

COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE
Inter-Office Communication

Date: April 18, 2024
To: Marcelia Nicholson, Chairwoman, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors
From: Medical Examiner's Office, Wieslawa Tlomak, MD, Chief Medical Examiner
Subject: Medical Examiner's Office 2023 Annual Report
File Type: Informational Report

This informational report provides a report on how the Office of the Medical Examiner set and achieved its 2023 goals.

POLICY

This report aligns to Chapter 108: Achieving Racial Equity & Health.

Milwaukee County Code of General Ordinances:	Chapter 108: Achieving Racial Equity & Health
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BACKGROUND

[File 22-104](#) amends Chapter 108 to require that “annually, by April 30 of each year or sooner, each Milwaukee County department leader and/or their designee(s) shall provide a written and oral report outlining their year-end results to a Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors committee. The reports shall, at a minimum:

- (a) Indicate the year-end goals the department set in the prior year
- (b) Share the rationale and relevance of the department's performance metrics (i.e. explaining why they are “SMART” goals (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, timely, and extending) and how they align to the county's racial equity strategy, if applicable)
- (c) Report the department's year-end results relating to the goals it had set, and
- (d) Provide a thorough analysis clearly articulating why goals were significantly exceeded, met, or not met.
- (e) Explain the department's progress in creating a departmental-level strategic plan that aligns to the countywide strategic plan and provide an update about future plans to revise and enhance the departmental-level plan in the year ahead.”

ALIGNMENT TO STRATEGIC PLAN

- 1A: Reflect the full diversity of the County at every level of County government
- 1B: Create and nurture an inclusive culture across County government
- 1C: Increase the number of County contracts awarded to minority and women-owned businesses

- 2A: Determine what, where, and how we deliver services to advance health equity
- 2B: Break down silos across County government to maximize access to and quality of services offered
- 2C: Apply a racial equity lens to all decisions

- 3A: Invest “upstream” to address root causes of health disparities
- 3B: Enhance the County’s fiscal health and sustainability
- 3C: Dismantle barriers to diverse and inclusive communities

Alignment to the above strategic goals is articulated in response to the questions below.

BODY

In 2023, the Medical Examiner’s Office (MEO) worked with the Office of Strategy, Budget and Performance to update its goals under the direction of the new Chief Medical Examiner appointed in March of 2023. The goals of the Medical Examiner’s Office are primarily focused on staffing, as this has been a critical need in recent years. Adequate staffing allows for the timely death scene investigation and conducting of forensic autopsies to determine the cause and manner of death. Medicolegal death investigation is critical for the health and welfare of the public as well as for legally defensible determination of the cause and manner of death in criminal and civil cases. The Medical Examiner’s office plays a key role in the surveillance of emerging diseases and public health trends including infectious diseases, drug deaths, and homicides.

1. What were the top 3 goals of your department/office in 2023? Please explain why they are “SMARTIE” goals (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, timely, inclusive, and equitable) and how they align to the county’s racial equity strategy.
 - o Goal 1 (County Goal Alignment 1A/1B): Improve employee well-being by
 - Attracting diverse, talented specialists to provide human-centered service to Milwaukee County and beyond,
 - Fully equipping our team members to be successful and investing in their growth.

The measurement of this goal will be when MEO is consistently fully-staffed by engaged, high-performing, satisfied employees who feel valued as measured by performance evaluations. This goal aligns to the County’s racial equity strategy by reflecting the full diversity of the County at every level of County government, and by creating and nurturing an inclusive culture across County government.

- Goal 2 (County Goal Alignment 2A/2B): Break down Medical Examiner's Office silos by:
 - Operationalize communication systems that foster collaboration across all Medical Examiner's Office service areas (autopsy, medicolegal death investigation, toxicology and administration).

This goal will be measured by the documentation of cross-training, collective problem-solving and cohesive teamwork at MEO through the daily morning reports, weekly case consensus conferences, weekly interesting case reports, monthly in-service meetings (hybrid meetings in person and via Teams), regular administrative meetings and regularly scheduled team building activities. This goal aligns to the County's racial equity strategy by breaking down silos across County government to maximize access to and quality of services offered.

