

EL PASO COUNTY CORONER'S OFFICE

2024 ANNUAL REPORT



The El Paso County Coroner’s Office (EPCCO) serves the citizens of El Paso County by investigating all sudden, unexpected, and non-natural deaths. While many deaths can be certified by the decedent’s physician, approximately 20-25% require further investigation. This process determines the cause and manner of death for those individuals in addition to protecting public health and safety.

In 2024, EPCCO performed **867 autopsies** on in-county deaths. For a fee, the El Paso County Coroner’s Office also completed 349 examinations for deaths originating in 19 other Colorado counties. Local autopsies decreased 13% from 2023; “out of county” exams dropped 39%, a number which reflects a mass recovery of remains by Fremont County.

<div>2024 TOTAL CASES INVESTIGATED</div> <div>6310</div> <div>(4.5% increase from 2023)</div>	<div>2024 TOTAL AUTOPSIES</div> <div>1216</div> <div>(22% decrease from 2023*)</div>	<div>2024 DEATHS WITHOUT AUTOPSY</div> <div>5094</div>
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In 2024, the EPCCO’s staff consisted of five board-certified forensic pathologists, including elected Coroner Leon Kelly, M.D.; Deputy Chief Medical Examiner Emily Russell-Kinsley, M.D.; and Associate Coroners Allison Cooper, M.D.; Jarod Murdoch, D.O.; and Megan Kliesner, M.D. The office also employed three administrative staff, 11 death investigators, four toxicologists, one histologist, and seven morgue technicians.

*Reflective of the mass recovery of remains from Fremont County in 2023.

Colorado Revised Statute (C.R.S.) 30-10-606 describes the roles and responsibilities of county coroners during death investigations. Complete forensic investigations primarily provide the cause and manner of death for individual decedents, but they can also assist in settling insurance or estate claims and determining the pursuit of civil or criminal charges relating to those deaths. The investigation of deaths can also identify issues relating to public health and safety by indicating trends in diseases, accidents, and crimes. As a result, these investigations provide peace of mind for both surviving loved ones and the public.

One of EPCCO’s responsibilities is to confirm the decedent’s identity and notify that person’s next-of-kin. In most cases, identification can be completed quickly through visual or forensic means. However, this process may prove more challenging in cases that involve burns, extensive injuries, or decomposition.

The El Paso County Coroner’s Office works to exhaust all leads pursuant to identification of the deceased and notification of their families. In 2024, 2 cases from El Paso County, dating back to 1991, were still pending identification. DNA testing, forensic anthropology, and facial reconstruction methods have been utilized in those investigations to broaden the reach of these efforts.

Two cases from 2024 still await identification. This year, 82 unclaimed remains were released to the Public Administrator to receive their final disposition. The Public Administrator’s Office steps in when family cannot be located or cannot make arrangements for the deceased.

Means of Identification

Visual - 532	Dental - 2
Out of County Coroners - 349	Unidentified - 2
Fingerprints - 320	Medical Devices - 1
Circumstantial - 9	DNA - 1

The term “autopsy” refers to a post-mortem (after death) examination of a deceased person to determine their cause and manner of death. An autopsy can feature different levels of examination appropriate to each case.

237

237 cases in 2024 were “**external only**” wherein the cause and manner could be established by the external examination* and a thorough medical history.

53

53 exams were **partial autopsies**, typically consisting of internal “head only” examinations to ensure that head trauma did not cause or contribute to the death.

926

926 autopsies included a full internal exam in which each of the organs are examined. These are considered “**complete**” autopsies.

28

28 deaths were certified after an investigation and review of medical records but without an exam. EPCCO performs these reviews in rare cases where a decedent does not have a physician at the time of death or that physician is located outside of Colorado.

89%

89% (1085 cases) included **toxicology testing**. Samples are nearly always collected during the autopsy, but tests may not be performed at the discretion of the pathologist.

724

724 of 867 (84%) of El Paso County’s autopsies involved **death scene investigation**. This means that a death investigator was dispatched to the place of death to perform an on-site investigation.

0

El Paso County Coroner’s Office performed 0 **exhumations** in 2024.

