

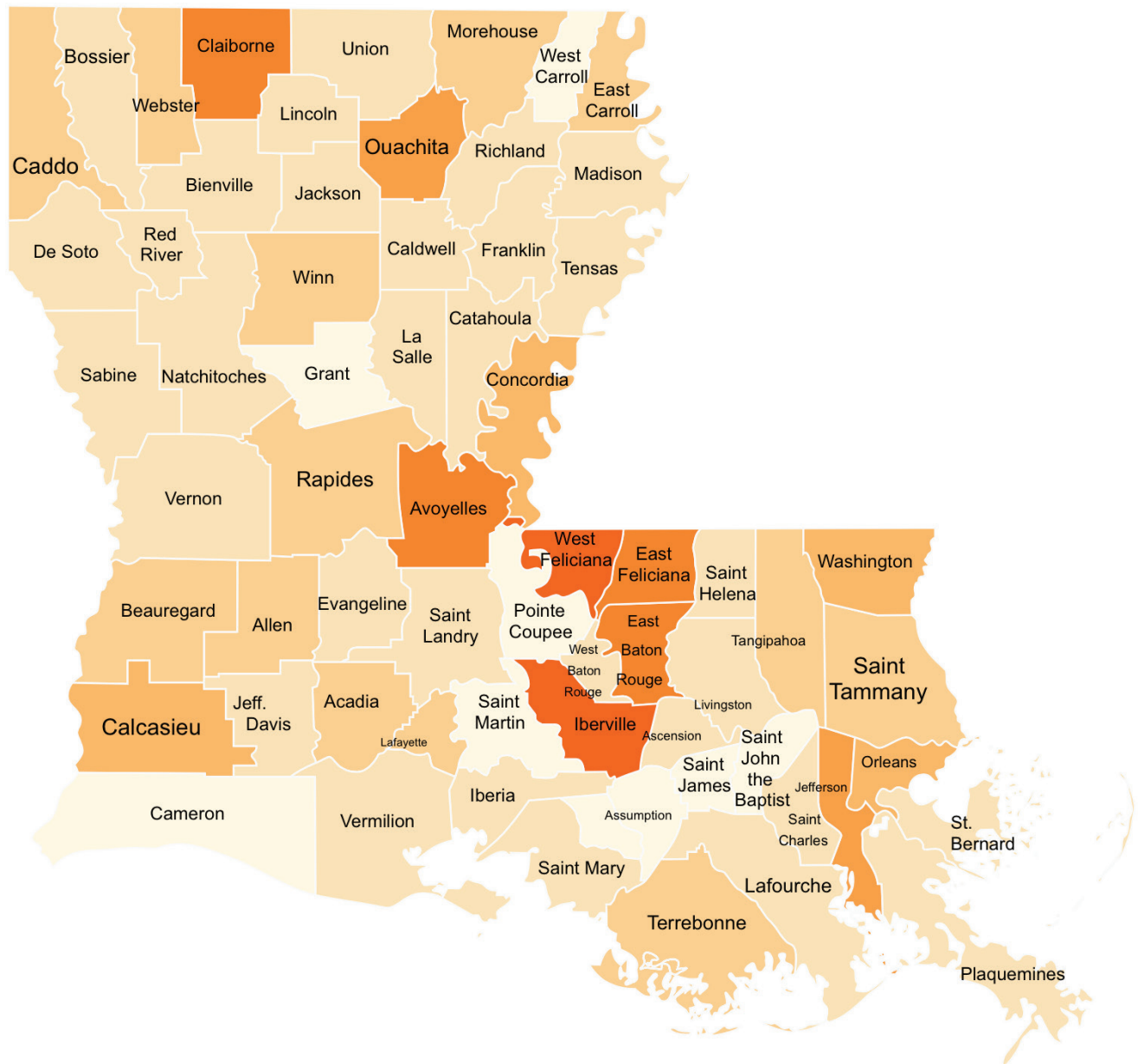


# **LOUISIANA DEATHS BEHIND BARS 2015—2019**

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# Heat Map of Known Deaths Behind Bars



0

1-4

5-10

10-20

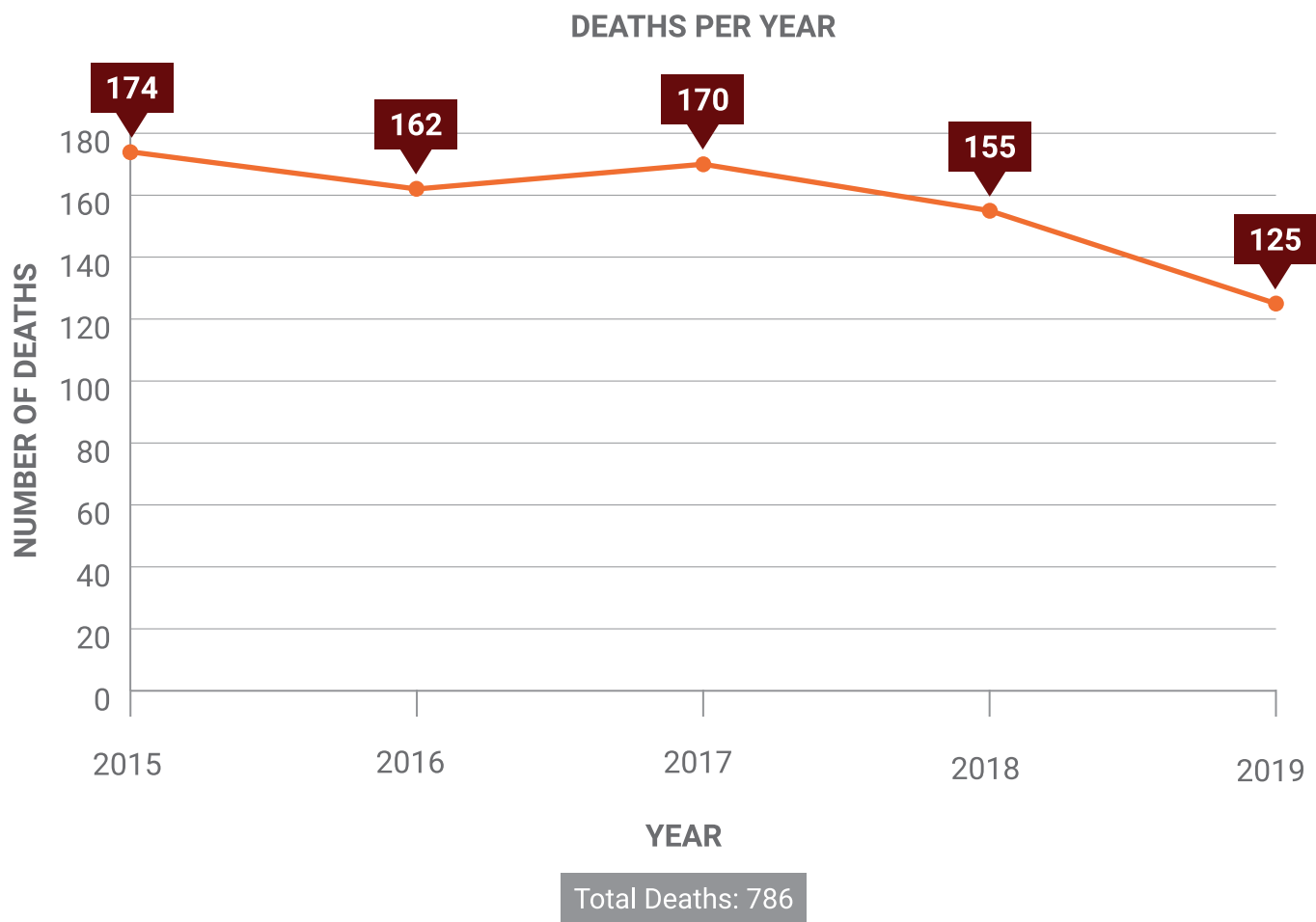
20-30

30-50

50+

# INTRODUCTION

**From 2015 to 2019, at least 786 incarcerated people died behind bars in prisons, jails, and detention centers across Louisiana. This report is the first comprehensive collection and analysis of deaths behind bars in Louisiana, based on public records requests filed with 132 facilities across the state.**



Black men ages 55-60 serving a sentence post-conviction are the largest impacted population by deaths behind bars, comprising 11% of all known deaths. None of the 786 known deaths were judicially sentenced to death row. All were either detained before their trial, serving a judicially determined sentence for a set number of years or life, or were detained for a parole or probation violation. The overwhelming majority of people died of medical causes, with the highest rates for heart disease and cancer. Approximately half of known medical deaths were related to a pre-existing medical condition, indicating that half of medical related deaths were due to conditions first diagnosed by prison or jail medical staff. Though suicides were only approximately 6% of deaths, they were more likely to occur in parish jails and within those jails, half occurred in segregation, more commonly known as solitary confinement.

Louisiana leads the nation in incarceration. We hold the most people, per capita, than any other state in the South, easily outpacing our neighboring states. Our state and federal government are constitutionally obligated to provide safe and humane conditions for incarcerated people, including constitutionally adequate healthcare.<sup>1</sup> These obligations arise from the Fifth, Eighth, and Fourteenth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution and Article I §§ 2 and 20 of the Louisiana State Constitution.

<sup>1</sup> The U.S. Supreme Court has held that the U.S. Constitution requires the provision of medical and mental healthcare to incarcerated people consistent with the level of care provided in community. See e.g. *Estelle v. Gamble*, 429 U.S. 97 (1976); *Farmer v. Brennan*, 511 U.S. 825 (1994); *Brown v. Plata*, 563 US 493 (2011).

At the same time, prisons, jails, and detention centers in Louisiana operate without independent oversight, mandatory standards, or public transparency. Parish jails are only required to report deaths of people detained pending trial to their local coroner. Prisons, parish jails and private prisons are only required to report deaths of people serving sentences to the Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections (DPSC) headquarters and the local coroner. Some facilities, but not all, will issue individual press releases when a death behind bars occurs. DPSC publishes limited and generalized data on causes of death for incarcerated people convicted of a crime in its quarterly Briefing Book, but does not provide demographic or facility information. Though most Louisiana facilities annually report deaths in custody to the federal Bureau of Justice Statistics within the U.S. Department of Justice, federal analysis based on these death in custody reports do not provide facility level information or disaggregate state data by race, age, or length of stay.

This project, through collecting and publishing data on deaths behind bars, aims to increase transparency of these public institutions and better understand how and why people die behind bars. Subsequent reports will compare the data collected on Louisiana deaths to national trends, as well as examine issues related to the data collection effort, including differential public records costs, facility and parish compliance, and the use of redactions by responding facilities.

## Incarceration in Louisiana

Louisiana is relatively unique in the U.S. for using local jails to house approximately 50% of people serving their state sentence in a local jail. Jails are traditionally operated by local sheriffs and are primarily for people detained pretrial. They are designed for short-term housing and therefore often lack more robust services essential for people serving long-term sentences, including appropriate healthcare, recidivism prevention programming, and skills training. Prisons, on the other hand, are operated by the state and are primarily for people serving a judicially determined sentence after being convicted of a crime. As a result of this bifurcated system, the DPSC prioritizes state prison beds for people with longer sentences or serious health needs. Local jails and private operators, such as LaSalle Corrections, house the remaining state population of 50%, in addition to their traditional pretrial populations. Jails and private operators receive a per diem per person per day, which cost the state approximately \$175 million for fiscal year 2019-2020.<sup>2</sup> The per diem rate paid by the state during the time period of this study - 2015 to 2019 - was \$24.39.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> La. Dep't Pub. Safety & Corr., Briefing Book, 76 (July 2020) at <https://s32082.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Full-BB-Jul-20.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> This rate was increased for fiscal year 2019-2020 to \$25.39 and for fiscal year 2020-2021 and thereafter to \$26.39. Act No. 245, La. Reg. Session (2019) (codified as amended at La. Rev. Stat. 15:824(B)(1)(a)).

Beyond jails and prisons, Louisiana also has a growing immigration detention population, housed in federally or privately operated prisons and parish jails through contracts with local sheriffs. After the legislature enacted significant reforms in 2017 pursuant to recommendations by the Louisiana Justice Reinvestment Initiative Taskforce, Louisiana anticipated a 10% reduction in population within 10 years. As those reforms have been implemented, jails and private facilities have turned to immigration detention to fill the recently emptied beds. There are also four “secure custody” juvenile detention centers operated by the state Office of Juvenile Justice, as well as thirteen locally operated “non-secure custody” juvenile detention centers.

## Methodology

Loyola Law students filed public records requests with 132 facilities, including all prisons, jails, juvenile detention centers (state and locally operated), and federal facilities in Fall 2019 and 2020. Students requested records of deaths in custody, including any records prepared and submitted to the U.S. Department of Justice’s Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS).<sup>4</sup> BJS publishes separate mortality reports for jails and prisons, with their latest reports for each (April 2021) analyzing data from 2000-2018. The data released by BJS, however, does not provide for analysis by facility and state data is not disaggregated by race, age, or length of stay. Students also reviewed news and court litigation databases for their assigned parishes (counties) to identify unreported deaths occurring behind bars.

Of the 132 facilities included in this study, we received responses from 69% of facilities. Twenty-nine percent of facilities (38) did not respond to our repeated public records requests over two years, in violation of Louisiana Public Records Act § 44:1 *et seq.* The project has also not received any death data from federal agencies operating detention centers in Louisiana, which is particularly troubling as the number of people detained for immigration violations has soared since 2017.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, the state DPSC, which administers eight state prisons holding approximately 16,000 people, fully responded to our requests and also sent responses for people legally under their custody but serving their sentence in local jails.

All data utilized in this report, including documents actually received, is available for download and more refined analysis at [www.incarcerationtransparency.org](http://www.incarcerationtransparency.org)

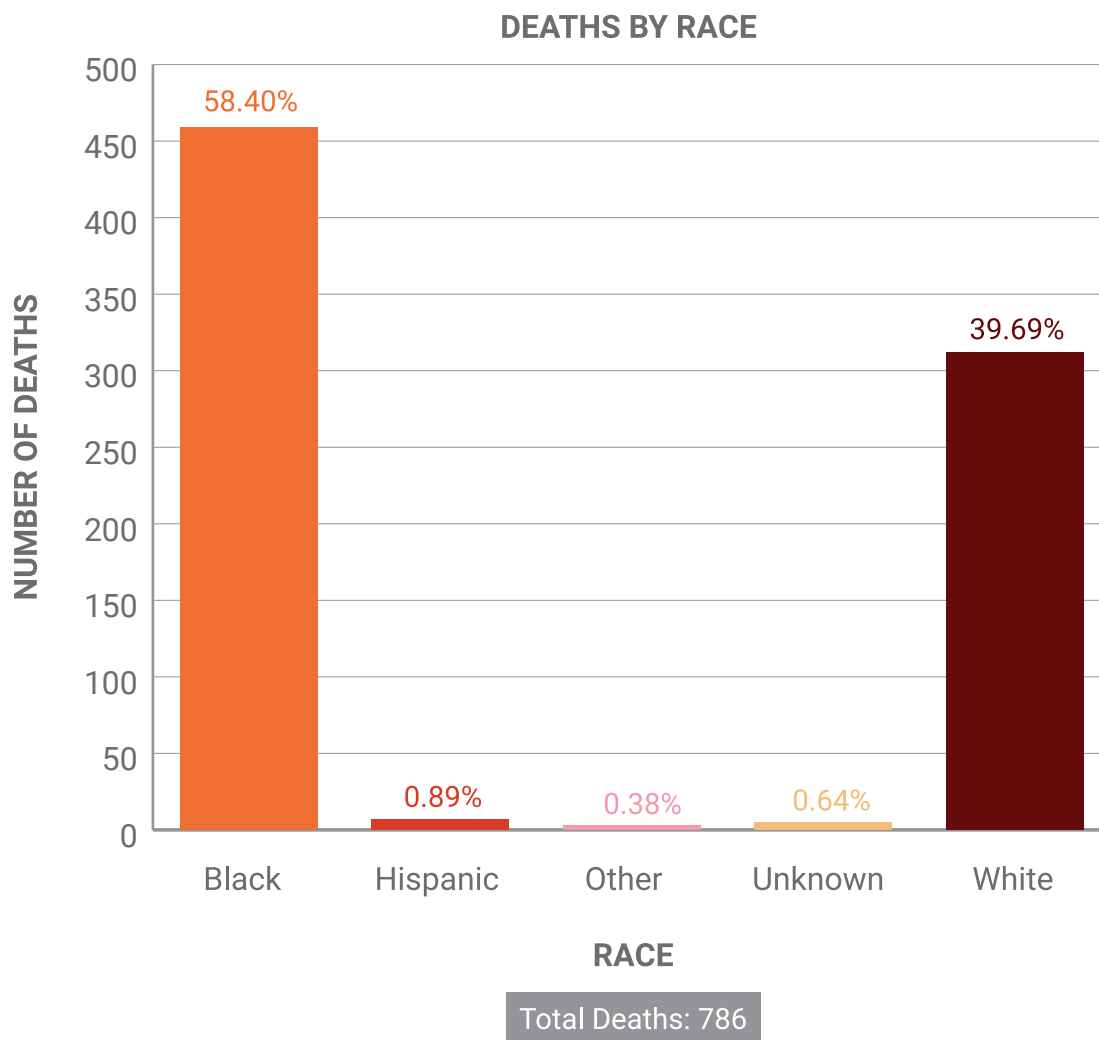
<sup>4</sup> Forms collected include CJ-9/CJ-9A (jails), NPS-4/NPS-4A (prisons), CJ-10/CJ-10A (private facilities) and NPS-5/NPS-5A (juveniles). Students also received correspondence from some facilities indicating there were zero deaths in that facility.

<sup>5</sup> See Laila Hlass & Mary Yanik, No End in Sight: Prolonged and Punitive Detention of Immigrants in Louisiana, 3, Tulane University Immigration Law Clinic at (May 2021) at <https://law.tulane.edu/sites/law.tulane.edu/files/TLS%20No%20End%20In%20Sight%20Single%20Pages%20FINAL.pdf>.

# I. WHO IS DYING?

## Race

Deaths behind bars in Louisiana reflect our broader patterns of race in incarceration, with African-Americans overrepresented given their share of the state population. African-Americans are 67.5% of people committed to state custody after conviction, compared to Whites at 32.1% and “Other” at 0.4%.<sup>6</sup> In juvenile settings, African Americans are 81% of youth in secure custody and 75% in non-secure custody.<sup>7</sup> Demographic data by race is only available for people serving convictions (whether in prison or jail) and for youth in secure and non-secure care, but is not available overall for locally-operated jails.



<sup>6</sup> La. Dep't Pub. Safety & Corr., Briefing Book, 19 (July 2020) at <https://s32082.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Full-BB-Jul-20.pdf>

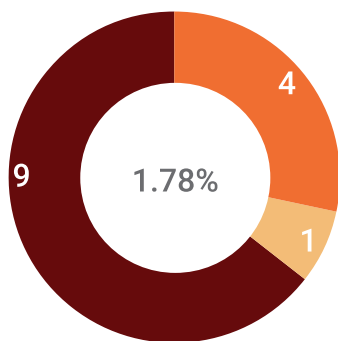
<sup>7</sup> Office of Juv. Justice, Fiscal Year 2017 Annual Report on Youth Served, 6 & 10 (2017) at [https://ojj.la.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Act499TrendReportFY2017\\_-finalforwebsite-1.pdf](https://ojj.la.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Act499TrendReportFY2017_-finalforwebsite-1.pdf)



Of the 786 known deaths from 2015 to 2019, Black people were 58.40% (459) of deaths and White people were 39.69% (312) of deaths. Of the remaining 14 deaths, seven were listed as Hispanic and the remaining were either listed as “other” or “unknown.”

