

Homeless Deaths in Santa Clara County, CA A Retrospective Study 2011-2016

Karin Wells, BA, Student Intern for the Chief Medical Examiner
Michelle A. Jorden, MD, Chief Medical Examiner
Santa Clara County Medical Examiner-Coroner's Office

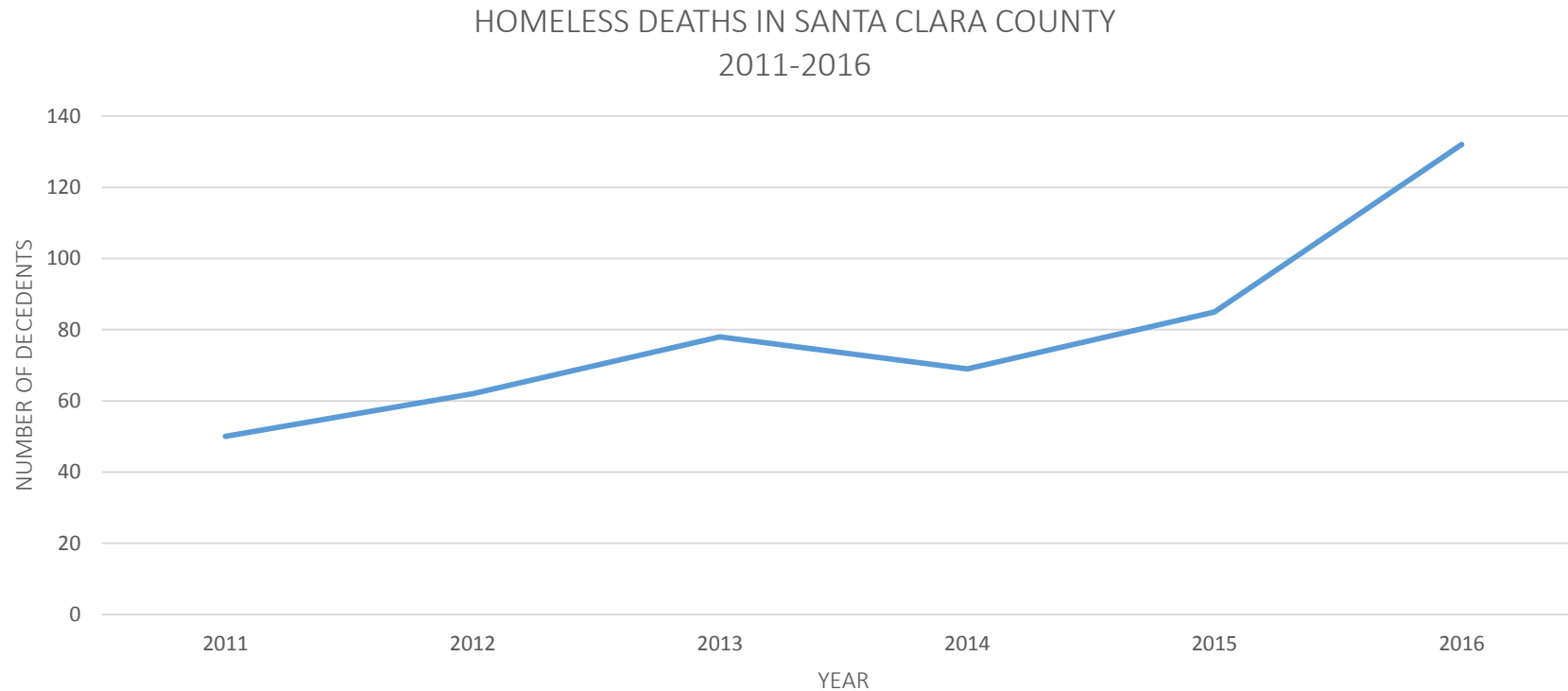
METHOD AND PROJECT OUTLINE

- Each year, from 2011 through 2016, was analyzed for
 - Demographics
 - Cause and manner of death
 - Location of death
 - Medical history
 - Drug use
 - Veteran status
 - Motor vehicle related deaths
- Each case file was reviewed, number of deaths verified, and variables analyzed by the Chief Medical Examiner Michelle A. Jordan, MD, Interim Chief Investigator Rosa Vega, and student intern Karin Wells

HOMELESSNESS

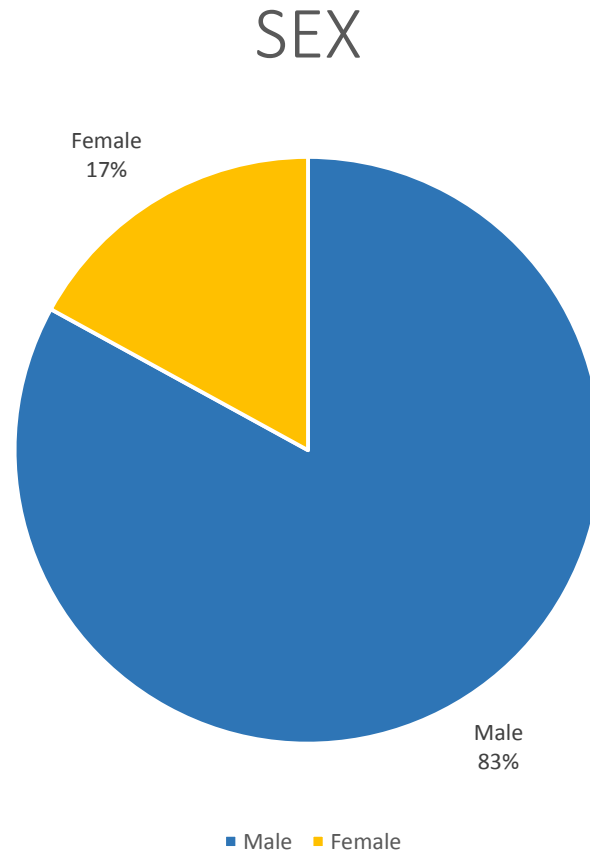
- The Medical Examiner-Coroner's Office determine homelessness if the circumstances of the death occurred in an environment to suggest homelessness (e.g. homeless encampment) or the decedent was known to be homeless **and/or** public record searches do not identify a valid living address

