

Advocates stress action in mental health plan



1 HOUR AGO • EDITH BRADY-LUNNY EBLUNNY@PANTAGRAPH.COM

BLOOMINGTON — The Mental Health Action Plan was developed to improve services for mentally ill residents of McLean County and not to be another report sitting on a shelf, the authors of the report told an audience Monday.

McLean County Board members John McIntyre and Susan Schafer offered an update on the county's mental health initiative at a forum at the Illinois State University Alumni Center in Normal. It was sponsored by the Women to Women Giving Circle of the Illinois Prairie Community

Foundation.

The ongoing need to house mentally ill inmates in the booking area of the McLean County jail was the focus of a 2013 study by the National Institute of Corrections. Former Sheriff Mike Emery requested the federal review.

The NIC recommended an expansion of jail facilities to better address the growing population of seriously mentally ill inmates. Community mental health services were found to be lacking and a contributor to a failed behavioral health network.

"You can't talk about mental health without talking about the jail. The issue at the jail is a community issue," Schafer told an audience of about 100 at Monday's event.

County Board Chairman Matt Sorensen named two advisory panels of public and private representatives to examine the needs and best practices for services. The action plan released in June is a road map for tackling several major deficiencies, among them housing, crisis services, medication, juvenile services and a lack of agency collaboration.

The County Board has been working with the Bloomington and Normal city councils to find new revenue sources for mental health. Both municipalities recently passed a 1-cent-per-dollar sales tax increase that will generate about \$4 million annually for mental health.

According to Schafer, \$1 million of the sales tax revenue will be allocated for debt service on an expansion of the jail and another \$1 million to help pay for jail operations related to a new mental health unit. The remaining \$2 million would go toward improvements in the community, including case management services and a program to better inform first responders of the mental health issues of those they meet on duty, said Schafer.

McIntyre listed a new crisis stabilization center opened by Chestnut Health Systems and the community crisis planning committee as major milestones in improving the mental health system.

The crisis center opened in April and provides 14 beds for short-term crisis care. The crisis committee includes local providers who have developed better ways to help mentally ill residents.