Pathways to Homelessness in New Mexico:

Comparing Residents and Non-Residents Experiencing Homelessness

Findings from the PICKUP Project

Prepared for the

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By Kimberly Page, PhD, MPH, MS
Christina Phillips, MA
Annemarie Madaras, MA, LPCC
University of New Mexico Health Sciences Center

Executive Summary

Between December 2023 and March 2024, the PICKUP (Providing Inclusive and Comprehensive Care for Unhoused Populations) project surveyed 511 people experiencing homelessness across 11 New Mexico counties, spanning both urban and rural communities. This report compares people whose homelessness began and continues in New Mexico ("residents") with people whose first and current episodes of homelessness both occurred outside New Mexico ("non-residents") — a group typically encountered after they have moved into New Mexico while already homeless.

Key takeaways for the Division of Housing:

- Four out of five people surveyed (80.0%, n=409) were consistent New Mexico residents; one in five (20.0%, n=102) had a consistent non-resident pattern.
- Active substance use is significantly associated with a higher probability of being a New Mexico resident. Current opiate use, current amphetamine use, injection drug use, drug use prior to homelessness, and unmet demand for substance use treatment were all significantly associated with resident status.
- A history of psychiatric hospitalization was significantly associated with a lower probability of being a New Mexico resident— i.e., more common among non-residents — suggesting a distinct behavioral health profile among people who arrive in New Mexico already homeless.
- Access to a primary care provider is significantly associated with residency status.
- Race/ethnicity is significantly associated with residency status: identifying as Hispanic/Latino is associated with a higher probability of being a New Mexico resident, while identifying as White/Caucasian is associated with a lower probability of being a New Mexico resident.
- Because 1 in 5 people experiencing homelessness in this sample do not meet a strict New Mexico-residency definition, residency-based eligibility rules for housing and homelessness programs may exclude a meaningful share of the population currently being served on the ground.

Detailed findings, methods, and full tables follow below.

1. Overview of the PICKUP Project and Study Population

The PICKUP project is an academic–community–civic partnership among the University of New Mexico Health Sciences Center (UNM HSC), community-based health service organizations, and the New Mexico Department of Health. It was designed to characterize the health, service needs, and housing trajectories of people experiencing homelessness (PEH) across New Mexico, using a framework grounded in the Gelberg–Andersen Behavioral Model for Vulnerable Populations, which organizes characteristics into four domains: predisposing factors, enabling factors, need factors, and health behavior factors.

Table 1 summarizes the core demographic composition of the sample overall and by residency status, using standard descriptive percentages (the share of each group with a given characteristic).

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Study Sample, Overall and by New Mexico Residency Status

Characteristic	Total Sample n (%) of 511	NM Residents n (%) of 409	Non-Residents n (%) of 102
Age 18–33	123 (24.1%)	98 (24%)	25 (24.5%)
Age 34–54	264 (51.7%)	210 (51.3%)	54 (52.9%)

Characteristic	Total Sample n (%) of 511	NM Residents n (%) of 409	Non-Residents n (%) of 102
Age 55+	124 (24.3%)	101 (24.7%)	23 (22.5%)
Male	344 (67.3%)	269 (65.8%)	75 (73.5%)
Female	165 (32.3%)	140 (34.2%)	25 (24.5%)
Hispanic/Latino	172 (33.7%)	158 (38.6%)	14 (13.7%)
American Indian, Alaska Native, or other Indigenous	133 (26%)	101 (24.7%)	32 (31.4%)
White/Caucasian	110 (21.5%)	77 (18.8%)	33 (32.4%)
Other racial/ethnic identity	91 (17.8%)	70 (17.1%)	21 (20.6%)
Less than high school or GED	158 (30.9%)	128 (31.3%)	30 (29.4%)
At least high school or GED	352 (68.9%)	281 (68.7%)	71 (69.6%)
Heterosexual	449 (87.9%)	357 (87.3%)	92 (90.2%)
LGBTQIA+	53 (10.4%)	47 (11.5%)	6 (5.9%)
Born in the U.S.	472 (92.4%)	387 (94.6%)	85 (83.3%)
Veteran	26 (5.1%)	23 (5.6%)	3 (2.9%)

Note: Percentages are calculated within each column (total sample, NM residents, or non-residents) and reflect the share of that group with each characteristic.

