

Medical Examiner Autopsy Workload

March 2019

Milwaukee County autopsies have increased 7.8% since 2013,

Autopsies for referral counties increased 111.7%.

A lack of contracts for most of the referral counties is a concern.

At the direction of the Milwaukee County Comptroller in response to a request from the Chairman of the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors, the Audit Services Division conducted an audit of the autopsy workload from 2013 to 2018 at the Milwaukee County Medical Examiner's Office. In his request the Chairman cited the reported impact the opioid crisis has had upon the workload along with the performance of autopsies for referral autopsies as noted in recent budgeting requests for additional resources. The Chairman expressed an interest in additional information, including autopsy fees, to assist policymakers to "determine if it is in the best interest of our residents to provide these services outside of Milwaukee County."

BACKGROUND

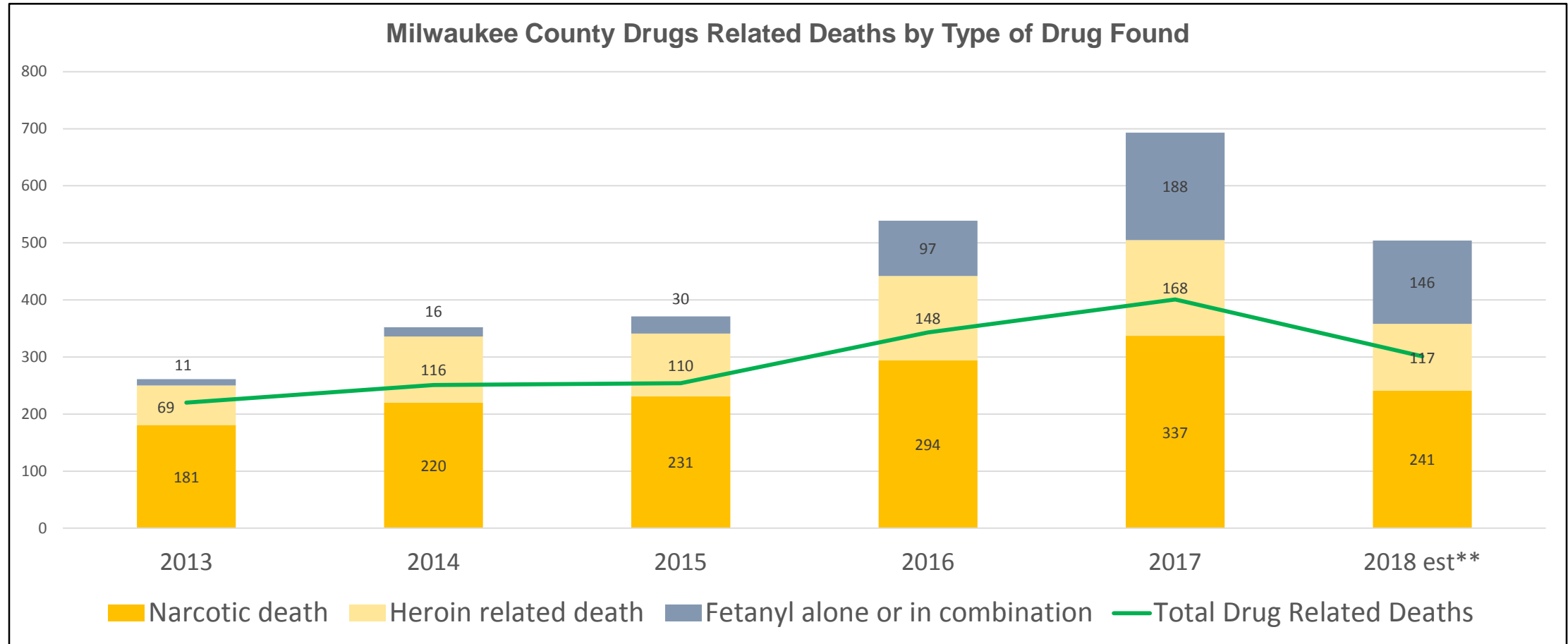
State Statutes and Milwaukee County Ordinances define the roles and responsibilities of the Medical Examiner including:

- Allowing the ME to perform autopsies for other counties per State Statute, and
- A County Ordinance which grants the ME the discretion to determine whether to perform an autopsy.

