

SOAR Works for Individuals Involved in the Criminal Justice System

Incarceration and SSA Disability Benefits

The Social Security Administration (SSA), through its Supplemental Security Income and Social Security Disability Insurance programs, can provide income and other benefits to support a healthy return to communities for previously incarcerated individuals. SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery (SOAR), a project funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), is a national technical assistance program that helps people who are experiencing or at risk for homelessness to access SSA disability benefits. The SAMHSA SOAR Technical Assistance Center can help local corrections and community transition staff integrate benefit options with community reentry strategies for people with serious mental illness and co-occurring disorders to promote post-release success.

- People with mental illnesses remain in jail eight times longer than other offenders at a cost that is seven times higher (Mental Health America, 2008).
- At least three quarters of incarcerated individuals with mental illness have a co-occurring substance use disorder (Council of State Governments, 2012).
- More than 20 percent of prisoners with mental illness experienced homelessness in the months before their incarceration, compared with 10 percent of the general prison population (Greenberg & Rosenheck, 2008).
- The intersection of criminal justice and behavioral health not only affects the justice-involved person but all systems involved in their care (treatment, housing, employment, and supervision).

SOAR and CJ Work!

- As of August 10, 2019 73% of 407 SOAR-assisted initial applications were approved for applicants were approved for applicants residing in jail or correctional facilities in an average of 85 days (according to the SOAR Online Application Tracking (OAT) system).
- SOAR initiatives within criminal justice settings continue to link people with mental illness to benefits upon their release, helping provide the momentum for more correctional facilities to consider using this approach as a foundation for building successful transition or reentry programs.

The Impact of Incarceration on Social Security Benefits

Incarceration Time	Effect on Benefits	Action Needed Upon Release
< 1 full calendar month	No effect	None
1 – 12 calendar month	Suspended	Can be reinstated upon release
12+ consecutive calendar months	Terminated	Must reapply

*As a general rule, reapplication can be made 30 days prior to expected release date but benefits cannot begin until release. With a pre-release agreement, this time can be extended to the 120 days prior to release.

The Impact of Incarceration on Social Security Disability Insurance

Incarceration Time	Effect on Benefits	Action Needed Upon Release
< 30 days	No effect	N/A
>30 days* convicted and confined	Suspended	Can be reinstated upon release

*Recipients are eligible to continue receiving their benefits until they are convicted of a criminal offense and confined to a penal institution for more than 30 consecutive days

SOAR Works with Jails: Eleventh Judicial Criminal Mental Health Project

The Eleventh Judicial Criminal Mental Health Project (CMHP) in Miami-Dade County, Florida was established in 2000 to divert individuals with serious mental illnesses or co-occurring substance use disorders from the criminal justice system into comprehensive community-based treatment and support services. The CMHP program supports SOAR dedicated staff trained to assist with SSI/SSDI applications. Through their dedication and collaboration, CMHP has achieved outstanding outcomes. From July 2008 through July 2019, 90 percent of 631 individuals were approved for SSI/SSDI benefits on initial application in an average of 43 days.

SOAR Works with State Prisons: Michigan Department of Corrections

In 2007, the Michigan Department of Corrections (DOC) discussed implementing SOAR in a region where the majority of the state’s prisoners with mental illnesses are housed. In January 2009, 25 DOC staff from 8 facilities, the facility administration, and prisoner reentry staff members attended a 2-day SOAR training session. The state developed a process to address issues such as release into the community before a decision is made by SSA, the optimal time to initiate the application process, and collaboration with local SSA and Disability Determination Services (DDS) offices. For Fiscal Year 2019 alone, the Michigan DOC has maintained a 78 percent approval rate over an average of 85 days.

Contact SOAR

soar@prainc.com

(518) 439-7415 ext. 2

<https://soarworks.prainc.com/>