AGING SERVICES & JUSTICE REFORM FOR RETURNING OLDER ADULTS

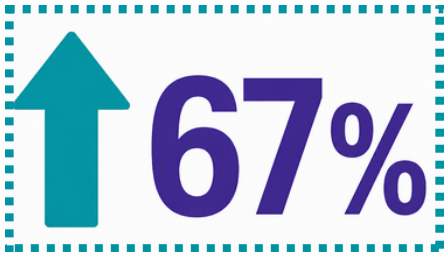
CHJ

How Aging Services Advocates Can Address Gaps and Shift Policies

THE PROBLEM

The proportion of older adults (50+) in the prison system has **surged dramatically** over the last two decades.

Older adults in prison have unique health needs, and long-term incarceration worsens their physical, behavioral, and social well-being.



Increase in the number of older adults in the prison system over the past two decades.

REENTRY CHALLENGES

Successful reintegration after incarceration is critical to promote health and reduce repeat offenses. Prison reentry is difficult to coordinate, and systems can be under-resourced compared to people's needs. Reentry requires **immediate access** to appropriate healthcare, accessible housing, and public benefits.

THE CRITICAL NEEDS PILLARS

Housing - Stable & Accessible
Finding stable housing can be difficult for aging adults returning from incarceration, as standard housing options may not accommodate their needs and age-related health conditions.

Healthcare Management
Older adults face many complex and compounded health conditions, requiring connection to health care supports, including insurance through Medicaid and Medicare.

Social Connection
After incarceration, people may find it challenging to reconnect with family and friends. Community-based programs and supportive environments provide connection and reduce loneliness.

Digital Skill Building
Because technology evolves so rapidly, and access to technology is limited in prison, older adults will benefit from practice with new types of devices and applications.

How Advocates Can Drive Change

Restore human dignity and build safer, healthier communities for everyone.

"We are now grandparents, fathers, mothers, mentors, teachers, and mature adults who are asking for a chance to reunite with our families and community as rehabilitative assets and not the socially unacceptable liabilities we once were."
- Mr. Stanley Bellamy, 2021 NY Senate Testimony (Served 37.5 years)

Be curious

Meet with reentry leaders, especially those focused on older adults, to better understand the assets and challenges people face in your community.



Engage

Use local networks to connect with state and regional aging services advocates, senior center coordinators, and local elder care networks.

Influence policy frameworks

Raise reentry challenges faced by older adults in regional and state multi-sector plans. Consider national model programs as examples.



Track & Support Legislative Models

State legislation can expand reentry options and increase support for older adults.

Refer to CHJ's Health and Justice leaders brief on older adults and reentry for more information.

Champion the 1115 Medicaid Reentry Waiver

The waiver enables states to restart Medicaid pre-release, eliminating critical gaps in care between incarceration and the community.



Bridge the Gap

Transforming system challenges into accessible pathways requires advocacy, policy innovation, and cross-sector collaboration.

The Osborne Association and The Fortune Society bridge the gap between criminal justice and senior care through specialized, age-informed support and national models.

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OCTOBER 2026
This project was funded by the RRF Foundation for Aging.
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