***External Examination** – Every autopsy includes a thorough examination of the outside of the decedent’s body to document changes due to natural disease, identifying marks and scars, evidence of medical treatment, injuries, and an inventory of clothing and property.

Average time to completion

In 2024, the average duration between autopsy and report completion was **37.7 days**. 64 cases (5%) required more than 60 days for a finished report, typically due to the case’s complexity or an ongoing investigation. This represents a 2.2% increase in long-term investigations from 2023.

Colorado Revised Statute (C.R.S.) 30-10-606 mandates that the following deaths must be reported to and investigated by the Coroner:

- Sudden, unexpected, or non-natural deaths
- When no physician is available to certify the deaths
- Industrial or workplace accidents
- Deaths that occur in the custody of law enforcement or in the care of a public institution
- Deaths due to public health threats
- All unexplained deaths

The responsibilities of a Colorado county Coroner's Office include:

- Pronouncing death
- Determining the cause and manner of death
- Identifying human remains
- Notifying the decedent's next-of-kin
- Investigating deaths in conjunction with, but independent of, law enforcement agencies
- Collecting evidence present on or within the body
- Securing a decedent's property for their next-of-kin
- Providing expert testimony in criminal or civil proceedings
- Granting tissues and/or organs for donation when permission has been given by the next-of-kin

2024 Revenue for El Paso County Coroner’s Office

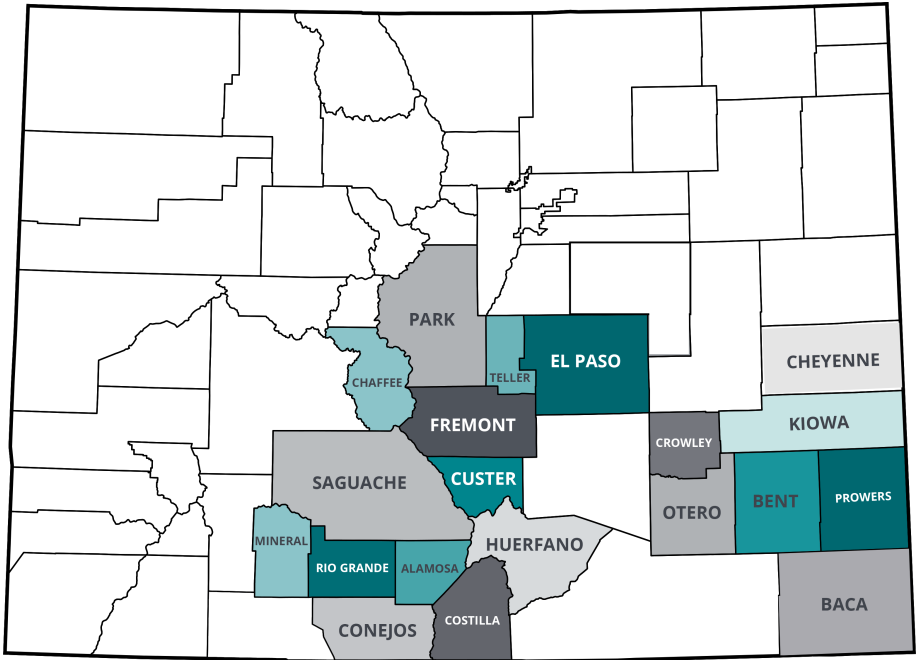
Grant for Violent Death Reporting	\$4,658
Out of County Autopsy Fees	\$505,250
Histology Fees	\$1,080
HB-21-1317 Tax Reimbursement	\$13,050
OD2A-S Toxicology Grant	\$42,525
Facility Fees	\$1,400
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Total Revenue for 2024	\$567,963*
*13% decrease from 2023	

El Paso County citizen cost breakdown

2024 population* of El Paso County	752,772
Total 2024 budget	\$4,787,682
Overall cost to citizens	\$4,219,719
Annual cost to each El Paso County citizen	= \$5.61

*US Census Bureau (2024)

1216
total autopsies



COUNTY	# of Autopsies
ALAMOSA	33
BACA	4
BENT	7
CHAFFEE	26
CHEYENNE	7
CONEJOS	15
COSTILLA	12
CROWLEY	3
CUSTER	9
EL PASO	867

# of Autopsies	COUNTY
70	FREMONT
19	HUERFANO
1	KIOWA
6	MINERAL
24	OTERO
37	PARK
11	PROWERS
11	RIO GRANDE
20	SAGUACHE
34	TELLER

“Manner of death” refers to the circumstances surrounding the cause of death. The “cause of death” describes the disease or injury that led to the death. There are five possible manners present on a Colorado death certificate:

Natural - These deaths are due solely to disease or aging.