2. Methods

Study Design and Participants

The PICKUP project conducted a cross-sectional survey of people experiencing homelessness in 11 New Mexico counties, covering both urban and rural areas, between December 2023 and March 2024. Individuals aged 18 and older who met the HEARTH Act definition of homelessness — lacking a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence; at imminent risk of losing housing within 14 days; or fleeing domestic violence, dating violence, or stalking — were eligible. Participants had to speak English or Spanish and demonstrate the capacity to complete the survey; a brief screener confirmed eligibility.

Survey and Data Collection

The survey instrument was adapted from the California Statewide Study of People Experiencing Homelessness, modified with local partner input to fit New Mexico's service context, and took 30–45 minutes to administer. It covered demographics, housing trajectory, healthcare access and utilization, insurance status, physical and mental health, substance use, economic factors, social service use, violence and trauma exposure, criminal justice involvement, and food security. Trained staff from partner organizations and UNM HSC administered the survey anonymously via REDCap on tablets, at shelters, encampments, agencies, and other participant-convenient community locations. All participants received a $40 gift card, and many sites offered additional resources such as clothing, food, and hygiene supplies.

Determining New Mexico Residency Status

Residency status was derived from participants' housing history, place of birth, length of time spent in their last stable housing, and in some cases insurance status, using the following operational definitions:

A participant was classified as a New Mexico Resident if any of the following were true:

- Their most recent stable housing was in New Mexico, and they lived there for more than 6 months; OR
- They were born in New Mexico and their most recent stable housing was in New Mexico; OR
- They have health insurance and their most recent stable housing was in New Mexico.

A participant was classified as a Non-Resident if any of the following were true:

- Their most recent stable housing was not in New Mexico, and this is not their first time experiencing homelessness; OR
- Their most recent stable housing was in New Mexico, but they lived there for less than 6 months.

This is an operational classification based on housing history, nativity, insurance status, and episode duration — it is a proxy for residency, not a legal or administrative determination of New Mexico residency, and should be interpreted accordingly when considering program eligibility policy.

Statistical Approach

Table 1 reports standard descriptive percentages (the share of each residency group with a given demographic characteristic). Table 2 takes the opposite, exposure-based framing used throughout the rest of this report: for each characteristic, it reports the probability of being a consistent New Mexico resident (vs. a consistent non-resident) among people with that characteristic, along with a prevalence ratio (PR) comparing that probability to a reference category. For variables with several mutually exclusive categories (e.g., age group, education), the reference category is one of the categories shown. For binary (yes/no) characteristics (e.g., each race/ethnicity category, Born in US, most Enabling/Need/Health Behavior items), the reference category is everyone without that characteristic. This framing directly addresses the question of which characteristics are associated with New Mexico residency status.

Ethics

The study was approved by the UNM HSC Institutional Review Board with a waiver of written informed consent; participants received an information sheet and gave verbal consent. All research followed the Declaration of Helsinki, emphasized voluntary participation, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw, and used trauma-sensitive approaches, with staff trained to make appropriate referrals to healthcare, mental health, substance use treatment, and housing services.

3. Comparing New Mexico Residents and Non-Residents

Figure 1 shows the proportions of people who identify as Hispanic/Latino and residency/non-residency.