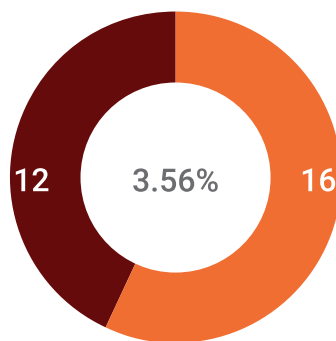
There appear to be differences among races depending on the cause of death. For medical causes of death, Black people are 60.9% of deaths, compared to White people at 38.72%. Violence, which only accounts for 1.53% of deaths, also shows a higher number of deaths for Black people behind bars (66.67%) versus White people behind bars (33.33%). Accidents, which generally are a small proportion of overall deaths, are the reverse, with Black people comprising 28.57% of accidental deaths, compared to White people at 64.29%.

### CAUSE OF DEATH BY RACE



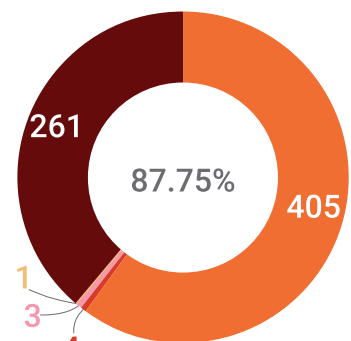
Death By Accident

Total Deaths: 14



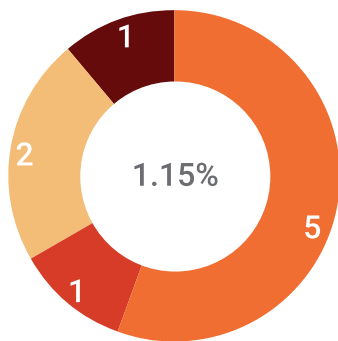
Death By Drugs

Total Deaths: 28



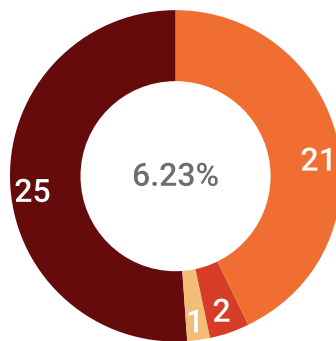
Death By Medical

Total Deaths: 674



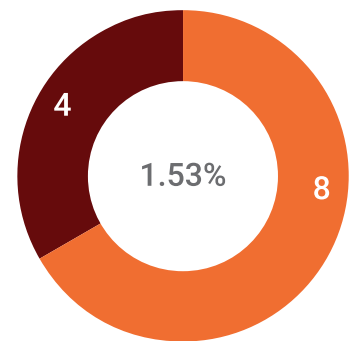
Death By Other

Total Deaths: 9



Death By Suicide

Total Deaths: 49



Death By Violence

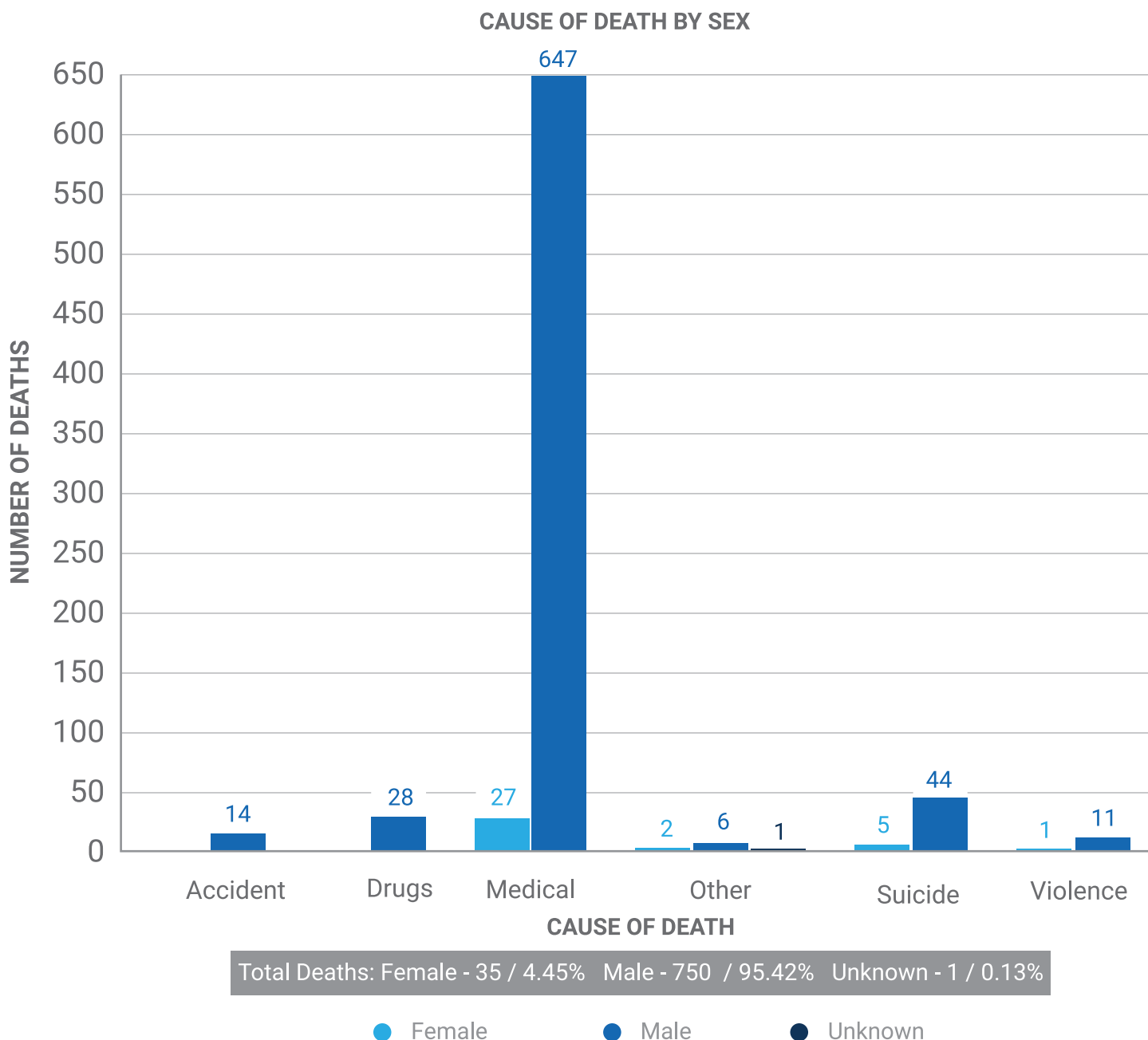
Total Deaths: 12



# Gender

Similar to race, known deaths by gender reflect broader incarceration patterns. Excluding people held pretrial or for immigration, adult men comprise 95.3% of people serving their sentence after conviction.<sup>8</sup> In juvenile settings, boys are 94% of youth held in secure custody and 84% of youth held in non-secure custody.<sup>9</sup>

Of the 786 death records reviewed, 95.42% were for men (750) versus 4.45% for women (35). Medical deaths were the leading cause of death for both men and women, followed by suicide. Deaths as a result of drugs or accidents were exclusively male.



<sup>8</sup> La. Dep't Pub. Safety & Corr., Briefing Book, 19 (July 2020) at <https://s32082.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Full-BB-Jul-20.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Office of Juv. Justice, Fiscal Year 2017 Annual Report on Youth Served, 6 & 10 (2017) at [https://ojj.la.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Act499TrendReportFY2017\\_-finalforwebsite-1.pdf](https://ojj.la.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Act499TrendReportFY2017_-finalforwebsite-1.pdf)

# Age

Louisiana has one of the oldest prison populations in the nation due to mandatory minimum and multi-bill sentencing laws. Approximately 25% of people serving sentences in Louisiana are over 50 years old (up from 20% five years ago). The average age of people serving sentences post-conviction in Louisiana is 40 years old for men and women alike (up from 36 years old 5 years ago).

Known deaths behind bars in Louisiana range in age from 13-96 years old. Overall, people ages 55-60 years old make up 19.24% of deaths, with people ages 61-66 at 17.13% and 49-54 at 15.92%.

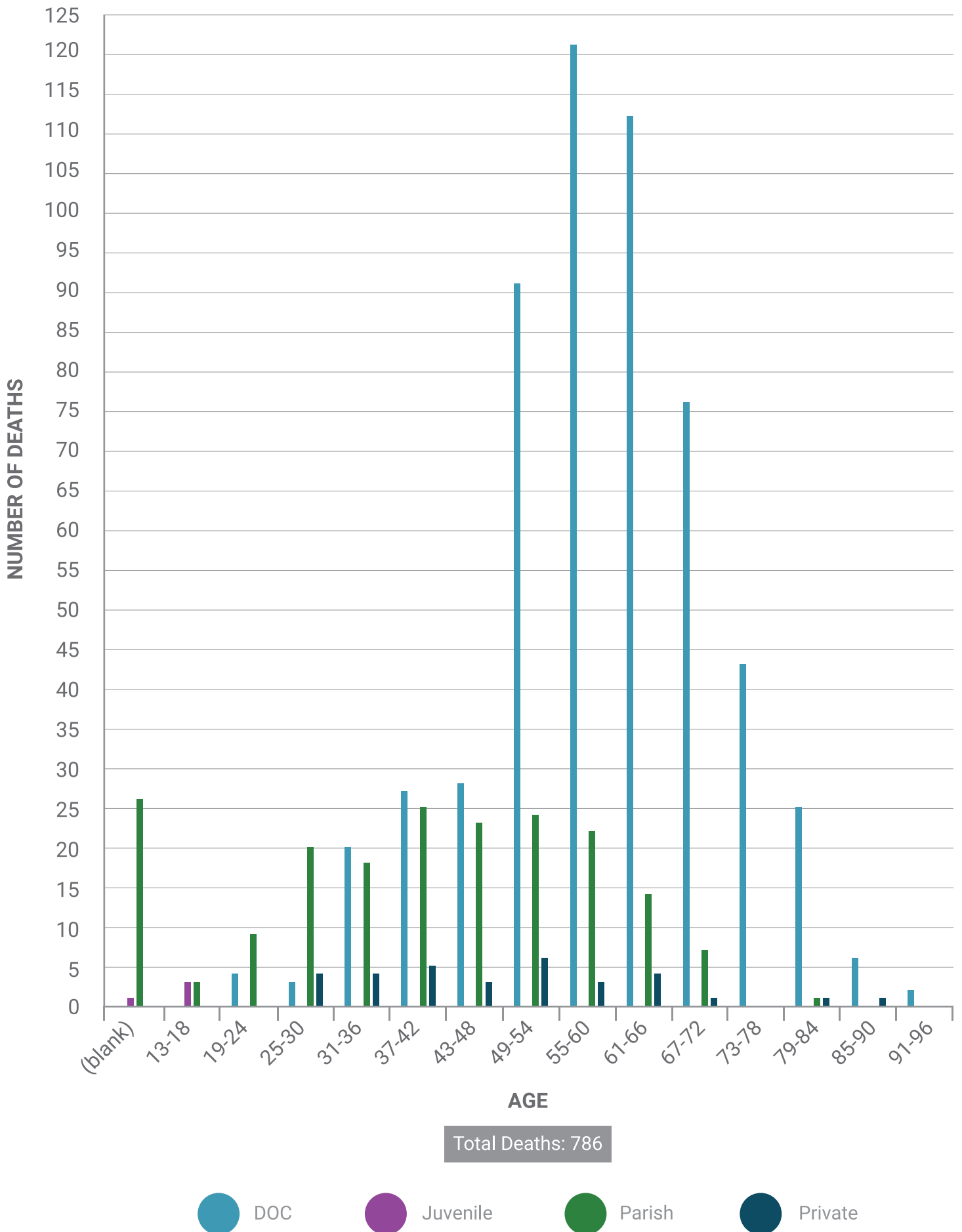
When we examine age of death by the type of facility, we see the same pattern for DPSC, with the highest percentage of deaths for people ages 55-60 (21.68%), followed closely by 61-66 years old (20.07%) and 49-54 (16.31%). Deaths in parish jails and private facilities skew younger. In parish jails, people ages 37-42 years old have the highest incidence of death (13.02%), followed closely by ages 49-54 (12.50%), then ages 43-48 (11.98%). In private facilities, people ages 49-54 (18.75%) have the highest incidence of death, then ages 37-42 (15.63%).

## DEATHS BY AGE & TYPE OF FACILITY

	% Age				Total %
Age	DOC	Juvenile	Parish	Private	
(blank)	0.00%	25.00%	13.54%	0.00%	3.44%
13-18	0.00%	75.00%	1.56%	0.00%	0.76%
19-24	0.72%	0.00%	4.69%	0.00%	1.65%
25-30	0.54%	0.00%	10.42%	12.50%	3.44%
31-36	3.58%	0.00%	9.38%	12.50%	5.34%
37-42	4.84%	0.00%	13.02%	15.63%	7.25%
43-48	5.02%	0.00%	11.98%	9.38%	6.87%
49-54	16.31%	0.00%	12.50%	18.75%	15.39%
55-60	21.68%	0.00%	11.46%	9.38%	18.58%
61-66	20.07%	0.00%	7.29%	12.50%	16.54%
67-72	13.62%	0.00%	3.65%	3.13%	10.69%
73-78	7.71%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	5.47%
79-84	4.48%	0.00%	0.52%	3.13%	3.44%
85-90	1.08%	0.00%	0.00%	3.13%	0.89%
91-96	0.36%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.25%
Total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

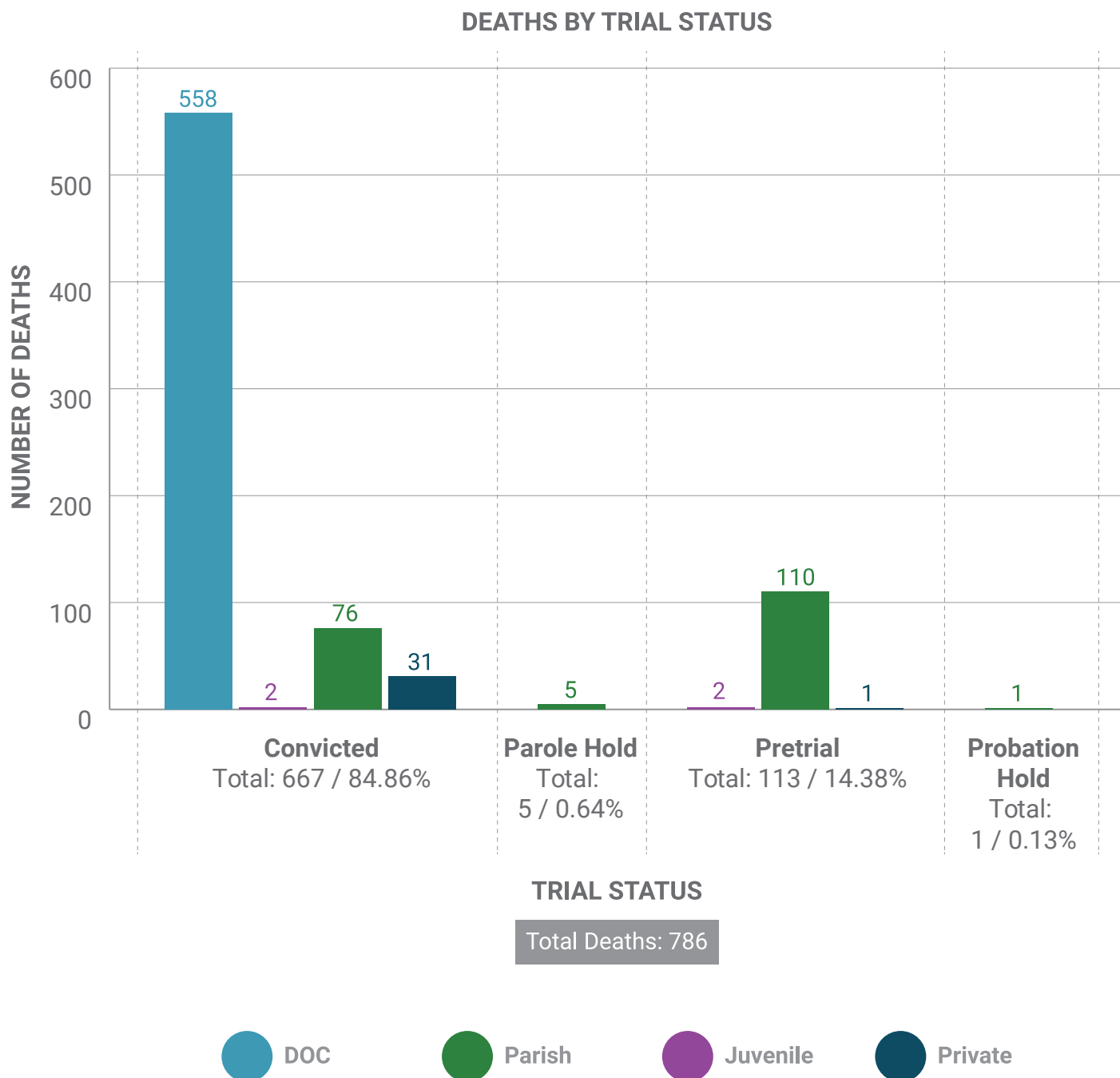
Total Deaths: 786

## DEATHS BY AGE & TYPE OF FACILITY



# Trial status

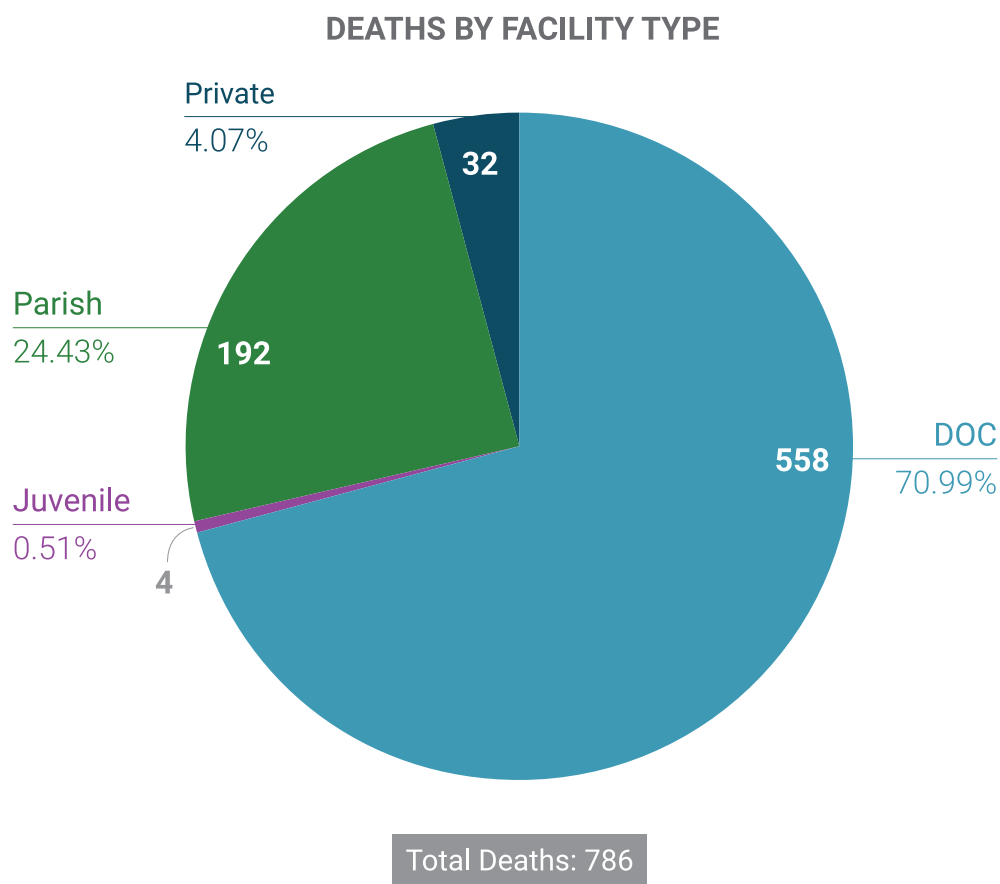
Approximately 85% of known deaths behind bars were of people serving a sentence for conviction of a crime. These deaths occurred primarily within DOC prisons (558 deaths for 70.99% of total deaths), but people with convictions also died serving their sentence in parish jails (76 for 9.67% of deaths), private facilities (31 deaths or 3.94%), and juvenile facilities (2 deaths). Pretrial deaths, i.e. deaths of people who had not yet had a trial determining their guilt or innocence, are 14.38% of all known deaths from 2015-2019, including two juveniles.



