

2023 SAMHSA SOAR DECEMBER E-NEWS



National Homeless Persons' Memorial Day

Each year, the longest night of the year (typically December 21) marks Homeless Persons' Memorial Day. On this day, we remember and mourn those who have died while experiencing homelessness.

For those who are living unsheltered, the Winter Solstice embodies a particularly dangerous time of year when the nights are long, the weather can be deadly, and overdose risk rises. SAMHSA's Homeless and Housing Resource Center provides crucial education about support for people who use drugs which may reduce harm and prevent injury and death. Additionally, our partners at National Healthcare for the Homeless Council have created resources for those living outside during cold weather events and for the providers who respond.

Here at the SAMHSA SOAR TA Center, Homeless Persons' Memorial Day also serves as a solemn reminder of the impact of homelessness on a person's health. Providing assistance with accessing SSI/SSDI income using the SOAR model can be a life-saving measure. If your community is not yet providing SOAR assistance, our Applicant Self-Help Guide provides guidance for individuals completing their own SSI/SSDI application.

We encourage you to join us in honoring those we've lost this year by taking part in your community's memorial, organizing your own memorial, or sharing the names of those lost in your community.

See How SOAR Works



SOAR Success in Washington

The following SOAR success story was submitted by Veronica Castenda, a SOAR-trained practitioner from Yakima Neighborhood Health Services in Yakima, Washington.

Justin Smith*, age 57, had been experiencing homelessness for three years when the local hospital referred him to the medical respite program at Yakima Neighborhood Health Services (YNHS) in October 2022. This program provides a temporary stay for homeless individuals who are too sick to be out on the street and not sick enough to be in the hospital. After recovering from his illness, Mr. Smith exited the respite program and moved into one of YNHS' Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) programs, the Rhonda D. Hauff Resource Center.

Once referred to YNHS, Mr. Smith connected with various providers and services. He was approved for the state's Aged, Blind, and Disabled (ABD) & Housing and Essential Needs (HEN) programs, which provided him with a little income to pay his rent. He was also able to get into the Medications for Opioid Use Disorders (MOUD) program and get connected to behavioral health and substance use counselors. Our team supported him in getting a cell phone and helped him learn how to use it, which allowed him to manage his medical and behavioral health appointments and so much more.

I met with him on a weekly basis to gather information for his SSI/SSDI application and work on his Medical Summary Report. I was able to get to know Mr. Smith and learn about his life and struggles along the way, including the abusive household he grew up in and the special education services he received in school. He finally got his approval from DDS and will be receiving \$1,980 per month in SSDI. This will provide enough income for him to find his own place and have more income to live comfortably. Mr. Smith stated, "None of this could have happened without everyone's help."

Have a story of your own? [Submit your SOAR success!](#)

Sharing Our Successes stories are edited for brevity and clarity. All beneficiary names have been changed to protect anonymity.



SOAR Tip: Navigate and Complete the SOAR Online Course

In this [video](#), SOAR Project Assistant Alisha Fletcher walks viewers through the critical functionalities of the SOAR Online Course: Adult Curriculum.

Upcoming Events



National SOAR Online Course: Adult Curriculum Review Session

December 20, 2:00 p.m.-5:00 p.m. ET

If you have passed the *SOAR Online Course: Adult Curriculum* within the last 5 years, you will receive an invite via email to this event. We will review what you learned in the course including the critical components of the SOAR-assisted SSI application process.



SOARing Over Lunch Conference Call

December 19, 2023, 1:00–2:00 p.m. ET

The SAMHSA SOAR TA Center holds informal monthly calls designed to help support SOAR efforts across the country.

[Read more about SOARing Over Lunch.](#)

In Case You Missed It

OAT and Outcomes Orientations

On October 31, 2023, the SAMHSA SOAR TA Center hosted a *special OAT and Outcomes Orientation* focused on using the Online Application Tracking (OAT) system as a management tool for SOAR State Team Leads, Local Leads, and Agency Leads/Supervisors. The webinar covered how to access OAT and the importance of tracking SOAR-assisted SSI/SSDI application decisions. It also explained how to use OAT data and run OAT Reports to assess SOAR program effectiveness, highlight SOAR success, gain community buy-in, and promote quality. On November 2, 2023, a *general walkthrough of the OAT system* was facilitated for all OAT users.

