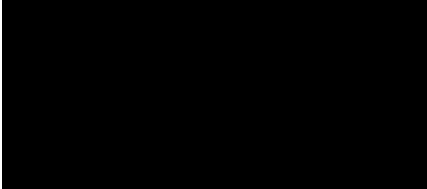



21 October 2024

C186302



Tēnā koe 

Thank you for your email of 27 August 2024 to the Department of Corrections – Ara Poutama Aotearoa, requesting information about elderly people in prison. Your request has been considered under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA).

Corrections manages people on sentences and orders at the direction of the Courts and the New Zealand Parole Board. Corrections does not determine whether a person is sentenced to prison or the length of their sentence.

As at 30 June 2024, the total prison population was 9,638 (although note that the prison population fluctuates on a daily basis and currently includes around 9,900 people). Of these 9,638 people, 6.8 percent were aged 60 and over. Around 0.3 percent were aged 80 and over. Further prison population statistics and breakdowns by a number of metrics, including age, are available on our website [here](#).

Although elderly people make up only a small proportion of the total prison population, Corrections is committed to ensuring that their sentences are managed humanely, including through the provision of appropriate health services. Corrections also has an Ageing Well Action Plan 2023-2026, which outlines the steps we are taking to improve the experience of older people who are in prison. You can view this [here](#).

When reviewing this response please also note, compassionate release can be granted to sentenced individuals by the New Zealand Parole Board in accordance with section 41 of the Parole Act 2002. Compassionate release almost always involves cases where a person is seriously ill and is unlikely to recover and would include cases where a person is elderly and has significant medical needs.

You requested:

I am wanting to know how many elderly prisoners (80+) there are in New Zealand prisons and how they are managed, if at all differently to other prisoners.

My request is as follows:

Can I please have the most up to date statistics on the number of elderly prisoners over the age of 80 in New Zealand. This should include a breakdown of where each of them are kept - in which prison and where that prison is in the country.

Please see the below table, which shows the number of prisoners over the age of 80 broken down by prison site as at 30 June 2024:

Site	Number of prisoners
Auckland South Corrections Facility	3
Hawke's Bay Regional Prison	1
Northland Region Corrections Facility	5
Rimutaka Prison	7
Rolleston Prison	3
Spring Hill Corrections Facility	1
Tongariro Prison	5
Waikeria Prison	3
Whanganui Prison	2

The location of each prison is publicly available [here](#).

- Any information around steps Corrections take to manage life in prison for individuals of this age. Do any prisons have an elderly or certain segregated wing?

When a person enters prison, Corrections' immediate priority is to ensure their mental and physical health needs are met. Health staff complete an assessment process, which includes assessing the needs of older people or those with disabilities. Where specific needs are identified, the services or equipment to meet these needs are provided and custodial staff are advised of the person's needs and the support required.

All prisons provide accommodation, toilet and washing facilities and access appropriate for older people. If a higher level of care is essential, referral processes are in place for people to transfer to the specialised High Dependency Unit at Rimutaka Prison. Alternatively, additional support services will be provided by other prisons' health centres.

The High Dependency Unit at Rimutaka Prison was designed in accordance with relevant disability sector and building code requirements to accommodate people who have high and complex needs, including those who are elderly, disabled, or have dementia. Access to

the unit is determined based on an assessment of needs, and multi-disciplinary prioritisation process.

Its features include:

- a clear line of sight throughout the unit, which utilises a bright, open plan to create a comfortable space while ensuring safety is paramount.
- widened doors, ramps, bathrooms upgraded to disability standards and all fixed beds removed and replaced with hospital type beds.
- minimised tripping hazards, handrails, and call bells placed appropriately for ease of access, particularly for people with limited mobility.
- refurbished clinical spaces to accommodate appropriate services, staff, and equipment.
- outdoor courtyard spaces that provide level surfaces and outdoor seating.

At Waikeria Prison, the Rata Unit Annex includes 20 cells, a disability shower and a concrete platform to eliminate steps and enable freedom of movement for mobility aids and wheelchairs. Two disability-friendly cells are adjacent to the disability shower. Grab rails and some bed rails have also been installed to support safe mobility. Additional equipment has been provided to assist the needs of older people in prison, such as a hospital bed, shower stools, toilet raisers, wheelchairs, and strollers/walkers.

At Rolleston Prison, which houses a high proportion of long-serving sentenced people and therefore high numbers of older men, a wing includes accommodations to assist older men in their daily activities to maintain their independence as much as possible. In this wing, cells are single bunked with a grab rail outside the door to assist people to ascend. Additional heating is provided in each cell. There are two communal showers that have ramp access. One shower has a fold down seat and handheld shower head. There is also a dedicated garden area, which the men maintain. Additional equipment is available to assist the needs of older men on this site as assessed by health staff.

Without overstepping any privacy issues - can I please have some examples of some of the sentences these prisoners are serving. What crimes were they sentenced for and how long they have spent in prison so far, how long do they have left. The more examples, and as wide ranging as possible, the better.

The following tables show the average time already served and the average imposed sentence length for the 30 people in prison aged over 80, as at 30 June 2024. The tables are split by the lead offence grouping under the Australian and New Zealand Society of Criminology (ANZSOC). Definition of these offence groupings are available on the Australian and New Zealand Standard Offence Classification (ANZSCO) website here:

<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/classifications/australian-and-new-zealand-standard-offence-classification-anzsoc/2011>

Because there is no sentence length for people in prison sentenced to Preventive Detention, the average sentence length cannot be calculated for this group. The data below includes only people on a sentence.

Average time (years) in prison by ANZSOC offence grouping as at 30 June 2024

ANZSOC	Sentenced prisoners	Preventive Detention
Homicide and related offences	0.3	N/A
Sexual assault and related offences	3.5	18.5

Average imposed sentence length (years) in prison by ANZSOC as at 30 June 2024

ANZSOC	Average imposed sentence length
Homicide And Related Offences	4.0
Sexual Assault And Related Offences	10.0

Have the numbers of elderly prisoners grown or decreased over the years? Has Corrections had to make any changes at any time about how such prisoners are managed? If so, why?

Prisoners over 80 account for approximately 0.3% of the total prison population. Please see the below chart, which shows the trends in the population of people in prison over the age of 80 between 30 June 2020 and 30 June 2024.



Are there certain jobs/tasks elderly prisoners do more in prison than others?

The employment and other day-to-day activities undertaken by elderly people in prison will vary based on the person's abilities and comfort. In 2020, Corrections' Office of the Inspectorate completed a thematic report into the lived experiences of older prisoners (aged 65 and older). The report found that among those who were interviewed, nearly half enjoyed some form of work, such as working in the prison gardens, cleaning, or helping in the prison library.

The full report is available on the Inspectorate's website, here:

<https://inspectorate.corrections.govt.nz/reports/thematic-reports/older-prisoners-the-lived-experience-of-older-people-in-new-zealand-prisons>

Corrections recognises that we have an increasingly ageing and diverse prison population. Since the publication of the Inspectorate's report we developed the Ageing Well Action Plan, which is linked at the beginning of this letter, to adapt to these changes.

Please note that this response may be published on Corrections' website. Typically, responses are published quarterly or as otherwise determined. Your personal information including name and contact details will be removed for publication.

I hope this information is helpful. I encourage you to raise any concerns about this response with Corrections. Alternatively, you are advised of your right to raise any concerns with the Office of the Ombudsman. Contact details are: Office of the Ombudsman, PO Box 10152, Wellington 6143.

Ngā mihi



Dr Juanita Ryan
Deputy Chief Executive Pae Ora