## II. WHERE ARE THEY DYING?

### Type of Facility

Louisiana has several different types of incarceration and detention settings, including state-operated prisons and youth detention centers, locally operated jails and youth detention centers, as well as privately managed jails and transitional work programs. Of the 786 known deaths, the majority occurred within state prisons, though deaths occurred in all types of facilities during the 2015-2019 period of review.



The number of total known deaths behind bars decreased in 2019, which could be a result of state reforms to reduce the incarcerated population statewide. In January 2015, 37,739 people were serving sentences post-conviction, including 18,767 housed in prisons, 18,027 housed in jails, and 945 housed in transitional work programs.<sup>10</sup> By December 2019, only

<sup>10</sup> La. Dep't Pub. Safety & Corr., Briefing Book, 13-14 (July 2020) at <https://s32082.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Full-BB-Jul-20.pdf>

31,609 people were serving state convictions, a reduction of over six thousand people. Of those 31,609 people, 15,042 served their sentence in a prison and 15,538 served their sentence in a local jail, with 1,029 people housed in a transitional work program.<sup>11</sup> The reduction of private deaths appears related to the operational transfer of Allen Correctional Center from a privately managed facility to a state-operated prison in 2017-2018.<sup>12</sup>

#### DEATHS BY YEAR & FACILITY TYPE

	DOC	Juvenile	Parish	Private	Total
2015	119		45	10	174
2016	116		34	12	162
2017	118	2	48	2	170
2018	110		39	6	155
2019	95	2	26	2	125
Total	558	4	192	32	786

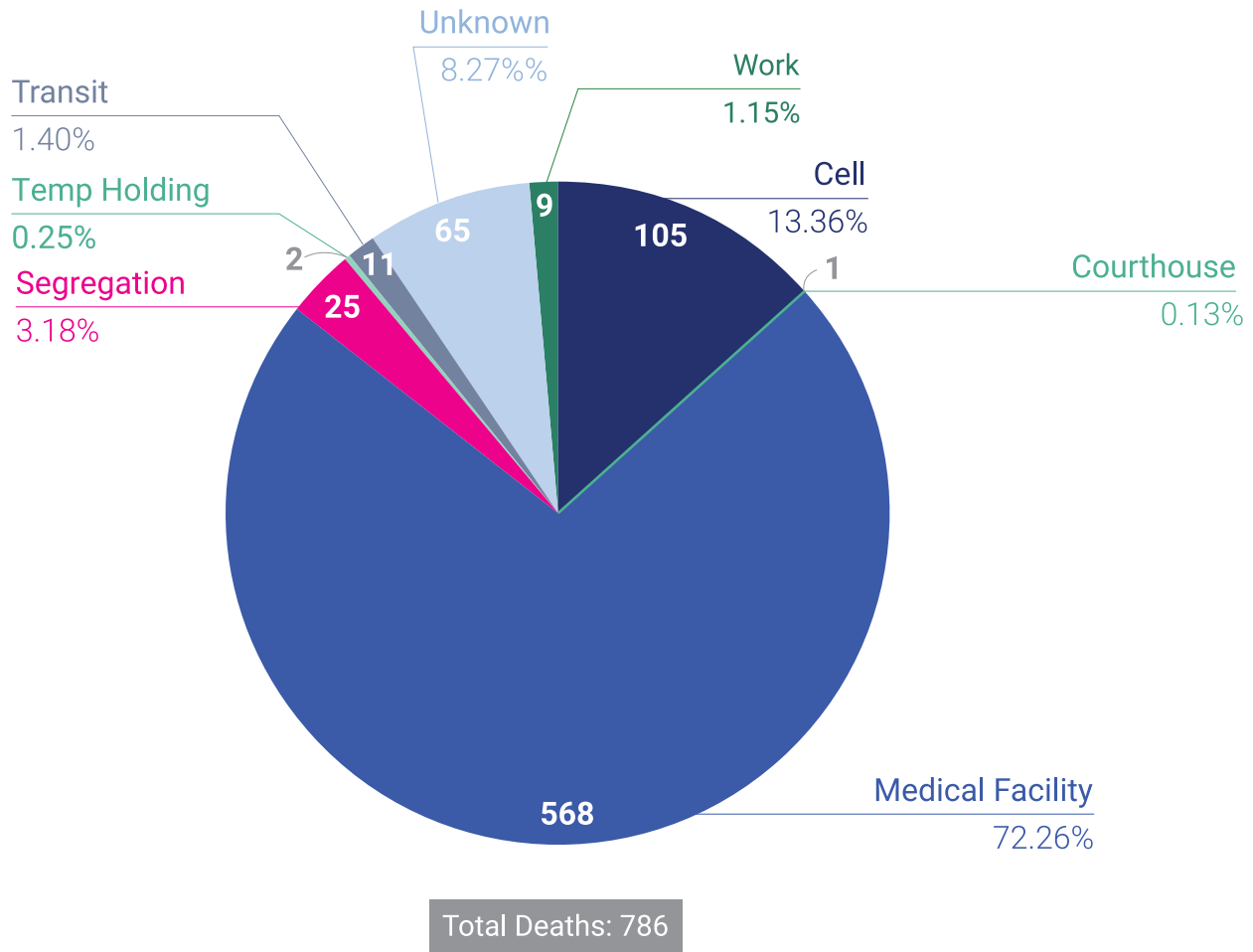
## Location within facility

Almost three-quarters of deaths (72.6%) occurred in a medical facility, which is consistent with medical illness being the leading cause of known deaths. While the “unknown” death location appears large, a review of those records indicates the majority of those deaths occurred in medical facilities outside of the prison or jail. Deaths in segregation may indicate challenges for custodial supervision and/or reflect the unique isolation of segregation cells. Segregation, more commonly known as solitary confinement, is usually employed for discipline for rule violations, protective custody, or for close observation/suicide watch. In segregation, a person is typically allowed out of their 6x8 foot cell for 1-2 hours each day, but is otherwise isolated from human interaction, denied visitation or participation in programming, as well as other privileges.

<sup>11</sup> Id.

<sup>12</sup> Gordon Russel, Louisiana Department of Corrections to take over privately run Allen Correctional Center in Kinder, The Advocate (Aug. 16, 2017) at [https://www.theadvocate.com/baton\\_rouge/news/article\\_b93d6ce4-8297-11e7-a5a8-afaf85c4af24.html](https://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/article_b93d6ce4-8297-11e7-a5a8-afaf85c4af24.html)

## DEATHS BY FACILITY LOCATION



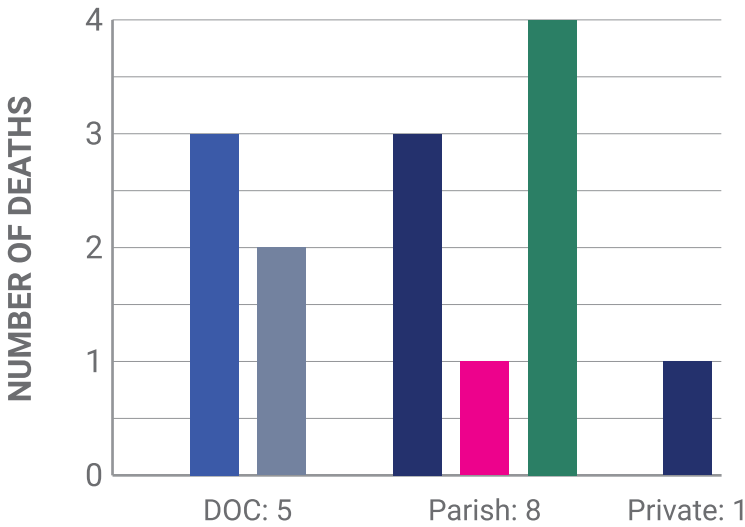
The following tables examine which types of deaths occur where within a facility and in which types of facilities. For example, though a relatively small proportion of overall known deaths, accidental deaths appear to be more common in parish jails than DPSC facilities and half of these parish accidental deaths are related to work injuries. Deaths due to drug overdoses also appear to be more common in parish jails than in prisons. Medical deaths are more likely to occur in non-medical spaces in parish jails (59.17%) than in state facilities (87.12%). This may be indicative of the fact that jails are generally less likely to have robust medical facilities behind bars, such as 24 hour infirmaries for patient treatment and observation. Suicides appear to be more typical in parish jails (30 deaths) than in state prisons (14 deaths).



DEATHS BY CAUSE OF DEATH, FACILITY TYPE, & FACILITY LOCATION

Total Deaths: 786

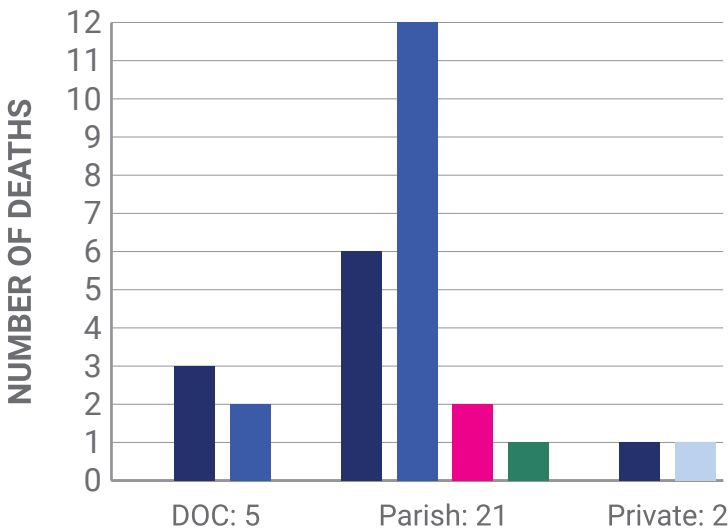
DEATHS CAUSED BY ACCIDENTS



FACILITY TYPE

Total Deaths: 14 / 1.78%

DEATHS CAUSED BY DRUGS



FACILITY TYPE

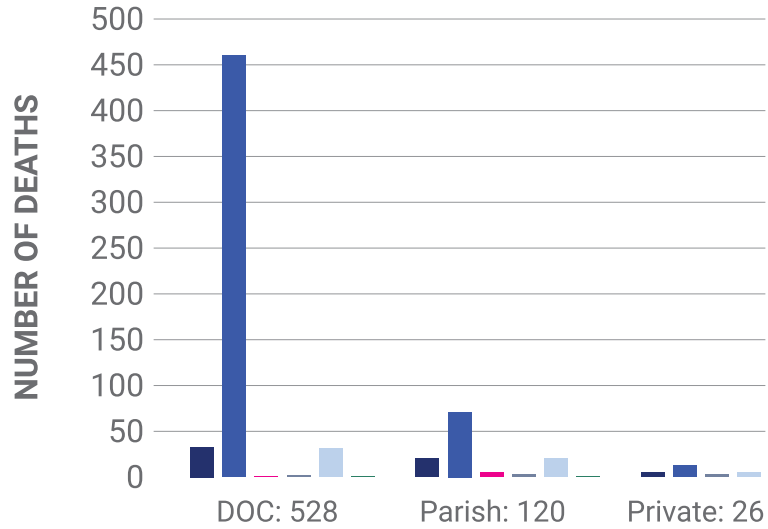
Total Deaths: 28 / 3.56%

● Cell ● Courthouse ● Medical Facility ● Segregation  
● Temp. Holding ● Transit ● Work ● Unknown

