

Older prisoners

(England and Wales)

July 2019

Older prisoners should be held in establishments that meet their basic needs, receive the same basic level of health and social care as non-prisoners, and receive adequate support on release.

Key issues

People aged 50 and over are the fastest growing age group in the prison population, a trend which is set to continue. Age UK defines older prisoners as those aged over 50, due to the accelerated ageing associated with being in prison. The proportion of older prisoners is projected to grow from 13,616 in June 2018 to 14,100 by 2022 in England and Wales.^{iv} It is also estimated that 5% of prisoners aged over 55 are affected by dementia.^v

A 2013 Inquiry by the Justice Select Committee found that in too many cases older prisoners were being held in establishments that could not meet their basic needs, were not being provided with essential social care, and were being released back in to the community without adequate support. As the older prisoner population grows, it is essential that a national strategy for older prisoners is adopted so that their health and wellbeing is maintained. Key issues include rising numbers of older prisoners, resettlement needs, accessibility of the prison estate and difficulties in accessing health and social care services.

Health and social care

Under the Care Act 2014, local authorities are responsible for assessments of need and the provision of social services to a prisoner if they meet the eligibility criteria. A 2018 thematic report by HM Inspectorate of Prisons and the Care Quality

“Coming to Age UK is the highlight of the week. It helps to normalise life. Age UK staff create a warm, welcoming and friendly atmosphere which greatly helps with feeling cared for.”
Older prisoner quoted in Age UK Wakefield District Older Prisoners Services report

Key statistics

17%

of the prison population are aged 50 and over.ⁱ

54%

of older prisoners are estimated to have a disabilityⁱⁱ.

48%

of older male prisoners are serving long sentences over 4 yearsⁱⁱⁱ.

Commission highlights that there remains widespread variation in the provision of social care services in prisons. The report also recommended that a national strategy for the provision of social care in prisons be created to meet the needs of current prisoners, as well as to prepare the system for future demand.^{vi} Public Health England have also published a toolkit for undertaking health and social care needs assessments for prisoners.^{vii}

With dementia remaining as a largely overlooked issue in prisons, and older prisoners being reluctant to draw attention to their symptoms, diagnosis can occur at a much later stage of the disease. Prison staff need to be trained to work alongside people living with dementia so that they can provide better responses to their needs.

Older prisoners account for over 50% of all prisoners that die in custody^{viii}. Prisons need to adapt to provide the necessary services to ensure prisoners have the care and support they need. The Dying Well in Custody Charter developed by NHS England and the Ambitions for Palliative and End of Life Care Partnership provides a framework of guidance for managing and supporting those involved in a prisoner's death.^{ix}

Accessibility of the prison estate

Older prisoners with a disability are not being provided with accessible accommodation, appropriate support or age specific programmes. As a result, older prisoners face increased physical isolation and marginalisation.^x

A 2018 thematic report found that many prisons had either limited availability of, or no, accessible cells for some prisoners with mobility issues.^{xi} The report recommended that where a prison is unable to provide suitable adaptations, prisoners should be transferred to establishments that can cater for their needs. The *2018 HM Prison and Probation Services, Model of Operational Delivery: Older Prisoners* report further highlights that the physical environment will continue to be a challenge as the prison estate ages.^{xii}

Resettlement of older ex-offenders

A 2013 Inquiry by the Justice Select Committee found that prisoners' needs are not being met when arrangements for resettlement are being made. Older prisoners often find it difficult to reintegrate back into society, as 46% of men in prison aged over 50 have been convicted of sex offences^{xiii} which means it may be harder for them to find approved premises due to licence conditions. Combined with the insufficient amount of placements available and the possible need for accessible

Overcoming isolation for older prisoners

Some local Age UKs are working in a number of prisons to create sociable activities to overcome isolation and improve the day to day lives of older prisoners. For example, one local Age UK has created in-house bespoke activities similar to those that would take place in a community-based centre, where prisoners can engage with prison life outside their cells.

and adapted accommodation, this can sometimes result in prisoners being released without having a fixed abode. Older prisoners also often become institutionalised whilst serving long sentences and require practical support when preparing to re-join society, particularly with regard to health and social care, technology, housing, benefits, and general wellbeing.

