

## 2015 SOAR Outcomes Summary

SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access and Recovery (SOAR) helps states and communities increase access to Social Security disability benefits 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. Funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), the SOAR Technical Assistance (TA) Center develops and provides systems planning, training and technical assistance to support the implementation of SOAR nationwide.

Over the last 10 years, the SOAR approach has been used to assist nearly 50,000 people who were experiencing or at risk of homelessness with applications for Social Security Administration (SSA) disability benefit programs—Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI).

Of the applications assisted using SOAR, 65 percent, representing 27,226 persons, have been approved for SSI/SSDI upon *initial* application since SOAR began (Table 1).<sup>1</sup> An additional 4,021 persons, whose applications were denied initially, were approved on reconsideration or appeal (Table 2). Taken together, since 2006, SOAR is responsible for assisting 31,247 persons who were experiencing or at risk

of homelessness to access Social Security disability benefits.

Each approval comes with life changing income and health insurance. In addition to the ongoing monthly benefits, many individuals are also eligible for retroactive benefits that are critical to establishing a new and stable life. Based on reports representing 462 approvals, beneficiaries received nearly \$3.6 million in retroactive benefits—an average of \$7,717 per person.

Decisions on SOAR-assisted initial applications were received in an average of 81 days in 2015, a *decrease* of 13 days from 2014. The national SOAR allowance rate for 2015 is 64 percent. This compares to the initial allowance rate of 28 percent for all persons aged 18–64 who applied for SSI or SSDI in 2013.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The SOAR TA Center requests voluntary submission of SOAR outcomes from states annually from July 1 through June 30 of each year. Unless otherwise noted, these are the data reported in this issue brief.

<sup>2</sup> SSI Annual Statistical Report, 2014. SSA Pub. No. 13-11827. Washington, D.C.: SSA, October 2015

### SOAR Super Stars for 2015

- **Top Approval Rates.** Our “Top Ten” criterion requires that states reported outcomes in 2015 and had at least 100 cumulative decisions. The average approval rate for these rock star states is **84 percent!** In order of average approval rate (highest to lowest), the Top Ten states are: Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Maryland, North Carolina, Arkansas, Kansas, Rhode Island, Alabama, Oregon, and Nevada.
- **Consistent Capacity.** Eleven states consistently reported over 100 decisions each year for the past three years. They are: Arkansas, Florida, Maryland, Michigan, Nebraska, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Virginia. Combined, these 11 states have helped **3,135 individuals** with their SSI/SSDI applications and received 2,205 approvals—a 70 percent allowance rate.
- **Most Improved Capacity.** Alabama, the District of Columbia, Georgia, Kansas, New York, and Rhode Island showed the most improvement in total decisions in 2015 from what they reported the previous year. Collectively, these six states went from **250 applications in 2014 to 1,318 applications** in 2015!
- **Most Improved Approval Rates.** Alaska, Arkansas, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Nevada, New Mexico, Vermont, and West Virginia showed the most improvement in their approval rates from 2014 to 2015. Collectively, these eight states increased their average approval rate from **62 percent to 85 percent!**
- **Most Improved Days to Decision.** Twelve states showed incredible reductions in their average days to decision. Alabama, Alaska, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Missouri, Nevada, Tennessee, and Virginia went from an average of 129 days to decision in 2014 to 90 days in 2015. Collectively, that is a **reduction of 39 days!**

We estimate that in 2015 alone, SSI/SSDI for the individuals served by SOAR brought nearly **\$275 million** into the economies of participating states and localities. In addition, states report that through SOAR they are:

- **Serving individuals who are chronically homeless.** Based on data from 40 states, the individuals served had been experiencing homelessness for an average of two years.
- **Increasing access to housing.** Twenty-four states report collaborations with supportive housing providers. These states also report that more than 50 percent of applicants for SSI/SSDI were housed in an average of 30 days.

### Implementation of Critical Components

States with higher approval rates credit their success to their capacity for implementing the SOAR critical components<sup>3</sup> and their attention to submission of high quality applications. The five SOAR critical components of application assistance include the use of the SSA-1696 Appointment of Representative form, collection and submission of medical records, writing and submission of a medical summary report, obtaining physician co-signatures on medical summary reports, and performing quality review of applications prior to submission. Use of these components statistically increases the likelihood of an approval on initial application for those who are eligible.<sup>4</sup> Paying attention to SOAR critical components has other benefits as well:

- **Better communication with SSA and DDS.** Based on data reported in the SOAR Online Application Tracking (OAT) program, 99 percent of applications were submitted using the SSA-1696 Appointment of Representative form as recommended by SOAR.
- **Fewer consultative exams.** Of those applications entered into OAT, only 25 percent required a consultative examination, which helps reduce costs and processing time.