## DEATHS BY CAUSE OF DEATH, FACILITY TYPE, & FACILITY LOCATION

Total Deaths: 786

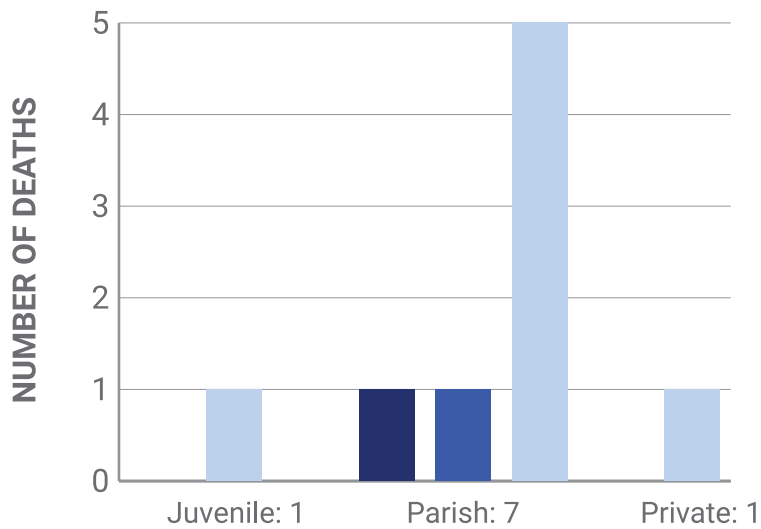
### DEATHS CAUSED BY MEDICAL CONDITIONS



### FACILITY TYPE

Total Deaths: 674 / 85.75%

### DEATHS CAUSED BY OTHER



### FACILITY TYPE

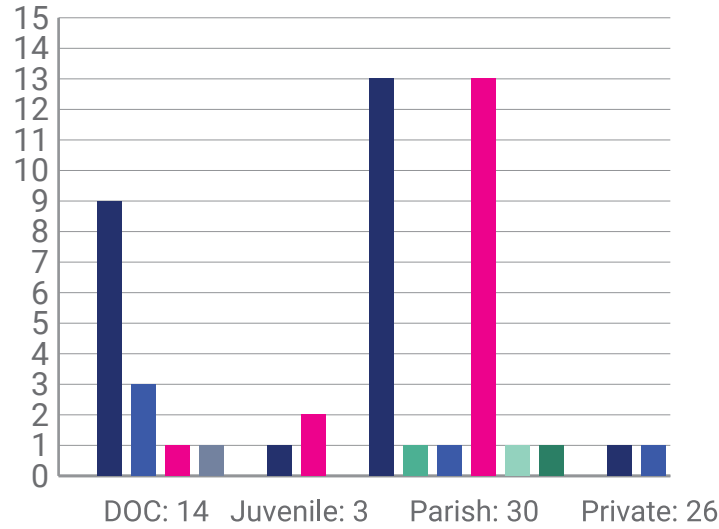
Total Deaths: 9 / 1.15%



## DEATHS BY CAUSE OF DEATH, FACILITY TYPE, & FACILITY LOCATION

Total Deaths: 786

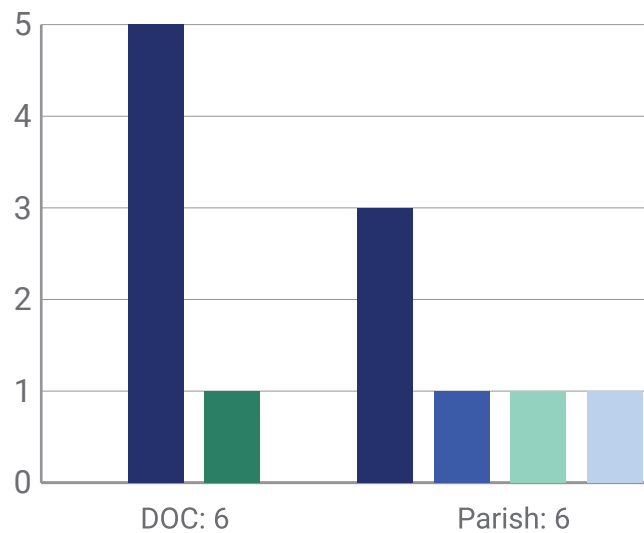
### DEATHS CAUSED BY SUICIDE



### FACILITY TYPE

Total Deaths: 49 / 6.23%

### DEATHS CAUSED BY VIOLENCE



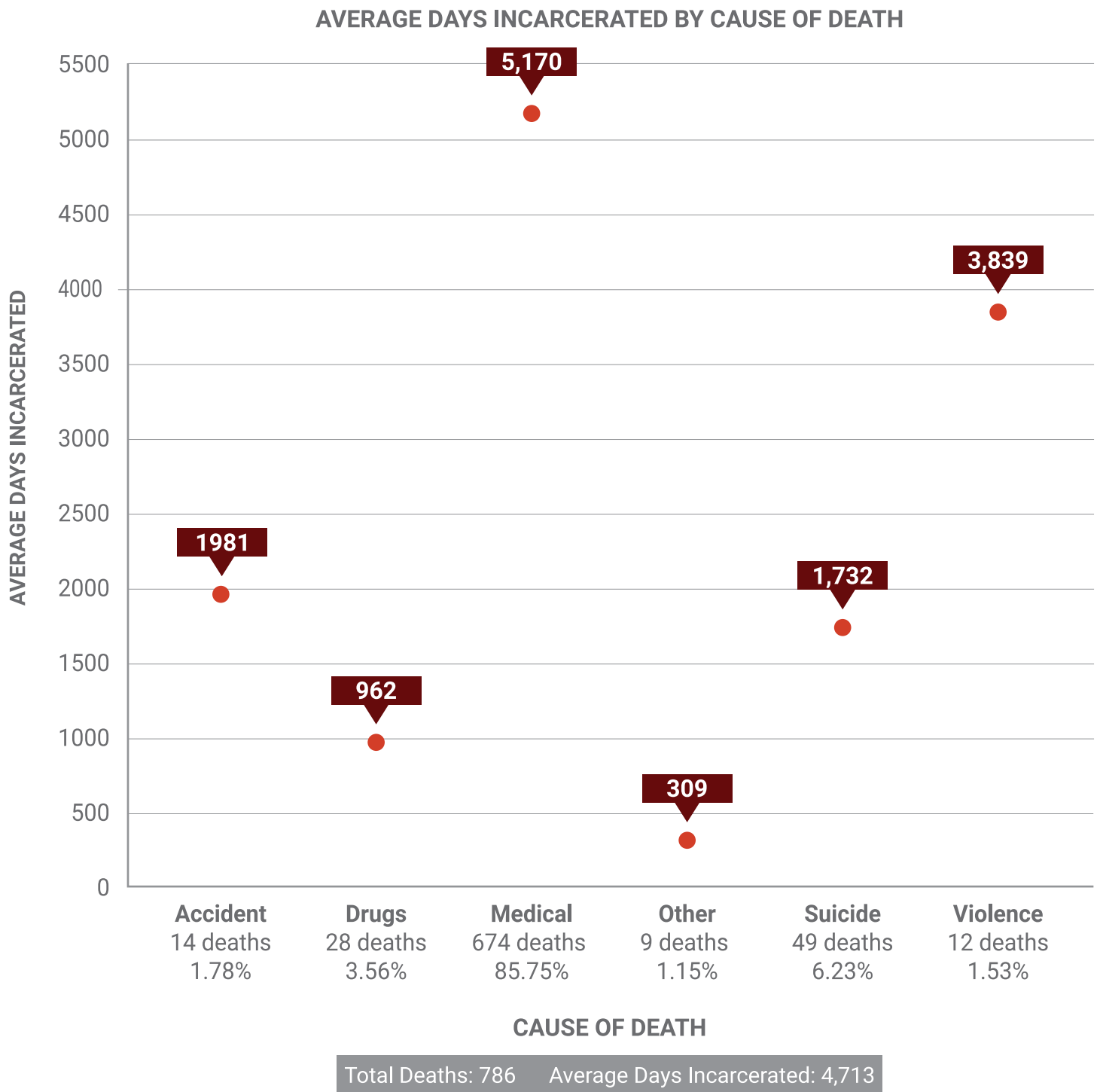
### FACILITY TYPE

Total Deaths: 12 / 1.53%



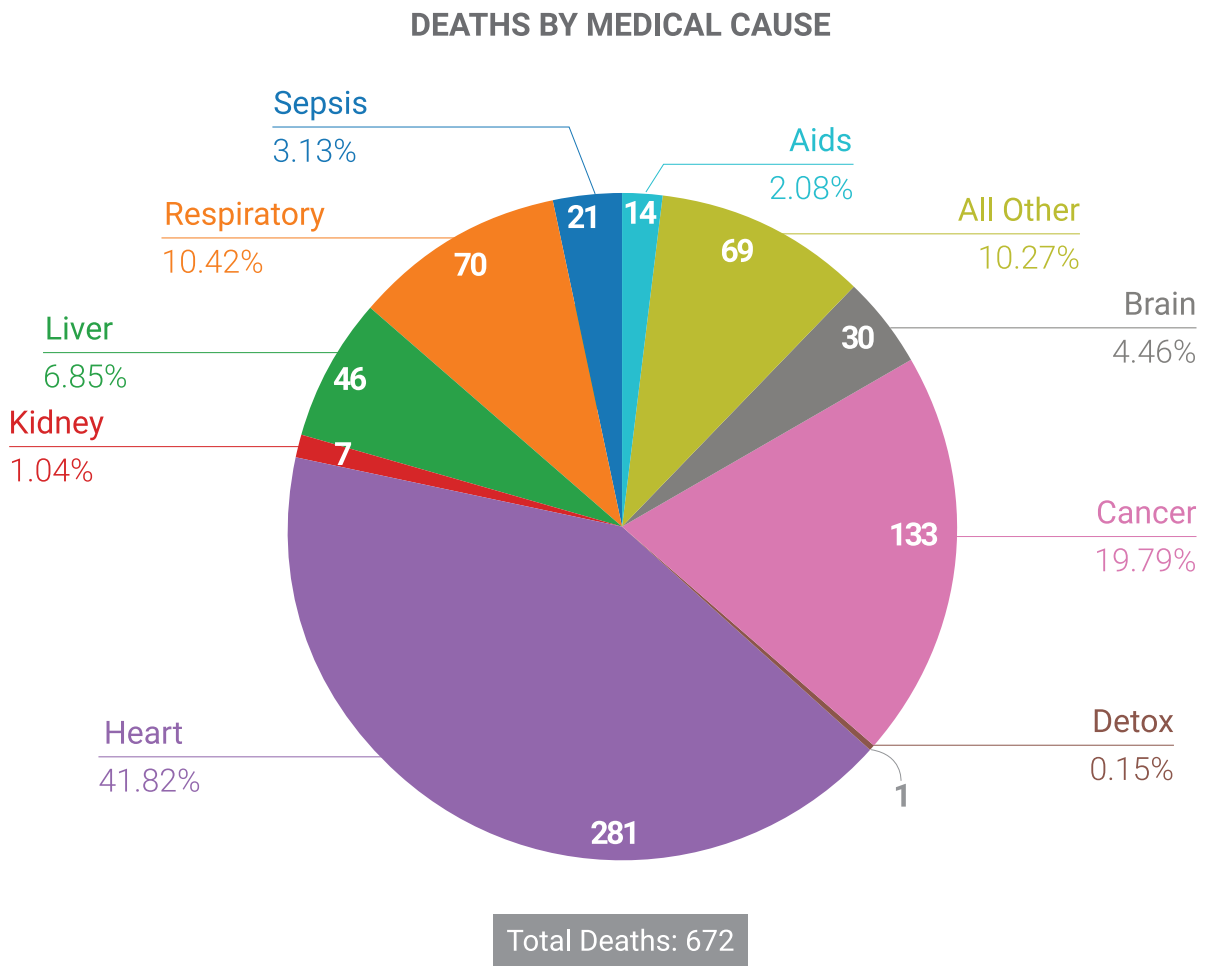
# III. WHY ARE THEY DYING?

The vast majority of deaths (85.75%) were related to medical illness. Contrary to popular culture depictions of prisons and jails, known deaths due to violence are a relatively small overall proportion of deaths behind bars. The second leading cause of death at 6.23% are completed suicides. Drug overdoses are third at 3.56% and though a small overall proportion of deaths, these overdoses occurred close in time to admission but also after years of being incarcerated.



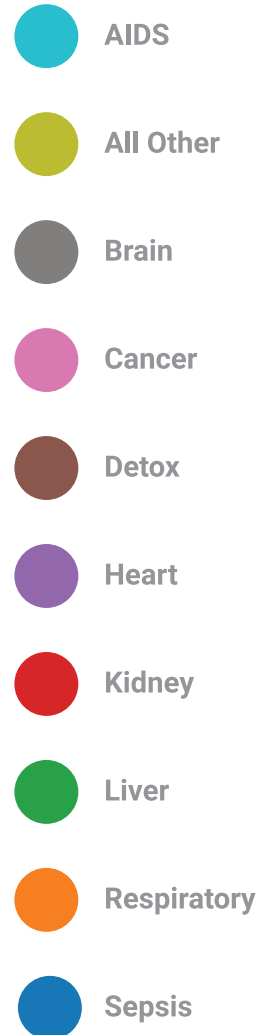
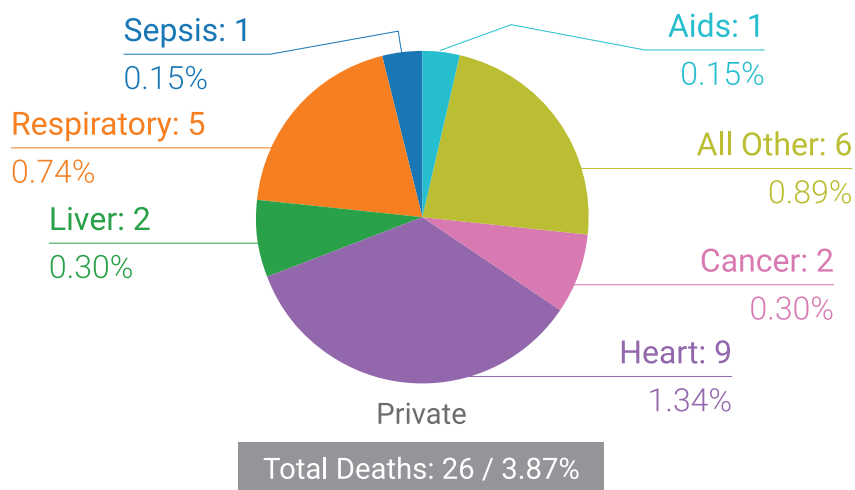
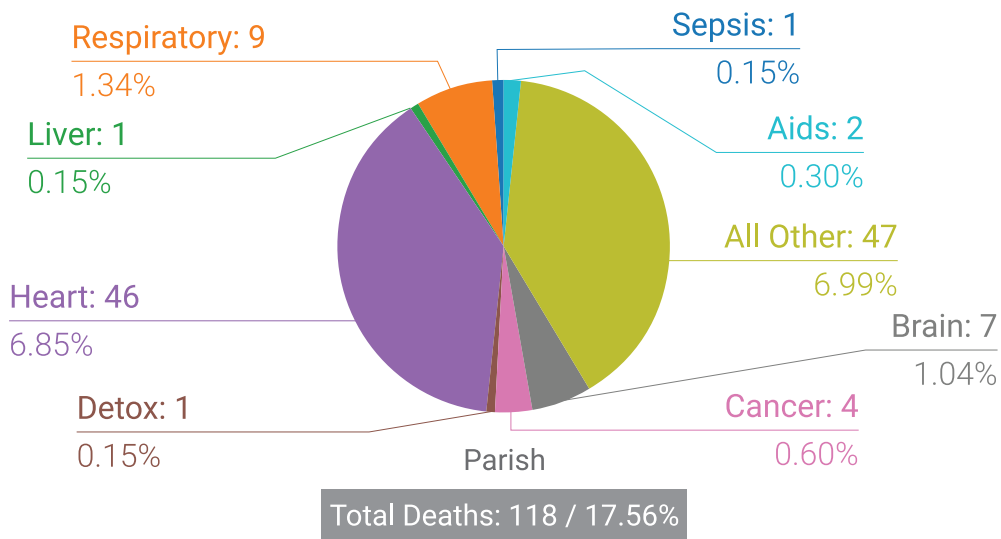
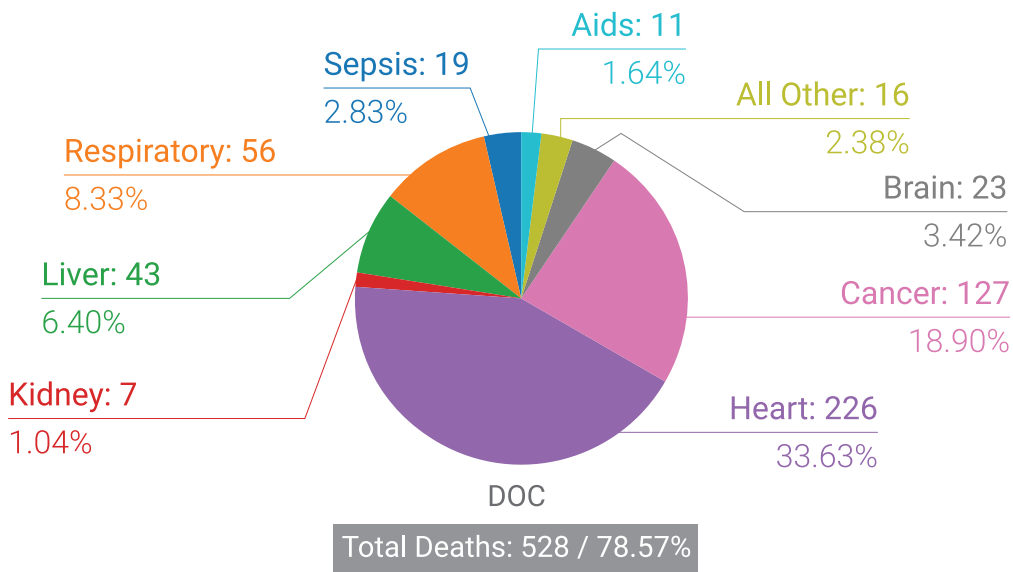
# Medical Deaths

The leading causes of medically-related deaths behind bars are cancer and heart attacks. Approximately 10% of known deaths from 2015 to 2019 are due to respiratory illness. Some of the deaths within the “all other” category concern deaths at facilities that either redacted the medical cause of death, failed to provide descriptive details on the cause of death, or described the deaths as the result of “natural causes.” Additional deaths within this category included deaths due to sickle cell, complications from hernia surgery, Alzheimers, and gastric ulcers, among others.



Of the known medical deaths, more than three-quarters occurred in state-operated prisons. For these prisons, heart disease and cancer were the leading causes of death. For parish jails and private facilities, the leading causes of death were heart disease as well as deaths by other causes (including deaths lacking more specific information).

## MEDICAL CAUSE OF DEATH BY FACILITY TYPE

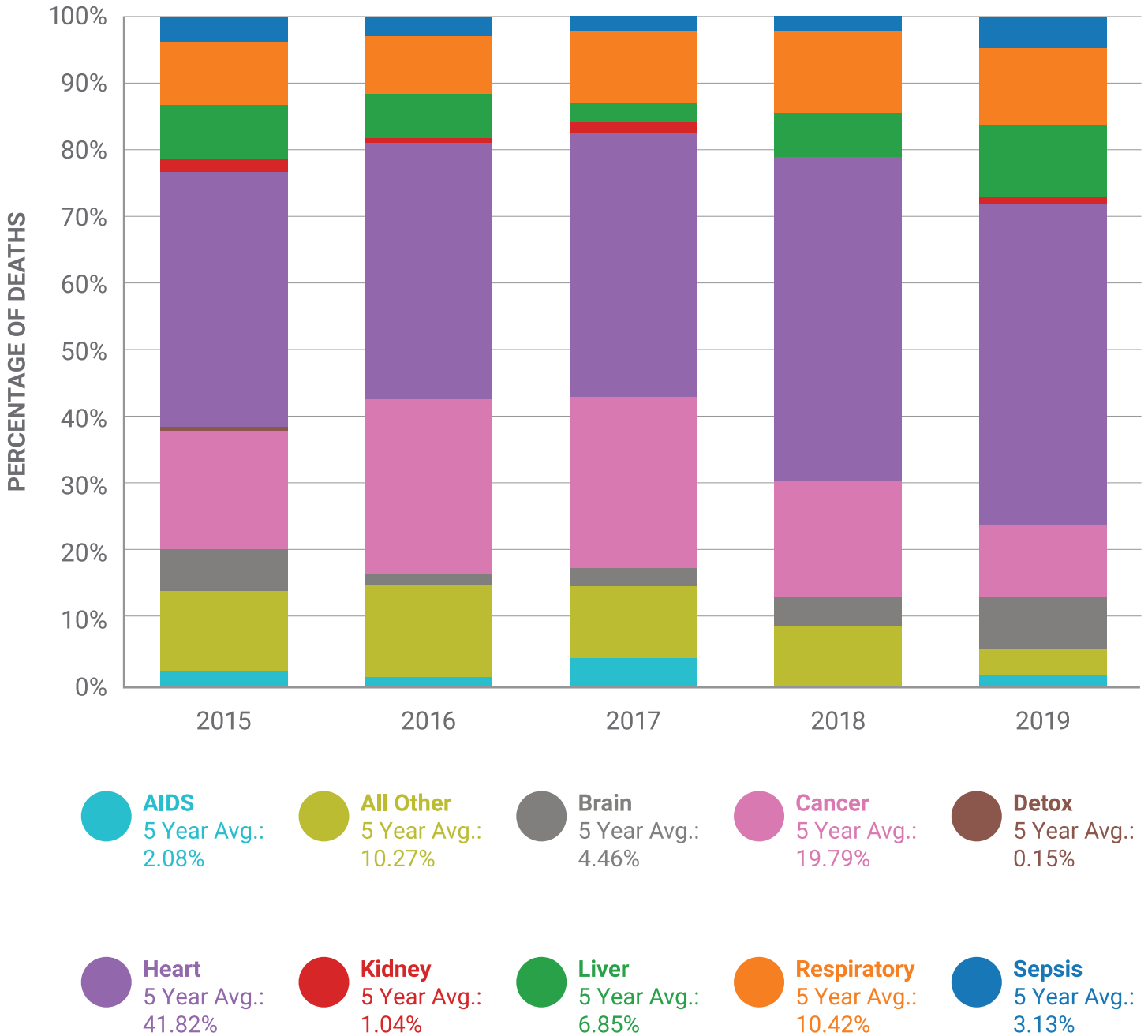


Examining deaths by year indicates deaths due to complications from HIV/AIDS appear to be decreasing after a highpoint in 2017. The percentage of deaths from heart disease appears to be increasing from 2015 to 2019, while deaths from respiratory causes appear relatively steady throughout the reporting period.

#### MEDICAL CAUSE OF DEATH BY YEAR

Cause of Death	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Total
<b>AIDS</b>	2.52%	1.46%	4.32%	0.00%	1.92%	<b>2.08%</b>
<b>All Other</b>	11.95%	13.87%	10.79%	9.02%	3.85%	<b>10.27%</b>
<b>Brain</b>	6.29%	1.46%	2.88%	4.51%	7.69%	<b>4.46%</b>
<b>Cancer</b>	17.61%	26.28%	25.18%	17.29%	10.58%	<b>19.79%</b>
<b>Detox</b>	0.63%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	<b>0.15%</b>
<b>Heart</b>	37.74%	37.96%	39.57%	48.12%	48.08%	<b>41.82%</b>
<b>Kidney</b>	1.89%	0.73%	1.44%	0.00%	0.96%	<b>1.04%</b>
<b>Liver</b>	8.18%	6.57%	2.88%	6.77%	10.58%	<b>6.85%</b>
<b>Respiratory</b>	9.43%	8.76%	10.79%	12.03%	11.54%	<b>10.42%</b>
<b>Sepsis</b>	3.77%	2.92%	2.16%	2.26%	4.81%	<b>3.13%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

## MEDICAL CAUSE OF DEATH BY YEAR



In general, the leading causes of medical-related deaths across race appear to be consistent, with heart disease and cancer the most common cause of death regardless of race. Black people, who are overrepresented behind bars, are also the clear majority of deaths for medical causes of death.