Accident - These deaths occur due to unintentional injury.

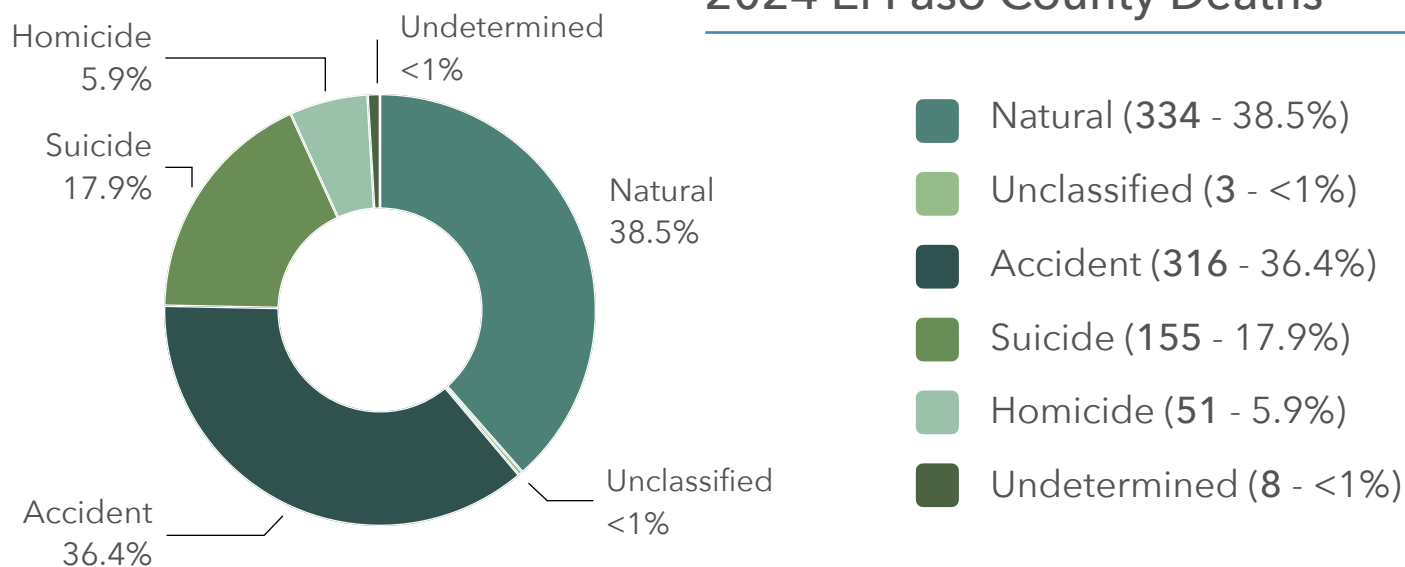
Suicide - These deaths are the result of an intentional act self-inflicted by the decedent.

Homicide - These deaths occur due to the intentional, injurious actions of another individual toward the decedent.

Undetermined - Deaths in this category may or may not have a determined cause of death, or they may exhibit two or more possible manners.

Unclassified - The death of a fetus in utero (in the uterus) does not receive a manner determination.

2024 El Paso County Deaths



Natural deaths are the result of processes such as aging or disease. In these cases, autopsies are only performed if the death occurred suddenly or while the decedent was not under the care of a physician.

39 investigated deaths were directly caused by chronic ethanol (alcohol) use, which represents a significant drop from 84 cases in 2023. However, 22 deaths in 2024 included chronic alcohol use as a factor in the death but not the main cause.

The table below lists the most common conditions associated with the natural deaths which received an autopsy.

