

Tri-City Mental Health Commission  
League of Women Voters of Mt. Baldy Area  
Observer Report by Betsey Coffman  
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Tri-City Mental Health Center serves low-income residents in the southern California cities of Pomona, Claremont and La Verne. It was established in 1960, a period of reform in public mental health care in California. Legislation was passed which enabled counties and cities to establish mental health agencies with state financial assistance and guidance. Most counties took advantage of this program, but only two “cities” signed up to participate while it was possible -- Berkeley in the north and the Joint Powers Agency of Pomona, Claremont, and La Verne in the south, which was formed to create a mental health program for residents of those three cities.

A Governing Board, composed of representatives appointed by the three cities, oversees the overall functioning of Tri-City Mental Health Center. The Tri-City Mental Health Commission is composed of residents who have demonstrated interest in public mental-health services and apply to become Commission members. They are appointed by the Governing Board. Their work consists of reviewing the mental health needs and services of the three cities, offering advice to the Board and Executive Director, reviewing the agency’s procedures, and reviewing and advising on the appointment of the agency’s Executive Director.

The Commission meets monthly (except in the month of August) at the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) Administration Building at 2001 North Garey Avenue in Pomona – across the street from the older Tri-City office building. Members include Toni Watson, Chair; Anne Henderson, Vice-Chair; Rubio R. Gonzalez, Governing Board Representative; and Commissioners Arny Bloom, Cheryl Berezny, Ethel Gardner, Jeanette Heitmann, Donald Perez, Joan M. Reyes, Daniel Rodriguez, Wray Rybeck, Twila L. Stephens, Alfonso “Al” Villanueva, David J. Weldon, and Davetta Williams.

The number of Commissioners is required to be 10 at a minimum and 15 at a maximum. During the earlier months of 2018 that number was nine, but this was remedied in June 2018 with the “swearing in” of six new appointees – Commissioners Gardner, Heitmann, Reyes, Rodriguez, Ryback, and Weldon.

Commission meetings sometimes include presentations by Tri-City staff about programs in which they work. Presentations during the past year have been about “Older Adult Services”, “School Partnership Teams” (which facilitate mental health services for school referrals), and the Masters’ Level Student Intern Program at Tri-City. A frequent topic of discussion is the problem of homelessness – which occurs frequently for persons with mental health difficulties. Often finding a place to live is an important step in the recovery of mental health. In April 2019, the Commission presided at a public meeting at which it heard and recommended Governing Board approval of the annual update plans for Tri -City’s Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) programs. These programs are beneficiaries of a tax levied on the wealthiest California residents that is specifically designated for mental health services. In May of this year four Commission members who had participated in an evaluation of some Tri-City programs presented their findings to a joint meeting of the Governing Board and the Mental Health Commission. They identified Tri-City’s top need as recruitment of psychiatrists and reported as “very successful” the Therapeutic Community Garden program.

The Tri-City Commission appears to this observer to be functioning well. Their service is an asset to the Tri-City Mental Health Center and they are able to spread the word that mental health assistance is available for residents in Pomona, Claremont, and La Verne.