# SOAR'ing to Stability

Cracking the Code to Obtaining SSA Benefits During Homelessness

- What is SOAR?
  - Overview of SOAR
  - SSA's Disability Requirements
- Why SOAR?
  - Barriers to successful outcomes without SOAR
  - SOAR outcomes
  - Income and housing stability, successful recovery
- SOAR in your community
  - The role of the Continuum of Care (CoC)
  - Existing community and homeless services
  - PATH funding
  - State funding/Existing social services agencies
- What next? Implementing SOAR in your community!

# What is SOAR?

Overview of SAMHSA SOAR (Social Security Outreach, Access, and Recovery)

# What is SOAR?

- A model for assisting eligible individuals to apply for Social Security Administration (SSA) disability benefits

- For individuals who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness and have a serious mental illness, co-occurring substance use disorder, or other physical disabilities

- Sponsored by SAMHSA in collaboration with the Social Security Administration (SSA) since 2005

- All 50 states and Washington, DC currently participate

# SSA's Definition of Disability

**Medical Conditions**

- Documentation
- Diagnosis
- Duration

**Functional Impairments**

- Severity
- Work
- SGA

# Why SOAR?

Overview of SOAR, including benefits and outcomes

# General SSA Applications

**Long Wait Times**

- Must wait 30+ days for phone appointment to start the process
- Applications currently taking up to 18 months to process (average 12 months)

**Poor Approval Rates**

- Less than 20% of applications are approved (this number dramatically decreases for individuals who are homeless and/or live with SMI)

**Lost Applicants/Denied Applications**

- Individuals experiencing homelessness often get denied due to housing instability, difficulties obtaining medical care and documentation, and trouble navigating the complex SSA system

# SOAR Applications

**Expedited Processing**

- No waiting for phone/in-person application appointments
- Applications approved in 3-4 months*

**Excellent Approval Rates**

- 76% approval rate on initial applications (in Virginia)
- 66% average national approval rate on initial applications

**Coordinated Application Process = Successful Outcomes!**

- SOAR workers receive training to learn how to effectively navigate the SSA application process
- SOAR is supported through local, state, and national networks developing effective systems for assisting individuals experiencing homelessness
- National technical assistance through the SAMHSA SOAR TA Center

# A Foundation for Recovery and Resiliency

**More Than Income**

- Access to healthcare and housing
- Increased education and employment opportunities
- Decrease in incarceration and hospitalizations

**SSI/SSDI: One Brick in the Foundation**
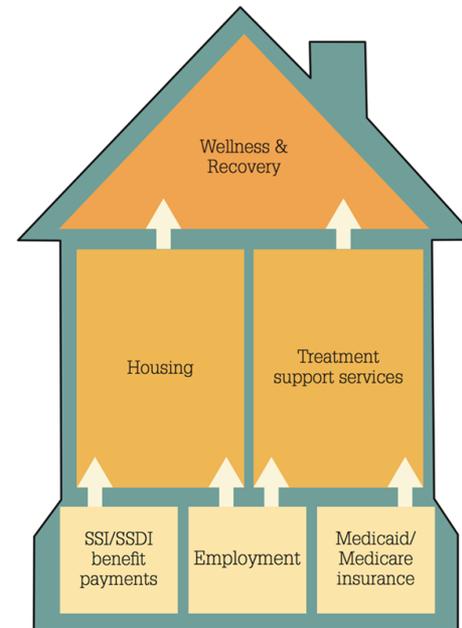
# How Do Communities Benefit?

SSI and Medicaid bring federal dollars into states, localities, and community programs:

- Health providers can recoup cost of uncompensated care.
- States and localities can recoup the cost of public assistance.
- Cash benefits and back payments received by individuals is spent in the local community *(2023: $717 million*).*

*\* https://soarworks.samhsa.gov/about-the-model/oat-and-outcomes*

# SOAR in Your Community

The Role of the Continuum of Care (CoC), Projects for Assistance in the Transition from Homelessness (PATH), local homeless services providers, and state/local social services

# The Role of Existing Homeless Service Systems

The CoC

PATH Programs

SSVF Programs

## CoC Role

- Include SOAR as part of the CoC requirement for assistance with benefits
  - Provide SOAR cohort training for entire CoC
  - Invite SOAR TA Center into discussions with CoC to assist with coordination*
  - Assist with developing coordinated process for SOAR applications
    - Will each agency designate a SOAR worker?
    - Will agencies pool funding to sponsor FT positions to handle community SOAR claims?
    - Will each agency worker process claims for individuals on their case load?