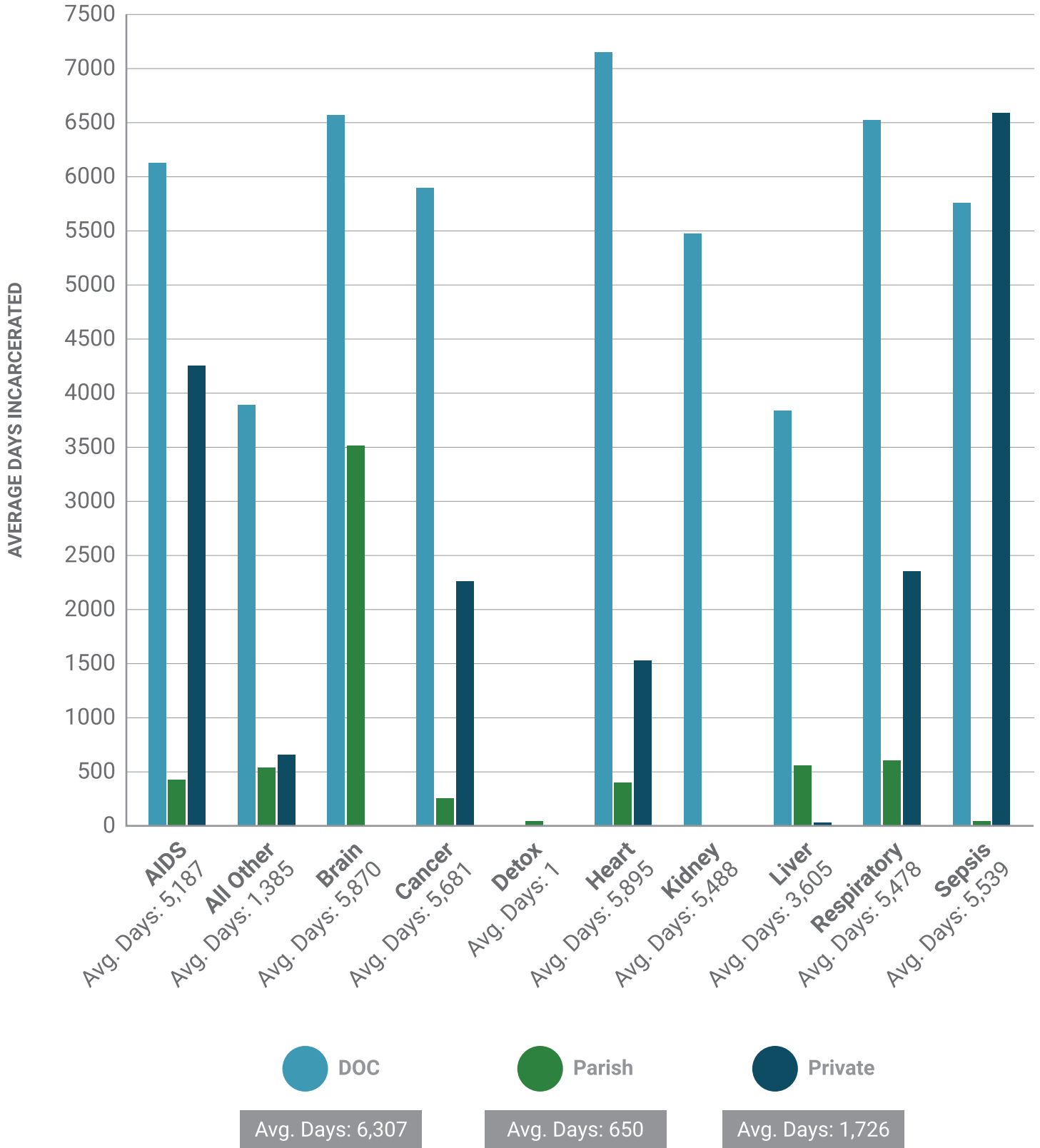


## MEDICAL CAUSE OF DEATH BY RACE

Cause of Death	Black	Hispanic	Other	Unknown	White	Total
AIDS	1.19%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.89%	2.08%
All Other	5.95%	0.15%	0.15%	0.15%	3.87%	10.27%
Brain	2.53%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	1.93%	4.46%
Cancer	11.90%	0.15%	0.00%	0.00%	7.74%	19.79%
Detox	0.15%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.15%
Heart	26.79%	0.30%	0.15%	0.00%	14.58%	41.82%
Kidney	0.74%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.30%	1.04%
Liver	3.42%	0.00%	0.15%	0.00%	3.27%	6.85%
Respiratory	5.95%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	4.46%	10.42%
Sepsis	1.34%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	1.79%	3.13%
Total	59.97%	0.60%	0.45%	0.15%	38.84%	100.00%

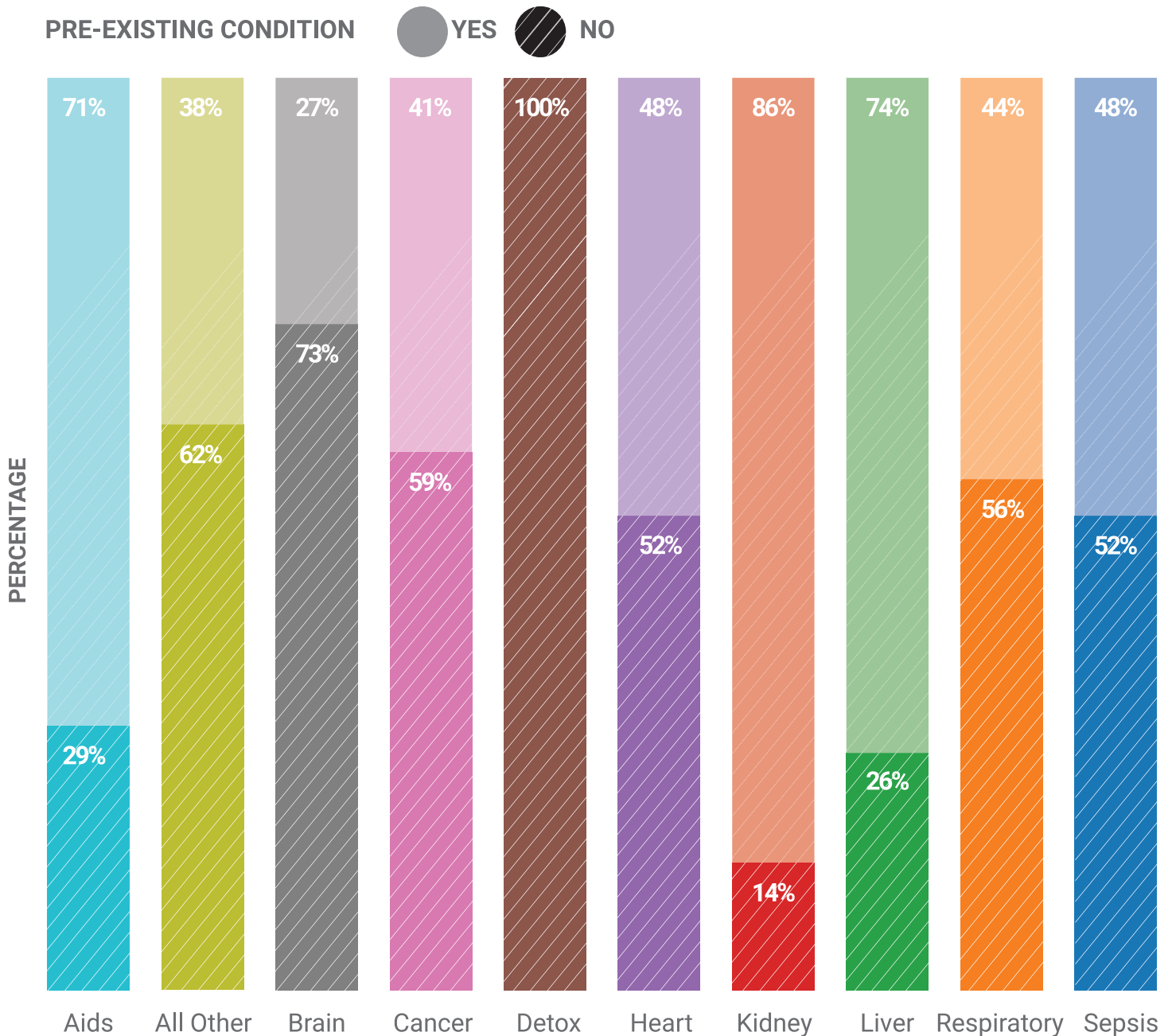
The average number of days incarcerated prior to medical death is highest for state prisons (approximately 17 years), compared to privately operated facilities (almost 5 years) and parish jails (1.7 years). In parish jails, deaths due to cancer on average occur within a year of incarceration and heart attack deaths within two years. Deaths due to sepsis, which is caused when a person's response to fighting infection damages internal tissues and organs, in one parish jail case occurred within two months of admission. All but one other sepsis death occurred in state prisons. Early intervention, through antibiotics, is critical as the incidence of death from sepsis increases quickly and sharply. In private facilities, of the two deaths due to liver disease, one occurred on the day of admission and the other 55 days after admission.

# MEDICAL CAUSE OF DEATH BY AVERAGE DAYS INCARCERATED & FACILITY TYPE



On average, less than half of known deaths were due to a medical condition that existed prior to detention behind bars, indicating that the medical condition in 53% of cases was initially diagnosed after being incarcerated. Only medical deaths due to three diseases (HIV/ AIDS, liver, and kidney diseases) were more likely to be due to a pre-existing condition prior to incarceration. The development of - and death from - other diseases during incarceration is likely related to the length of sentences in Louisiana and may implicate the general lack of preventative health care for incarcerated adults under the age of 50 years old.<sup>13</sup>

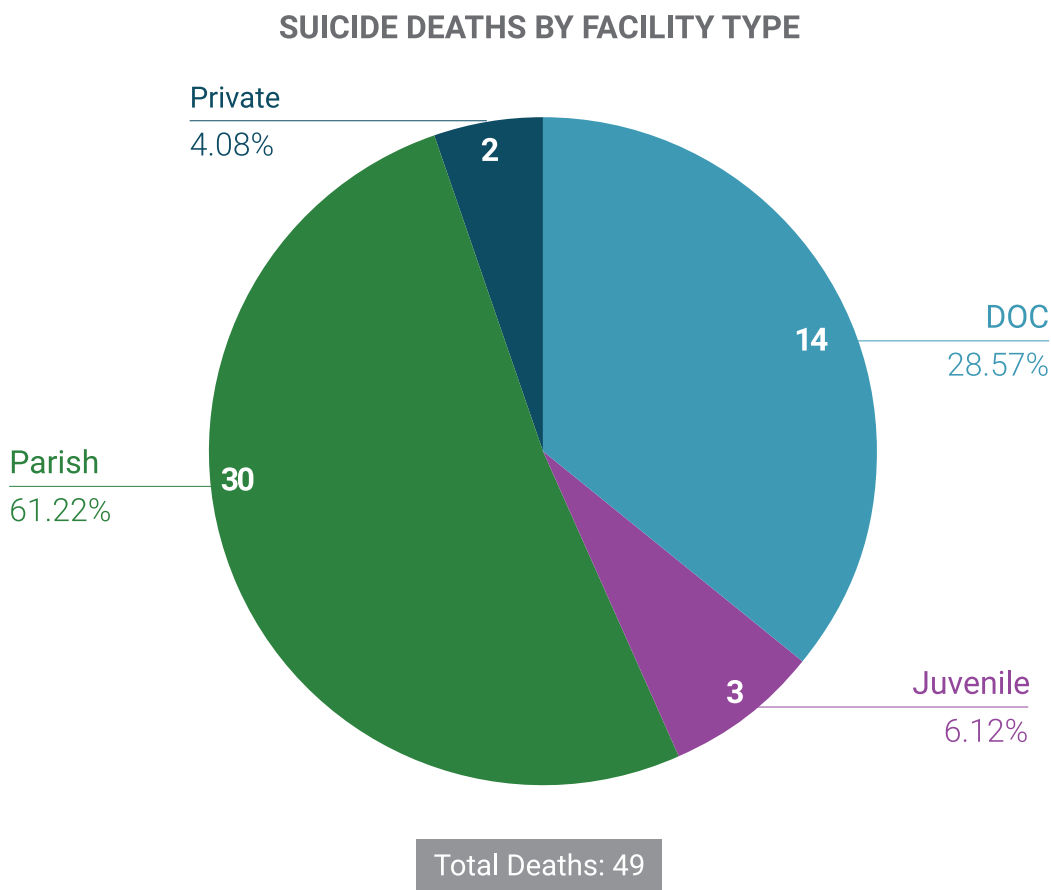
### PRE-EXISTING CONDITION BY MEDICAL CAUSE OF DEATH



<sup>13</sup> For more discussion of preventative health care policies in state prisons in Louisiana, see Andrea Armstrong, Bruce Reilly, & Ashley Wennerstrom, Study Brief: Adequacy of Healthcare Provided in Louisiana State Prisons, 4-5 (May 2021) at [https://www.loyno.edu/sites/default/files/2021-05/DPSC\\_Healthcare\\_Brief.pdf](https://www.loyno.edu/sites/default/files/2021-05/DPSC_Healthcare_Brief.pdf)

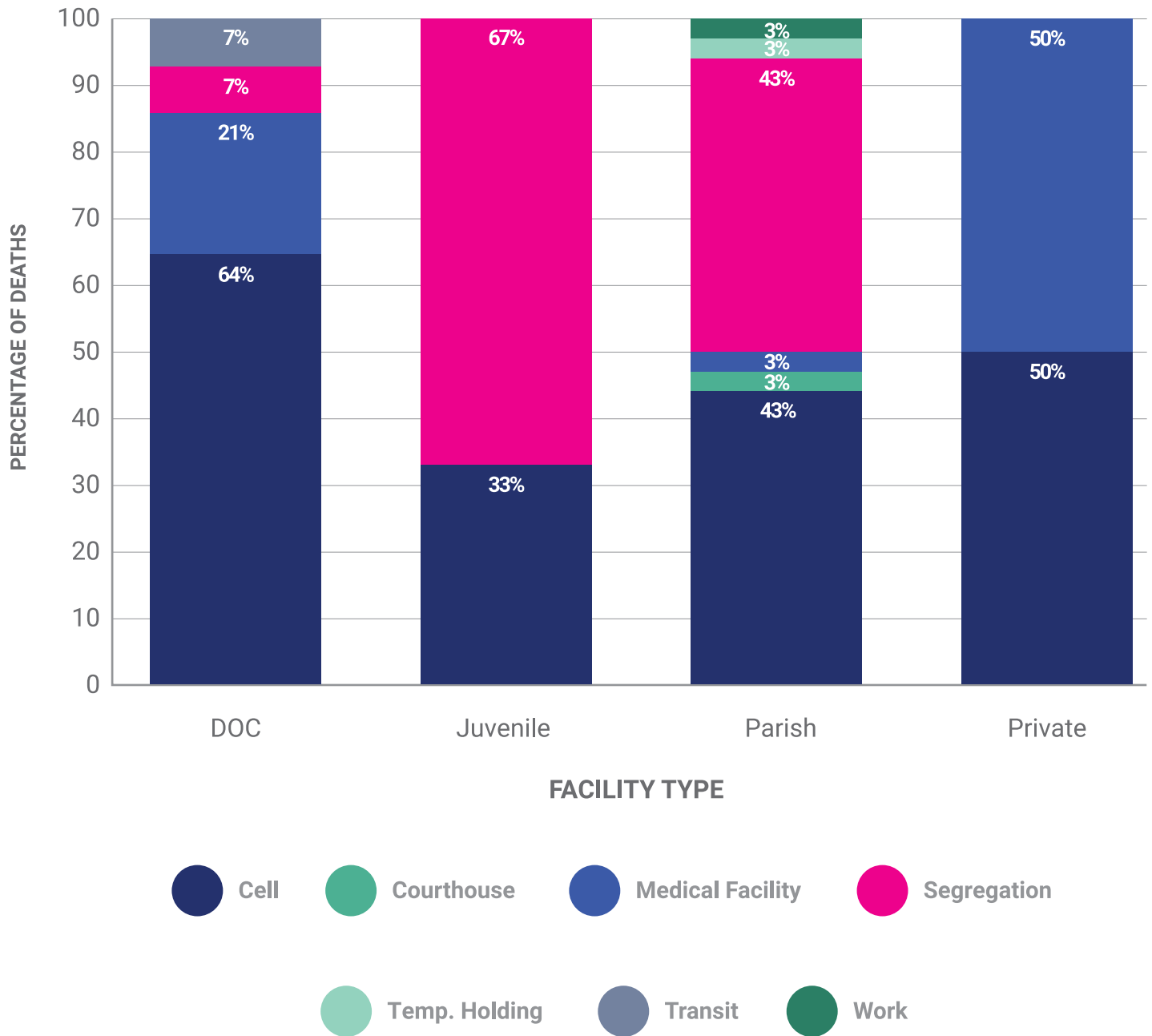
# Suicide

Contrary to the pattern of medical deaths occurring primarily in state prisons, completed suicides occurred more frequently in parish jails. Almost two-thirds of suicides occurred in parish jails. Suicide is also the leading cause of death for youth held in detention. Three of the four deaths in youth detention centers were due to suicide, with details on the cause of death for the fourth child unknown. The majority of suicide deaths at all facilities were completed by hanging, though records indicate one suicide by “single gun shot to the head” while at the parish courthouse and another involved a “self-inflict[ed] stab wound to the neck.”



There are differences in where suicides are completed depending on the type of facility. Almost two-thirds of the completed and known suicides in state prisons occurred in a person’s cell and only 7% occurred in segregation. In contrast, suicides in segregation were more common in youth detention centers and parish jails. Suicides in segregation are of particular concern, since segregation settings usually entail a higher level of individual supervision/ observation than general shared cell or dorm settings combined with more restrictive policies on items allowed in a segregation cell. Half of all completed suicides in parish jails occurred in segregation cells, raising questions about the degree of observation performed by custodial and medical staff. All but two of these segregation parish jail suicides were hangings.

## SUICIDE DEATHS BY FACILITY LOCATION & FACILITY TYPE



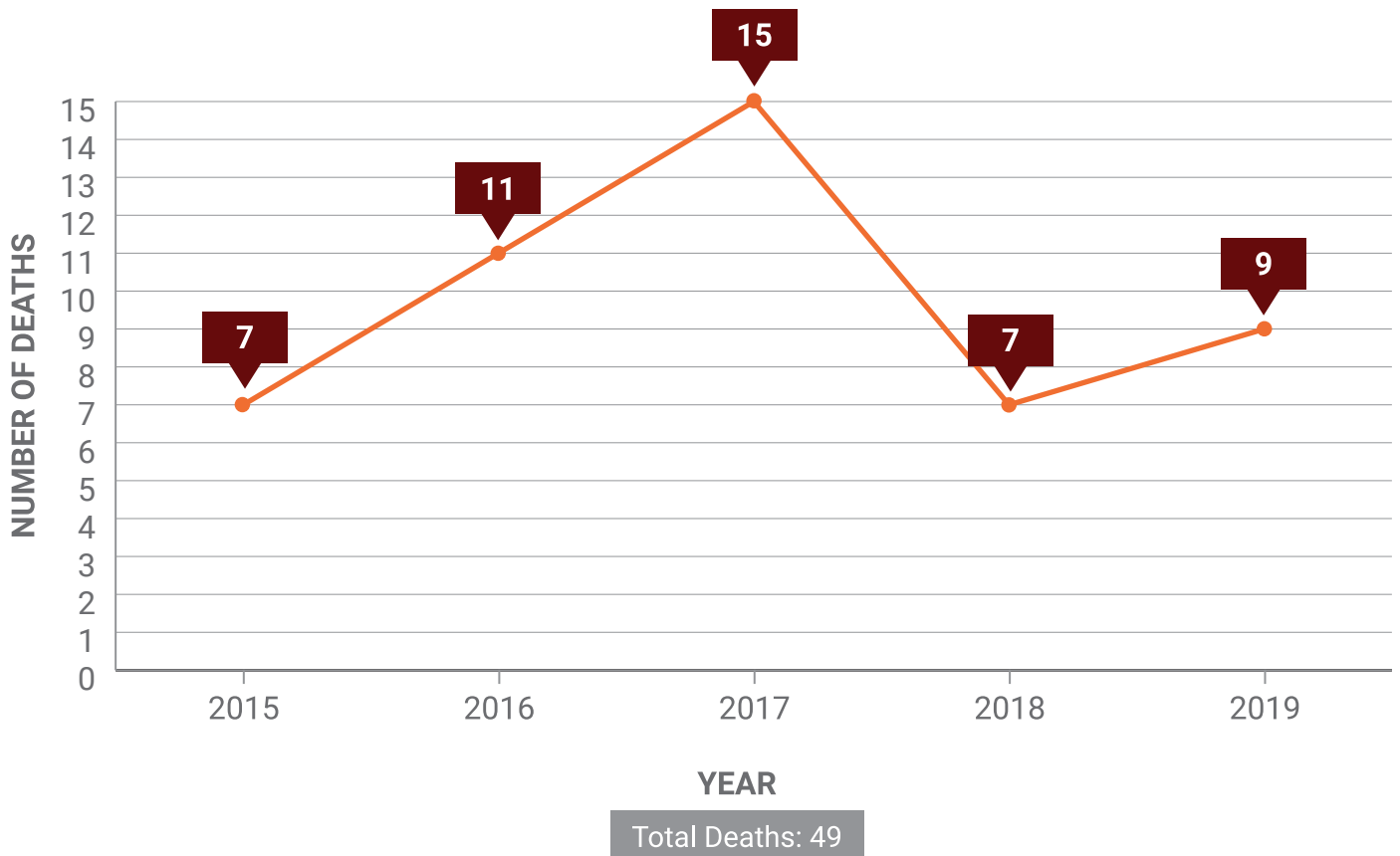
For youth deaths, two out of three suicides occurred during the evening hours, when there is less probability of educational or rehabilitative programming occurring. For state prisons, suicides were more likely to occur (or be discovered) between six o'clock in the morning and noon. In contrast, completed suicides occurred (or were discovered) pretty evenly throughout the day in parish jails, which raises questions about supervision/observation and perhaps the lack of other activities, such as programming or outdoor recreation, during the day.