### SAMHSA Homeless Programs

SOAR is a strong complementary program for SAMHSA's Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness (PATH) and Cooperative Agreements

to Benefit Homeless Individuals (CABHI) grantees. The central components of outreach, engagement, assessment, and documentation are all performed with the goal of recovery in mind. In order to help connect individuals with serious mental illness(es) and co-occurring substance use disorders who are experiencing or at-risk of homelessness with housing and healthcare, you need income and health insurance. SOAR can be that missing link for individuals with disabilities.

**PATH.** All 50 states report collaboration with the SAMHSA PATH program including:

- Dedicated benefits specialists on PATH teams
- SOAR training for PATH outreach and case management staff
- State PATH contacts serve as SOAR coordinators and leaders



### Working with Veterans

SOAR worked closely with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and state and local Veteran initiatives to ensure that Veterans eligible for SSA benefits were assisted with their applications.

- Thirty-two states reported assisting Veterans with their disability applications and over 300 Veterans were helped with their applications using SOAR.
- 2015 saw increased collaboration with the Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) grant program. Currently, more than 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. Fourteen percent of survey respondents (42 grantees) reported using SSVF grant monies to fund a dedicated SOAR benefits specialist and an additional 15 percent indicated that they plan to incorporate one in the future.
- In 2015, the SOAR TA Center partnered with the VA to complete a one-year SOAR pilot with federal VA staff at four VA Medical Centers across the country. Following this pilot, the VA released federal guidance for staff: *SOAR Works to End Veteran Homelessness: VA Caseworker's Guide*.

<sup>3</sup> <http://soarworks.prainc.com/article/soar-model-key-components>

<sup>4</sup> Based on data from January 15, 2005 to February 14, 2014 extracted from the SOAR Online Application Tracking (OAT) system. Data includes 4,200 application outcomes from 35 states.

**CABHI.** Eleven states (Arizona, Colorado, Kansas, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, Mississippi, New Mexico, Nevada, Rhode Island, and Tennessee) reported that they used SAMHSA’s CABHI grants to fund dedicated SOAR positions. Arizona, Louisiana, and Pennsylvania are using CABHI funds to support training and expansion efforts for SOAR.

## Employment

Employment is *especially* beneficial to people with disabilities as the benefits go far beyond the monetary gains. Employment gives people a sense of purpose, gives meaning to their days, opens gateways to social interactions, and provides a connection to their community. People seeking or receiving SSA benefits are encouraged to work or seek employment either independently or with the help of professional supports such as Supported Employment Programs. Despite the myths about working while applying, 20 states reported that **25 percent** of their 1,896 applicants were **working during the application process**. The exciting news is that 16 states reported that **nearly 50 percent** of the 929 SSI/SSDI beneficiaries they had assisted were **working post-approval**.

## Hospitals/Healthcare

Hospitals that serve uninsured individuals benefit when their patients obtain SSI and Medicaid or SSDI and Medicare. Hospitals are also able to reduce the use of expensive emergency care services by linking patients to ongoing treatment with community providers. The following collaborations with hospitals were reported by 27 states:

- Agreements with medical records departments for expedited records at no cost
- Easy access to needed assessments
- Dedicated benefits specialist positions within the hospital
- Grant funding to support local nonprofit SOAR programs
- Discharge planning in state hospitals

## Cost Savings and Reimbursement

**Medicaid/Medicare Reimbursement.** Once an individual is approved for SSI and Medicaid, treatment providers can retroactively bill Medicaid for services provided up to 90 days prior to the SSI protective filing date. This results in reimbursement for previously uncompensated care as well as payment for ongoing

## Working with Transition Age Youth (TAY)



Young adults aged 18–24 face particular challenges when applying for SSA disability benefits. Members of this age group are often too old for child services but may not be ready or eligible for adult services. Many SOAR providers are seeing great success in serving this special population.