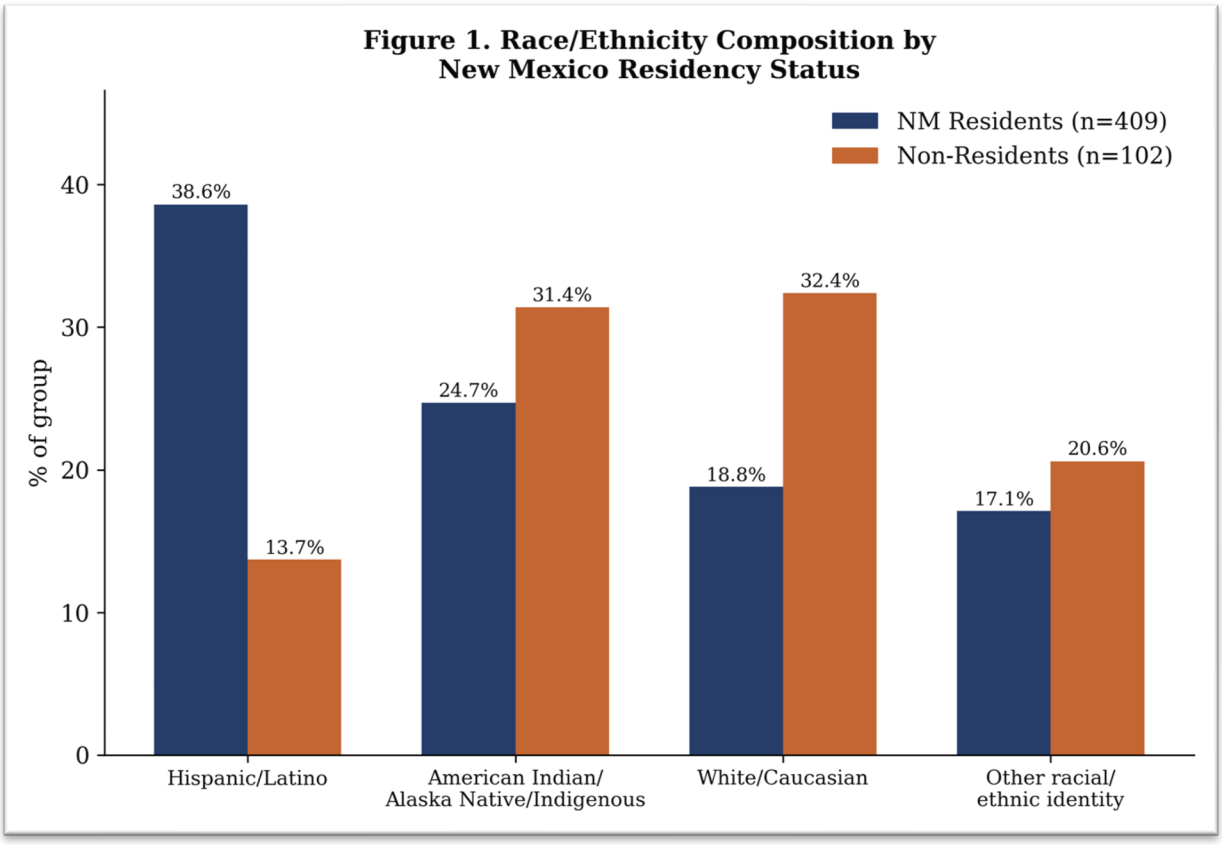


Figure 2 shows the proportion of people who reported a first or re-occurring experience of homelessness and residency classification.

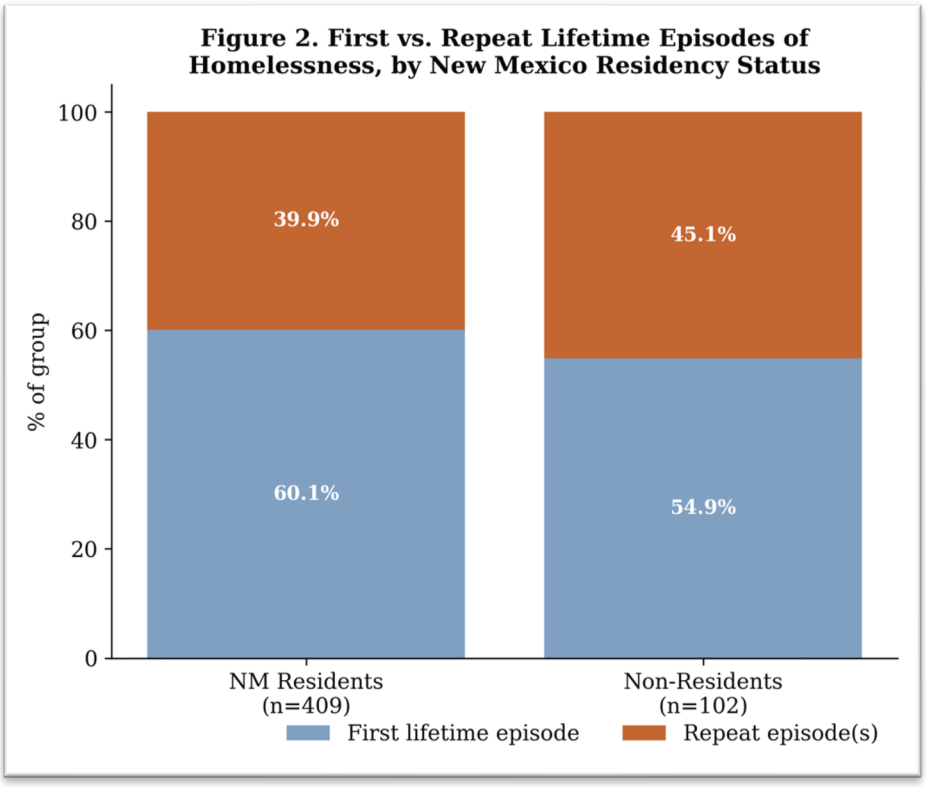


Figure 3 shows the reported duration of the CURRENT homelessness episode by residency status.

