limited to, visual and physical examination of the deceased and the surroundings, the pronouncement or confirmation of the death of an individual, establishing the date and time of death, review of medication present and usage. We review medical history, identifying any recent changes in health or physical conditions, and obtaining information by speaking with family members, nursing staff and physicians, as well as neighbors, witnesses or law enforcement.

In deaths where law enforcement is involved, it is a collaborative effort of sharing investigation findings and knowledge. In some death investigations, more information is needed before a cause and manner of death can be made. An autopsy may be done, and toxicology studies may be required to determine what kind and how much of a certain medication is present in a person's system. X-rays may be taken to determine if there are broken bones or if any foreign objects are present and the location. There are other tests available for specific inquiries.

## **Goals and Objectives Achieved in 2023**

In 2023, the Department investigated and signed off on 353 death investigations, a decrease of 1% over the previous year. The Department viewed and signed 832 cremation permits, a decrease of 2% and ordered and completed 43 autopsies, the same amount as the previous year.

The Department successfully transitioned to contracting forensic pathology services through Fond du Lac County. Our collaborative efforts have yielded significant benefits, and a seamless transition occurred without any disruptions in critical tasks. This achievement underscores the effectiveness of our partnership and reaffirms our commitment to delivering uninterrupted, high-quality services.

## Budget

	<b>2023 Budget</b>	<b>2023 Result</b>	<b>Variance</b>
<b>Revenues</b>	\$301,988	\$311,943	\$9,995
<b>Expenses</b>	-\$301,988	-\$289,777	\$12,211
<b>Total</b>	\$0	\$22,166	\$22,166

The Medical Examiners budget concluded 2023 with a positive expenditure variance of \$12,211 primarily attributed to fewer autopsies than projected and reduced costs associated with toxicological testing. The positive revenue variance of \$9,995 was due to the impact of increased fees authorized by the County Board beginning October 1, 2023.

Our approved budget for 2024 is \$328,777 with a property tax levy of \$159,817.

## Issues and Challenges Ahead

The Department will face two continuing challenges in 2024. The first is the availability of synthetic opioid drugs and emerging illegal designer substances, which is increasing overdose deaths within Sheboygan County. These unforeseen deaths from illicit drugs have a substantial impact on our community in addition to posing significant budgetary concerns for the Medical Examiner's Department.

The second challenge is the increasing number of the baby boomer generation nearing end of life. This demographic shift is expected to lead to an increase in overall mortality rate per 1,000 population through 2049. Advancement in healthcare, public health initiatives, and social support systems can help to mitigate some of the challenges.

## Goals and Objectives for 2024

- Provide forensic training opportunities to staff by identifying specific areas where additional training is needed, researching training programs offering workshops and courses, and verifying the proposed training does not interfere with office coverage.
- Review coroner/medical examiner software options by identifying software options available that are specific to coroners and medical examiners, working with Information Technology Department to determine if the programs work with existing systems, and evaluating the features and functionality of the software for case management, documentation, and integration. Additionally, we will review the viability of the software programs for cost and life expectancy.
- Complete a transportation cost analysis by compiling data on transportation cost related to investigations including fuel expense, vehicle maintenance and mileage reimbursements for personally owned vehicles then assessing the feasibility and potential cost savings of using county vehicles instead of personally owned vehicles. We will consider factors such as vehicle availability, insurance coverage, maintenance schedules, and staff convenience then present findings and recommendation prior to the conclusion of the 2025 budget cycle.