### SUICIDE DEATHS BY TIME OF DAY & FACILITY TYPE

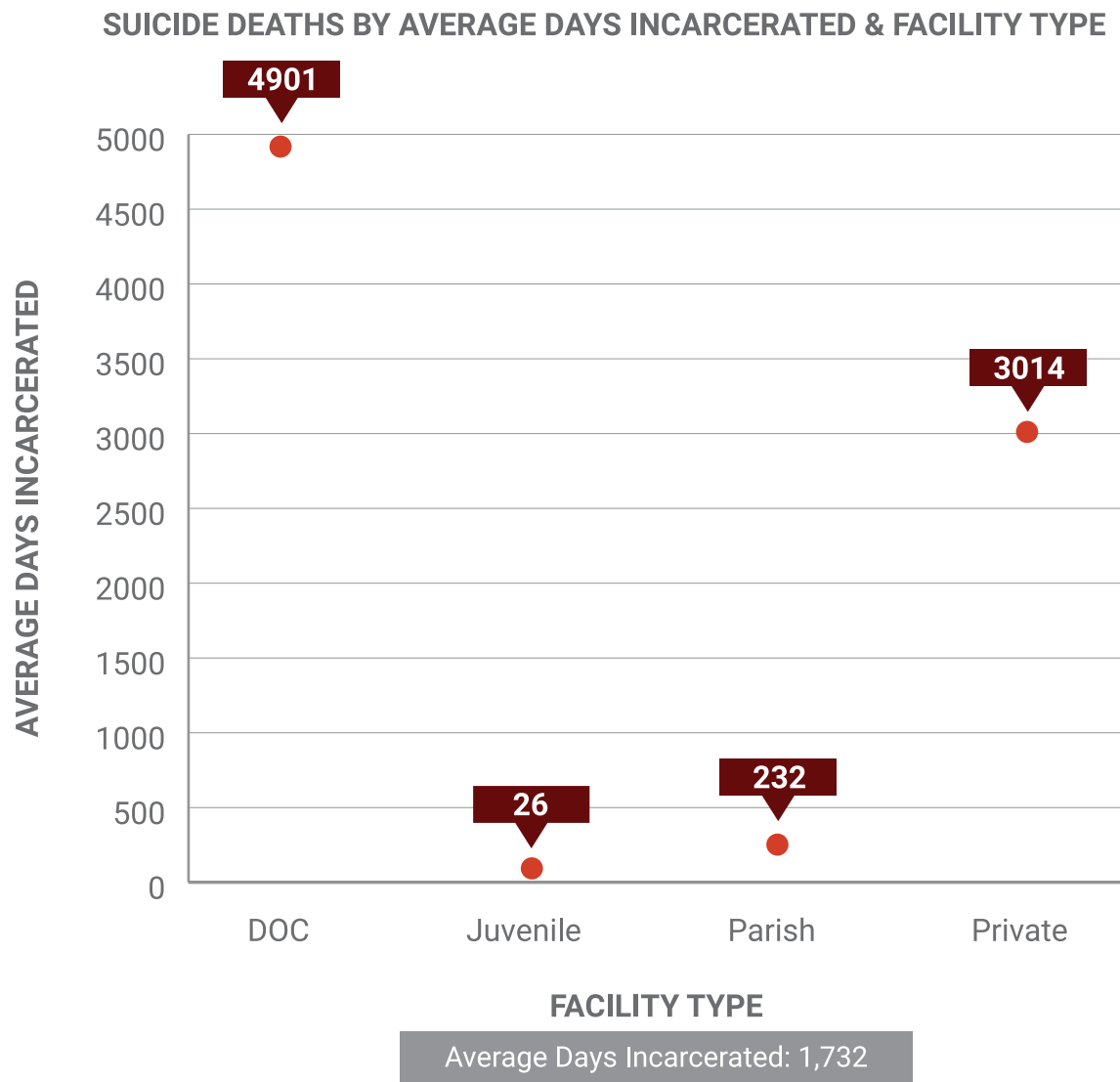
	DOC	Juvenile	Parish	Private	Total
Morning (6am to noon)	43%	0%	27%	0%	29%
Afternoon (noon to 6pm)	29%	0%	23%	50%	24%
Evening (6pm to midnight)	14%	67%	27%	0%	24%
Overnight (midnight to 6am)	14%	0%	17%	50%	16%
Unknown	0%	33%	7%	0%	6%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Known suicide deaths were highest in 2017, comprising 8.8% of deaths for that year. Though the number of known suicide deaths (9) was substantially less in 2019, completed suicides as a proportion of overall deaths for that year was higher (7%) than for other years including 2015 (4%) and 2018 (4.5%).

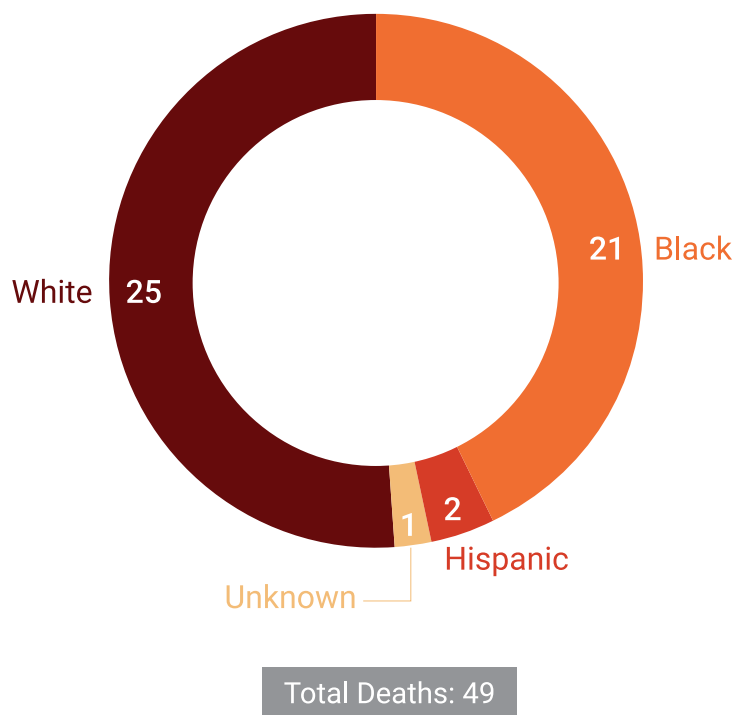
### SUICIDE DEATHS BY YEAR



The average number of days incarcerated prior to death by suicide indicates that suicides occur relatively early in juvenile detention. One of the youth suicides happened within 9 days, the second at 43 days, while records for the third suicide did not indicate length of stay. The average length of incarceration for completed known suicides in parish jails ranged from the first day of incarceration to one year and eight months (684 days). The latter suicide concerned a person incarcerated pre-trial and occurred in segregation/solitary housing. Seven of the thirty suicide deaths in parish jails occurred within the first week of incarceration. Both privately operated and state prisons had on average, longer lengths of incarceration prior to suicide, ranging from 2 to 32 years prior to death.



## SUICIDE DEATHS BY RACE



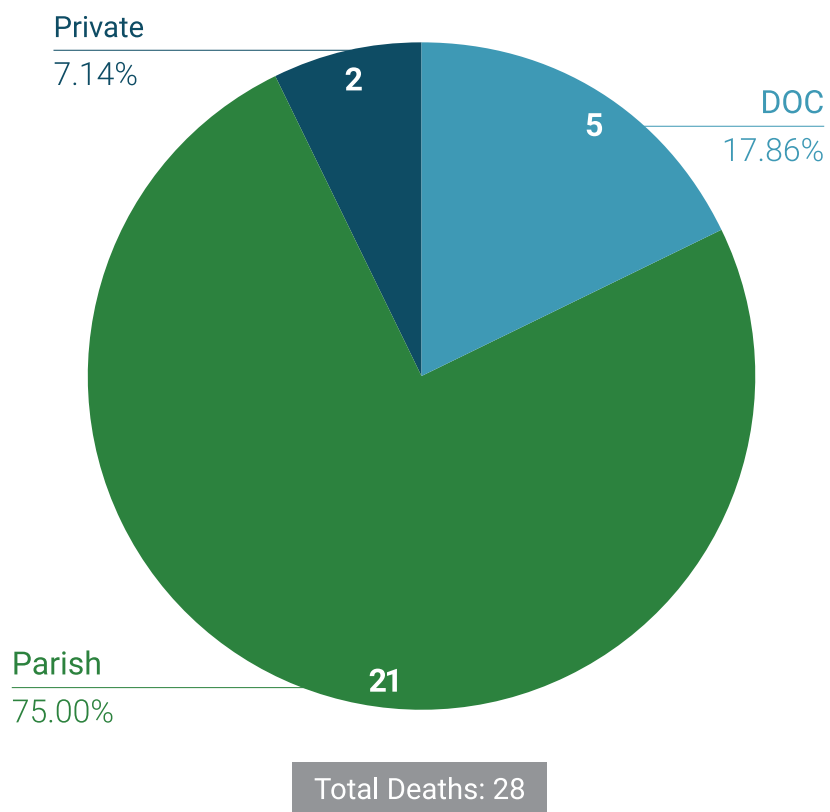
In contrast to most other causes of death, African-Americans are not a majority of suicide deaths. Black people are 43% of suicide deaths, compared to White people at 51%. Four of the five suicide deaths of women were White.

## Drugs

Drug overdoses are a relatively small proportion of overall deaths and similar to suicides, are more likely to occur in parish jails than other types of facilities. Drugs causing death included cocaine, heroin, methamphetamines, fentanyl, ibuprofen, synthetic cannabinoids, and inhaled hydrocarbons. Not all records specified the drug overdosed, however, where listed, methamphetamines, heroin, and fentanyl appeared most common.

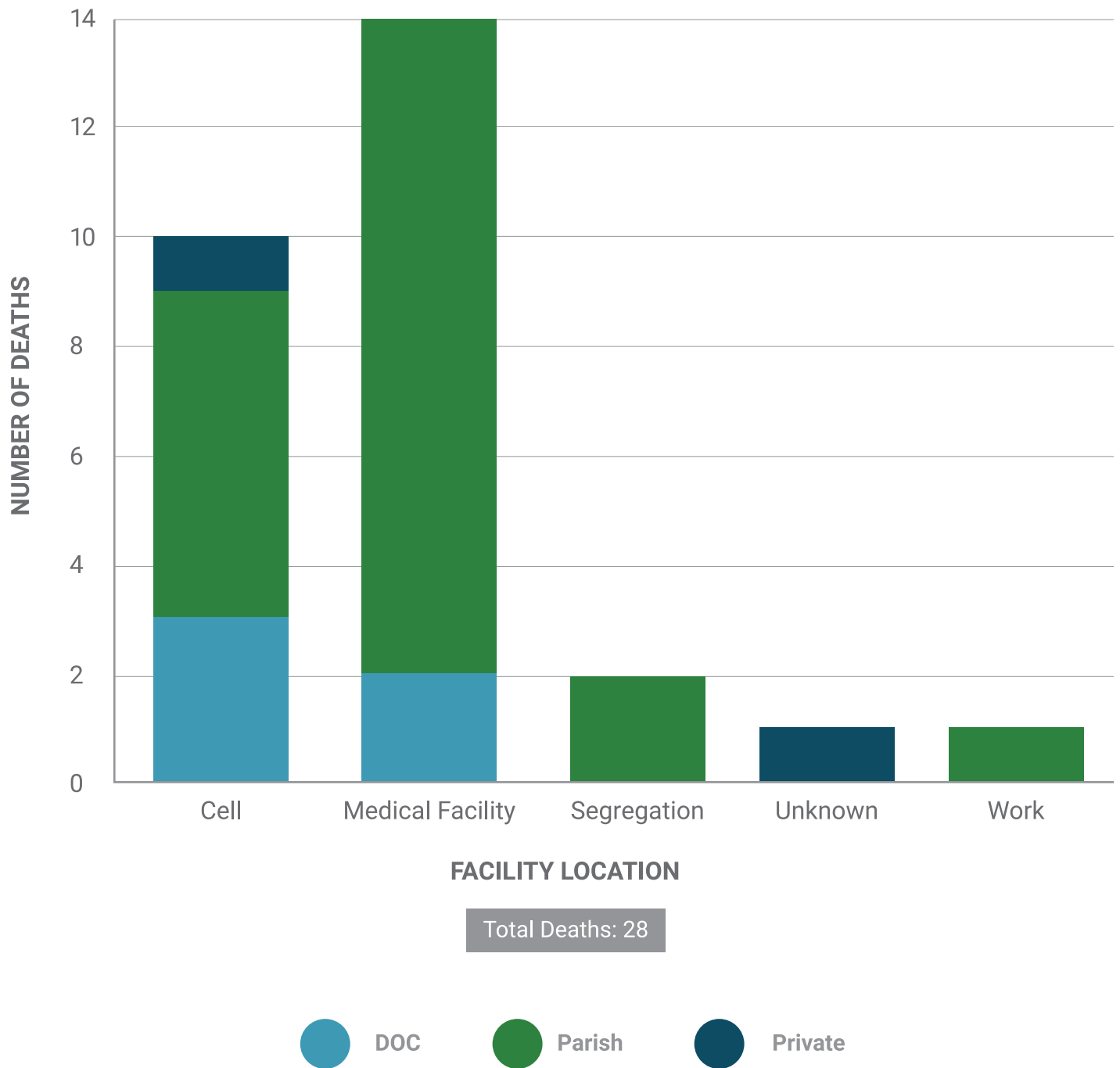


### DRUG RELATED DEATHS BY FACILITY TYPE



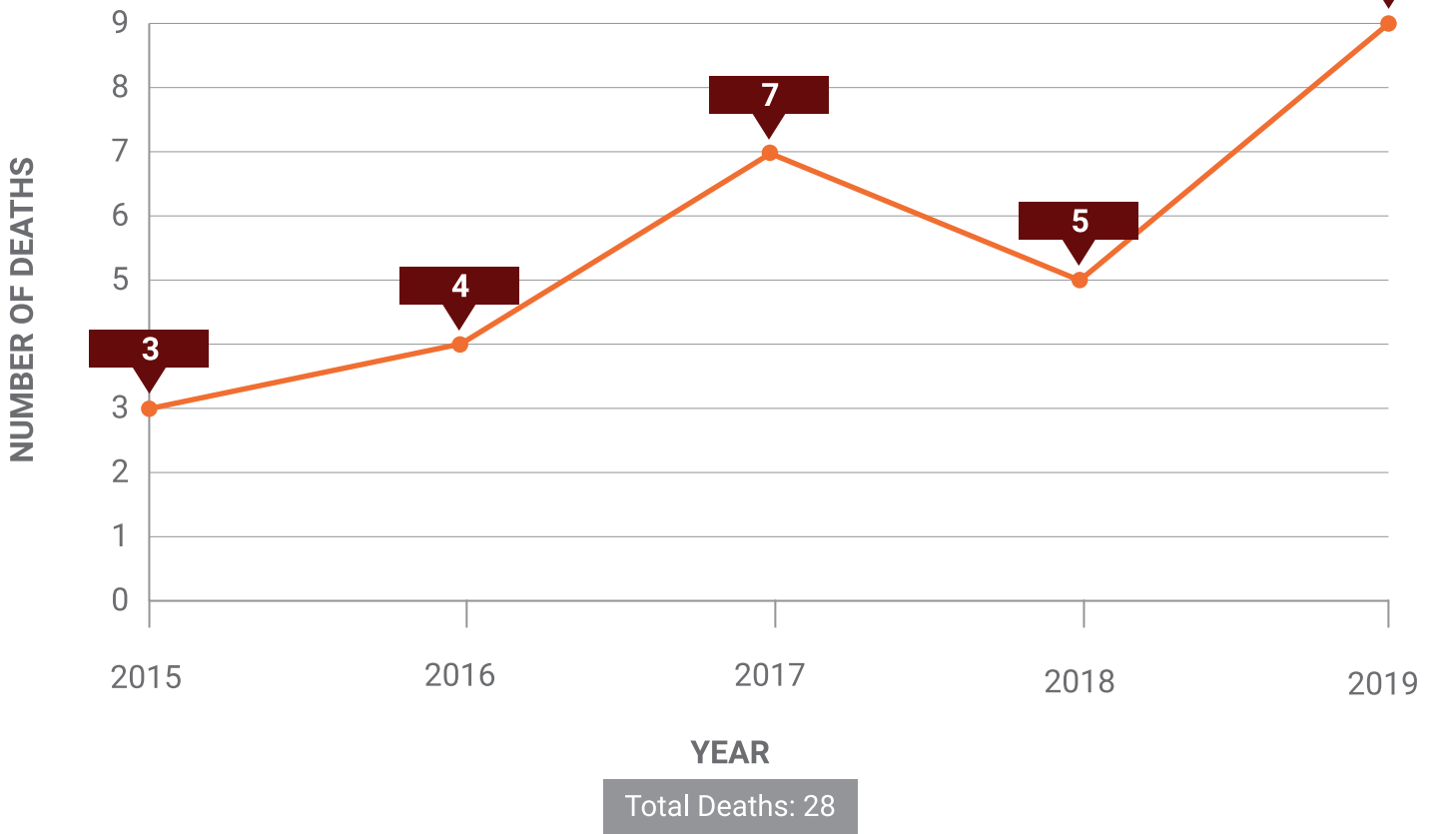
Approximately half of the deaths related to drug overdose occurred in medical facilities, though that is not necessarily the location for the ingestion of the drugs. The two drug-related deaths that occurred in segregation were relatively early admissions with one dying on the same day as admitted and the other after 11 days of incarceration.

## DRUG RELATED DEATHS BY FACILITY LOCATION & FACILITY TYPE



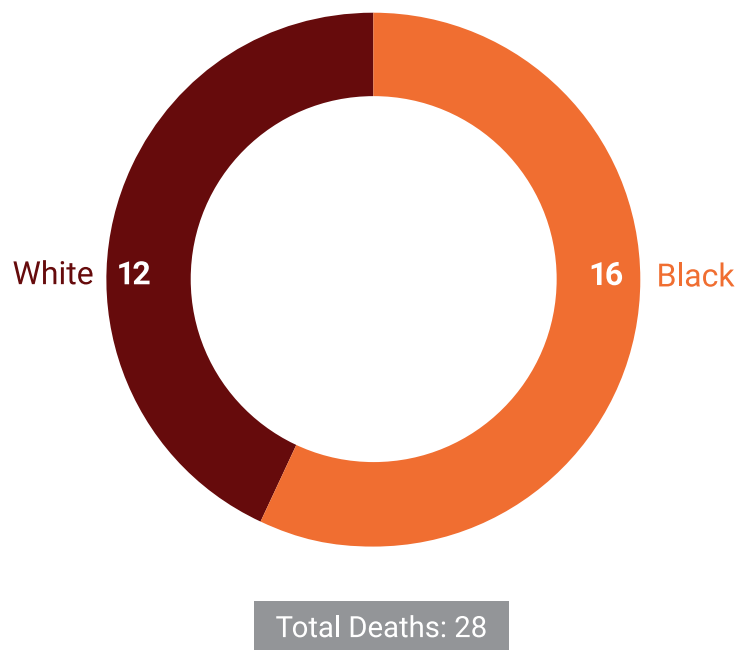
Known drug-related deaths appear to be increasing in number over time. The lowest proportion of drug-related deaths was in 2015 at 1.7% of overall known deaths behind bars. By 2019, drug-related deaths were 7% of overall deaths for the year.

