



New Social Security Administration Commissioner

On December 20, 2023, Martin O'Malley was sworn in as Commissioner to lead the Social Security Administration (SSA). Commissioner O'Malley will provide leadership to about 61,000 employees across 1,500 facilities and will be responsible for administering the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) programs.

In his confirmation hearing testimony, Commissioner O'Malley expressed that he would bring his experience to the role to improve operations at SSA and address challenges the agency is currently facing that impact SOAR work, including customer service issues and long wait times for decisions on disability benefits.

Commissioner O'Malley will serve the remainder of the term which expires on January 19, 2025. [Read more at SSA.gov.](#)

January Spotlight

SAMHSA's 20th Prevention Day!

SAMHSA's Prevention Day (SPD) takes place on Monday, January 29, 2024. SPD is an annual gathering dedicated to advancing the prevention of substance use and misuse. At this 20th anniversary event, SAMHSA will "explore current innovations, reflect on past accomplishments, and chart a course for the future of prevention."

The day-long event is FREE, but registration is required. [Read more and register!](#)



See How SOAR Works



SOAR Success in Oklahoma

The following SOAR success story was submitted by a SOAR-trained practitioner from Tulsa, Oklahoma

My mom, Marie, is a Cherokee woman in her mid-50's that lives in an extremely rural part of northeastern Oklahoma where resources are scarce. Assistance from the Cherokee Nation has enabled her to hold onto her modest trailer home 45 minutes from the closest town, but her physical conditions have progressively worsened over the last five years, leaving her unable to work enough hours to maintain. In the last year, she has put off surgeries that might help because she couldn't afford to take the time off. At the same time, her work as a caregiver to the elderly and disabled has gotten more physically risky and contributed to her physical decline.

Using the SOAR model, we submitted her SSI/SSDI applications in June 2023. Prior to this, I advised my mom to document her work history to the best of her ability and I assisted her in collecting all her medical records. It was a feat that took about a month's time, but we came prepared with six binders of medical records on the day we submitted her application.

We received favorable decisions for both SSI and SSDI in the first week of October, about 3.5 months later. Since then, my mom has continued to work a small amount, but her income is now supplemented by SSI and SSDI, allowing her the freedom to adjust her workload as needed (so long as she reports her income regularly). This flexibility has given her peace of mind, knowing that she can see the doctors she needs without interrupting her ability to pay her bills. In the next year, she's looking forward to finally getting the surgeries she needs, which we hope will improve her quality of life. From my perspective as her daughter, the ability to see her care for herself more meaningfully is invaluable. In the long term, it probably means that I will have her around longer because she isn't forced to risk her physical health in order to earn income.

Being prepared with everything we needed before putting metaphorical pen to paper was so helpful! It allowed us to submit a complete and comprehensive application, so SSA wasn't left with a lot of questions to ask or follow-up to conduct. Because we were familiar with the SSA Blue Book listings, we were also able to highlight her conditions, treatment, and functional limitations in a way that addressed what we knew SSA would be looking for. In short, we gave them everything they needed to make a decision and I believe this contributed to how quickly our decisions were received.

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



SOAR Tip: New Year, New Outcomes!

January marks the halfway point of the SOAR outcome reporting year (7/1/23-6/30/24)! **Now** is the time to ensure that all decisions received since July 2023 have been entered into OAT. We encourage SOAR leaders to review agency, local, and state-wide OAT data to identify any targeted technical assistance needs and create action steps to provide support to practitioners.

SOAR leaders can review the [SOAR Outcomes Collection Timeline](#) to stay on top of data collection all year long! Reach out to your [SOAR TA Center liaison](#) for additional support.