- Twenty-one states reported working with 171 TAY applicants and achieving an **81 percent approval rate** in an average of **81 days**.
- These states were also successful with reconsiderations. They assisted 23 TAY applicants with an approval rate of 70 percent in 71 days.
- These outcomes dispel the *myth* that it is more difficult to get approvals with this age group.
- Of those youth approved, **57 percent were also working post-approval**. More myths dispelled!

treatment. Eight states (California, Florida, Georgia, Nebraska, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and Wyoming) report **\$1.32 million** in Medicaid reimbursement, or an average of **\$6,400 per person**, as a result of SOAR. Medicare reimbursements averaged **\$2,800 per person**. Some states are participating in Medicaid’s Administrative Claiming (MAC) program, which helps defray the cost of certain administrative activities related to providing Medicaid services.

**General/Public Assistance Reimbursement.** Some communities offer people who are disabled and have low income a monthly cash stipend to help cover essential living expenses while they apply for SSI. This general or interim assistance is provided while the SSI application is pending. Once approved, the state or county is reimbursed out of the individual’s SSI retroactive payments. Communities can then use these funds to help support others who need assistance or to fund SOAR efforts to transition people from public assistance to SSI. Based on nine state reports, (California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Jersey, West Virginia, and Wyoming), communities were reimbursed, on average, **\$2,218 per person approved for SSI**. Twenty-three states reported collaborations with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families providers and/or General Assistance programs.

**Table 1. 2015 SOAR-Assisted Initial Application Outcomes**

State	Locality	2015 Decisions	2015 Approvals	2015 Allowance Rate	2015 Average Days	Years of Data	New Cumulative Decisions	New Cumulative Approvals	Cumulative Allowance Rate
Alabama	Birmingham	21	17	81%	42	7	132	100	76%
Alaska	Anchorage	3	2	67%	130	7	96	63	66%
Arizona	Maricopa County	45	28	62%	110	5	174	99	57%
Arkansas	Multiple sites	171	154	90%	84	7	761	611	80%
California*	Multiple sites	732	350	48%	75	various	3016	1736	58%
Colorado	State	79	51	65%	89	various	588	387	66%
Connecticut	State	65	49	75%	167	6	249	168	67%
Delaware	State	0	0	N/A	N/A	7	293	212	72%
District of Columbia	Multiple sites	102	57	56%	104	5	196	136	69%
Florida	State	246	180	73%	78	various	3483	2373	68%
Georgia	Multiple sites	169	142	84%	92	7	2223	1306	59%
Hawaii	State	0	0	0%	N/A	4	29	25	86%
Idaho	Multiple sites	34	24	71%	59	4	138	80	58%
Illinois	Multiple sites	55	40	73%	87	5	272	182	67%
Indiana	State	3	2	67%	69	7	23	20	87%
Iowa	State	17	6	35%	82	5	73	47	64%
Kansas	Multiple sites	111	82	74%	116	6	699	553	79%
Kentucky	Louisville	44	23	52%	125	8	798	505	63%
Louisiana	Multiple sites	40	20	50%	102	6	288	176	61%
Maine	State	0	0	N/A	N/A	4	7	7	100%
Maryland	Multiple sites	175	141	81%	87	6	690	584	85%
Massachusetts	Multiple sites	9	5	56%	55	6	473	272	58%
Michigan	State	298	182	61%	106	7	2502	1499	60%
Minnesota	State	73	30	41%	95	8	1949	1296	66%
Mississippi	Multiple sites	48	29	60%	60	5	119	68	57%
Missouri	Multiple sites	41	17	41%	86	5	120	57	48%
Montana	Multiple sites	11	2	18%	127	4	109	40	37%
Nebraska	Multiple sites	141	80	57%	72	7	863	494	57%
Nevada	Multiple sites	19	18	95%	107	7	289	209	72%
New Hampshire	State	0	0	N/A	N/A	4	7	6	86%
New Jersey	Multiple sites	45	27	60%	132	7	412	243	59%
New Mexico	State	72	55	76%	115	7	472	316	67%
New York	Multiple sites	902	500	55%	53	various	1817	1137	63%
North Carolina	State	316	261	83%	119	9	1446	1178	81%
North Dakota	State	1	1	100%	69	1	1	1	100%
Ohio*	State	818	390	48%	65	8	4527	2290	51%
Oklahoma	State	0	0	N/A	N/A	8	661	477	72%
Oregon	Portland	212	155	73%	75	8	1448	1067	74%
Pennsylvania	Multiple sites	68	49	72%	71	6	200	135	68%
PA cont.	Philadelphia	223	215	96%	57	8	1566	1545	99%
Rhode Island	State	13	10	77%	121	8	213	164	77%
South Carolina	State	52	30	58%	123	5	151	91	60%
South Dakota	Sioux Falls	11	6	55%	125	3	82	69	84%
Tennessee	Multiple sites	87	78	90%	55	8	532	432	81%
TN cont.	Nashville	198	196	99%	33	9	917	901	98%
Texas	Multiple sites	33	19	58%	137	7	360	240	67%
Utah	State	0	0	N/A	N/A	8	3835	1828	48%
Vermont	State	2	2	100%	103	1	6	3	50%
Virginia	State	182	124	68%	102	8	1081	767	71%
Washington	Clark County	33	13	39%	96	4	99	48	48%
WA cont.	Veterans	0	0	N/A	N/A	4	227	212	93%
West Virginia	State	30	30	100%	121	7	83	62	75%
Wisconsin	Multiple sites	126	65	52%	130	6	903	595	66%
Wyoming	Multiple sites	35	14	40%	113	4	173	114	66%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>6,211</b>	<b>3,971</b>	<b>64%</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>41,871</b>	<b>27,226</b>	<b>65%</b>