TOTAL HOMELESS DEATHS 2011-2016

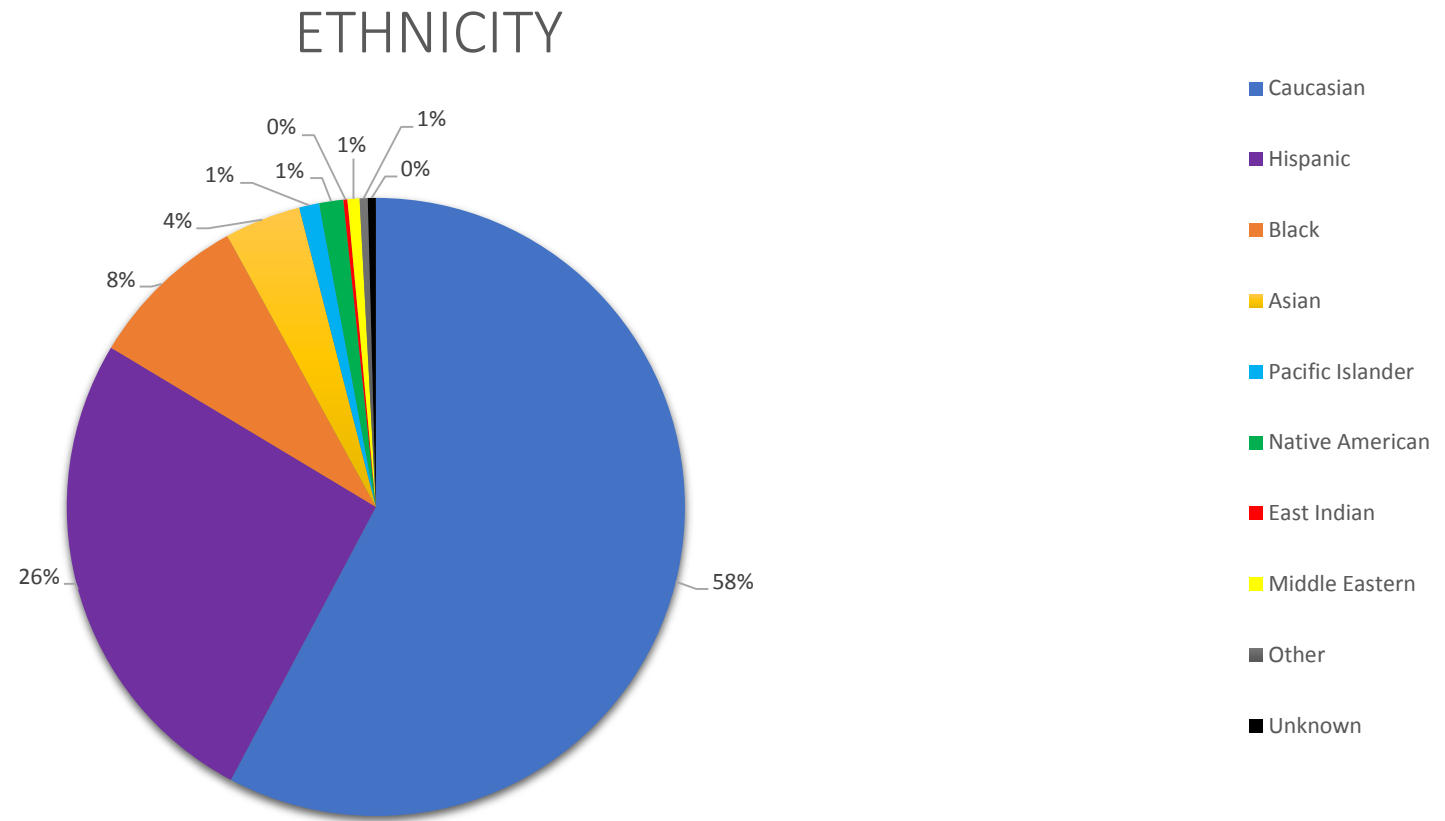


- There were 50 homeless deaths in Santa Clara County in 2011, followed by 62 in 2012, 78 in 2013, 69 in 2014, 85 in 2015, and 132 in 2016.
- Between 2011 and 2016, the number of homeless deaths increased by 164%.

