

## **The Elderly in Prison: A Growing Concern**

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At a time when state budgets are stretched, managing healthcare costs for the elderly is becoming a fast growing concern in prisons nationwide. The National Institute of Corrections defines elderly inmates as those with a chronological age of **50 years or older**. As of 2010, 13% of inmates in our prison system were over 55 years old.<sup>1</sup> This number is predicted to increase between four and seven times in the next 20 years, becoming the **fastest growing prisoner age group**.<sup>2</sup> By 2030, it is estimated that **1/3 of the entire US prison population** – currently estimated at 1.6M - **will be 55 years or older**.<sup>2</sup>

In addition, studies have found incarceration **accelerates the aging process by an average of 11.5 years**.<sup>3</sup> Compared to younger prisoners; older inmates have higher rates of mild and serious health conditions. Due to deteriorating health, aging inmates have special needs. These needs range from medication and special diets to round the clock nursing, driving costs of managing an elderly prisoner to an estimated **\$70,000 annually** – this is *3x the cost of regular inmates*.<sup>4</sup>

These increased healthcare costs, combined with the growing number of elderly inmates, are driving key decision makers to find solutions. One way to contain these costs is to build a menu with heart healthy, cost effective options. Since good nutrition lowers the risk for many chronic diseases, including heart disease and stroke, providing the prison population with a menu that includes heart healthy items is key.<sup>5</sup>

Partnering with a food service company who is an advocate of heart healthy guidelines is one way to manage the strain on correctional budgets. These companies can assist you in identifying viable healthy alternatives for your corrections menu and assist you in building a cost effective menu. The menu should include heart healthy items such as reduced or low sodium foods, whole grains, high fiber foods, foods that limit sugar and fortified foods for increased nutrition.

Being aware of the increasing aging population in prisons is the first step of containing healthcare costs. Providing a menu to facilitate health and longevity is next. Please contact Sharone Story at [Sharone@goodsource.com](mailto:Sharone@goodsource.com) for more information on how Good Source can help you manage your costs through customized product development solutions.

1. *American Correctional Association, 2010 Directory*
2. *Financial Times, April 24 2011*
3. *Correctional Health Care Report, NIC, 2004*
4. *Pew Center of the States*
5. *Physical Activity and Good Nutrition, Atlanta, GA, 2001*