

Lifer's Group Fast Facts: UNCONSCIONABLY HIGH MEDICAL COSTS BUT INADEQUATE MEDICAL OUTCOMES IN MASSACHUSETTS DEPT. OF CORRECTION

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FACTS

Total (\$212.26 million) and per prisoner (\$35,312) medical care costs for Massachusetts (MA) state prisoners again increased in FY2024 (Table). Quality matrices, however, were so poor that Wellpath, the for-profit medical provider, was fired for overwhelmingly deficient performance. Inexplicably, the Department of Correction (DOC) selected a novice, for-profit company, VitalCore, as replacement. Troublingly, 7 months in, prisoner experiences indicate that performance has continued to deteriorate rather than improve.

U.S. national annual health care spending per person rose from \$9,655 in 2016 (1) to \$12,555 in 2022 (2), a 30% increase. By contrast, DOC medical spending, \$9,964 per prisoner in 2016, ballooned 229% by 2022 (\$32,736 per prisoner) and by 254% in 2024. These exorbitant increases unacceptably dwarf both national and MA trends. The latest available data for MA annual health care spending per state resident is \$10,264 in 2022 (3), even though serving an older and therefore higher cost population (1), consisting of 23% aged 60 and older (4) as compared to only 15% of prisoners aged 60+ (5).

AVERAGE ANNUAL MEDICAL COSTS PER MA-DOC PRISONER, FY 2016-2024

	FY 2016	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024
Medical Costs (in Millions)	\$ 94.45	\$115.31	\$135.30	\$169.09	\$174.32	\$184.54	\$195.17	\$198.05	\$212.26 ^a
Custody Pop. ^b (January 1)	9,479	9,015	8,835	8,425	7,900	6,553	5,962	5,863	6,011
Avg Annual Cost/Prisoner	\$ 9,964	\$12,791	\$15,315	\$20,070	\$22,066	\$28,161	\$32,736	\$33,780	\$35,312
% Increase from									
Prior year	---	+28%	+20%	+31%	+10%	+28%	+16%	+ 3%	+ 5%
FY2016	---	+28%	+54%	+101%	+121%	+183%	+229%	+239%	+254%

^a Source: G. Haas. "MA-DOC Expenditures and Staffing Levels for FY2024" (Dec 2024).

^b Custody population January 1 of each Fiscal Year, halfway through FY (DOC Fact Cards).

DISCUSSION

It is unquestioned that the high percentage of aging MA Life Without Parole (LWOP) prisoners, long the highest in the U.S.(6), contributes to high medical costs for older prisoners who overall cost 3-5 times the average (7). The above data expose, for the first time, that the choice to privatize MA prison health care, using corporate for-profit companies, was misguided. Alarmingly and predicatably, high costs have not been accompanied by improved health care quality as profit incentives perversely minimize rather than optimize care.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Outdated mandatory MA sentencing laws have led to excessive numbers of LWOP prisoners who age in prison, disproportionately increasing incarceration and medical costs, and should be amended.
2. Use of privatized health care by for-profit, out-of-state companies inevitably increases medical costs while decreasing quality of care and must be ended. Transitioning to use of the high quality not-for-profit medical care resources that are available in MA should be an urgent priority.

[ENDNOTES and Sources listed on reverse side]

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ENDNOTES

Sources: Data for the Table and text are based on information acquired from serial public records requests from the MA-DOC, 2016-2025; published by the MA-DOC in "Fact Cards"; and from the references below. Calculations by the author.

1. Dieleman JL, Cao J, Chapin A, et al. "US Health Care Spending by Payer and Health Condition, 1996-2016" J Am. Medical Assoc., 339(9):863-884 (2020).
2. Ferris TG, Dixon J, and Blumenthal D. "Lessons from England's National Health Service", New Engl J Med, 391(19):1852-1859 (2024).
3. Center for Health Information and Analysis. "Performance of the Massachusetts Health Care System, Annual Report", (CHIA, Boston, MA 02116, March 2024).
4. MA Dept of Public Health. "Covid-19 Dashboard", accessed August 2, 2020.
5. Greineder D. "MA-DOC Criminally Sentenced Jurisdiction Population by Sentence and Age Group" (Lifer's Group Inc.** , Norfolk MA 02056, May 2024).
6. Nellis A. "No End In Sight: America's Enduring Reliance on Life Imprisonment" (The Sentencing Project, Washington, DC 2021). MA-DOC. "Fact Cards", January 1, 2024 (Dept of Correction, Milford, MA 01757).
7. ACLU. "At America's Expense: The Mass Incarceration of the Elderly" (ACLU, New York, NY, 2012). Greineder D. "The Cruel Aging of Massachusetts Life-Sentenced Prisoners: Practical, Economic and Moral Consequences" (Lifer's Group Inc.** , Norfolk, MA 02056, January 2022).



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