

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/when-aging-in-place-means-aging-in-prison>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

A [New York Times](#) editorial about the [implications of dementia behind bars](#) is the newest item among several [articles](#) and [reports](#) issued this year about the rising number of aging inmates in Americas prisons.

While this issue is not news to anyone in the corrections field [my 2010 Vera report on geriatric and medical release](#) itself follows at least three decades of alarms about the demographic boom in older prisoners states still struggle to find solutions to manage the higher costs of health care for this population.

A [recent article](#) in the *Connecticut Mirror* last month highlights some of these challenges. Following [efforts to promote seniors aging in community settings rather than in institutions](#), Connecticut officials forecast a drop in the need for nursing home beds. The right-sizing of these facilities, in turn, gives the states Department of Correction an opportunity to develop a workable pipeline to [contract with nursing homes to place ailing older parolees](#), rather than relying on ad-hoc arrangements. But as the article points out, nursing home operators may still be hesitant to accept these placements, especially if other residents and their family members raise objections, and if communities raise NIMBY issues.

It would be interesting to learn more from Connecticut's experience what nursing home operators and care providers need to handle an incoming population of elderly formerly incarcerated people with chronic health problems. As [geriatric specialists Dr. Brie Williams and Jessamyn Connell-Price](#) note:

To implement early-release policies for older men and women, the already overburdened correctional system is being asked to develop a new release process that triggers serious concerns about safety, fairness, and cost-shifting. We strongly believe that prison systems should not have to undertake this task alone. Health care professionals, legislators, and community leaders must be involved in this process. Such an interdisciplinary approach would help offset some of the burden on the criminal justice system and would help ensure that release guidelines incorporate critical concepts from each field.

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