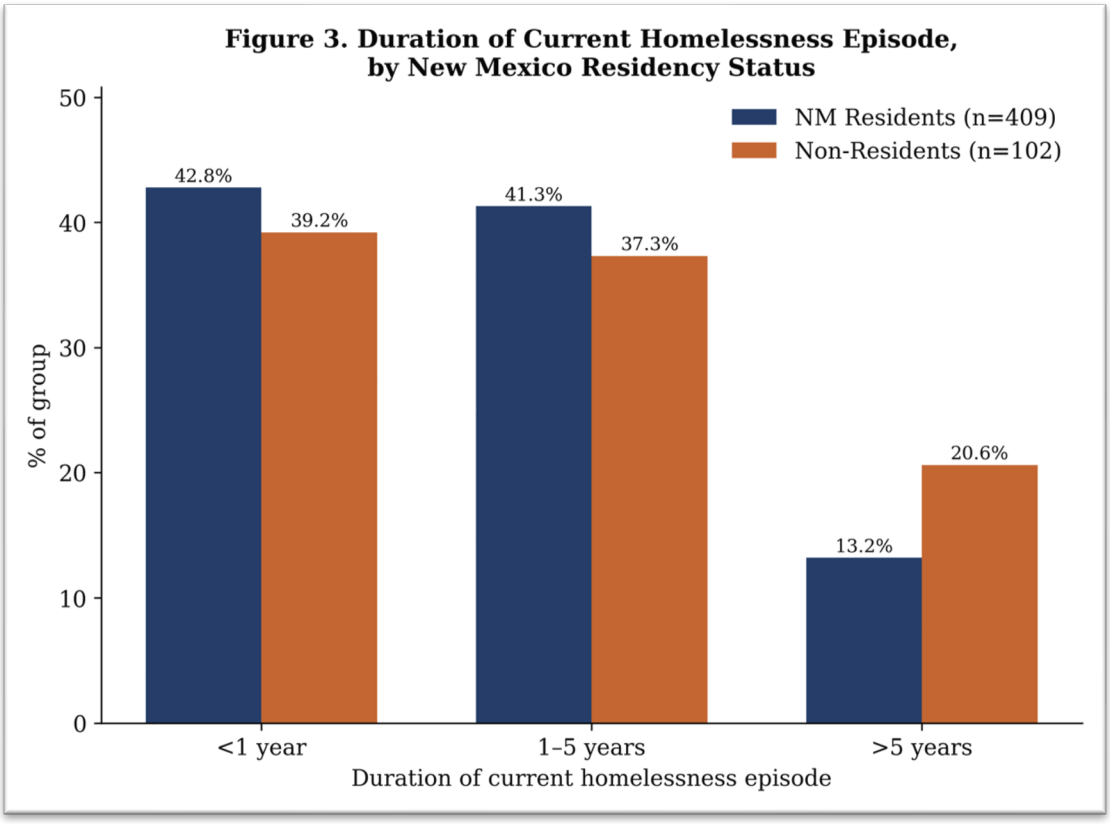


Table 2 presents the full set of characteristics from the Gelberg–Andersen Behavioral Vulnerability Model and their association with New Mexico residency status. For each characteristic, the table reports the probability of being a New Mexico resident vs. a non-resident among people with that characteristic, and a prevalence ratio (PR) comparing that probability to a reference or complement group. Rows shaded and bolded indicate a statistically meaningful association (the 95% CI for the PR does not include 1.0). Figure 4 (on page 9) shows these associations visually.

Predisposing Factors (beyond core demographics)

This domain covers background and history beyond core demographics — carceral history, prior homelessness episodes, and mental health history.

