

# Aging in the Correctional System: Challenges and Policy Solutions

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# Demographics of Aging Prisoners

## 1 | Prison Population

- About 12% of U.S. prisoners are 55+ years old
- Increased likelihood of life and death penalty sentences
- Fastest growing population

## 2 | Health Status

- Higher rates of chronic diseases such as heart disease, hypertension, diabetes
- Higher likelihood of TBIs a significant factor to dementia
- Higher rates of trauma prior to prison and in prison

## 3 | Changes in Imprisonment Rates

- Prison population expanded from 3% to 15% between 1991 and 2021
- By 2020, 30% of older adults are serving life sentences
- Over 61,000 older adults are sentenced to die in prison

# Challenges Posed to Prisoners

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1. **Incarceration accelerates aging** (Kaiksow et. al 2023)  
Presence of chronic and life threatening illnesses in incarcerated individuals
2. **Negative outcomes of solitary confinement**  
Detrimental to physical, mental, and emotional health
3. **Limited resources, inaccessibility, and understaffing in prisons**  
(LeMasters et. al 2022)  
Every year spent in prison decreases life expectancy by 2 years

# Challenges Posed to Public

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1. **Cost of incarcerating older adults**

The expense and care of older adults is 3x more costly

2. **'Nursing Homes Behind Bars'**

Expensive to recruit and train appropriate staff

3. **Simply not worth the cost**

Lack of public safety issue and low recidivism rates

# Policy Solutions

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1. **Second Look Sentencing**

Model Penal Code theory (Reitz 2017)

2. **Compassionate Release (aka medical parole)** (Prison Policy Initiative 2018)

Even with shortcomings, not used often enough

3. **Universal Parole Eligibility after 15 years**

Prisoners considered for parole after 15 years

# Thank you!

## Q & A

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