DEMOGRAPHICS: SEX



DEMOGRAPHICS: ETHNICITY



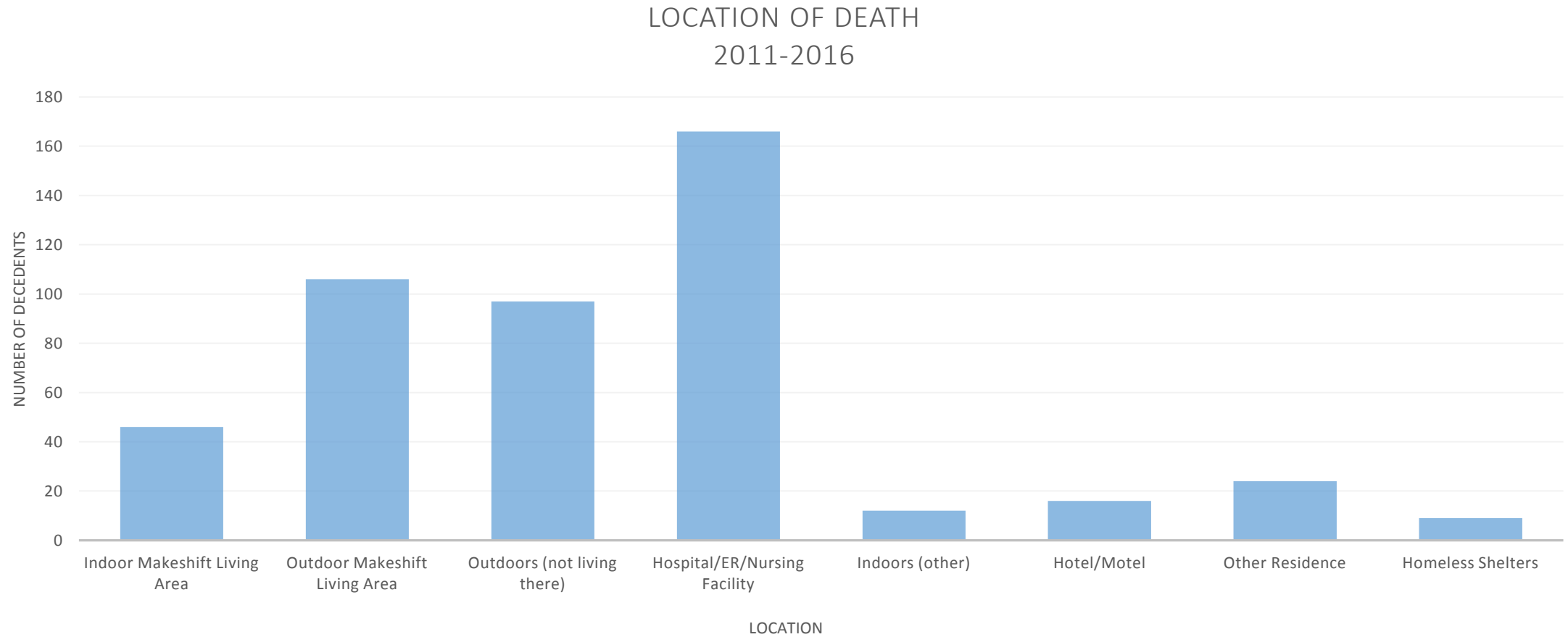
DEMOGRAPHICS: AGE

AGE AT DEATH

Year	Age (in years)
2011	53
2012	47, 55, 57
2013	46, 49, 52
2014	58
2015	53
2016	62

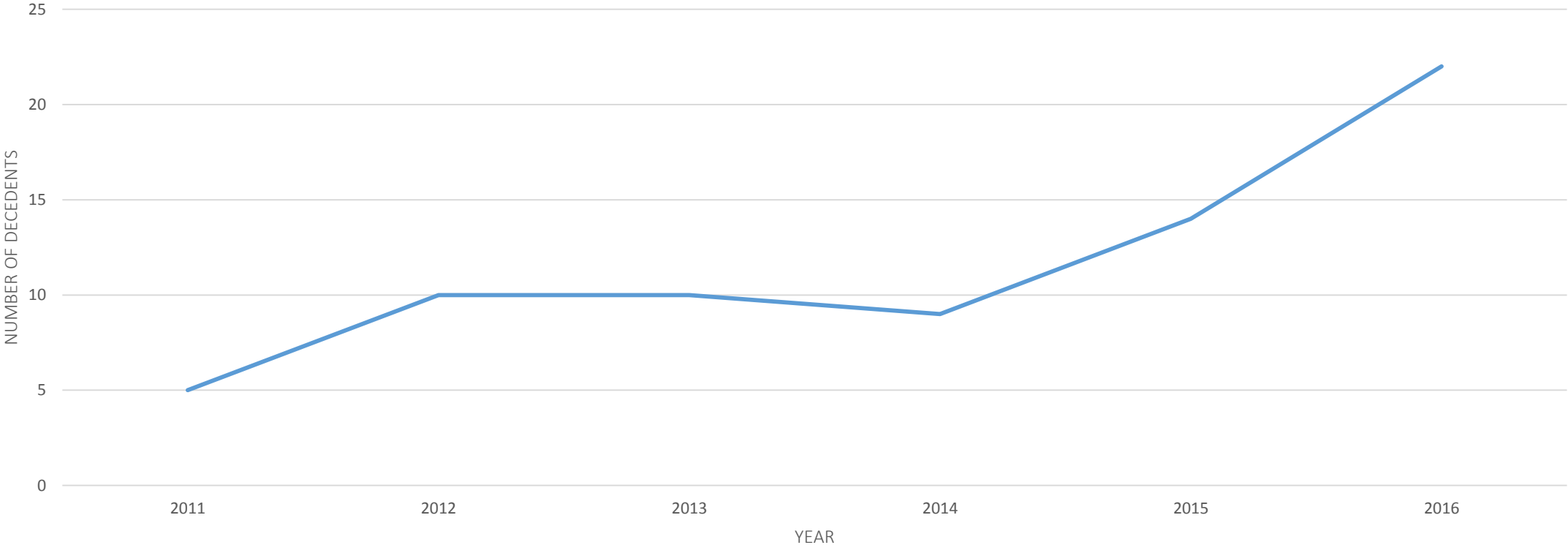
- There were two fetal demises during the six year period.