\*Includes appeals



## Working with Justice-Involved Persons

SOAR contributes to positive reentry efforts for justice-

involved persons. Our mantra, “decision before discharge,” expresses the goal to initiate applications while individuals are still incarcerated so that benefits begin when they return to their communities. SOAR collaborations with criminal justice agencies have helped returning citizens live healthier lifestyles and promote successful post-release. These collaborations were reported by 20 states and include:

- Jail in-reach for pre-release applications
- Jail diversion programs
  - » In 2015, the Jail Diversion Program in the Eleventh Judicial Criminal Mental Health Project in Miami, Florida, assisted with 68 applications and saw a 91 percent approval rate in an average of 48 days.
- State prison reentry initiatives
  - » A collaboration between Sing Sing Correctional Facility and the Center for Urban Community Services in New York, New York, to file pre-release applications has seen continued success. In 2015, this program served 47 applicants with a 96 percent approval rate in an average of 31 days.
- Training for state departments of correction (and state forensic mental health facilities)
- Collaboration with parole and probation to coordinate services

## Sustainability

In 2015, 19 states reported that they were successful in securing new or sustaining funding for their SOAR programs, resulting in the creation/continuation of nearly **60 FTE SOAR benefits specialist positions**, and 2 SOAR Coordinator positions. Some examples include:

- Legal Action of **Wisconsin** contributed **\$50,000** to implementing SOAR in Wisconsin using Cy Pres funding through September 2015. Waukesha County secured an on-going grant from a local hospital and a county grant for sustaining support of their SOAR initiative.
- **North Carolina** secured funding for 15 new, dedicated SOAR caseworker positions, including

five funded by community hospitals. This brings the total to **27 full-time** dedicated SOAR workers in North Carolina. Their PATH program increased funding for six benefit specialist positions.

- **Colorado** Disability Benefits Support Program (Colorado DBS) serves as the lead SOAR agency in the state of Colorado. It is the only nonprofit agency in Colorado solely dedicated to providing SSI/SSDI application assistance. In less than four years, Colorado DBS has secured funding for **21 positions**. Those positions are funded through public and private funds from local, state and federal sources.
- **Missouri's** State Department of Mental Health has created a **dedicated billing code** for SOAR services. This code will allow contracted Community Mental Health organizations to receive \$450 up front for opening a case and completing all the SOAR critical components and an additional \$275 once the case has been approved by SSA. A dedicated billing code will allow more organizations to participate in SOAR and monetarily benefit from successful applications.
- **Rhode Island's** SOAR program has expanded its reach by training and providing ongoing support to **local university students** acting as SOAR case managers. Utilizing students allows the program to serve a greater number of clients, offers a timely and positive process for applicants, and provides a unique learning opportunity for students.
- **Ohio** received a 2-year Money Follows the Person/HOME Choice grant that supports their SOAR efforts.