### DRUG RELATED DEATHS BY YEAR

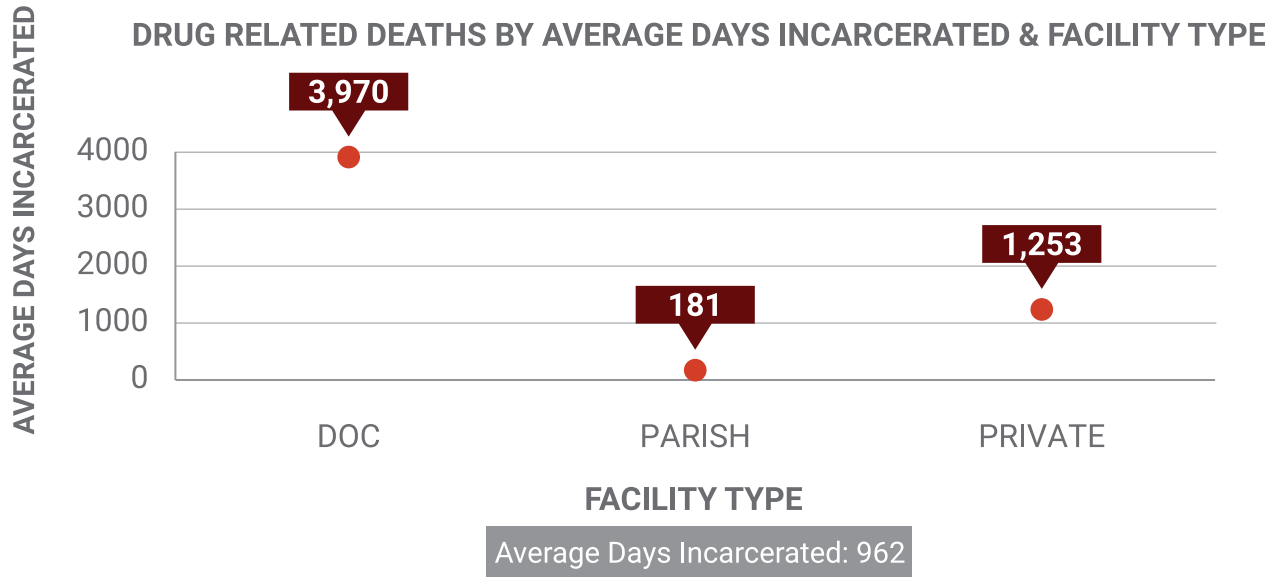


All drug overdose deaths behind bars from 2015-2019 are male. Black males are the majority of these deaths (57%) consistent with their overrepresentation in the incarcerated population.

### DRUG RELATED DEATHS BY RACE

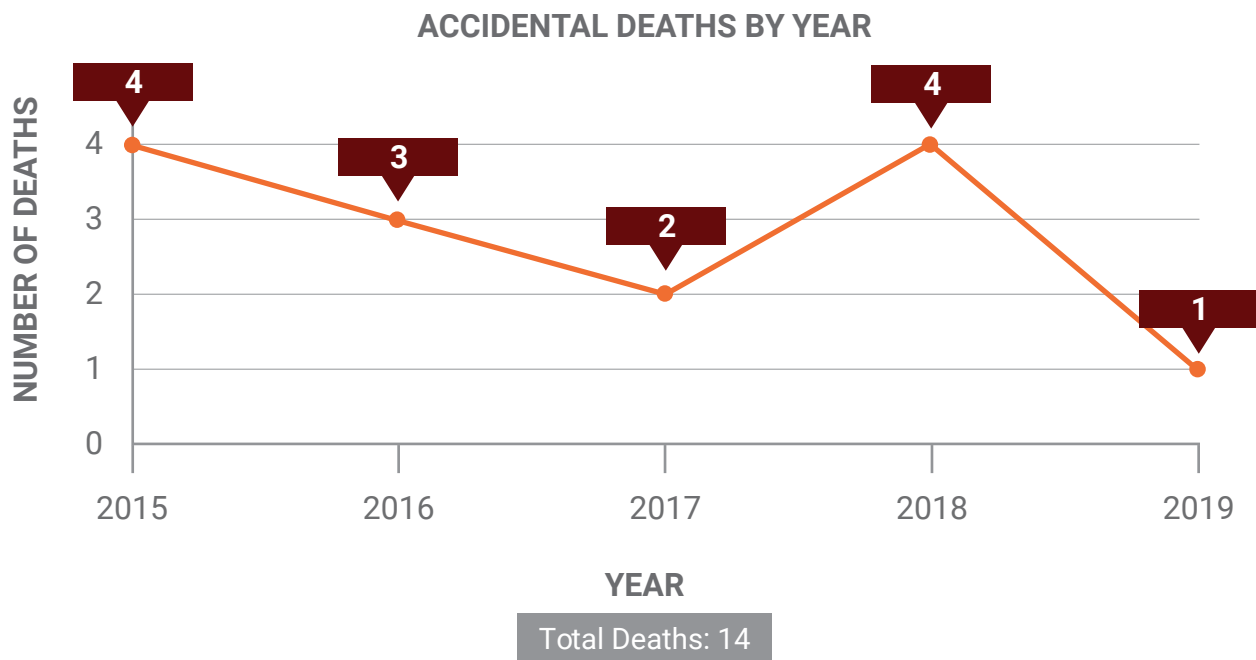


Drug overdoses occurring close to admission implicates policies on hospital transfers for medical distress. Drug overdoses occurring later in a person's incarceration implicate the ability of staff to limit the introduction of contraband behind bars. The average number of days incarcerated prior to a drug related death is lowest in jails at approximately 6 months, while the average for private facilities is approximately 3 years and almost 11 years for state prisons.



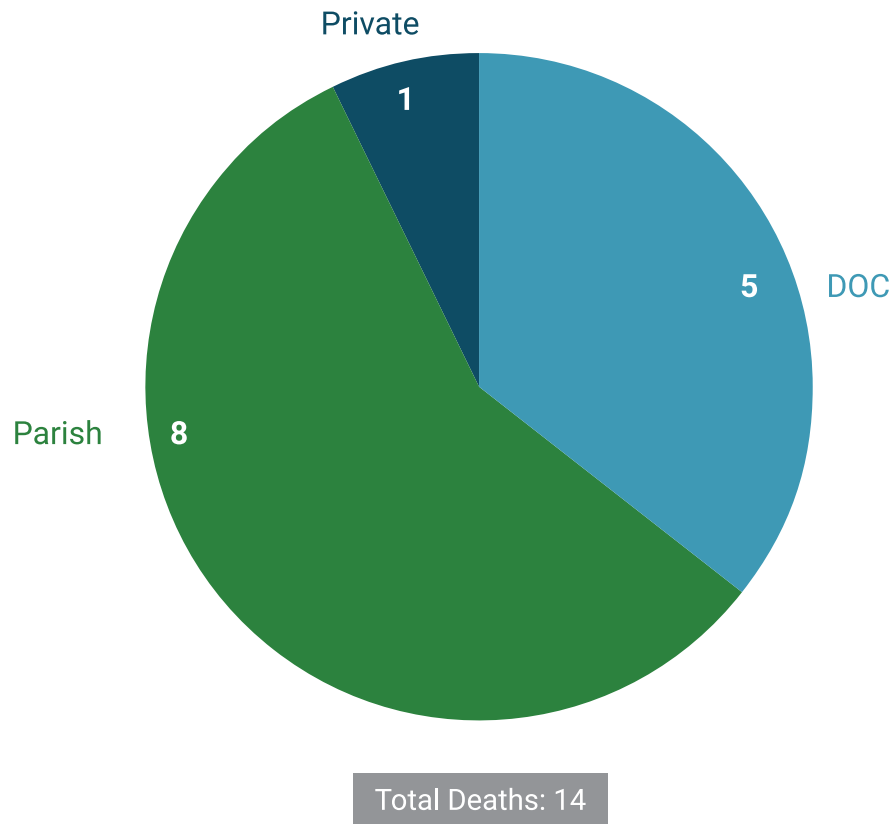
## Accident

Deaths due to accidents behind bars primarily involved head injuries leading to traumatic brain injuries. One death is reported as "accidental" but concerns an officer-involved shooting after the person's apparent failure to heed the prior fired warning shot. Two of the accidental deaths involved drowning.



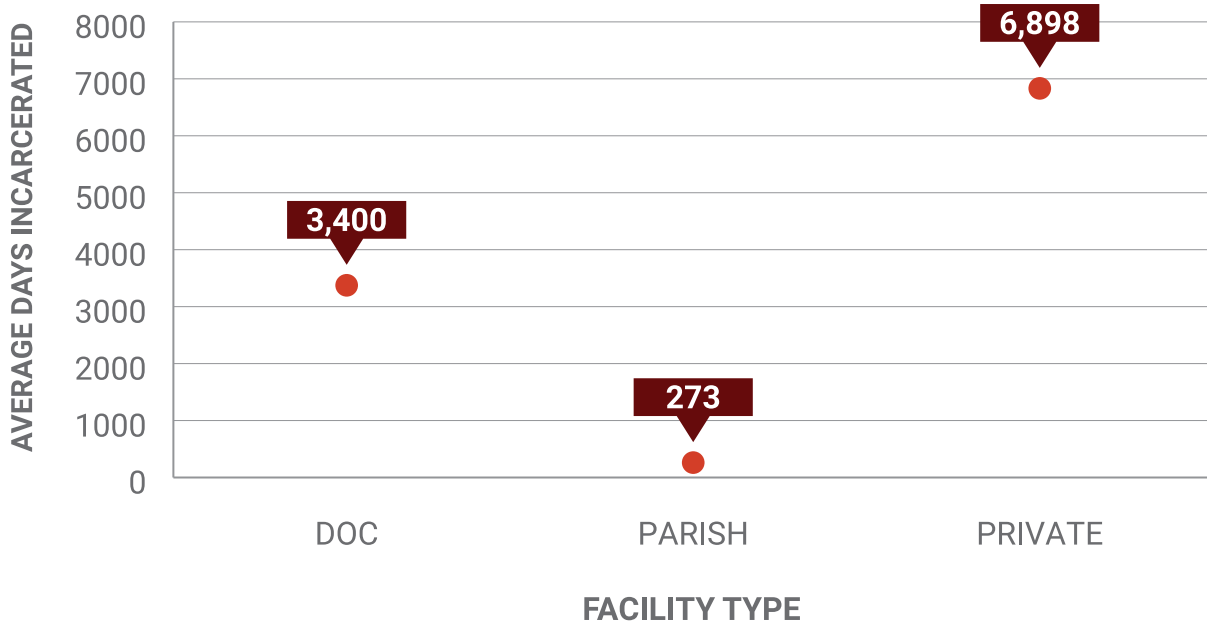
The majority of deaths due to accidents occurred in parish jails, compared to state or private facilities, though some of those in parish jails are related to work-related injuries sustained outside of the facility.

#### ACCIDENTAL DEATHS BY FACILITY TYPE



The average number of days incarcerated was lower in parish jails than state or private prisons. The length of time a person was incarcerated prior to death by accident ranged from 5 days to over 18 years. Only one accidental death occurred in a private facility. One of the parish deaths occurred after 10 days incarcerated at the facility where they died, but records indicate the death occurred as part of work-release and therefore it is likely the person was previously incarcerated at a different facility.

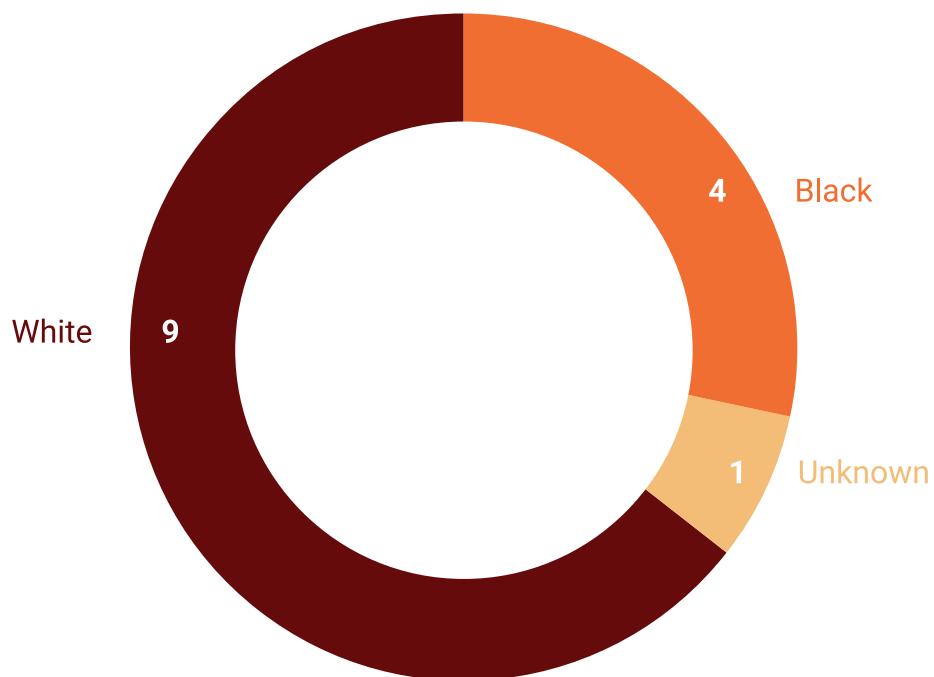
### ACCIDENTAL DEATHS BY AVERAGE DAYS INCARCERATED & FACILITY TYPE



Average Days Incarcerated: 1981

All of the known accidental deaths were male. In contrast to most other categories of death, White men are the majority of deaths by accident (64%) compared to Black men (29%).

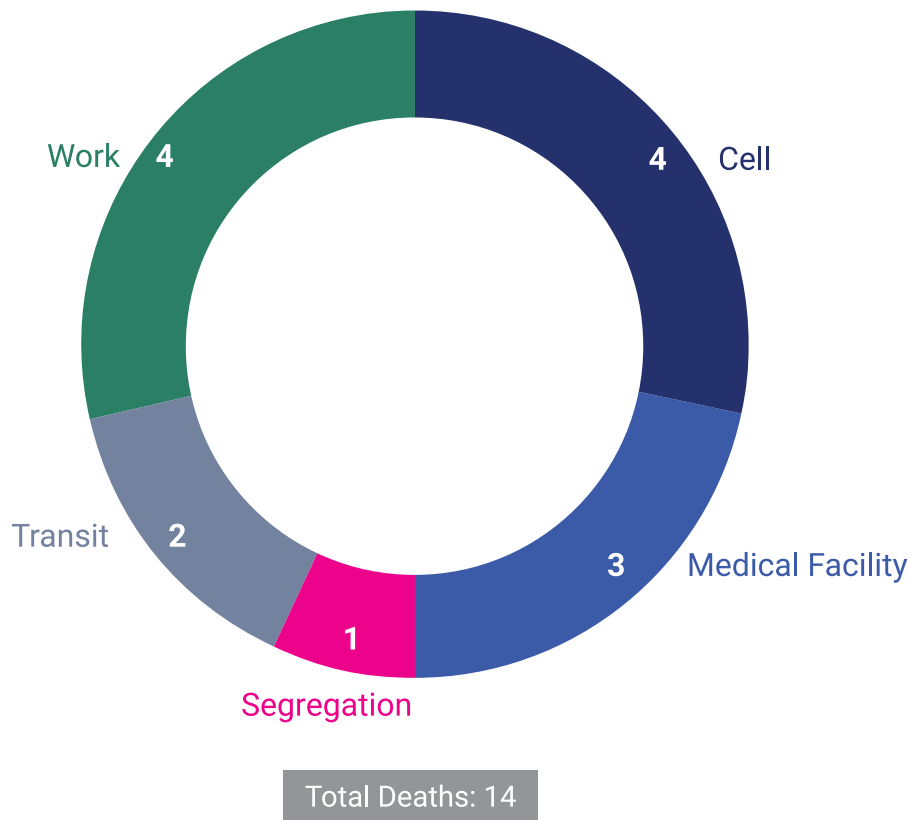
### ACCIDENTAL DEATHS BY RACE



Total Deaths: 14

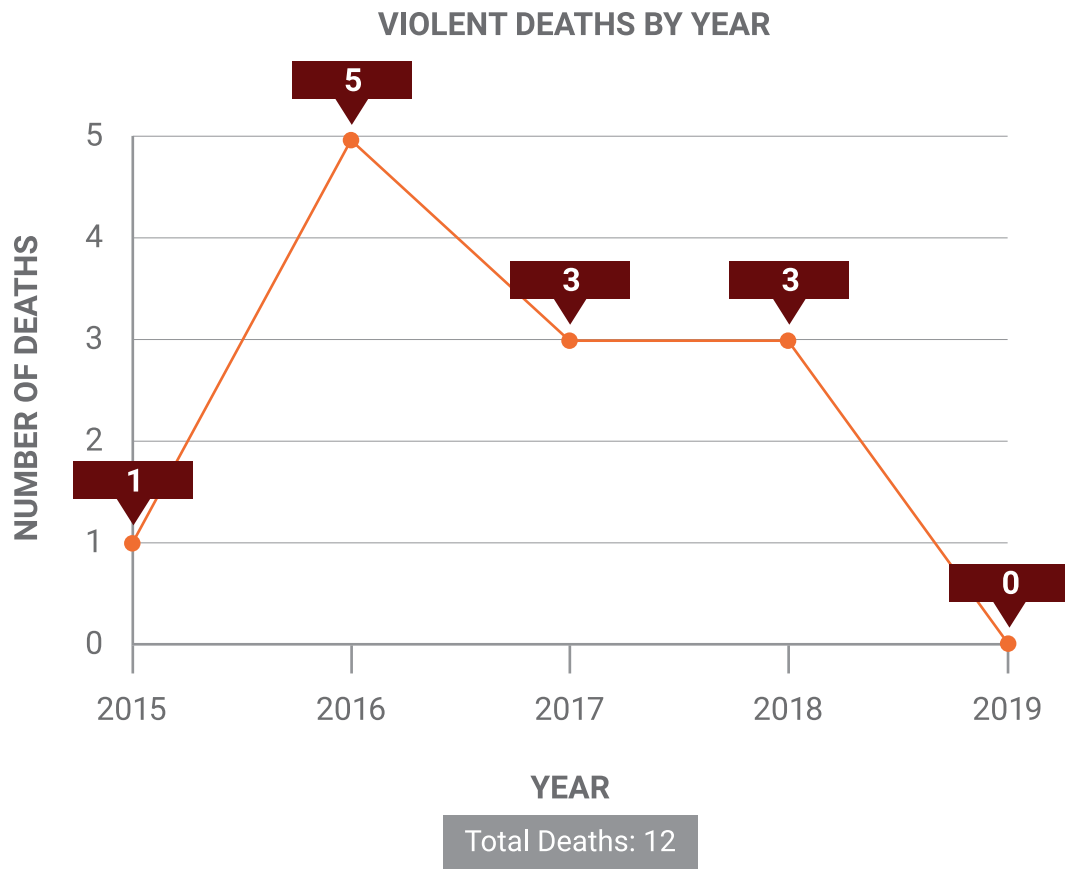
The two leading locations for accidental deaths were cells inside the facilities and work outside of the facilities. For deaths in cells, three of the accidental deaths were due to head injuries, of which one is described as the result of falling down. The fourth death did not indicate how the injury leading to death was sustained. Of the four deaths occurring as a result of work, two involved drowning (one when a boat collapsed on the Mississippi River); one involved falling from the bed of a truck travelling down a U.S. highway; and one involved an unspecified “accidental injury to self” at work.