Characteristic	Total N	NM Resident, n (% (95% CI)) of exposure*	Non-Resident, n (% (95%CI)) of exposure*	PR (95% CI)†
Have you ever in your lifetime spent in a city, county jail or state, federal prison (yes vs. no)	326	268 (82.2 (77.7, 86))	58 (17.8%)	1.00 (0.91, 1.11)
In the 6 months before becoming homeless, did you speed any time in jail or prison? (yes vs. no)	122	100 (82 (74.2, 87.8))	22 (18%)	1.00 (0.90, 1.11)
Ever in Juvenile detention (yes vs. no)	85	63 (74.1 (63.9, 82.2))	22 (25.9%)	0.91 (0.79, 1.05)
Experienced violence since becoming homeless (yes vs. no)	158	121 (76.6 (69.4, 82.5))	37 (23.4%)	1.03 (0.96, 1.10)
Slept outdoors most often in the past 6 mo. (yes vs. no)	277	221 (79.8 (74.7, 84.1))	56 (20.2%)	0.97 (0.91, 1.04)

Characteristic	Total N	NM Resident, n (% (95% CI)) of exposure*	Non-Resident, n (% (95%CI)) of exposure*	PR (95% CI)†
Duration of current homelessness episode				
<1 year	215	175 (81.4 (75.7, 86))	40 (18.6%)	ref
1-5 years	207	169 (81.6 (75.8, 86.3))	38 (18.4%)	1.06 (0.96, 1.16)
>5 years	75	54 (72 (61, 80.9))	21 (28%)	0.96 (0.82, 1.12)
Has experienced more than one episode of homelessness (yes vs. no)	209	163 (78 (71.9, 83.1))	46 (22%)	0.93 (0.85, 1.03)
Have you ever been diagnosed with PTSD (yes vs. no)	199	163 (81.9 (76, 86.6))	36 (18.1%)	1.03 (0.94, 1.13)
Have you experienced anxiety in the past 30 days (yes vs. no)	276	227 (82.3 (77.3, 86.3))	49 (17.8%)	1.16 (0.95, 1.40)
Have you experienced depression in the past 30 days (yes vs. no)	227	189 (83.3 (77.9, 87.6))	38 (16.7%)	1.14 (0.998, 1.31)
Have you ever been prescribed medication for emotional or mental health problems (yes vs. no)	201	161 (80.1 (74, 85))	40 (19.9%)	0.97 (0.89, 1.07)

Enabling Factors

This domain covers resources and access that make it easier (or harder) to obtain services — insurance, a regular source of care, income, and program participation.

Characteristic	Total N	NM Resident, n (%) of exposure*	Non-Resident, n (%) of exposure*	PR (95% CI)†
Are you covered by any kind of health insurance? (yes vs. no)	**382**	**318 (83.3 (79.2, 86.7))**	**64 (16.8%)**	**1.21 (1.04, 1.41)**
Do you have a primary care provider? (Physician, nurse practitioner, or physician assistant) (yes vs. no)	**163**	**129 (79.1 (72.3, 84.7))**	**34 (20.9%)**	**1.16** CI = 1.03,1.32**)**
Currently receiving any income* (yes vs. no)	510	408 (80 (76.3, 83.2))	102 (20%)	1.07 (0.91, 1.25)
Currently engaged in social services program legal, faith community, community organization, domestic violence) (yes vs. no)	89	68 (76.4 (66.6, 84))	21 (23.6%)	0.92 (0.80, 1.06)

Need Factors

This domain covers the presence of chronic physical health conditions.

Characteristic	Total N	NM Resident, n (%) of exposure*	Non-Resident, n (%) of exposure*	PR (95% CI)†
Diabetes (yes vs. no)	69	54 (78.3 (67.2, 86.4))	15 (21.7%)	0.97 (0.84, 1.12)
Cancer (yes vs. no)	33	25 (75.8 (59, 87.2))	8 (24.2%)	0.94 (0.77, 1.14)
HIV/AIDS (yes vs. no)	5	4 (80 (37.6, 96.4))	1 (20%)	0.97 (0.63, 1.51)

Characteristic	Total N	NM Resident, n (%) of exposure*	Non-Resident, n (%) of exposure*	PR (95% CI)†
Weak kidneys/chronic kidney disease (yes vs. no)	39	30 (76.9 (61.7, 87.4))	9 (23.1%)	1.02 (0.87, 1.20)
Heart problems or stroke (yes vs. no)	85	67 (78.8 (69, 86.2))	18 (21.2%)	0.96 (0.85, 1.09)
Liver disease (HBV, HCV, cirrhosis) (yes vs. no)	**73**	**69 (94.5 (86.7, 97.9))**	**4 (5.5%)**	**1.17 (1.08, 1.27)**
Asthma, chronic bronchitis, emphysema, or COPD (yes vs. no)	116	90 (77.6 (69.2, 84.2))	26 (22.4%)	0.97 (0.87, 1.09)
High blood pressure (yes vs. no)	157	122 (77.7 (70.6, 83.5))	35 (22.3%)	0.93 (0.84, 1.03)