National strategy

There is still no specific national strategy on older prisoners. Although the 2013 Inquiry by the Justice Committee recommended that one should be developed, this recommendation was not accepted by the Government. HM Prisons and Probation Services have developed a 'Model of Operational Delivery' toolkit to meet the full needs of older prisoners, but the use and implementation of this toolkit in prisons has so far been limited.

Good practice does exist^{xiv} and is promoted by bodies such as the RECOOP, Clinks and the Older People in Prison Forum, but needs to be universal. Local voluntary sector partnerships can improve coordination between prisons and health and care services.

Public Policy Proposals

- A national strategy for older prisoners should be developed.
- Older prisoners should have the same level of basic social and healthcare support as non-prisoners, to improve their general wellbeing.
- Although the legal duty for providing social care lies with local authorities, these organisations should work with HM Prisons and Probation Services to make sure the social care needs of prisoners are met.
- Prisons should ensure that Officers and health care staff deliver high-quality end of life care for prisoners. Being in prison should not replace the right to a dignified death, to meet the needs of both the individual and their families.
- HM Prisons and Probation Service should ensure that prison staff receive training on how to care for older prisoners.
- As part of the Government's rehabilitation programme, guidance should be developed on practical matters such as pension advice, housing and accessing health and social care ahead of release.

- Prisons must ensure that they meet their Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act 2010, for example by ensuring that accommodation is suitable for prisoners with mobility or other support needs and by providing age specific regimes for prisoners.
- Voluntary sector agencies have a key role to play in improving the lives of older prisoners both inside and outside the prison. More resources should be given to the third sector to provide these and other services to older prisoners.

Want to find out more?

Age UK has policy positions on a wide range of policy issues, including money matters, health and wellbeing, care and support, housing and communities. There are also some crosscutting themes, such as age equality and human rights, age-friendly government and information and advice.

Further information

You can read our policy positions here;
www.ageuk.org.uk/our-impact/policy-research/policypositions/
Individuals can contact us for information or advice here;
www.ageuk.org.uk/informationadvice/ or call us on 0800 169 8787

ⁱ HM Prison and Probation Service, Model of Operational Delivery: Older Offenders, 2018

ⁱⁱ HM Prison and Probation Service, Model of Operational Delivery: Older Offenders, 2018

ⁱⁱⁱ HM Prison and Probation Service, Model of Operational Delivery: Older Offenders, 2018

^{iv} Ministry of Justice, Prison Population Projections 2018 to 2023, 2018.

^v Mental Health Foundation, Losing Track of Time, Dementia and the ageing prison population: treatment, challengers and examples of good practice, 2013.

^{vi} Social Care in Prisons: A Thematic Report, HM Inspectorate of Prisons and Care Quality Commission, 2018

^{vii} Health and social care needs assessment for older prisoners, 2017. Available online:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/662677/Health_and_social_care_needs_assessments_of_the_older_prison_population.pdf [08/07/2019]

^{viii} Ministry of Justice, Safety in Custody Statistics, England and Wales: Deaths in Prison Custody to December 2018 - Assaults and Self-harm to September 2018, 2019. Available online:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/774880/safety-in-custody-bulletin-2018-Q3.pdf [16/05/2019]

^{ix} , Ambitions for Palliative and End of Life Care Partnership and NHS England, Dying well in Custody Charter, Self-Assessment Tool, 2018.

^x House of Commons Justice Committee, Older Prisoners, 2014.

^{xi} HM Inspectorate of Prisons and Care Quality Commission, Social Care in Prisons: A Thematic Report, 2018.

^{xii} HM Prison and Probation Service, Model of Operational Delivery: Older Offenders, 2018.

^{xiii} 6 House of Lords written question [HL3278](#), 2017.

^{xiv} See e.g. Age UK, Supporting Older People in Prison: Ideas for Practice, 2011. Clinks, Flexibility is Vital, 2019.