

2020 SAMHSA SOAR MAY E-NEWS



COVID-19 Resources for SOAR Providers

Across the country, SOAR providers have been developing new and innovative methods to engage applicants and complete Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) applications during the COVID-19 pandemic. The SAMHSA SOAR TA Center is here for you during this difficult time and has created a dedicated webpage of resources for SOAR providers. This webpage provides information on and answers to common questions on the following topics:

- Unemployment Insurance and its impact on SSI/SSDI
- Economic Impact Payments and SSI/SSDI
- COVID-19's impact on the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)
- Federal resources
- National partner resources
- Suggestions from the field

In addition to this resource page, the SAMHSA SOAR TA Center hosted a webinar on April 16, 2020, "SOAR Implementation During COVID-19." In this webinar, SAMHSA SOAR TA Center staff and SOAR providers from Nashville, Tennessee, and Austin, Texas, discussed innovative ways to continue providing SOAR services while maintaining a safe physical/social distance. SOAR providers shared how they are using new (and old!) modes of communication to keep SSI and SSDI applications moving forward. Presenters described strategies for communicating with the Social Security Administration (SSA) and Disability Determination Services (DDS) while offices are closed or operating remotely. Participants also learned about the impact of unemployment and stimulus payments on Social Security benefits. The slides and supplementary materials from this webinar are available for download.

Is your agency using an innovative practice to connect with SOAR applicants? Share it with the [SAMHSA SOAR TA Center](#)! Thank you for your commitment to the individuals we serve and the SOAR process during this challenging time.

Celebrate National Prevention Week

During May 16-20, 2020, celebrate National Prevention Week with SAMHSA! Each May, SAMHSA celebrates National Prevention Week to highlight the importance of preventing substance use and promoting positive mental health. Visit [SAMHSA's Prevention Week](#) web page to join the prevention challenge, download the planning toolkit, learn about local and virtual prevention events, and register for webinars where you can learn more.



Interested in learning more about the impact of substance use on SOAR-assisted SSI/SSDI applications? Visit the SOARWorks website and check out the [SOAR Library](#) to access resources, including the following:

- "Co-Occurring Substance Use: Material to Disability?"
- "Understanding and Documenting Opioid and Other Substance Use Disorders for SSI/SSDI Claims"
- "Gathering Information About Substance Use"

Sharing Our Successes

SOARing with Supported Employment in Maryland

Michelle Boulden Hammond from [Mid Shore Behavioral Health](#) in Easton, Maryland, wrote in to share this incredible success story!



"Kenton* was referred to my agency through his mental health provider. He was experiencing homelessness and had severe mental health symptoms. He had previously applied for SSI/SSDI several times and was denied each time. I took on his case, however, the office from which he was receiving mental health services closed. He started with another provider, but they disagreed with signing the Medical Summary Report (MSR). I completed the MSR and connected him with supported employment opportunities while advocating for my client to the physician of the importance of his past mental health history. While waiting for a decision to be made, Kenton began working with supported employment. Kenton's SSI/SSDI application was approved, he still is working, and he has obtained housing and transportation."

Thanks for this fantastic success story, Michelle! Michelle's words of wisdom to other SOAR providers are, "remember that we are valuable in our knowledge of helping those who have mental health, homelessness, and substance abuse issues. We are the bridge that helps them cross over to quality of life and recovery."



Collaboration and a Strong MSR Contribute to SOAR Success in Massachusetts

Heather Gilbert from [Eliot Community Human Services](#) in Lowell, Massachusetts, wrote it to share this fantastic success story:

“Theresa* was a member of our program and had worked part-time for many years, but due to her physical and mental health conditions, it was becoming detrimental to her well-being to work more than a few hours per week. At the time I met her, she was unemployed. Theresa opened up to me about being behind on mortgage payments and being afraid of losing her home. She was also in an unhealthy relationship but was fearful of the financial implications of ending it.

