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## Albuquerque's Homeless Worse Off

**By Juan Carlos Rodriguez***Journal Staff Writer*

Albuquerque's most vulnerable homeless people are worse off than those in many other cities, Mayor Richard Berry said Wednesday.

About 200 volunteers and city employees, including Berry, spent much of the week before last out in the cold weather, asking homeless people about their health and other aspects of their lives in order to rank them for a free housing program the city hopes to start in the next few months.

Berry said 475 homeless people agreed to do the survey, out of 700 who were asked. Organizers ranked the respondents and determined the 75 most vulnerable homeless people in Albuquerque. Their average age is 53, and their average time being homeless is 20 years, Berry said.

"On average, the percentage of the homeless population that meets the vulnerability index, nationwide, is 43 percent. Albuquerque is higher at 53 percent," Berry said.

The survey was conducted by the 100,000 Homes campaign, a project of the housing advocacy nonprofit Common Ground. The comparison is based on surveys the organization has done in other cities.

The index is a ranking of several questions involving the health of survey participants, including whether the person has liver disease, HIV/AIDS or any injuries related to cold weather; is over 60 years old, or has visited the emergency room three or more times in the last year.

Berry said the 75 most vulnerable in Albuquerque, based on the information they provided on the surveys, cost the city \$852,000 for inpatient hospitalizations and \$141,000 for emergency room visits.

He said the estimated cost of housing Albuquerque's 75 most vulnerable homeless is \$500,000 per year, less than other options, including shelters, jails, prisons and hospitals.

The purpose of identifying the most vulnerable homeless people is so the city can begin to offer them free housing. The city will use federal and state money to pay for apartments.

Berry said all those who are offered a place to live will have to pass a background check to make sure they won't be a danger to those living near them. He said he hopes the program is under way in a few months.

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