

SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery (SOAR) and Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF)

Connecting Veterans with Social Security Administration (SSA) disability benefits is a critical step to increasing income stability for Veterans and their families, particularly for those Veterans whose work activity is limited by disabling conditions. SOAR directly contributes to SSVF's goal of promoting housing stability among very low-income Veteran families by increasing access to critical income supports.

Social Security Basics

SSA administers two disability programs that can provide assistance to Veterans and their families.

- Supplemental Security Income (SSI), a needs-based program, for individuals who are blind, disabled, or elderly, with low income/resources
- Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) for blind or disabled individuals who are insured through employee and employer contributions to the Social Security Trust Fund
- In most states Medicaid and/or Medicare health insurance accompany these benefits for those eligible

What is the SOAR model?

SOAR is a national program designed to increase access to Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) for eligible adults who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness and have a mental illness, medical impairment, and/or a co-occurring substance use disorder.

- Since SOAR began in 2006, over 27,226 people who were experiencing or at risk of homelessness were approved on their initial application using the SOAR model
- In 2015, SOAR-trained providers across the country maintained an average approval rate of 65% for initial applications in an average of 81 days from application date to decision

Where does SOAR fit into SSVF services?

The SSVF program requires grantees to assist participant households to access both public benefits and mainstream community resources that are available from federal, state, local, or tribal agencies, or any eligible entity, in their communities.

- The program guide states: *"For applications to the Social Security Administration, participants should be assisted by staff who are trained in the SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery Program (SOAR) available to direct human service workers"*¹
- The SSVF notice of funding availability (NOFA) includes the expectation that grantees will use the SOAR program through community linkages or staff training

¹Department of Veterans Affairs Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) Program Guide:

http://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/ssvf/docs/SSVF_Program_Guide_March_2015_Edition.pdf

Current SSVF Grantee Involvement in SOAR

SSVF grantees nationwide are already using SOAR to end Veteran homelessness in their communities!

- Currently, over half of the 380 grantees report using the SOAR model through community referrals and providing the service in-house with both SSVF and non-SSVF staff, with 14% of grantees surveyed dedicating an SSVF funded position for a SOAR benefits specialist
- 40% of grantees have SOAR-trained staff, with an average of 2.27 trained staff per grantee
- Grantees using SOAR reported that the application took an average of 27 days to complete

91% of SSVF grantees who responded to a survey in September 2015 said that SOAR would be a useful tool in helping Veterans access benefits and income.

Steps to Getting Started with SOAR!

1. Gather more information:

- a. Issue Brief: *Connecting Veterans to Social Security Disability Benefits: A Key Component in Ending Veteran Homelessness*
- b. Reach out to the SOAR TA Center with questions and for help in planning your SOAR initiative

2. Explore options for SOAR training with your staff

- a. Free online SOAR training: <http://soarworks.prainc.com>

3. Commit to integrating a SOAR-trained benefits specialist into your SSVF staff

- a. Utilize the SOAR TA Center's sample [SOAR Job Description](#)
- b. Work with your SSVF Regional Coordinator to integrate SOAR into your scope of work

Resources:

"Connecting Veterans to Social Security Disability Benefits: A Key Component in Ending Veteran Homelessness." The SAMHSA SOAR TA Center. September 2014.

<http://soarworks.prainc.com/sites/soarworks.prainc.com/files/Veterans508.pdf>

Contact the SAMHSA SOAR Technical Assistance Center at: SOAR@prainc.com or 518-439-7415.