In addition, the mission of the Medical Examiner's Office is:

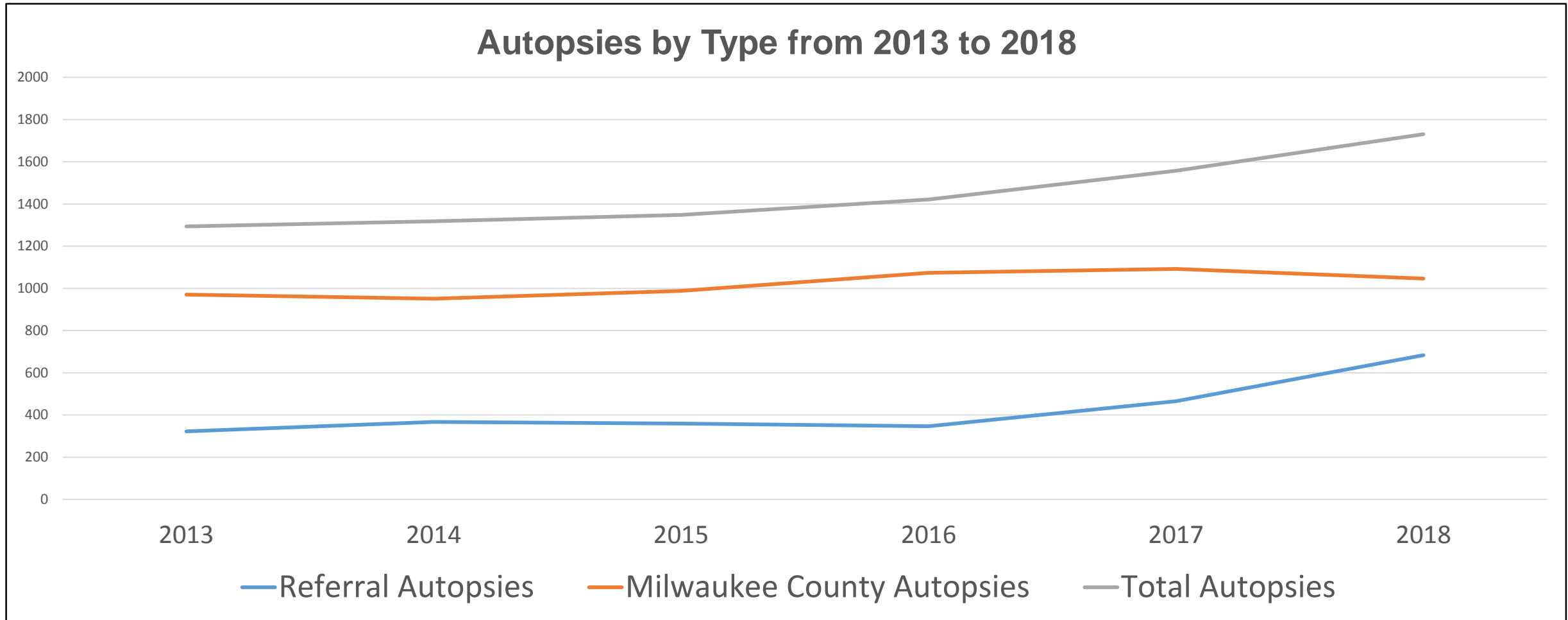
- *to promote and maintain the highest professional standards in the field of death investigations; provide a timely, accurate, and legally defensible determination of the cause and manner of death; enhance public health and safety through reducing the incidence of preventable deaths, protect the interests of deceased individuals and their families and serve the community.*

Drug related deaths have increased since 2013, but the number and type of drugs found in a decedent has seen a more dramatic increase which results in a growing need for toxicology work.