Upcoming Events



SOARing Over Lunch Conference Call

Tuesday, January 9, 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](#)



OAT and Outcomes Orientation

Tuesday, January 23, 2:00-3:00 p.m. ET

Join us to learn the ins and outs of successfully reporting the outcomes of your SOAR-assisted SSI/SSDI applications. We will take you step-by-step through the process from registering for an account to entering details about the application. We will also address many common questions and discuss how you can use your outcomes to promote SOAR in your community. [Register here!](#)

Federal Updates

Social Security Administration Will Collect Race and Ethnicity Data

The Social Security Administration is now collecting race and ethnicity data to better understand how their programs serve the public. Collecting race and ethnicity data for research and statistical purposes is one way for SSA to determine public service equity. Information that applicants and customers voluntarily share does not affect decisions on benefit applications.

For more information, see [Why Researchers Now Rely on Surveys for Race Data on OASDI and SSI Programs: A Comparison of Four Major Surveys](#).

Partner Updates

HUD Point-in-Time Count

On December 15, 2023, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) released its [2023 Annual Homeless Assessment Report \(AHAR\): Part I - Point-in-Time Estimates](#). For brief summaries, see [2023 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report: By The Numbers](#) and [Fact Sheet: Key Findings from the Point-in-Time Counts](#)

HUD has [substantially invested](#) in addressing the housing needs of those facing homelessness, particularly the most vulnerable populations. To see highlights on how communities are making progress in addressing and reducing homelessness, see [HUD's fact sheet](#).

Justice in Aging Issue Brief: Streamlining Access to Medicare Savings Programs - Tips for Advocates

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid (CMS) has taken action to improve access to affordable Medicare coverage through Medicaid Savings Programs (MSPs). On September 21, 2023, CMS issued the [Streamlining Medicare Savings Program Eligibility Determination and Enrollment](#) final rule that will make it easier for individuals to enroll and retain eligibility in MSPs.

[Justice in Aging's](#) issue brief, [Final Rule to Streamline Enrollment in Medicare Savings Programs](#), explains the changes and highlights opportunities for state advocates to increase enrollment and expand health care affordability for older adults and people with disabilities enrolled in Medicare.

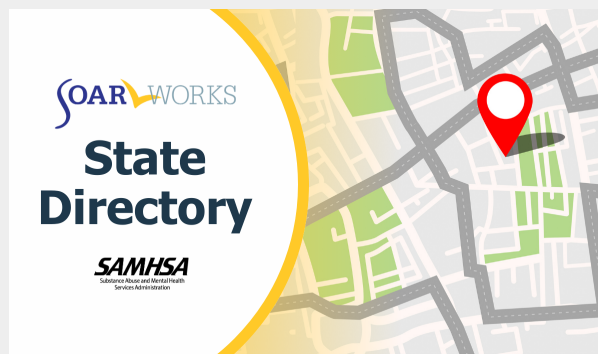
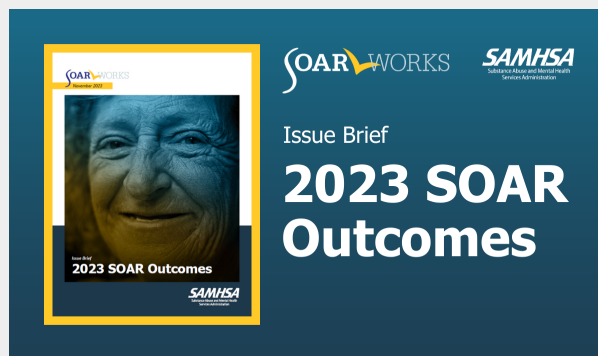
SOAR Jobs



- **Connecticut:** New Reach - *SOAR Certified Housing Caseworker (Full-time)*: Provide SOAR assistance to eligible clients referred as well as Rapid Rehousing services to clients in Fairfield County. This position is split 50/50 between SOAR dedicated services and Rapid Rehousing services.
- **Montana:** HRDC - *SOAR Benefits Case Manager (Full-time)*: The SOAR Benefits Specialist must be able to work in the community and meet individuals experiencing homelessness where they are, including in the woods, under bridges, and in abandoned houses. This position requires you to work directly with individuals experiencing homelessness who have a serious mental illness and/or co-occurring substance use disorder.

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](#)!

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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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