Health Behavior Factors

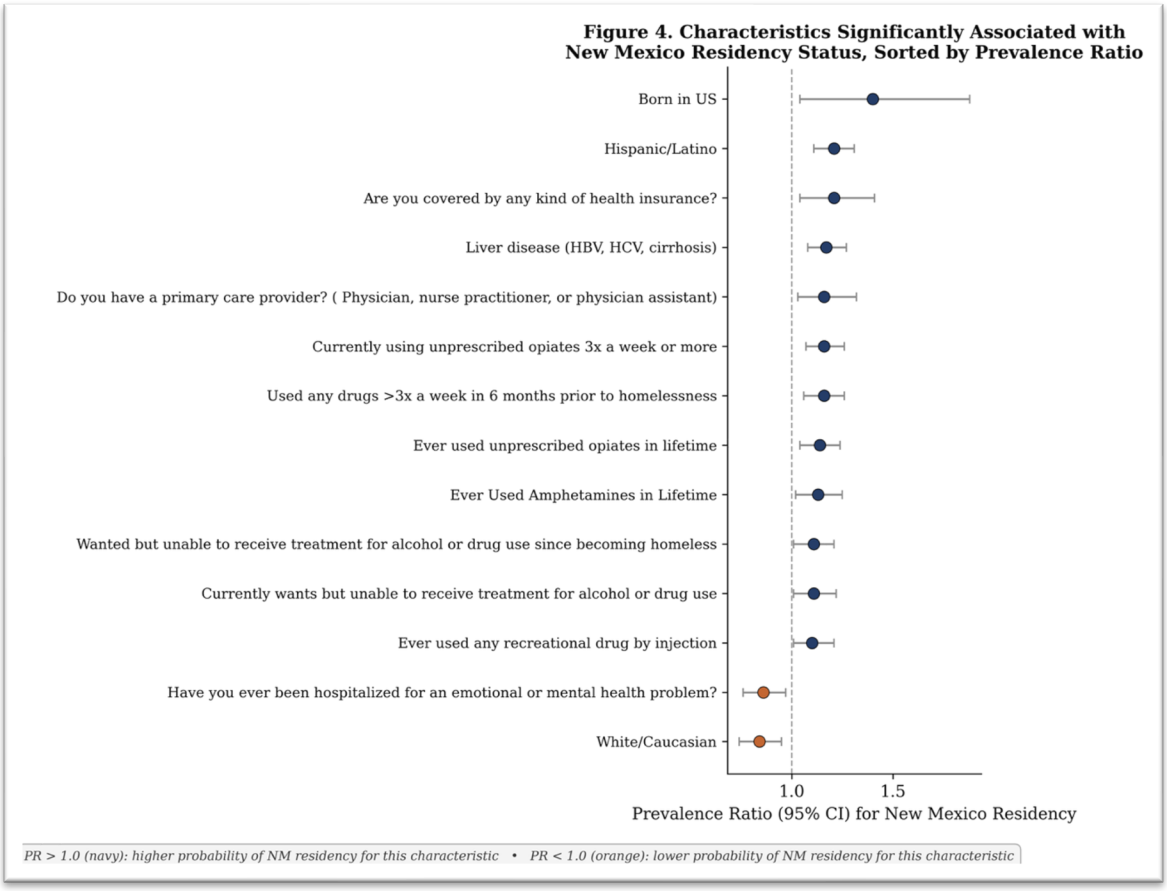
This domain covers substance use patterns, treatment history, and use of health services.