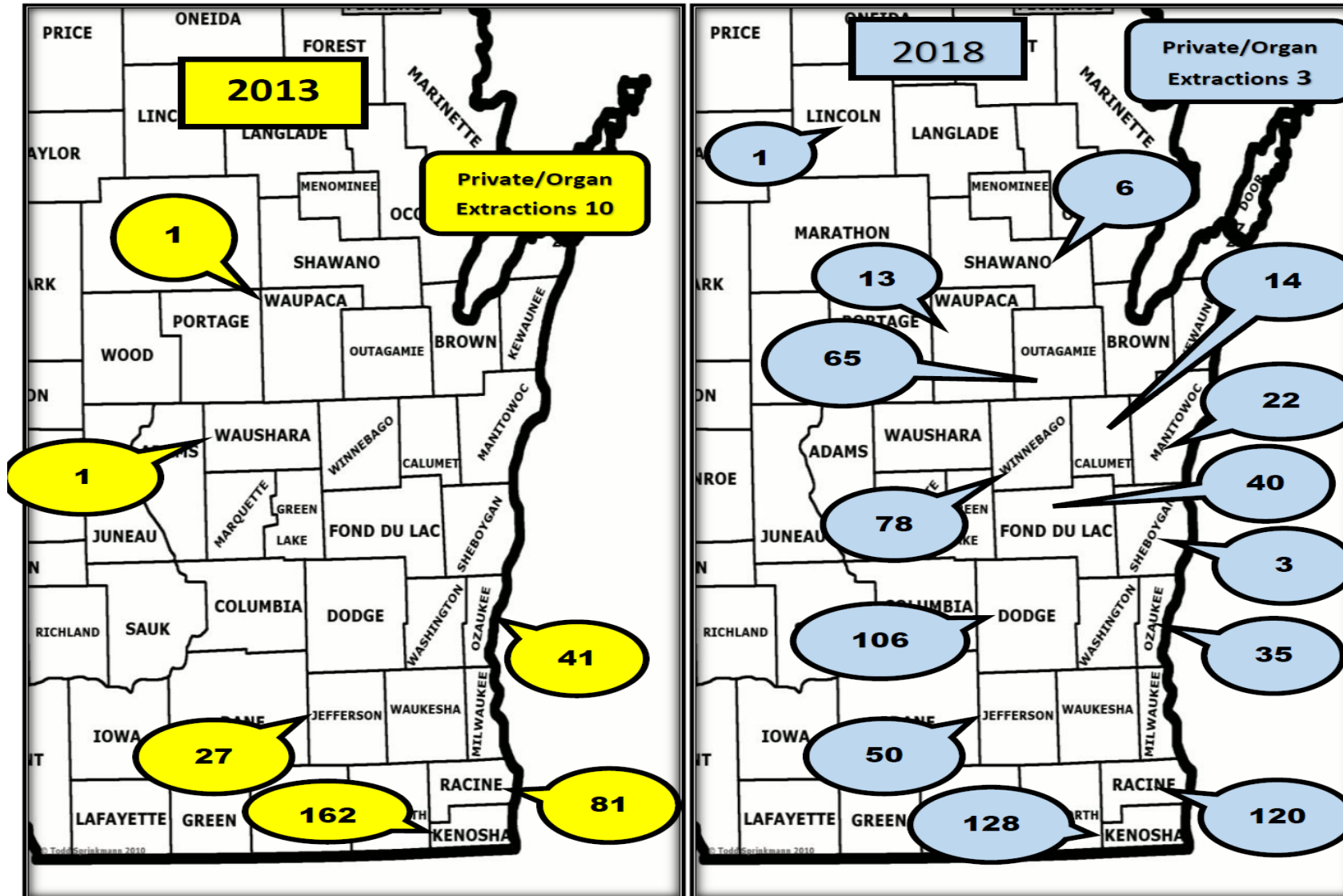


What we found.....

During the first year of our review in 2013, the Medical Examiner’s Office performed 323 autopsies for 6 referral counties; by 2018 that number had grown to 684 autopsies for 14 referral counties. We recommend that the ME work with policymakers to include guidance on the magnitude of referral autopsies to be performed by the ME.



In 2013, autopsies were performed for 6 referral counties, in 2018 that number had grown to 14.



The National Association of Medical Examiners began issuing autopsy standards in the 1970s. NAME states that a forensic pathologist shall not perform more than 325 autopsies in a year with a recommended maximum number of autopsies of 250 per year.

