

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

Accessing Social Security Administration (SSA) disability benefits is a critical step toward income stability for Veterans whose work activity is limited by disabling conditions or who have children with disabilities. 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 adults or children who are blind, disabled, or elderly, with low income/resources
- Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) for blind or disabled adults 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 or children 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, 56,481 people who were experiencing or at risk of homelessness were approved on their initial application using the SOAR model.
- In 2023, SOAR-trained providers across the country maintained an average approval rate of 66% for initial applications in an average of 167 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 SSVF notice of funding availability (NOFA) states: "Grantees are expected to access the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery (SOAR) program directly by training staff and providing the service or subcontracting services to an organization to provide SOAR services."ⁱ
- The *SSVF and SOAR Integration Toolkit* provides detailed guidance from the VA about how to incorporate the SOAR model into services for Veterans and their families.ⁱⁱ

SSVF Grantee Involvement in SOAR

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

- In the June 2019 VA, HUD, and United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) Community Planning Survey, 202 out of 366 respondents (55 percent) indicated that they are using the SOAR model in their HUD Continuum of Care (CoC) Coordinated Entry System, which includes SSVF grantees, to help Veterans with disabling conditions access SSI/SSDI.
- An additional 77 respondents (21 percent) are in the process of implementing the SOAR model to serve Veterans.
- In previous surveys, SSVF grantees reported spending an average of 17.3 hours on each SSI/SSDI application using the SOAR model.

Steps to Getting Started with SOAR!

1. Review the *SSVF SOAR Integration Toolkit* with your community partners
 - a. The toolkit contains extensive resources on how to integrate the SOAR model into your SSVF grant activities and your community planning.
2. Gather more information:
 - a. Issue Brief: *Connecting Veterans to Social Security Disability Benefits: A Key Component in Ending Veteran Homelessness*ⁱⁱⁱ
 - b. Reach out to the SAMHSA SOAR TA Center with questions and for help in planning your SOAR initiative
3. Explore options for SOAR training with your staff
 - a. Free, self-paced *SOAR Online Courses*^{iv}
4. Commit to integrating a SOAR-trained benefits specialist into your SSVF staff
 - a. Utilize the SOAR TA Center's sample SOAR Job Description^v
 - b. Work with your SSVF Regional Coordinator to integrate SOAR into your scope of work

For more information, contact the SAMHSA SOAR Technical Assistance Center at SOAR@prainc.com or 518-439-7415 x2.

ⁱ Department of Veterans Affairs Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) Notice of Funding Availability, October 27, 2022: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2022-10-27/pdf/2022-23448.pdf>

ⁱⁱ "SSVF SOAR Integration Toolkit." Department of Veterans Affairs. August 2019.

https://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/ssvf/docs/SOAR_SSVF_Toolkit.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ "Connecting Veterans to Social Security Disability Benefits: A Key Component in Ending Veteran Homelessness." The SAMHSA SOAR TA Center. August 2017. <https://soarworks.samhsa.gov/article/veterans-social-security-disability>

^{iv} SOAR Online Courses: <https://soarworks.samhsa.gov/online-courses>

^v Sample SOAR Job Description: <https://soarworks.samhsa.gov/article/sample-soar-job-description>