

Panel tackles women's health issues

By Alea Williams | Staff Reporter On February 6, 2019

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The Leon County/Tallahassee Committee for Women and Girls Health and Development Committee during their meeting on Tuesday.
Photo Submitted by Alea Williams.

The Tallahassee-Leon County Commission on the Status of Women and Girls is determined to improve the quality of life in the community.

Members of the commission's Committee on Health and Development said Tuesday they intend to focus on maternal health and sexually transmitted diseases this year. Jeanne O'kon, a psychologist, is chairwoman of the committee.

Dr. Joedrecka S. Brown- Speights, a FAMU alumna, believes that the most important issues that face women and girls in Tallahassee are poverty, discrimination, equal pay and health care disparities.

"For younger girls and women, I think sexual transmitted diseases is a big issue. We're seeing more cases of chlamydia in women of color and that goes into the health disparities that were seeing," said Brown Speights, a family physician at FSU College of Medicine, said.

Leon County is the highest-rated county in Florida for chlamydia on a per-capita basis. From 2014 to 2018, there was a 150 percent increase in cases of syphilis in Leon County, according to the health department.

"The local government can play a role in that, because a lot of these things are system based issues that can help improve living conditions for women and girls, improving access to quality health care, access to good nutrition and good paying

jobs ... and quality education for everyone that lives in the community,” Brown-Speights said.

The Oasis Center for Women and Girls staffs the committee. The executive director, Michelle Gomez, said, “The pay rate, women on average in Tallahassee make 84 cents to the dollar which is five cents less than what it was five years ago. So we’re moving in the wrong direction and the commission is focused on keeping those issues top of mind and recommending solutions. “

The committee members believe they can influence local government.

“We do influence public policy and we do consult with the city and county as an advisory group and encourage them to pass certain policies, practices and budget decisions that do affect women and girls favorably,” O’Kon said.

The commission is a non-profit and its members are all volunteers. “All 21 commissioners are volunteers so we are doing this out of the kindness of our hearts because we are committed to helping women and girls in our community,” O’Kon said.