Cardiovascular	172
Chronic Alcohol Abuse	42
Non-COVID-19 Infections	22
Diabetes	17
Gastrointestinal	14
Pulmonary Disease	13
Morbid Obesity	8
Global/Geriatric Decline	7
Pulmonary Embolism	7
Other	6
Chronic Substance Abuse	5*
Congenital Disorders	5
Neurological Decline/Dementia	5
Cancer/Neoplasm	5
Epilepsy/Seizure Disorder	4
COVID-19	2

334

total autopsied
Natural deaths
in El Paso
County in 2024

The diseases that most commonly appear as significant contributing factors in death, alongside other causes, include obesity, diabetes, pulmonary disease, cardiovascular disease, tobacco use, and chronic alcoholism.

*Two of these deaths are related to cannabinoid hyperemesis syndrome (CHS).

El Paso County has experienced a downward trend in accidental deaths in the past two years. Compared to 380 fatal accidents in 2023, 2024 saw 316 autopsy cases with an accidental manner—a 16.8% decrease. However, there has been a 33.9% increase in fatal motor vehicle accidents from 2023 to 2024. Drug deaths decreased 27% compared to the previous year. Hypothermia and exposure deaths, commonly associated with homelessness, held steady.

Drugs	154
Motor Vehicle Collisions*	36
Falls	30
Motor Vehicle Crashes Involving Motorcycles	26
Pedestrian Injuries	18
Hypothermia/Exposure	16
Drowning	9
Other	7
Pediatric Unsafe Sleep	6
Choking	4
Fires/Thermal Burns	4
Asphyxia	2
Carbon Monoxide	2
Motor Vehicle Crashes Involving Mopeds	1
Motor Vehicle Crashes Involving E-Scooters	1

*This statistic includes only motor vehicle crashes (MVCs) where the decedent occupied a passenger or commercial vehicle.

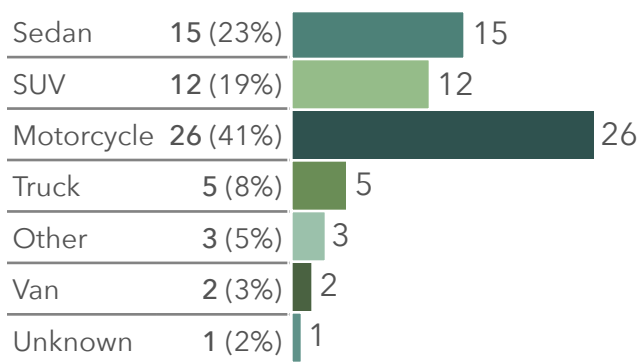
Blunt Force Injury Accidents

Passenger & Commercial Vehicles	36	E-Scooters	1
Motorcycles	26	Mopeds	1
Simple Falls in Adults	24	Mountain Bikes	1
Pedestrians	18	Horseback	1
Falls Down Stairs	6	Heavy Equipment	1

82 total motor vehicle accidents

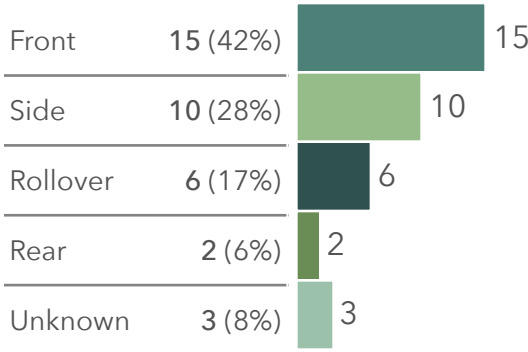
33% involved motorcycles
22% involved pedestrians

Type of Vehicle Decedent Occupied*



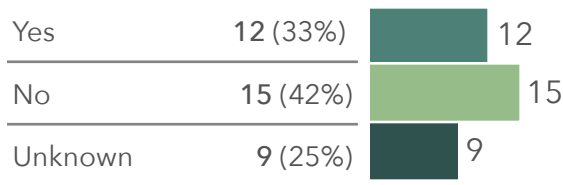
*Please note that this data does not count MVCs involving pedestrians.