LOCATION OF DEATH

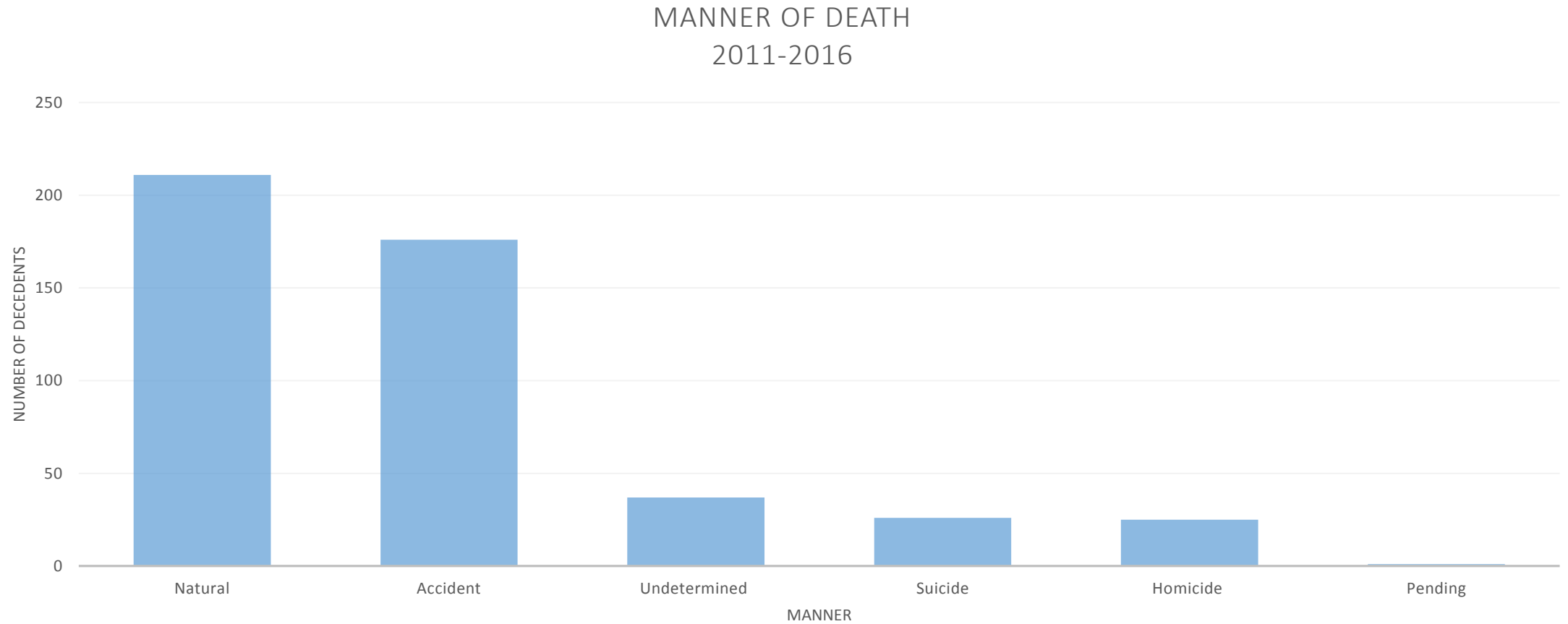


THE AGING HOMELESS POPULATION

DECEDENTS 65 AND OVER
2011-2016

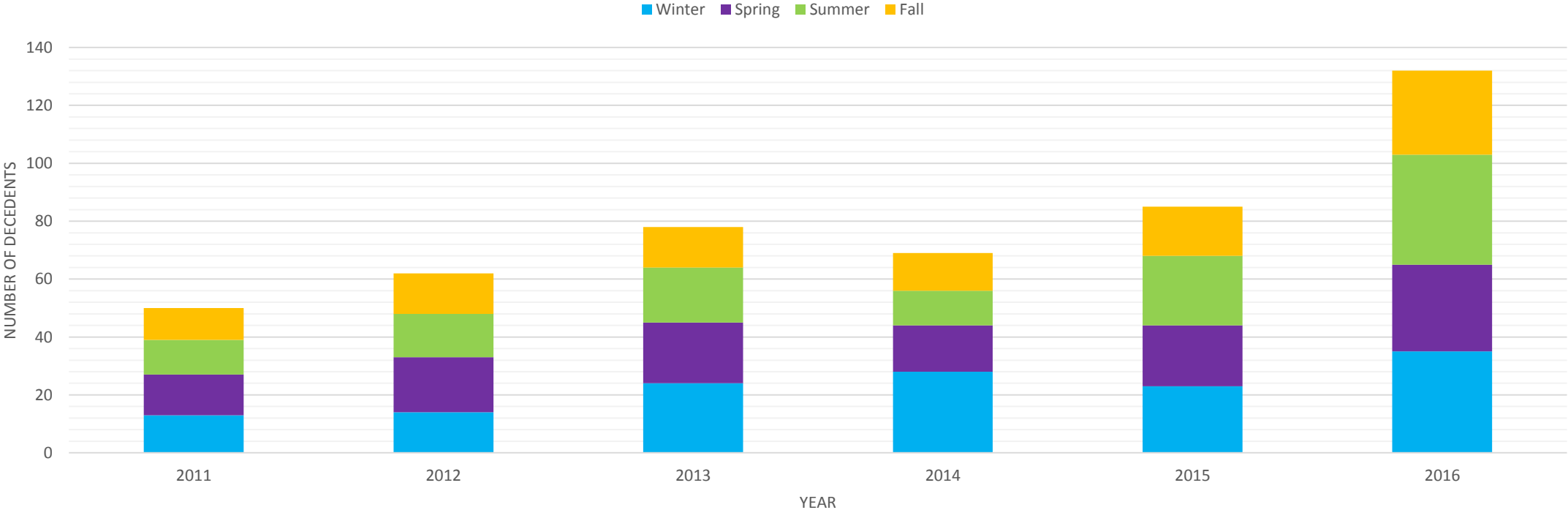


MANNER OF DEATH

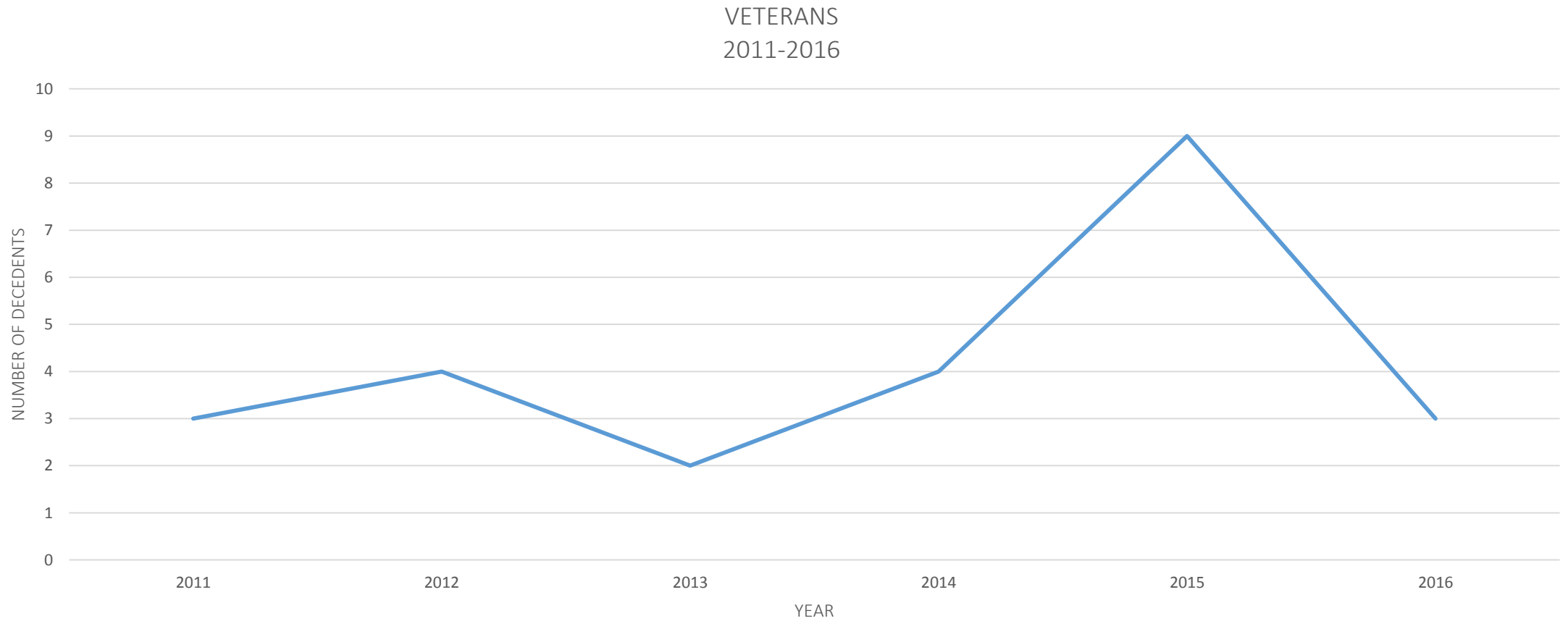


TOTAL DEATHS PER SEASON

DEATHS PER SEASON
2011-2016

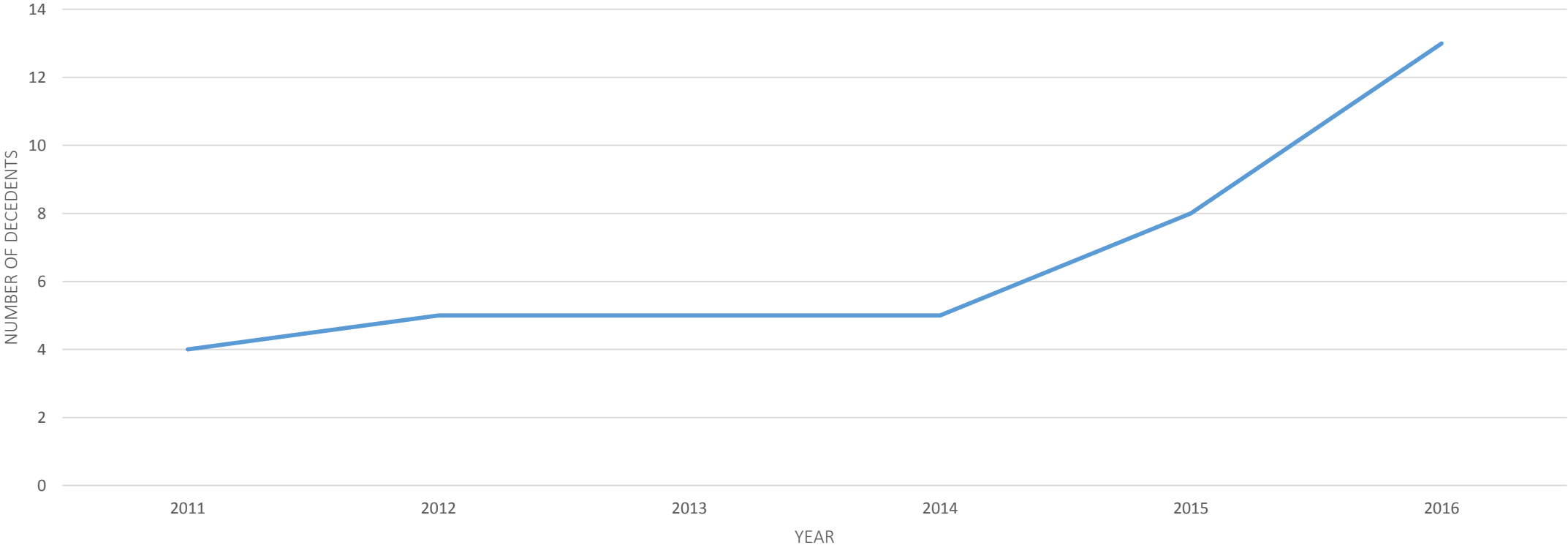


HOMELESS VETERANS



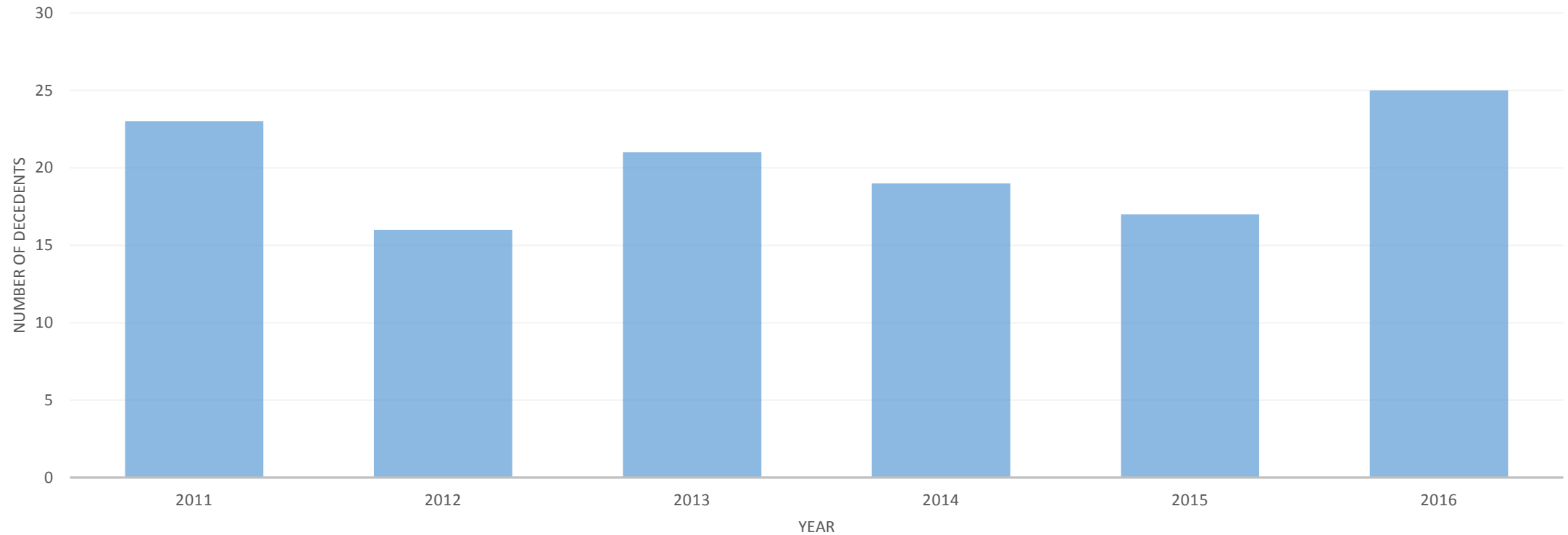
CAUSES OF DEATH: VEHICLE ACCIDENTS

VEHICLE ACCIDENTS AS CAUSE OF DEATH
2011-2016

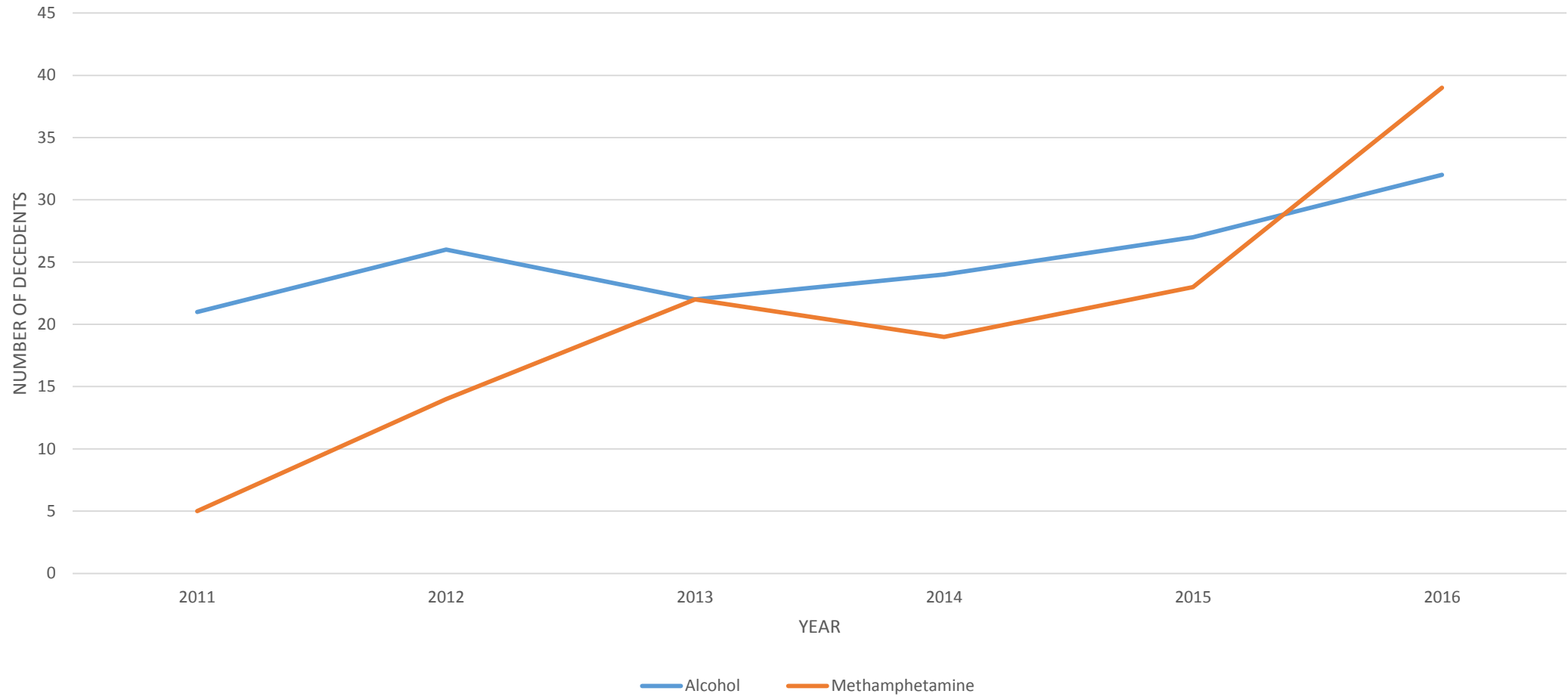


CAUSES OF DEATH: DRUGS AND ALCOHOL

CAUSE OF DEATH DUE TO DRUG/ALCOHOL INTOXICATION
2011-2016

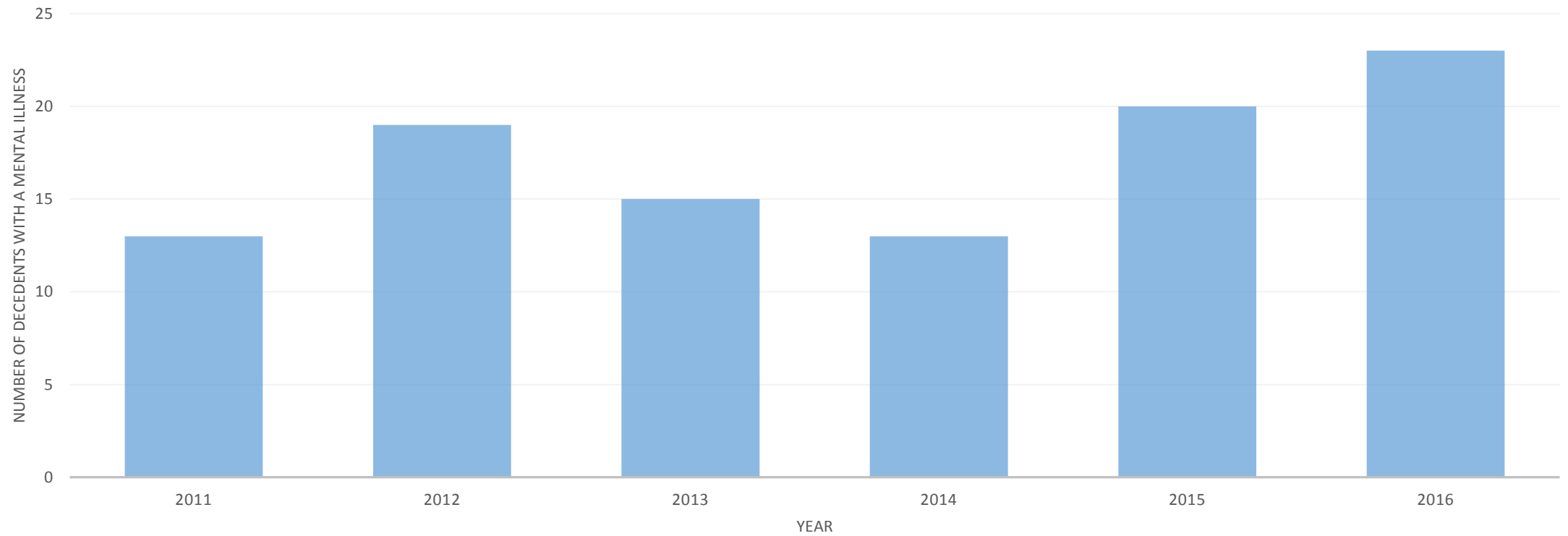