Characteristic	Total N	NM Resident, n (%) of exposure*	Non-Resident, n (%) of exposure*	PR (95% CI)†
Nicotine use: none	125	92 (73.6 (65.3, 80.5))	33 (26.4%)	ref
Nicotine use some days	76	64 (84.2 (74.4, 90.7))	12 (15.8%)	1.06 (0.94, 1.18)
Nicotine use everyday	289	237 (82 (77.2, 86))	52 (18%)	0.96 (0.85, 1.08)
Ever used cocaine in lifetime (yes vs. no)	260	210 (80.8 (75.5, 85.1))	50 (19.2%)	0.99 (0.90, 1.09)
Currently using cocaine >3x/week (yes vs. no)	14	10 (71.4 (45.4, 88.3))	4 (28.6%)	0.82 (0.57, 1.19)
Ever Used Amphetamines in Lifetime (yes vs. no)	**279**	**234 (83.9 (79.1, 87.7))**	**45 (16.1%)**	**1.13 (1.02, 1.25)**
Currently using amphetamines >3x/week (yes vs. no)	111	97 (87.4 (79.9, 92.3))	14 (12.6%)	1.10 (0.9992, 1.21)
Ever used unprescribed opiates in lifetime (yes vs. no)	**196**	**170 (86.7 (81.3, 90.8))**	**26 (13.3%)**	**1.14 (1.04, 1.24)**
Currently using unprescribed opiates 3x a week or more (yes vs. no)	**109**	**98 (89.9 (82.8, 94.3))**	**11 (10.1%)**	**1.16 (1.07, 1.26)**
Used any drugs >3x a week in 6 months prior to homelessness (yes vs. no)	**150**	**131 (87.3 (81.1, 91.7))**	**19 (12.7%)**	**1.16 (1.06, 1.26)**
Ever used any recreational drug by injection (yes vs. no)	**132**	**117 (88.6 (82.1, 93))**	**15 (11.4%)**	**1.10 (1.01, 1.21)**
Drug or alcohol use ever has led to health, social, legal, or financial problems (yes vs. no)	232	186 (80.2 (74.6, 84.8))	46 (19.8%)	1.01 (0.92, 1.11)
Ever received treatment or counseling for alcohol or drug use (yes vs. no)	207	166 (80.2 (74.2, 85.1))	41 (19.8%)	0.99 (0.91, 1.09)
Overdosed or needed emergency care or Narcan (yes vs. no)	99	81 (81.8 (73.1, 88.2))	18 (18.2%)	1.02 (0.91, 1.13)
Has a physical or mental condition, impairment, or disability that affects your daily activities (yes vs. no)	224	178 (79.5 (73.7, 84.2))	46 (20.5%)	0.97 (0.89, 1.07)
Have you ever been hospitalized for an emotional or mental health problem? (yes vs. no)	**127**	**94 (74 (65.8, 80.9))**	**33 (26%)**	**0.86 (0.76, 0.97)**

Characteristic	Total N	NM Resident, n (%) of exposure*	Non-Resident, n (%) of exposure*	PR (95% CI)†
Has used the ED since becoming homeless	47	41 (87 (74.8, 94))	6 (12.8%)	1.09 (0.96, 1.24)
Since being homeless, has there been a time where you needed healthcare but were unable to? (yes vs. no)	22	15 (68.2 (47.3, 83.6))	7 (31.8%)	0.83 (0.60, 1.16)
Wanted but unable to receive treatment for alcohol or drug use since becoming homeless (yes vs. no)	**122**	**105 (86.1 (78.8, 91.1))**	**17 (13.9%)**	**1.11 (1.01, 1.21)**
Currently wants but unable to receive treatment for alcohol or drug use (yes vs. no)	**87**	**75 (86.2 (77.4, 91.9))**	**12 (13.8%)**	**1.11 (1.01, 1.22)**
Currently receiving treatment or counseling for alcohol or drug use (yes vs. no)	24	21 (87.5 (69,95.7))	3 (12.5%)	1.06 (0.89, 1.25)

**Percentage of people with this characteristic who fall into the NM Resident / Non-Resident group (i.e., probability of the residency outcome given the exposure), not the percentage of each residency group with this characteristic (see Table 1 for that framing on demographics). †PR = prevalence ratio comparing the probability of NM residency for this category to its reference category. For variables with several mutually exclusive categories (e.g., age group, education, nicotine use), the reference category is shown as "ref" in its own row. For single yes/no characteristics shown as one row (e.g., each race/ethnicity category, Born in US, Veteran, most Enabling/Need/Health Behavior items), the reference category is simply everyone without that characteristic (e.g., White/Caucasian vs. not White/Caucasian) and is not printed as a separate row. Bolded/shaded rows have 95% confidence intervals that exclude 1.0.*

Figure 4 shows Characteristics statistically significantly associated with New Mexico residency status sorted by prevalence ratio demonstrating higher and lower probability of being a NM resident.