**ACCIDENTAL DEATHS BY FACILITY LOCATION**

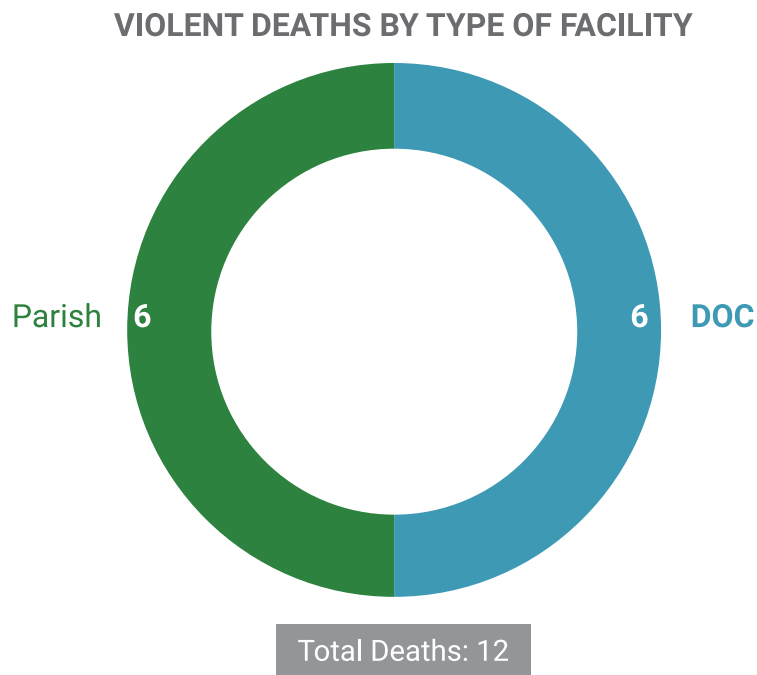


## Violence

Deaths due to violence were one of the least common forms of deaths behind bars in Louisiana. This may be due to coding errors or judgment by reporting facilities, since at least one death coded as accidental was in fact an officer-involved shooting. There were zero deaths due to violence reported for 2019. All of the deaths related to violence involved altercations between incarcerated people. Most of the deaths due to violence were the result of head injuries sustained during the assault, but one was due to choking by another incarcerated person.

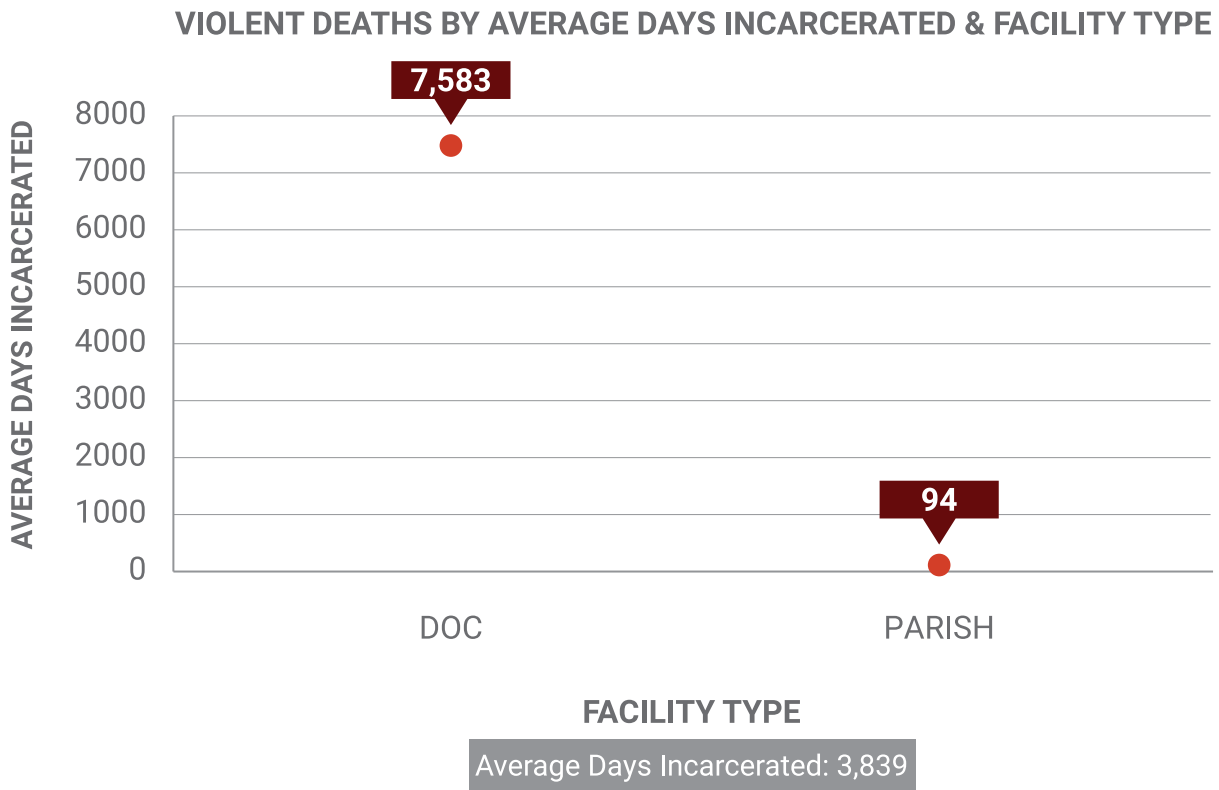


State prisons and parish jails are the only recorded types of facilities reporting deaths due to violence. Neither juvenile nor private facilities reported deaths due to violence. Three of the violent deaths occurring in parish jails occurred in a single facility, namely East Baton Rouge Parish Prison.

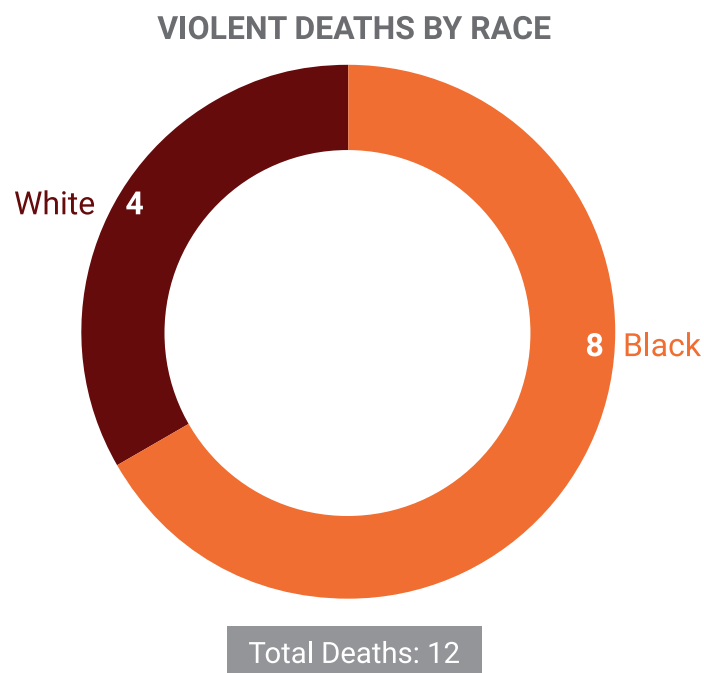




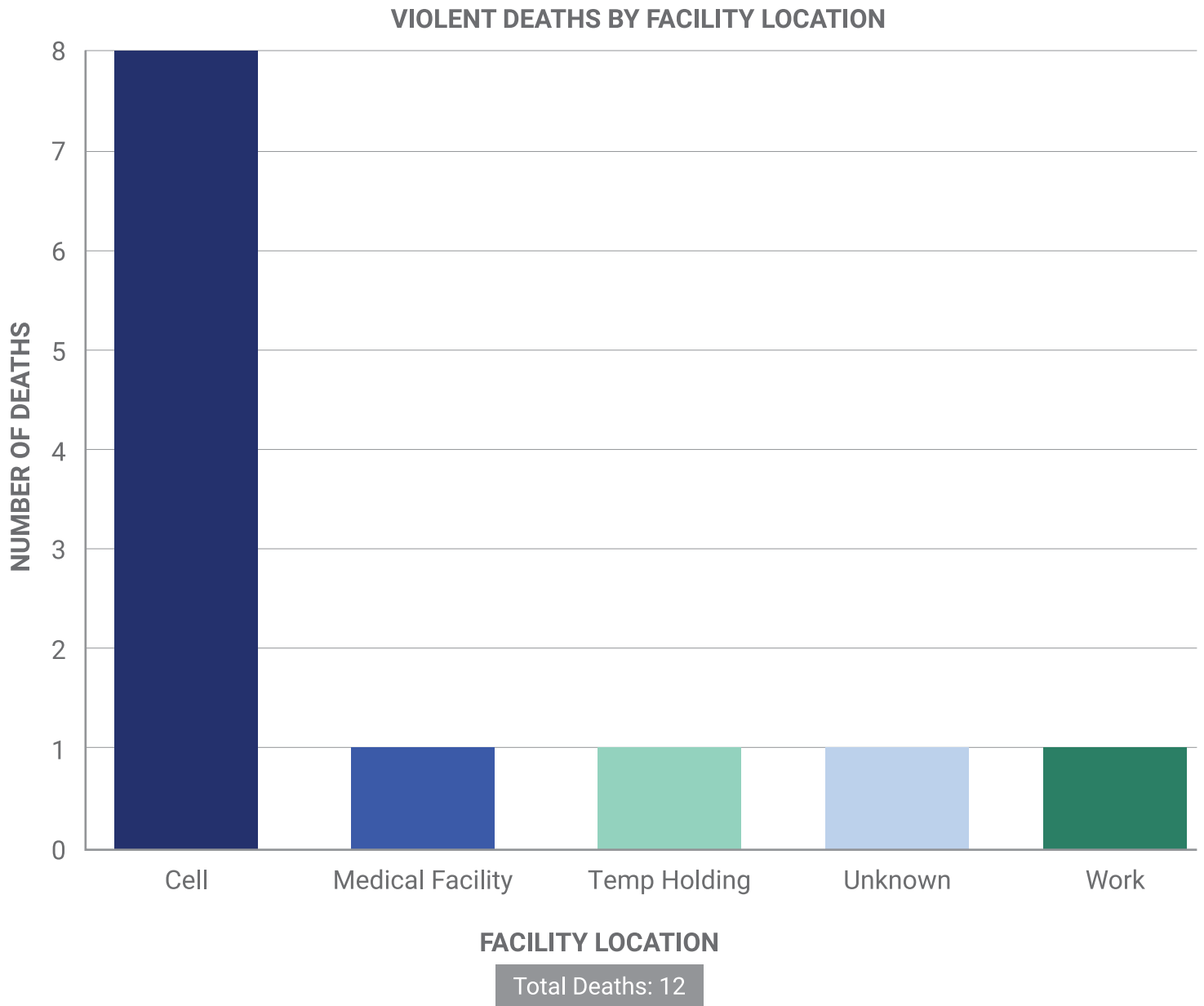
The average number of days incarcerated prior to violence leading to death was shorter for parish jails than state prisons. Two of the violent deaths in parish jails occurred within 24 hours of admission and the remaining deaths in parish jails occurred within the first year of incarceration (between 10 to 228 days). Violent deaths in state prisons occurred later in incarceration, ranging from 9 to 27 years behind bars before death.



African-Americans comprise two-thirds of reported deaths due to violence, compared to one-third of Whites. Only one of the deaths was female.



Two-thirds of deaths due to violence occurred in cells, the majority of which involved assaults and blunt force trauma leading to head injuries. This would seem to indicate that the violence was not a product of contraband or homemade weapons, but does implicate supervision and observation policies of these facilities. The timing of these deaths was evenly spread across morning, afternoon, evening, and overnight. Notably, two of the three reported violent deaths occurring in East Baton Rouge Parish Prison happened in the evening.



# CONCLUSION

This report provides the first ever analysis of deaths behind bars in Louisiana in prisons, jails, & youth detention centers. 38 out of 132 local, private, or federal facilities have not provided requested records to date. Though incomplete, the 786 documented deaths are a significant step to greater transparency of these public institutions.

While not all deaths behind bars are necessarily preventable, prisons and jails should ideally have lower death rates than the general public due to the physical proximity of medical care behind bars, 24-hour staffing and supervision, and reduced probability of certain types of deaths, such as car accidents, due to incarceration.

**A person's risk of death behind bars should not depend on their facility assignment.**

Although DOC prioritizes placement of people with serious medical needs in select state prisons, such as Louisiana State Penitentiary, medical-related deaths also occurred in parish jails where there are less robust medical systems in place.

**Death behind bars can impact anyone incarcerated, regardless of their crime or guilt or innocence.** Some incarcerated people died relatively early in their judicially determined sentences. Others died after completing the majority of their sentence while enrolled in work release programs designed to aid their transition home. Fourteen percent of deaths were of people who had only been accused of a crime, without a chance to prove their innocence, or to be found guilty.

**Prison, jail, and youth detention administrators can and should use this data to compare the operation of their individual facilities to others.** In some cases, the trends identified implicate institutional policies and practices, which should be reviewed with the aim of decreasing deaths behind bars.

**State and local leaders should officially collect, track, analyze, and publish this data for the public.** This report can serve as an important baseline for future research and analysis, but continued transparency of our public institutions is needed for sustainable improvements and public support.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

## Author

Professor Andrea Armstrong (JD, MPA) joined the Loyola University New Orleans, College of Law faculty in 2010. She is a national expert on prison and jail conditions and is certified by the U.S. Department of Justice as a Prison Rape Elimination Act auditor. Her research focuses on the constitutional dimensions of prisons and jails, specifically prison labor practices, the intersection of race and conditions of incarceration, and public oversight of detention facilities. She teaches in the related fields of constitutional law, criminal procedure, law and poverty, and race and the law. Prof. Armstrong also received a three-year Interdisciplinary Research Leader grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, shared with the Voice of the Experienced and LSU Center for Healthcare Value and Equity, to examine the effects of incarceration on health service use in Louisiana, currently a global and national leader in incarceration rates. Prof. Armstrong is a graduate of Yale Law School, the Princeton School of Public and International Affairs, and New York University.

## Project Participants

This project would not have been possible without the hard work and dedication of the following Loyola University New Orleans law students enrolled in the incarceration seminar.

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# APPENDIX

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# Deaths by Facility

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Total
<b>DOC</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>558</b>
Allen Correctional Center				1		1
B.B. Rayburn Correctional Center - DOC	1	2	4	1	3	11
David Wade Correctional Center - DOC	5	6	4	9	6	30
Dixon Correctional Institute - DOC	9	12	9	5	6	41
Elayn Hunt Correctional Center - DOC	42	32	39	30	32	175
Louisiana State Penitentiary (Angola Prison)	56	53	52	50	41	252
Lousiana Correctional Institute for Women - DOC	2	3	6	2	2	15
Raymond Laborde Correctional Center - DOC	4	8	4	12	5	33
<b>Juvenile</b>			<b>2</b>		<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>
Swanson Center for Youth at Monroe - DOC / Youth			1			1
Ware Youth Center - DOC Youth			1		2	3
<b>Parish</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>192</b>
Acadia Parish Jail			2		2	4
Ascension Parish Jail				1		1
Avoyelles Marksville Detention Center	1	1		3		5
Avoyelles Parish Simmsport Detention				1		1
Baton Rouge City Jail		1	1			2
Bienville Parish Jail			1			1
Bogalusa City Jail	1					1
Bossier Parish Maximum Security Facility			1			1
Caddo Parish Correctional Center		2	1	2	1	6
Calcasieu Parish Correctional Center	1	1		1	1	4
Calcasieu Sheriff's Prison				1		1
Caldwell Parish Correctional Center	1					1
City of Kenner Jail	1			1		2
City of Morgan City Jail	1					1
City of West Monroe Jail	1					1
Claiborne Parish Detention Center			2			2

Concordia Correctional Facility	3	2			1	6
Concordia Parish Work Release Facility			1	1		2
East Baton Rouge Parish Prison	3	6	5	4	4	22
East Baton Rouge Work Release		2			1	3
East Feliciana Parish Work Release			1			1
Evangeline Parish Jail	1					1
Franklin Parish Detention Center	2		1			3
Iberia Parish Jail		2				2
Iberville Parish Jail	1					1
Jefferson Davis Parish Jail		1				1
Jefferson Parish Correctional Center	4	1	6	4	4	19
Lafayette Parish Correctional Center	2	1		2		5
Lafourche Parish Detention Center				1		1
Lafourche Parish Transitional Work Program			1			1
Lincoln Parish Detention Center				1		1
Livingston Parish Detention Center		1	1			2
Livingston Parish Transitional Work Program				1		1
Madison Parish Correctional Center & Work Release Facility				1		1
Morehouse Parish Detention Center		1				1
Morehouse Parish Jail	3					3
Natchitoches Parish Detention Center			2			2
Orleans Parish Prison & TDC	3	2	7	2		14
Other	1	1				2
Ouachita Correctional Center		2	1	4	2	9
Plaquemines Parish Detention Center				1		1
Rapides Parish Detention Center I, II, III	1	1	2		2	6
Riverbend Detention Center		1	1	2	1	5
Sabine Parish Correctional Division		1				1
Saint Bernard Parish Jail			1			1
Shreveport City Jail		1				1
Southwest TWP	2				1	3
St. Charles Parish Nelson Coleman Correctional Center		1	1			2



St. Helena Parish Jail				1		1
St. Landry Parish Jail	1					1
St. Tammany Parish Jail	2		2	1		5
Sulphur City Jail			1			1
Tangipahoa Parish Prison	1	1	1	1	1	5
Tensas Parish Detention Center	1					1
Terrebonne Parish Criminal Justice Complex	2	1	1			4
Union Parish Detention Center	2					2
Vermilion Parish Law Enforcement Center	1					1
Vernon Parish Correctional Facility			2			2
Washington Parish Jail	1		1		1	3
Webster Correctional Facility (Bayou Dorcheat Correctional Facility)	1			1	1	3
Webster Parish Jail			1	1	1	3
West Baton Rouge Parish Detention Center					1	1
West Feliciana Parish Work Release Facility					1	1
<b>Private</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>32</b>
Allen Correctional Center	3	5				8
Catahoula Correctional Center - LaSalle		1	1	1	1	4
City of Faith Monroe House (Male & Female)	1				1	2
Jackson Parish Correctional Center - LaSalle		1		1		2
LaSalle Corrections Center	1			1		2
Richland Parish Detention Center (Males) - LaSalle	1					1
Richwood Correctional Center - LaSalle		1				1
River Correctional Center - LaSalle		1		3		4
South Louisiana Correctional ICE Processing Center	1					1
Winn Correctional Center	3	3	1			7
<b>Total</b>	<b>174</b>	<b>162</b>	<b>170</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>786</b>