## Reconsiderations and ALJ Hearings

States are increasingly using the SOAR approach to assist with applications in the appeals process, both with reconsiderations and hearings by an Administrative Law Judge (ALJ). The number of states using SOAR at the appeals level and tracking their outcomes has nearly tripled since 2010. In 2015, 1,335 SOAR-assisted decisions were rendered at the appeals level, with 52 percent of all reconsiderations or ALJ hearings resulting in an allowance (see Table 2). SOAR-assisted appeals take an average of 82 days, a decrease of 31 days from 2014 and well below the national average of over 15 months.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Average Wait Time Until Hearing Held Report for the Month of December 2015: [http://www.ssa.gov/appeals/DataSets/01\\_NetStat\\_Report.html](http://www.ssa.gov/appeals/DataSets/01_NetStat_Report.html)

**Table 2: 2015 SOAR-Assisted Appeals Outcomes**

State	Locality	2015 Appeals Decisions	2015 Appeals Approvals	2015 Appeals Allowance Rate	2015 Appeals Average Days	Years of Data	Appeals Cumulative Decisions	Appeals Cumulative Approvals	Cumulative Appeals Allowance Rate
Alabama	Birmingham	0	0	N/A	N/A	5	4	4	100%
Alaska	State	0	0	N/A	N/A	4	20	8	40%
Arizona	Phoenix	1	0	0%	N/A	5	50	29	58%
Arkansas	Multiple sites	116	107	92%	104	5	199	141	71%
California	Multiple sites	198	42	21%	78	4	333	140	42%
Colorado	State	4	2	50%	N/A	6	76	64	84%
Connecticut	State	2	2	100%	90	4	55	19	35%
District of Columbia	Multiple sites	25	15	60%	448	5	61	34	56%
Florida	State	83	49	59%	92	6	398	220	55%
Georgia	Multiple sites	24	19	79%	117	5	469	173	37%
Hawaii	State	0	0	N/A	N/A	3	5	5	100%
Idaho	Multiple sites	10	3	30%	84	4	57	21	37%
Illinois	Multiple Sites	16	6	38%	110	4	31	19	61%
Indiana	State	1	1	100%	68	1	1	1	100%
Iowa	State	6	1	17%	76	5	38	19	50%
Kansas	Multiple Sites	38	20	53%	122	6	168	109	65%
Kentucky	State	6	1	17%	78	6	224	130	58%
Louisiana	Multiple sites	15	10	67%	99	5	110	67	61%
Maryland	Multiple sites	27	19	70%	108	6	180	136	76%
Massachusetts	State	0	0	N/A	N/A	2	1	0	0%
Michigan	State	12	8	67%	332	6	662	452	68%
Minnesota	State	26	9	35%	194	5	213	154	72%
Mississippi	State	0	0	N/A	N/A	4	7	3	43%
Missouri	State	3	1	33%	38	5	20	15	75%
Montana	Billings	4	4	100%	60	4	42	21	50%
Nebraska	Multiple sites	48	17	35%	72	6	337	146	43%
Nevada	Multiple sites	12	12	100%	200	5	131	107	82%
New Jersey	State	10	5	50%	133	6	127	80	63%
New Mexico	State	18	13	72%	193	5	79	39	49%
New York	State	386	177	46%	540	5	406	188	46%
North Carolina	State	68	46	68%	N/A	6	405	303	75%
Oregon	Portland	39	29	74%	N/A	6	395	214	54%
Pennsylvania	State	5	5	100%	217	2	126	65	52%
Rhode Island	State	1	0	0%	66	4	168	103	61%
South Carolina	State	7	5	71%	107	4	52	26	50%
South Dakota	Sioux Falls	6	4	67%	45	1	6	4	67%
Tennessee	State	6	5	83%	30	5	23	14	61%
Texas	State	15	9	60%	175	3	35	19	54%
Utah	State	0	0	N/A	N/A	4	1585	497	31%
Virginia	State	54	35	65%	171	6	208	124	60%
West Virginia	State	6	3	50%	66	4	83	23	28%
Wisconsin	Multiple Sites	33	14	42%	101	5	171	83	49%
Wyoming	Multiple sites	4	0	0%	227	4	9	3	33%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>1,335</b>	<b>698</b>	<b>52%</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>7,770</b>	<b>4,022</b>	<b>52%</b>

**For More Information**

For more information about SOAR visit <http://soarworks.prainc.com> or email [soar@prainc.com](mailto:soar@prainc.com). Follow us on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/soarworks> or on Twitter [@soarworks](https://twitter.com/soarworks).