



Summary

Advisory report: An ageing prison population

Council for the Administration of Criminal Justice and Protection of Juveniles (RSJ)

Background

Dutch society is ageing. In other words: the proportion of elderly people in the Netherlands is increasing. This phenomenon is similarly perceptible in the prison system. Dutch penitentiary institutions (PIs) now house elderly prisoners who suffer from age-related problems and have associated care needs. The situation is playing out at this very moment, and is pressing in individual cases. Due to the fact that the number of older prisoners is relatively small and that any problems are currently resolved through improvisation and a great deal of commitment from staff, the situation at present is still manageable. However, the prison system is not structurally equipped or prepared for the needs of older prisoners. This situation is only set to become more critical as the number of elderly prisoners increases in the coming years, as is expected.

A policy for elderly prisoners

In this advisory report, the RSJ posits that policy should be developed and implemented for elderly prisoners and that – where necessary – regulations should be amended, and practical measures should be taken. The key points of that policy are outlined below.

Detention – appropriate and necessary

The RSJ is of the opinion that the starting point should be that elderly suspects should be prevented from ending up in detention, with consideration for the safety of society. In the case of older suspects, it should be considered whether detention is appropriate and necessary. If this is not the case, alternative settlement should be chosen in lieu of a prison sentence.

Accommodation of elderly prisoners in small-scale wards

Elderly prisoners who are able to function and support themselves in regular prison wards can be accommodated in those wards. However, the more vulnerable elderly prisoners are best off accommodated in small-scale units, where they receive more attention and where there is more monitoring for unwanted confrontations between younger and older prisoners (extortion, bullying). For that reason, small-scale units should be created within PIs where elderly prisoners are accommodated.