- Goal 3 (County Goal Alignment 3A): Drive upstream investments through data:
 - Secure adequate staff and technology to provide timely, accurate data to the residents of Milwaukee County as well as to different agencies in Milwaukee County.

Measurement of this goal is by the use of the searchable dashboard databases on the County's website by various Milwaukee County partners, stakeholders, and the public. MEO displays mortality data on Milwaukee County's strategy dashboard that has increased transparency regarding the negative detriments of health and highlights disparate health outcomes by race and ethnicity. This goal aligns to the County's racial equity strategy by investing "upstream" to address root causes of health disparities.

2. To what extent were these goals accomplished in 2023? Please explain.

- a. Goal 1: Improve employee well-being
 - i. In late 2023, numerous employees of the Medical Examiner's Office came together to brainstorm ideas of what the future of the Medical Examiner's Office will look like. A key metric to measure this goal is determining that MEO is consistently fully-staffed. MEO is currently in the process of filling positions for the Toxicology Laboratory Director and Medicolegal Death Investigator. One medical doctor will be joining the office in July 2024. The office should be fully staffed in summer of 2024.
- b. Goal 2: Break down Medical Examiner office silos
 - i. The Morning Report takes place every weekday at 8:00 AM. Case Consensus Conference and Interesting Case Report are weekly activities. Monthly in-service meetings began in summer of 2023 where all employees are encouraged to come together to learn about current topics and best practices in death investigation. We have internal as well as external speakers presenting topics important in the area of medicolegal death investigation. Attendance has averaged approximately 98 percent.

Additionally, monthly staff gatherings involving themed “pot-luck” lunches have been well-received with approximately 75 percent of employees participating. The ME Office staff wants to work together and have fun together. More outings and gatherings are scheduled for 2024.

c. Goal 3: Drive upstream investments through data

MEO continues numerous collaborations with several entities including the Office of Emergency Management and the Office of Strategy, Budget and Performance to provide real-time mortality statistics to stakeholders and the public to highlight the disparate health outcomes by race and ethnicity. This data continues to be used by decision-makers to address root causes and health disparities. Work continues to build a searchable database to make data requests easier to fulfill and perform.

3. What factors *enabled* progress toward accomplishing these goals?

The factors that enabled progress toward accomplishing our goals include excellent working relationships with other County Departments as well as dedicated staff.

4. What factors *hindered* progress toward accomplishing these goals?

The factors that hindered progress toward accomplishing our goals are primarily the unpredictable 24-hour nature of the functions of the Medical Examiner’s Office. We are never able to “shut down” to focus on staff training or development and must respond to reportable deaths at all times of the day. Additionally, the case load has increased primarily due to the opioid epidemic in the last several years.

In the last three years, we have lost fifty percent of our Medicolegal Death Investigators. Three retired, and the remainder left for positions in other counties in Wisconsin.

5. What is the status of your Department/Office in developing its strategic plan? If complete, please upload your plan with this report.

We continue to work with Office of Strategy Budget and Performance to develop our strategic plan.

6. If not addressed in #5, what are your Department/Office goals for 2024?

- 1) Improve employee well-being;
- 2) Break down Medical Examiner’s Office silos;
- 3) Drive upstream investments through data;
- 4) Manage the Forensic Science Center project and budget;
- 5) Manage the implementation of new case management (LIMS) software;

- 6) Work with Procurement on autopsy referral revenue contracts;
- 7) Fill staff vacancies (Forensic Laboratory Director, Medicolegal Death Investigator, Administrative position);
- 8) Teaching Medicolegal Death Investigation class at UW-Milwaukee and Marquette University and Medical College of Wisconsin medical students and pathology residents;
- 9) Training forensic pathology fellows.

FISCAL EFFECT

The report is informational only and there is no fiscal impact.

VIRTUAL MEETING INVITES

PREPARED BY:

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APPROVED BY:

Wieslawa Tlomak, MD

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ATTACHMENTS:

cc: Kelly Bablitch, Chief of Staff, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors
Janelle M. Jensen, Legislative Services Division Manager, Office of the County Clerk