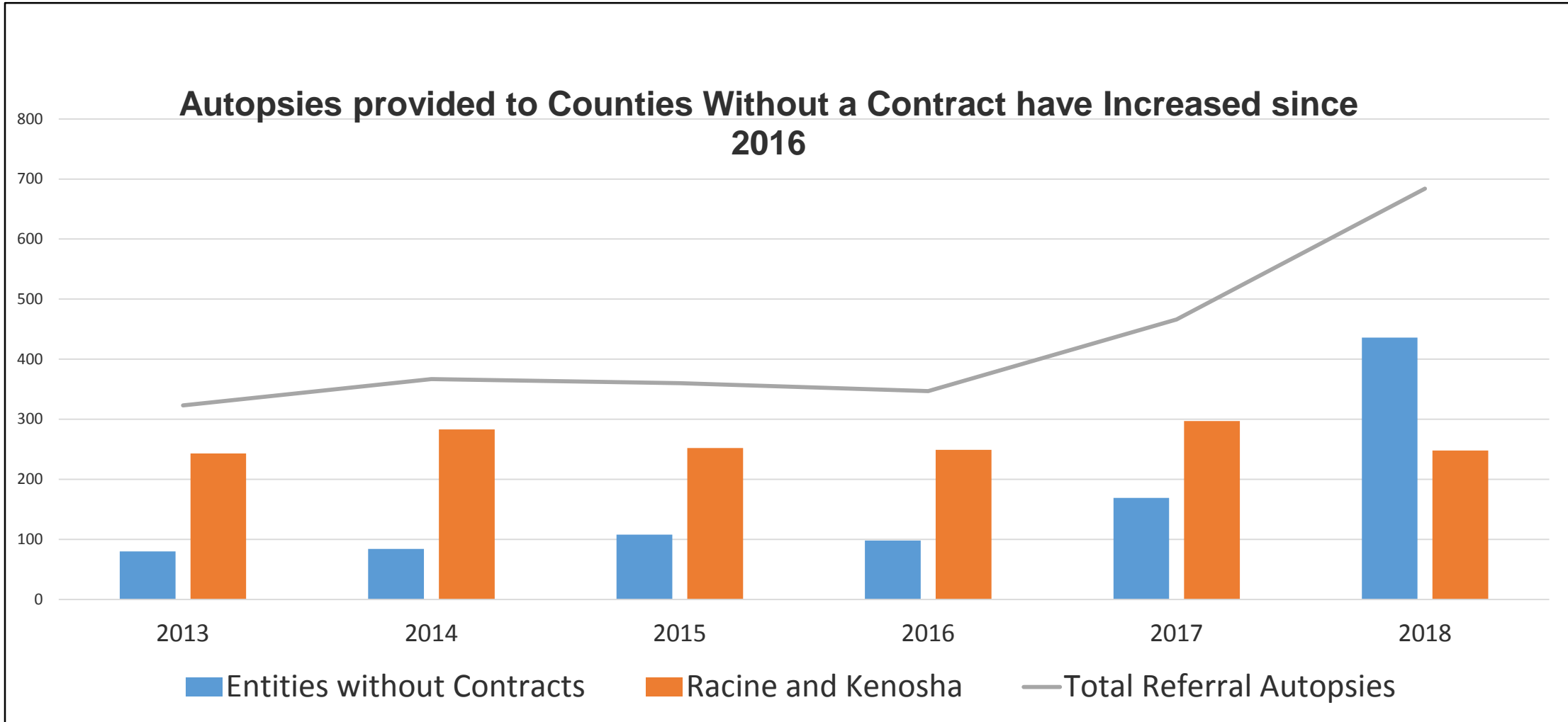
The Medical Examiner's Office average 264 autopsies per full time pathologist for the years 2013 to 2017. We recommend the ME present a plan to ensure the office does not exceed the parameters established by NAME.

Autopsies Performed per Pathologist 2013–2018*

	<u>2013</u>	<u>2014</u>	<u>2015</u>	<u>2016</u>	<u>2017</u>	<u>2018</u>	<u>Avg.</u>
Pathologist 1	276	289	286	231	292	273	275
Pathologist 2	283	157					252
Pathologist 3	275	263	276	249	301	243	268
Pathologist 4	236	267	285	243	320	295	274
Pathologist 5		130	216	242	282	240	247
Pathologist 6			76	252	245	270	247
Pathologist 7						210	280
Total	1,070	1,106	1,139	1,217	1,441	1,531	
Average per Pathologist	268	260	258	243	288	266	264
Number of Pathologist over 250	3	3	3	1	4	3	

*Averages were adjusted for the numbers of months actually worked within a year by a pathologist and for the determination by NAME that the performance of three external exams is equal to one autopsy in terms of workload.

The Medical Examiner has properly executed contracts with Racine and Kenosha Counties only. From 2013 to 2018, the Medical Examiner provided 941 referral autopsies for other counties without a contract in place. We recommend the immediate execution of contracts or other formal agreements with any outside entity receiving autopsy, brain or other organ extraction services.