Federal Updates

SSA Talks - Will Social Security Be There When I Retire?

The Social Security Administration's (SSA) Chief Actuary, Steve Goss, answers this question in the latest episode of the audio series, SSA Talks. In this 13-minute episode, Steve sheds light on the Social Security Trust Funds and how they relate to your future benefits. The episode is accompanied by a fact sheet and transcript. Be sure to check out this series and sign up for future alerts at [SSA Talks](#).

SSA's Mobile Check-In Express

People visiting their local Social Security field offices can now check in from their mobile devices using SSA's Mobile Check-In Express. To use this service, SSI/SSDI applicants can scan the QR code at their local Social Security office to check in for scheduled and non-scheduled appointments. The applicant must be at the Social Security office and have their mobile location services on. For more information, visit [Save Your Place in Line with Mobile Check-in Express](#).

Justice in Aging: Medicaid Unwinding

The protections put in place to keep individuals enrolled in Medicaid and protect their health coverage during the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency have ended. States are now reviewing individuals' ongoing eligibility for Medicaid. This process of redetermining current eligibility is called "unwinding," and it poses challenges to older adults—particularly those dually eligible for Medicare and Medicaid. *Justice in Aging* published a resource, [Common Medicaid Unwinding Issues Impacting Older Adults: Advocacy Opportunities & Practice Tips](#), to help advocates identify and resolve these challenges experienced during Medicaid unwinding and preserve access to critical health care coverage for low-income older adults.

ASPE Report: Addressing Homelessness Among Older Adults

In collaboration with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Behavioral Health, Disability and Aging Policy, the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) recently released their final report addressing the needs of older adults that are experiencing homelessness. In this report, SOAR is included as a tool to provide a sustainable source of income for a large share of older adults experiencing homelessness. Be sure to check out the full report at [Addressing Homelessness Among Older Adults: Final Report](#).

NASMHPD: Hiring Practices Toolkit for Peer Workforce

SMI Adviser and the National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors (NASMHPD) are proud to present a new toolkit on recovery-friendly hiring practices for peers who have past involvement with legal systems. This guide, *Building New Horizons: Opening Career Pathways for Peers with Criminal Justice Backgrounds*, provides a detailed blueprint to assist organizations that provide behavioral health services. It offers guidance on how to hire and support peers who have lived experience of serious mental illness (SMI), substance use disorders (SUD), and legal involvement. The toolkit is organized into three modules: Pre-Hiring, Hiring, and Post-Hiring. Each module outlines best practices and actionable strategies to foster an accessible and effective peer workforce.

SOAR Jobs





- **Illinois:** [Association House of Chicago](#) - [SOAR Benefits Coordinator \(Full-time\)](#): The SOAR Benefits Coordinator will be responsible for assisting class members residing in SMHRFs (Specialized Mental Health Rehabilitation Facilities) and NFs (Nursing Facilities) with applying for Social Security Benefits through the SOAR program.
- **Oklahoma:** [Oklahoma County Diversion Hub](#) - [SOAR Case Manager \(Full-time\)](#): The Diversion Hub is a comprehensive, one-stop network dedicated to assisting justice-involved individuals in Oklahoma City. The SOAR Case Manager will provide direct case management services to clients and act as the primary point of contact and liaison between the client, Justice Navigator, and the service navigators.
- **Virginia:** [Micah Ecumenical Ministries](#) - [SOAR Coordinator \(Full-time\)](#): The SOAR Coordinator is a full-time position responsible to the Income Navigator. Most individuals served are enrolled in one of Micah's housing programs. This position has a focus on submitting high-quality Social Security benefits applications using the SOAR model.

Learn more about these positions on the [SOARWorks website](#). Do you have a job posting you would like to share with the SOAR community? Please submit it to the [SAMHSA SOAR TA Center!](#)

More From SOAR

SAMHSA
Substance Abuse and Mental Health
Services Administration

SOAR WORKS

**Understanding the Steps to
Completing SOAR-Assisted
SSI/SSDI Applications**

Webinar Materials Available!

WEBINAR

SOAR WORKS

**WORLD
AIDS
DAY**

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The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery (SOAR) Technical Assistance (TA) Center is sponsored by SAMHSA, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

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