Type of Collision if Known*



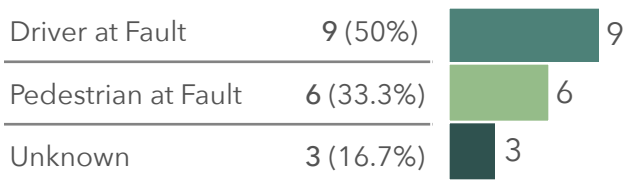
*Please note that this data does not count MVCs involving motorcycles, pedestrians, ebicycles, scooters, or mopeds.

Use of Restraint/Seatbelt*



*Please note that this data does not count MVCs involving motorcycles, pedestrians, ebicycles, scooters, or mopeds.

Vehicle vs Pedestrian



Suspected Primary Cause of Crash

Reckless Driving/Excessive Speed	34 (41%)
Impaired Driver	18 (22%)
Road Conditions	8 (10%)
Medical Event	6 (7%)
Pedestrian Fault	6 (7%)
Operational Error	5 (6%)
Unknown	3 (4%)
Other	2 (2%)

Of the 39 fatal accidents where the decedent was the “at-fault” driver, and where toxicology was performed, 28 had alcohol, THC, or other drugs in their system at the time of autopsy.

Alcohol	7
Drugs	7
Drugs & Alcohol	5
Drugs & THC	4
Alcohol & THC	2
Alcohol, Drugs & THC	2
THC	1

Accidental drug-related deaths decreased 27% from 2023 to 2024. Fentanyl deaths also decreased, dropping 44% compared to the prior year’s data. However, deaths involving methamphetamine increased 7%, occurring 34% of the time in combination with fentanyl. Newly emerging drugs include fentanyl analogues, bromazolam, xylazine, mitragynine (aka kratom), and dipyanone.

154

total drug-related accidental deaths
in El Paso County in 2024

Breakdown of contributing substances across all accidental DRDs

Methamphetamine (+/- ethanol or other meds)	46	Cocaine & other opioids (+/- other meds)	1
Methamphetamine & fentanyl (+/- other meds)	27	Cocaine, methamphetamine, & other opioids	1
Fentanyl (+/- ethanol or other meds)	18	Fentanyl, cocaine, & ketamine (+/- other meds)	1
Cocaine (+/- ethanol or other meds)	11	Fentanyl, cocaine, & other opioids	1
Prescription opioids (+/- ethanol or other meds)	8	Fentanyl, fentanyl analogue, & heroin	1
Fentanyl & cocaine (+/- other meds)	5	Fentanyl, fentanyl analogue, methamphetamine, & cocaine	1
Fentanyl & other opioids (+/- other meds)	5	Fentanyl, fentanyl analogue, xylazine, & cocaine	1
Heroin (+/- ethanol or other meds)	4	Fentanyl, fentanyl analogue, xylazine, & heroin	1
Ethanol	3	Fentanyl, methamphetamine, & cocaine	1
Methamphetamine & cocaine (+/- other meds)	3	Heroin & cocaine	1
Methamphetamine & other opioids (+/- other meds)	3	Ketamine	1
Mitragynine (+/- other meds)	3	Methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA)	1
Fentanyl & fentanyl analogues (+/- other meds)	2	Methamphetamine & MDMA	1
Methamphetamine & heroin (+/- other meds)	2	Other prescription drugs	1

Most Common Drugs in Death

Methamphetamine	85	Heroin	9
Fentanyl & Analogues	71	Gabapentin	5
Cocaine	27	Diazepam.....	5
Prescription Opioids	22	Xylazine.....	5
Ethanol.....	16		

8%

of overdose deaths involved drugs prescribed by the decedent's physician

75%

of accidental drug deaths were male

- 25% were female
- <1% were documented as transgender

46

was the average age at death for all drugs (45 in 2023)

84%

of drug-related deaths occurred before the decedent could be transported to the hospital

7%

had no known drug use history prior to death

70

total number of fentanyl-related deaths in 2024

(Includes accidents and suicides)