Milwaukee County charges a flat rate per autopsy conducted, however, the rate varies by County.

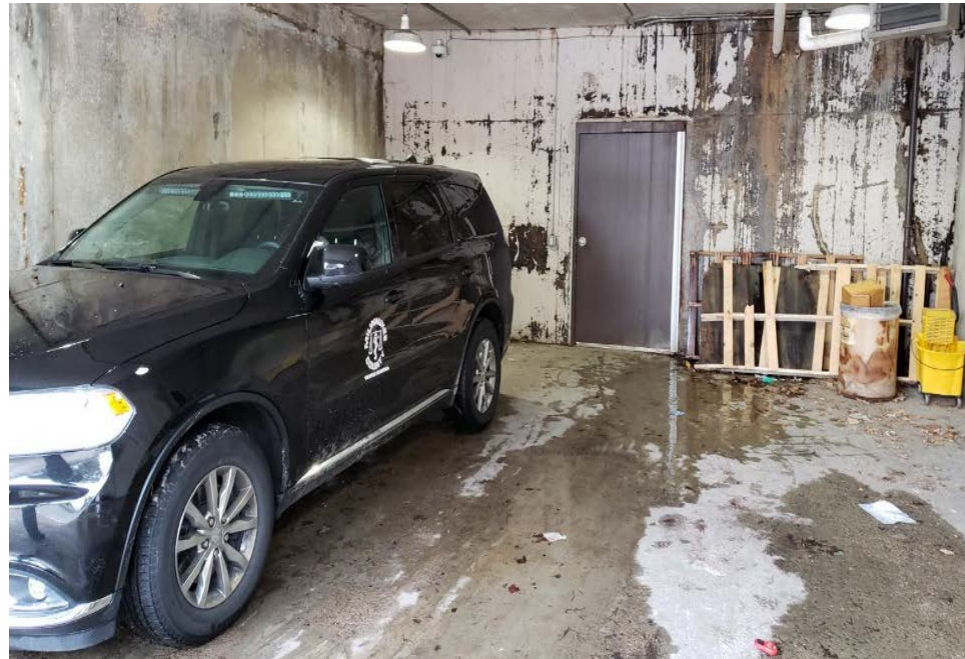
State Statute requires the fee to be reasonably related to the costs to perform an autopsy and that the County Board approve the fee. The ME submitted the fee as a part of its 2018 Requested Budget fee schedule, but we were unable to determine if the County Board was provided this document as part of the budget documents it approved.

We found that the autopsy fees charged by the Medical Examiner's Office to be reasonably related, if not too low, to its cost to perform an autopsy. We recommend an analysis occurs to determine the approximate cost of an autopsy and seek County Board approval of the fee.

Rates Charged to Referral Counties and Other Entities for Autopsies and Organ Extractions	
<u>Autopsy Rate</u>	<u>Counties</u>
\$1,250	Jefferson, Outagamie – 2018
\$1,500	Calumet, Dodge, Fond du Lac, Kenosha, Manitowoc, Ozaukee, Shawno, Sheboygan, Waupaca, Winnebago - 2018.
\$1,600	Racine – 2018
\$2,000 to \$3,000	Organ Extraction – 2018 according to the Medical Examiner



Existing facility issues should be rectified while planning has begun on a potential new facility. We recommend the ME work with DAS Facilities Management to immediately repair portions of the facility.



Enhance recordkeeping is needed to provide documentation to ensure proper payment is received for referral autopsies. We found we could not verify payments of \$23,300 from 2013 to 2017 for 17 referral autopsies.

We made numerous administrative and recordkeeping recommendations including:

- *Create a check monitoring system to track payments for services provided including creating an electronic record of all invoices and payments received and creating a numbering system for invoices.*
- *Attempt to verify if payment was received for the items identified by the Audit Services Division and recoup funds from any referral counties, if necessary.*
- *Include identifying information in the County's general ledger system when depositing payments from referral counties.*
- *Immediately request inclusion of an invoice function in the new ERP system for autopsies.*

We reviewed Employee Engagement Data, Overtime Paid, Staff Interviews and staff separation data to attempt to determine if the increased workload was having an adverse effect on staff. Given the results of the 2018 Employee Engagement data and our discussions we staff, we recommend:

- *the ME use the Employee Engagement data in an attempt to assess if any segment of employees are more affected by the increase in autopsies.*