*SAMHSA SOAR TA Center Coordinated Entry Resource

## PATH Programs

INCOME=HOUSING

### Existing Objectives

- PATH's objective is to assist with transitioning individuals from homelessness to housing
  - This objective is much easier when participants have access to income

### Funding for SOAR positions

- PATH funding can be used to create/fund FT/PT SOAR Workers in PATH programs

### Technical Assistance

- Technical assistance available through the SAMHSA SOAR TA Center* and the Homeless and Housing Resource Center

*SOAR Resource for PATH and SOAR

## SSVF Programs

### Existing Expectations

- SSVF notice of funding availability (NOFA) already requires grantees to use SOAR

- SSVF housing objectives are easier to obtain and maintain when individuals have access to income

### Funding for SOAR positions

- SSVF funding can be used to create FT/PT SOAR positions within programs

### Technical Assistance

- Significant technical assistance has been developed through the SOAR TA Center* and the Veteran's Administration*

*SOAR Resource for SSVF
*SSVF SOAR Integration Toolkit

# The Role of Social Services, Federal, and State Funding

State Funding

Local DSS

Local Hospitals & MCO's

# State Funding

**State Funded Positions in Virginia**

- State General Funds utilized to create/sustain:
  - FT SOAR positions in permanent supportive housing
  - FT SOAR positions in the Commonwealth's psychiatric facilities
  - SOAR dedicated positions in local and regional jails through Forensic Discharge Program

**Other possible state-managed funding resources:**

- Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG)
- State Opioid Response Grants (SOR)
- Olmstead Funding

**Technical Assistance**

- The SOAR TA Center is available to assist with exploring funding resources and positions*

*SOAR Resource for federal & state funding

**DBHDS**

## Local Departments of Social Services

**VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES**

**SOAR Positions in Local Virginia DSS:**

• Adult Protective Services

• Family Stabilization

• VIEW Program (TANF employment supports)

• Homeless Service Units

• Division of Child Support Enforcement

**Complementary Objectives**

• Several Social Service units have objectives that depend on participant income to assist in stabilization.

• Positions are already funded to assist with applying for Social Security benefits.

  • SOAR supports expedited, positive outcomes to promote stabilization, independence, and recovery

*SOAR Resource for <u>federal & state funding</u>

# Local Hospitals & MCO's
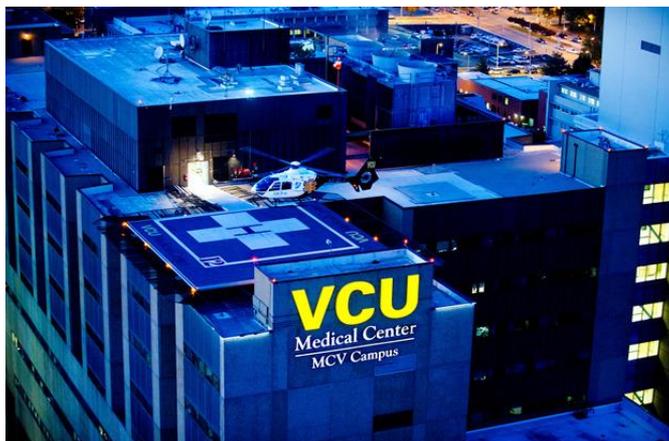


**Virginia Hospital Funded Positions:**

• High Risk Primary Care Clinic

• Oncology Clinic

**Virginia Private Managed Care Organization (MCO) funded positions:**

• High Utilizer Case Management

• Case Manager for members living with serious mental illness

**Complementary Objectives**

• Positions are already funded in local hospitals and clinics to assist with SSA application processing.

  • SOAR supports expedited, positive outcomes to promote stabilization, independence, and recovery

*SOAR Resource for federal & state funding

# Implementing SOAR in Your Community

Next steps, resources, and helpful supports

# Next Steps

- Learn more about SOAR

- Contact your SAMHSA SOAR TA Center Liaison

- Reach out to your local and/or state SOAR leads (available on the SOAR website)

- Register for the SOAR Online Course

- Use the SOAR website/tools for helpful resources around funding, hiring, and supervising SOAR positions

# Additional Resources

- SOAR Works Website and Online Course: https://soarworks.samhsa.gov/

- SOAR Outcomes Tracking: https://soartrack.samhsa.gov/

- SSA Disability Information: https://www.ssa.gov/benefits/disability/

- SAMHSA Housing Resource Center: https://hhrctraining.org/

**DBHDS**

**Join the SAMHSA SOAR email list to stay up to date on SOAR news and events!**



https://bit.ly/SOAReNews
*(Link is case sensitive)*

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Virginia SOAR Website

Social Security | Virginia SOAR | Virginia

SAMHSA SOAR Website

Home | SOAR Works! (samhsa.gov)