PRESENCE OF METHAMPHETAMINE AND ALCOHOL

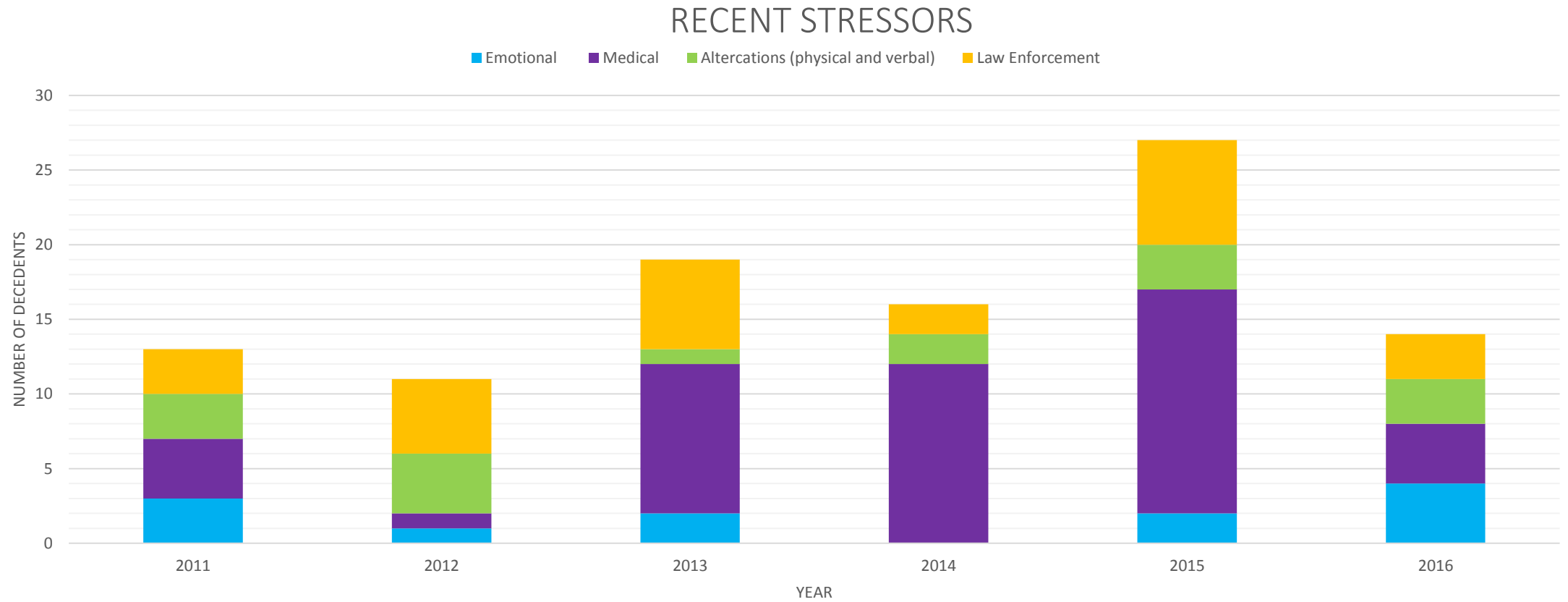


MENTAL ILLNESS

MENTAL ILLNESS
2011-2016



STRESSORS PRIOR TO DEATH



HIGHLIGHTS

- The number of homeless deaths in Santa Clara County increased 164% over the six year period. Between 2011 and 2016, the homeless population rose, with the greatest number of deaths occurring in 2016.
- Homeless deaths were more common among males than females, with Caucasians being the most predominantly represented ethnic group.
- Alcohol and drug abuse continues to claim a significant number of homeless deaths each year with alcohol and methamphetamine