Theresa had limited healthcare records, especially in terms of mental health care. She was someone who didn’t seek much support as she was embarrassed to talk about her struggles. I used the MSR interview questions to guide deep discussions about her life, and it allowed me to paint a very detailed picture of her lifelong struggles and their impact on her ability to function. After communicating the importance of the SOAR process and having the MSR counted as medical evidence to Theresa’s nurse practitioner, they were willing to co-sign my report. Due to her limited records, DDS requested two consultative exams. I spent time before both of those appointments walking Theresa through the process of those exams, encouraging her to be as honest as possible and to give examples of how her conditions negatively affect her life. I emphasized that this was critical despite her tendency to minimize her struggles. I believe that preparing Theresa for what to expect during the consultative exam, in tandem with a strong MSR, was responsible for her receiving an approval on her initial application. We celebrated together when we got the news! The retroactive payment that she received was immediately helpful to get back on track with her mortgage. Theresa told me that knowing she has some stable monthly income is already making a huge difference in reducing her stress, and she is now talking more confidently about leaving her unhealthy relationship.”

Thank you for sharing this great success story, Heather! When asked what advice she would provide to other SOAR providers, Heather recommended “using the solid tools available to us through SOAR and to not give up on advocating for that co-signature. The SOAR process clearly works if you follow it closely and guide your applicant through the steps.”

[Submit Your SOAR Success](#)

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

SOAR Job Postings

California

Homeless Outreach Program Integrated Care System is seeking a full-time SOAR Benefits Specialist based in Los Angeles, California. The successful candidate will conduct eligibility screenings, administrative support, and program coordination activities in order to attach individuals to the Benefits Advocacy Services Program.

Maryland

Prologue, Inc., is seeking a full-time SOAR Disability Case Manager based in Pikesville, Maryland. The successful candidate will implement and sustain the Homeless ID project for individuals ages 13 and older in Baltimore County who are experiencing homelessness and have a mental illness or co-occurring mental illness and substance use disorder.

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

Events

SOARing Over Lunch Conference Calls

May 12, 2020, 1:00 p.m. ET—Join today!

The next SOARing Over Lunch Conference Call will take place on May 12, 2020, at 1:00 p.m. ET! The SAMHSA SOAR TA Center hosts this series of informal monthly calls designed to help support SOAR efforts across the country. Participants can join to ask about any SOAR-related question they may have.

Add SOARing Over Lunch to Your Calendar

Get Social with the SAMHSA SOAR TA Center

Hear more about what SAMHSA SOAR is up to via [@samhsagov](#) on Twitter, [@samhsa](#) on Facebook, and [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#) on LinkedIn!



The image is a screenshot of a LinkedIn post from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The post is from the SAMHSA SOAR TA Center, which has 104,349 followers. The post text reads: "HUMAN SERVICE PROFESSIONALS: The SAMHSA SOAR TA Center's Online Course is a FREE resource to further your knowledge about accessing Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits for individuals experiencing or at risk of homelessness who have a serious mental illness, medical impairment, or a co-occurring substance use disorder. Learn more https://lnkd.in/e5-ATPK". Below the text is a promotional graphic for the "SAMHSA SOAR ONLINE COURSE". The graphic features a woman with curly hair looking at a computer screen. The text on the graphic says "SOAR WORKS BEGIN TODAY! SAMHSA SOAR ONLINE COURSE Adult and Child Curricula Available SAMHSA Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration". At the bottom of the graphic, it says "SOAR Online Course Catalog | SOAR Works! soarworks.prairinc.com".

Federal Updates

[Social Security and Coronavirus Disease \(COVID-19\)](#)

The Social Security and COVID-19 web page is a collection of resources, updates, and guidance around online services for the public. The website is divided into the following sections:

- Stay Informed
- Monthly Benefits and Other Financial Help
- Protect Yourself from Scams
- Getting Help from Social Security
- Hearings
- COVID-19 Resources
- Online Services
- Office Closings
- Info for Media/Press Releases
- Stay Informed

[SAMHSA and COVID-19](#)

SAMHSA recognizes the challenges posed by the current COVID-19 situation and is providing guidance and resources to assist individuals, providers, communities, and states across the country. Resources on this page range from virtual recovery resources to guidance for opioid treatment programs.

Partner Resources

[Housing Instability and Homelessness CARES Act Suggestions for State, Local, Tribal, and Territorial Elected Officials](#)

Under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, the U.S. Departments the Treasury and Housing and Urban Development has allocated funds to state, local, tribal, and territorial governments that may be used for emergency housing assistance. The National League of Cities, National Low Income Housing Coalition, and National Alliance to End Homelessness, and Mayors and CEOs for U.S. Housing Investments have a fact sheet for elected officials to help maximize federal resources made available under the CARES Act to reduce housing instability and homelessness resulting from measures to control the spread of COVID-19.