

# Integrating SOAR into the Homeless Response System

2024 NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON  
ENDING HOMELESSNESS

★ AND CAPITOL HILL DAY ★

JULY 8-10, 2024

WASHINGTON D.C.

#NAEH2024

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SSI/SSDI Outreach and Recovery (SOAR) can be vital in helping individuals experiencing homelessness achieve stability and transition toward housing. SOAR specialists are throughout the country, yet they often lack a direct connection to the local homeless system response. Discover how communities have woven SOAR into their coordinated efforts, enhancing income and stability for those in need.



# Integrating SOAR into Homeless Response Systems

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration  
(SAMHSA) SOAR Technical Assistance Center  
Policy Research Associates, Inc.



# Disclaimer

*The views, opinions, and content expressed in this presentation do not necessarily reflect the views, opinions, or policies of the Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS), the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).*

# SAMHSA SOAR Technical Assistance (TA) Center



- Created in 2009 to help develop action plans for implementing and expanding SOAR programs in communities nationwide
- TA is provided to all 50 states (each state with their own liaison)
- TA is delivered in person, via telephone, electronically, and through other formats (webinars, newsletters, national calls, etc.)
- There is no cost for any technical assistance or training provided

# Quick Poll (Show of Hands)

- How many attendees are familiar with SOAR?
- How many attendees are familiar with SOAR initiatives in their local homeless response system?

# Purpose and Objectives

- **Overarching goals**

- Illustrate the effectiveness of using the SOAR model to maximize income
- Identify opportunities to integrate SOAR into homeless response systems

- **Agenda Review**

- SOAR Introduction
- SOAR and Lived Experience
- SOAR and Performance Management
- SOAR and Coordinated Entry

# What is SOAR?

- SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery
- A model for assisting eligible adults and children 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 for Adults

- The inability to engage in any substantial gainful activity (SGA) (\$1,550/month in 2024)
- By reason of any medically determinable physical or mental impairment(s)
- Which can be expected to result in death or which has lasted or can be expected to last for a continuous period of not less than 12 months.



# SOAR Works!

## 2023 Outcomes

INITIAL APPLICATIONS

APPEALS

APPROVAL RATE

66% 42%

NUMBER OF APPROVALS

2,604 324

NUMBER OF DECISIONS

3,918 763

AVERAGE DAYS TO DECISION

167 196

## Cumulative Outcomes

65%

CUMULATIVE INITIAL  
APPROVAL RATE

50%

CUMULATIVE APPEAL  
APPROVAL RATE

56,481

CUMULATIVE INITIAL  
APPROVALS

8,891

CUMULATIVE APPEAL  
APPROVALS

65,372

PEOPLE RECEIVING  
BENEFITS BECAUSE  
OF SOAR



105,013

TOTAL SERVED

\*National SOAR outcomes as of June 30, 2023

<https://soarworks.samhsa.gov/about-the-model/oat-and-outcomes>

# Homeless Response System Benefit: Income Growth

## How does SOAR fit into Homeless Response?

- SOAR Works across the lifespan, with diverse populations, and within complex systems.
- Efficiency: The goal is to improve the health and quality of life of people experiencing chronic homelessness by rapidly facilitating their entitlement to federal benefits and medical insurance
- Equity/Health Equity
- Value of Lived Experience

## Benefits of SOAR in Homeless Response



**Housing Cost burden can be a primary cause or contributing factor to the risk of homelessness**



**Wide ranging positive impacts of increasing income**

- HUD System Performance Measures for CoC-funded projects
- Increasing housing stability/options for Veterans served by VA grantees (SSVF, GPD, HUD-VASH)
- Reductions in hospitalizations and recidivism

Justin Volpe – Senior Peer Support Coordinator (National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors)

## **SOAR & Lived Experience**

Hope Rodgers – CoC Performance Manager (TX Balance of State CoC)

# **SOAR & Performance Management**

Omar Martinez – Homeless Response System Planning & Implementation Manager. (Coalition for the Homeless of Houston/Harris County)

## **SOAR & Coordinated Entry**

# The SOAR Online Courses



## **SOAR Online Course: Adult Curriculum**

This course trains case workers to assist adults (age 18+) who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness and have a serious mental illness, medical impairment, and/or a co-occurring substance use disorder to apply for the Social Security Administration's (SSA) disability programs, Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI).



## **SOAR Online Course: Child Curriculum**

This course trains case workers to assist children (under age 18) who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness and have a serious mental illness, medical impairment, and/or a co-occurring substance use disorder to apply for Supplemental Security Income (SSI), a Social Security Administration (SSA) disability benefit program.