being the most commonly abused drugs. Heroin deaths are being monitored given the opioid epidemic.
- The number of elderly deaths over the age of 65 years has risen and is expected to rise given the aging baby boomer population.
- A significant percentage of the homeless are continuing to die in homeless encampments and on the streets with zip codes 95128 and 95116 being the hot spots currently identified for these deaths.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Homelessness is a complex and multifactorial social issue as exemplified in this study. Access to consistent medical and mental health care services, as well as drug and alcohol services and employment resources are underscored.
- The combination of drug and alcohol intoxication was shown to be the most prevalent lethal factor over the entire study period. Ensuring that the homeless population has consistent access to drug and alcohol intervention services is warranted.
- The current opioid epidemic can affect the homeless population including access to synthetic opioids. The distribution and use of Narcan (naloxone) should be considered in this population to prevent overdoses.
- With an increase of baby boomers becoming older, preventive healthcare in the form of vaccines (pneumonia/shingles), as well as treating chronic medical conditions such as hypertension and diabetes is underscored for this population.
- The homeless population, like anyone, may be involved in relationships with others or pets that cannot be easily separated or accommodated in shelters or other facilities. We must remember and be sensitive to these, as well as transgender and LGBTQ issues that may affect this population.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Deputy Public Defender Andrew Gutierrez
County of Santa Clara

Interim Chief Medical Examiner-Coroner Investigator Rosa Vega
Santa Clara County Medical Examiner-Coroner's Office

