

Memorandum

Date: OCT 18 2013

From: Acting Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Operations and Management (10N)

Subj: Employees Encouraged to Assist with SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access and Recovery (SOAR)

To: Network Directors (10N1 – 23)

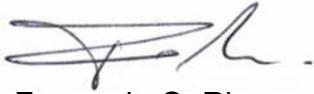
Chief Medical Officers (10N1 – 23)

Network Homeless Coordinators (10N1 – 23)

1. The goal to end homelessness among Veterans by the end of 2015 remains a top priority for VA. To get there, communities are highly encouraged to explore all available resources from Federal, State, and local government, as well as from the private sector. Specifically, existing resources such as Social Security Income/Social Security Disability Income (SSI/SSDI) also have the ability to substantially serve the at-risk and homeless Veteran population by providing them with consistent income that often promotes permanent housing stability, self-sustainment, functional independence, and ongoing care for at-risk and homeless Veterans' disabling conditions.
2. Since the SSI/SSDI application process is cumbersome, VHA personnel in all homeless programs are encouraged to be trained in and utilize the SOAR program. SOAR is a Federal interagency project funded in part by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). It is designed to increase access to SSI/SSDI benefits for those who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness and have a mental illness and/or a substance use disorder. SOAR is proven to increase the approval rate for those applying as well as expedite the time it takes for individuals to obtain access to such financial benefits.
3. Pursuant to guidance previously provided VA employees are not authorized to sign any forms on behalf of the Veteran or their family member(s), nor are they authorized to serve as their Authorized Representative (SSA Form 1696) or Representative Payee (SSA Form 11).
4. This memo serves to clarify VHA homeless staff's role in assisting homeless and at-risk Veterans. In accordance with the Federal interagency SOAR program, VHA homeless staff that are involved in managing homeless or at-risk Veterans' medical condition are encouraged to assist Veterans and the local SOAR community provider with gathering the required information, completing the application, and submitting the required documentation to the Social Security Administration. Additionally, they are allowed to disclose VA records if the Veteran signs the appropriate release (SSA Form 827) as well as complete the Disability Report-Adult (SSA Form 3368) to be listed as a contact that knows the Veteran.

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5. This assistance ensures timely access to SSI/SSDI benefits which improves and supports the Veteran's recovery oriented clinical treatment goals of permanent housing stability, self-sustainment, functional independence, and reinforces and promotes ongoing care for the Veteran's disabling condition. Assisting homeless and at-risk Veterans with the SSI/SSDI application process is consistent with VA's adoption of the Housing First and Recovery Models, and is intended to promote, preserve, and restore the health of the Veteran. Furthermore, assisting Veterans to complete SSI/SSDI applications encourages the efficient application and processing of SSI/SSDI applications by ensuring that the Veteran's application is accurate and complete. This assistance can help eliminate unnecessary claims appeals and improves overall efficiency and effectiveness within the Social Security Administration.
6. Beyond assisting with the SOAR process, if the Veteran is not yet receiving VA benefits secondary to a mental health condition, VHA homeless staff are also encouraged to assist the Veteran in filing any appropriate mental health disability claim with the Veterans Benefits Administration and are encouraged to ensure that the Veteran attends his/her scheduled mental health compensation and pension evaluation.
7. For questions on this memorandum, please contact Dr. Keith Harris, Director of Clinical Operations, VHA Homeless Programs Office, via email at Keith.Harris@va.gov.
8. Thank you for your continued dedication in preventing and ending homelessness among Veterans and their families by the end of 2015.



Fernando O. Rivera, FACHE