- Standardized training provided across all geographic areas
- SOAR Leaders can coordinate follow-up training and support
- Course is FREE, web-based, and self-guided
- 20 CEUs from National Association of Social Workers (NASW)

# Getting Involved: Time Commitment

- Emphasis on being able to commit time to complete and submit quality applications
- 20-40 hours per complete application
- Completing all SOAR critical components
- Tracking outcomes

**SOAR** WORKS

**SAMHSA**  
Substance Abuse and Mental Health  
Services Administration

**Getting Involved With SOAR**

**YOU WANT TO BE A SOAR PROVIDER? THAT'S GREAT! HERE'S WHAT TO EXPECT.**

SOAR promotes recovery and wellness through increased access to Social Security disability benefits for eligible individuals who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness and have a serious mental illness, medical impairment, and/or a co-occurring substance use disorder. SOAR providers assist individuals with complete and quality applications. This is not an easy task, and we want to be sure that you understand the commitment required—it is well worth the effort!

**TRAINING**

The **free** SOAR Online Course ([soarworks.samhsa.gov/online-courses](https://soarworks.samhsa.gov/online-courses)) trains providers to assist individuals with the Social Security disability application process. The course includes an Adult Curriculum for assisting with Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) claims for adults and a Child Curriculum for assisting with SSI claims for children.

Each curriculum has 7 classes, each of which has a series of articles, short quizzes, and a practice case component. The practice case provides an opportunity for trainees to apply what they have learned in the course by completing a sample application for a fictitious applicant using SOAR techniques.

It takes approximately 20 hours to complete each curriculum, and participants can work at their own pace. We encourage students to complete the curriculum within 30 days to retain the information learned.

Upon successful completion, participants will receive **20 continuing education units** from the National Association of Social Workers.

Many SOAR Local Leads offer SOAR Online Course Review Sessions to review key components of the curriculum, discuss local/state practices, and connect new providers to local Social Security Administration (SSA) and Disability Determination Services (DDS) offices.

**TIME COMMITMENT**

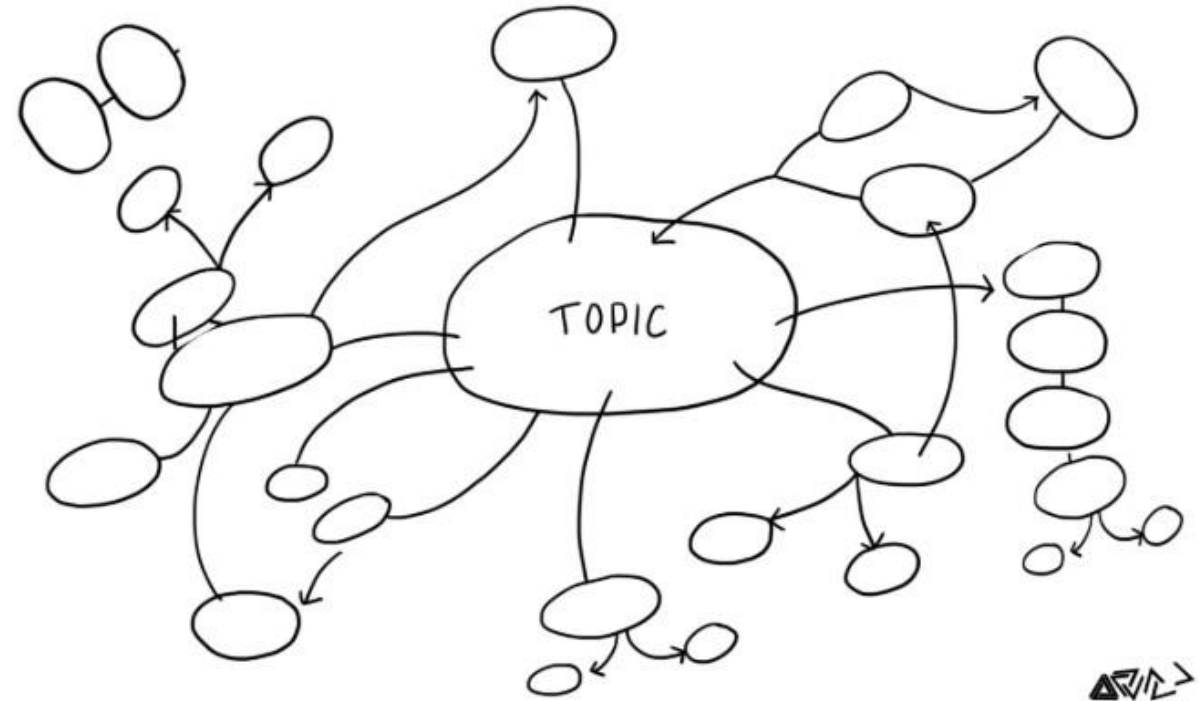
We estimate that each SOAR application will take approximately **20-40 hours** to complete, from initial engagement to receiving a decision on a claim. This generally occurs over the course of **60-90 days**.

The time spent on each application will vary depending on the amount of engagement that is needed as well as other variables such as the experience level of the SOAR worker. For example, engagement with an applicant who is residing in an institution may take 20 hours, while it may take longer to connect with someone who is living outside or difficult to contact.



# Next Steps: Consider the Following?

- What does your system look like?
- What are your community priorities?
- Where could you see the biggest impact if you added SOAR?





# Questions?

Question & Answer  
Open Discussion



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



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



# Thank You

SAMHSA's mission is to reduce the impact of substance abuse and mental illness on America's communities.

<https://soarworks.samhsa.gov>

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