



Winnebago County Mental Health Advisory Committee

Committee Members:

Angie Goral

Winnebago County
Board Member

Philip Eaton

President/CEO,
Rosecrance Health
Network

Carol Klint, RN, M.S.

Behavior Health
Advocate

Richard Kunnert M.S. ED.

Representative, Mental
Health Association of
the Rock River Valley

Charles Smith, M.D.

Founder, Group Hope

Matthew Toohey

Executive Director,
Access Services of
Northern Illinois

Sandra Martell, RN, DNP

Winnebago County
Health Department
Administrator
(Ex-Officio)

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For Immediate Release

Funding for crisis services, more care for children needed to improve mental health of Winnebago County residents

ROCKFORD – After surveying the community, the Winnebago County Mental Health Advisory Committee has set two top priorities for our community: increasing inpatient and outpatient mental health services for children and securing funding for crisis response services.

The committee, tasked with advising Winnebago County leaders on how to address service gaps for needed mental health services, spearheaded a survey project that took place during the summer and fall of 2015. The survey addressed a variety of topics, including how easy/difficult it is to access care and how prevalent mental health issues are within the community.

Mental health in this case is a broad category that represents mental health and substance abuse treatment, as well as services for people with developmental disabilities. Winnebago County is the only urban area in Illinois that has no broad-based local funding support for mental health services. That lack of local dollars has been magnified in recent years as agencies have wrestled with state budget cuts and other grant reductions.

Surveys were distributed to providers, referral sources, and community members who have direct or indirect experiences with mental health services. In total, 2,150 surveys were returned; the majority of those were completed by community members.

Once the surveys were collected and the data downloaded, the results were validated by other sources, including subject matter experts, people who use or whose family members use mental health services, and national benchmarking. The next steps included a review of the results by committee members and preparation of a final report.

That report was presented to Winnebago County Board Chairman Scott Christiansen in July. Christiansen agreed that the two most immediate community-driven strategies need to be: (1) Fund crisis response services at Rosecrance through hospital trust funds; and (2) Establish pediatric mental health services at Mercy Health System's Rockford Memorial Hospital on Rockton Avenue.



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The most common community issues identified by survey participants involved crisis response services, availability for mental health treatment for children, a lack of support for people with intellectual/developmental disabilities, the need for improved client identification and outreach, and better case management.

“Improving our mental health system is essential to make us a vital community,” Christiansen said. “We need to work together – residents, local officials and the great service providers we have – to become a model of community resiliency for the rest of the country.”

The survey and its findings are only the beginning of this process. Small groups of Mental Health Advisory Committee members will now work to help educate the community and local organizations about the service gaps and gather support to help improve the system.

“We are energetic as a committee to move forward,” said Angie Goral, a Winnebago County Board member and the committee’s chairman. “We need individuals to help us with the implementation and coordination of this plan. If you are interested in some of our committee members coming to meet with your group, I encourage you to reach out. “Mental health is in our hands, it’s up to all of us.”

Please call 815-720-4213 for more information. You can also connect with the committee via Facebook (visit [facebook.com](https://www.facebook.com) and search “Winnebago County Mental Health Advisory Committee”) and Twitter (twitter.com/WinnCo_MHAC).

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