24%

of all deaths have marijuana metabolites present at autopsy

32%

of drug-related deaths had THC metabolites present at death

Average age of fentanyl death

41 YEARS

No change over 2023

Average age of non-fentanyl drug death

50 YEARS

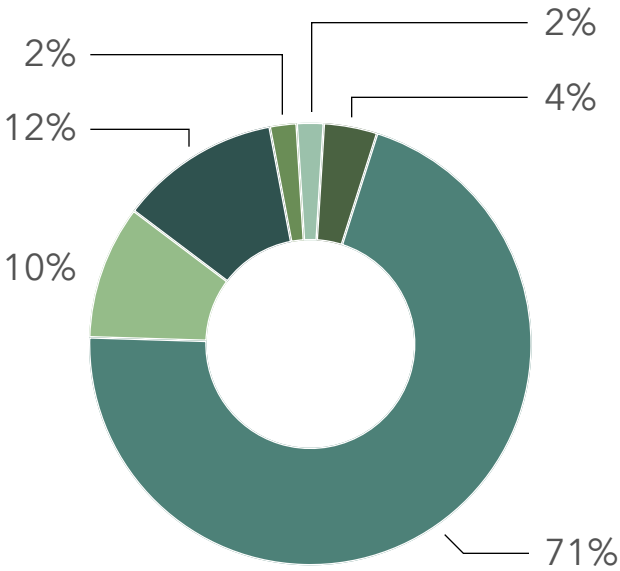
Decrease of 1 year over 2023

2024 saw a 2% increase in total homicides (50 in 2023). Firearm-related homicides held steady from the previous year.

51 total homicides in 2024

Weapons Used

Firearms	36
Blunt Force	5
Sharp Force	6
Blunt Force & Sharp Force	1
Strangulation	1
Other	2



Apparent Circumstances of the Homicides

Altercation	17
Domestic/Family Violence	9
During the Commission of Another Crime	5
Officer Involved*	5
Other	5
Unknown	10

29%

of decedents personally knew the suspect in their death

86%

of victims were male
- 14% were female
- 0 were documented as transgender

*All 5 officer-involved deaths were caused by a use of force that resulted in the death of another. In these cases, the manner is ruled homicide. However, this determination is not an opinion on the legality of the force used, as this judgment is not within the purview of the Coroner’s Office.

There was a 17.9% decrease in total suicides compared to 2023 (189).

155 total suicides in El Paso County in 2024

Firearms	93
Ligature	29
Drugs	20
Asphyxia	6
Fall	4
Other	2
Sharp Force	1

Drugs Used in Suicide

Only Opioids	4
Mix Containing Opioids	4
Single Non-Opioids	6
Mixed Non-Opioids	3
Illicit and Prescription Drugs	1
Only Illicit Drugs	0
Other	2

2024 Suicide Facts

45

average age at death
(range of 14 - 87 years)

24

suicides were under the age of 25
- 4 were under the age of 18

37%

included notes or social media posts indicating suicidal intentions

65%

have a reported history of prior suicidal thoughts

29%

have a reported history of suicide attempts

69%

of suicide autopsies contained drugs (39%), alcohol (34%) or THC (24%) at the time of death

23%

have known active or prior military duty
- 2% are active duty

79%

Of completed suicides were male
- 20% were female
- 1% were documented as transgender



The five most common risk factors linked to suicide in El Paso County are mental health issues, physical health issues or chronic pain, relationship issues, substance use, and history of abuse or domestic violence.

In 2024, the El Paso County Coroner’s Office investigated the deaths of 28 children (individuals under the age of 18 years old). These cases are reviewed by the El Paso County Child Fatality Review Team to identify trends and develop initiatives that can prevent the deaths of minors. Youth suicides decreased 60% from 2023. One fentanyl-related death occurred among minors in 2024.

28 total

Age

<1 Month	4
1 Month - 11 Months	7
1-4 Years	3
5-12 Years	4
13-17 Years	10

Breakdown

Homicides	4
Infant Unsafe Sleep/Asphyxia	6
Natural	7
Motor Vehicle Crash	2
Suicides	4
Accidental Drug Overdose	1
Pedestrian	1
Fire	1
Undetermined	2

Teen Suicides (Ages 13-17 Years)

Gender	
Male	3
Female	1
Documented Transgender	0
Ligature	2
Firearms	2
Drugs	0
Other	0

Identified Risk Factors
Family discord, bullying, LGBTQ+ status, academic performance.