4. Key Findings and Implications for Policy and Practice

Statistically Meaningful Associations

- **Hispanic/Latino:** 38.6% were New Mexico residents among people with this characteristic, vs. 8.1% non-residents. The PR 1.21— shows that Hispanic/Latino ethnicity was associated with a 21% higher probability of being a New Mexico resident.
- **White/Caucasian:** 18.8% were New Mexico residents among people with this characteristic, vs. 30% non-residents. The PR in this case = 0.84 shows a 16% lower probability of those who identify as White/Caucasian are a New Mexico resident.
- **Born in US:** 82% of people who were born in the US were New Mexico residents compared to 18% non-residents. The PR shows that there is a 40% higher probability of residents being born in the US compared to those classified as non-New Mexico resident.
- **Do you have a primary care provider? (Physician, nurse practitioner, or physician assistant):** 79.1% of those who reported having a primary care provider were New Mexico residents vs. 20.9% among non-residents. The PR shows us that there is a 16% higher probability of people who have a primary care provider being a New Mexico resident.
- **Liver disease (HBV, HCV, cirrhosis):** 94.5% of those who said they had liver disease were New Mexico residents compared to 5.5% non-residents, showing that people with liver disease had a 17% higher probability of being a New Mexico resident.
- **Ever Used Amphetamines in Lifetime:** 83.9 % of those who reported ever using amphetamine substances were New Mexico residents vs. 16.1% non-residents. The PR shows that this is a 13% higher probability of being in this group and being a New Mexico resident.
- **Ever used unprescribed opiates in lifetime:** 86.7% of people who reported ever using unprescribed opiates were New Mexico residents vs. 13.3% non-residents. Thus people who reported this behavior had a 14% higher probability of being a New Mexico resident.
- **Currently using unprescribed opiates 3x a week or more:** 89.9% of people who endorsed currently using unprescribed opiates were New Mexico residents, whereas 10.1% among those who were classified as non-residents. This corresponds to a 16% higher probability that current illicit opioid use was associated with being a New Mexico resident.
- **Used any drugs >3x a week in 6 months prior to homelessness:** 87.3% of people who endorsed drug use before becoming homeless were classified as New Mexico residents. This compares to 12.7% among non-residents. There is a 16% higher probability of being a resident given regular drug use prior to homelessness. This is similar to the excess probability seen with other drugs and being a resident.
- **Ever used any recreational drug by injection:** 88.6% of people who had a history of any injection drug use were New Mexico residents vs. 11.4% non-residents. The excess risk, or probability – of being a New Mexico resident given injection drug use history was 10% (PR 1.10 (1.01, 1.21)).
- **Have you ever been hospitalized for an emotional or mental health problem?:** 74% were New Mexico residents among people with this characteristic, vs. 26% non-residents. The PR = 0.86 shows a 14% lower probability of NM residency among people with a psychiatric hospitalization history.
- **Wanted but unable to receive treatment for alcohol or drug use since becoming homeless:** 86.1% of people who reported this barrier since becoming homeless were New Mexico residents vs. 13.9% non-residents. This

unmet treatment need was associated with an 11% higher (PR 1.11 (1.01, 1.21)) — associated with a higher probability of being a New Mexico resident.

- **Currently wants but is unable to receive treatment for alcohol or drug use:** 86.2% of those who endorsed this need were New Mexico residents vs. 13.8% non-residents, showing an 11% higher probability of people endorsing this need being a New Mexico resident.

Implications for the Division of Housing

- **Substance use treatment capacity:** active current opiate use, amphetamine use, injection drug use, drug use prior to homelessness, and unmet demand for substance use treatment are all significantly associated with a higher probability of being a New Mexico resident. This points to a need for expanded, low-barrier substance use treatment capacity for the resident homeless population, and suggests unmet treatment access may be a driver of residents' homelessness trajectories.
- **Behavioral health pathways for non-residents:** a history of psychiatric hospitalization is significantly associated with a lower probability of being a New Mexico — i.e., more common among non-residents — despite their lower rates of active substance use. Outreach and enrollment assistance (e.g., Medicaid, primary care linkage) tailored to newly arrived or transient individuals could help close gaps in insurance and primary care access, both of which are also significantly associated with residency status. And the proportion of people who had this history was still high among New Mexico residents, so this still needs further assessment.
- **Culturally responsive services:** identifying as Hispanic/Latino is significantly associated with a higher probability of being a New Mexico resident, while identifying as White/Caucasian is significantly associated with a lower probability. Service design, language access, and outreach materials should reflect these differing compositions.
- **Eligibility and funding formulas:** 1 in 5 people experiencing homelessness in this sample would not meet a strict definition of New Mexico residency. Programs that condition eligibility on residency history may be serving — or excluding — a substantial share of the population encountered by NM providers day to day; the Division may want to review how residency is defined and verified across housing and homelessness programs.

These findings describe associations in a cross-sectional sample and do not establish causal pathways into or out of homelessness. They are intended to inform service planning and further investigation, not to stand alone as a basis for eligibility determinations for individuals.