Unsafe Sleep Infant Deaths: 6 Total

Deaths due to an unsafe sleep surface	2
Deaths due to co-sleeping with adults	4

Since homelessness remains a concern for our community, it is important to examine what issues cause or contribute to death in this population. In 2024, the El Paso County Coroner’s Office investigated 86 unexpected deaths of homeless individuals, which represented a 25% decrease from 2023. Homicides rose by 4%, while drug-related deaths fell by 37%. Hypothermia and exposure deaths remained steady from the previous year.

86 total deaths in El Paso County’s homeless population during 2024

Homelessness can include any of the following:

- Sleeping on the streets
- Sleeping in a tent, vehicle, or temporary shelter
- “Couch surfing” or “squatting”
- Transitional living programs
- Temporary residence in a motel or hotel

49 average age at death

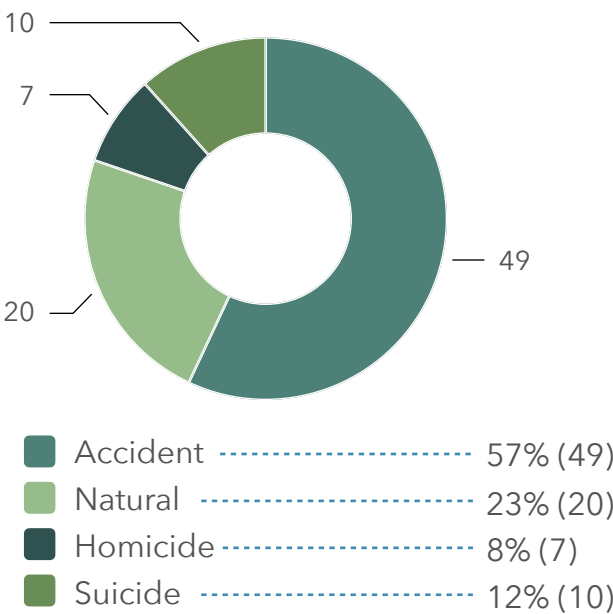
74% of homeless deaths were male

- 26% were female
- 0 were documented as transgender

36% had a last known address outside of El Paso County

Accidents	49 TOTAL
Drug intoxication	31 (63%)
Hypothermia or exposure	9 (18%)
Motor vehicle crash	5 (10%)
Drowning	2 (4%)
Fall	1 (2%)
Pediatric unsafe sleep	1 (2%)

Manners of Death



Homicides	7 TOTAL
Gunshot Wound	4
Blunt Force	1
Sharp Force	2

Drug Intoxications	31 TOTAL
Methamphetamine +/- other drugs	16
Fentanyl +/- other drugs	12
Other illicit drugs	2
Prescription drugs	1

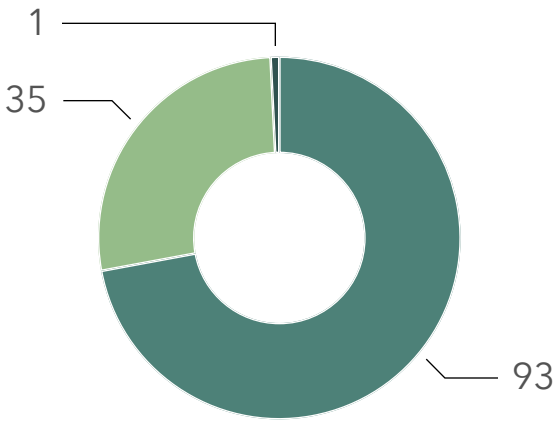
In 2024, 129 individuals died of firearm-related injuries. There was a decrease in firearm-associated homicides compared to 40 in 2023. Suicides involving firearms decreased 22%. There were 0 accidental deaths related to firearms in 2024, and one death with an Undetermined manner.

129

total firearms-related deaths
in 2024

Breakdown of Manners

- Suicide 72% (93)
- Homicide 27% (35)
- Undetermined <1% (1)



Firearm-Related Homicide Circumstances

Altercation	13
Domestic Violence	5
While committing another crime	3
Use of deadly force by law enforcement	5
Unknown	9

Age Ranges

FIREARM
HOMICIDE

7 - 64
years old

FIREARM
SUICIDE

16 - 87
years old

87%

Males

vs.

13%

Females

utilized a firearm to complete suicide.
<1% of firearms-related suicides were documented as transgender.