

SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access and Recovery (SOAR) and Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP)

Connecting Veterans with Social Security Administration (SSA) disability benefits is a critical step to increasing income stability for Veterans and their families, particularly for those Veterans whose work activity is limited by disabling conditions. The SOAR model helps individuals obtain SSA disability benefits while they are pursuing their vocational goals through the HVRP Program.

Social Security Basics

SSA administers two disability programs that can provide assistance to Veterans and their families.

- Supplemental Security Income (SSI) is a needs-based program for individuals who are blind, disabled, or elderly, with low income/resources.
- Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) is for blind or disabled individuals who are insured through employee and employer contributions to the Social Security Trust Fund.
- In most states, Medicaid and/or Medicare health insurance accompany these benefits for those eligible.

Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP)

Funded by the U.S. Department of Labor – Veterans' Employment and Training Service (DOL-VETS), the goals of HVRP are to provide services to assist in reintegrating homeless Veterans into meaningful employment and stimulate the development of effective service delivery systems to address the needs of homeless veterans.

Helping Veterans access SSI/SSDI while pursuing employment

There are a number of **myths** around working while applying for or receiving SSI/SSDI benefits:

- You cannot work at all while applying for SSI/SSDI
- Benefits end immediately when you return to work
- You can only work 20 hours per week while receiving SSI/SSDI
- If Social Security knows you are working they will say you aren't disabled anymore

Luckily for the Veterans we serve, these myths are false!

Working while applying for SSI/SSDI

You can work during the application process, and information gathered from work activity can help strengthen the SSI/SSDI application by documenting any functional limitations an individual experiences at work. SSA looks at the *type* and *amount* of work completed to see if an individual can maintain "substantial gainful activity (SGA)." This is quantified as earning \$1,350/month (2022 amount).

Working after being approved for SSI/SSDI

SSA has numerous work incentives for both SSI and SSDI recipients that encourage individuals to seek and maintain employment without the fear of losing their hard-earned benefits. SSA's Ticket to Work Program is a free program available to all SSI/SSDI beneficiaries. SSA has specialists that can explain in detail how going back to work will impact a person's benefits.

- Their website, <https://choosework.ssa.gov/>, has links to local employment resources and offers free training webinars for beneficiaries and service providers

Overview of SSA disability benefits for Veterans

Veterans may be eligible for SSA disability benefits regardless of the decision they receive for VA disability benefits. The definition of disability and application process is different for SSA and VA disability benefits.

For SSI/SSDI, the Veteran needs to show:

1. Evidence of a physical and/or mental health condition, which results in functional impairments that limit their ability to work at a substantial gainful level (quantified as \$1,350/month in 2022).
2. That the disabling condition has lasted, or is expected to last, for 12 months or end in death.

The definition of disability for SSI/SSDI does not require the Veteran's disability to be linked to their military service, does not take into account a Veteran's discharge status, and does not pay on a graduated scale.

SSA Expedited Processing for Veterans

Veterans may qualify for programs from SSA that expedite disability decisions:

1. 100% Permanent and Total Veterans Initiative

In March 2014, SSA introduced a new initiative to expedite the processing of applications from Veterans who have a 100% Permanent and Total (P&T) disability rating from the VA. To receive expedited processing, Veterans should identify themselves as a "Veteran rated 100% P&T" when initiating the SSI/SSDI application, and should provide the VA rating notification letter to SSA.

2. Wounded Warriors

Veterans who received disabling mental or physical health injuries while on active duty on or after October 1, 2001 are eligible for expedited SSI/SSDI application processing. The injury does not need to have occurred during combat operations. When initiating the SSI/SSDI application, Veterans should inform SSA that their injury occurred while on active duty.

SOAR and HVRP Strategies

1. Educate Veterans that they **can** work and receive SSA disability benefits!
2. Utilize Social Security work incentives and SSA's Ticket to Work program
3. Celebrate successful examples of Veterans who work while receiving SSA disability benefits

Resources:

The SOAR model assists Veterans nationwide who are experiencing or at-risk of homelessness in accessing SSA disability benefits. Training in the SOAR model is available, free of charge, from the SAMHSA SOAR Technical Assistance Center. For more information, contact SOAR@prainc.com or visit <https://soarworks.samhsa.gov>.

Information about SSA work incentives on the SOAR Works website:

<https://soarworks.samhsa.gov/topics/employment-work-incentives>

"SOAR and Employment for SSI/SSDI Beneficiaries." The SAMHSA SOAR TA Center.

<https://soarworks.samhsa.gov/article/soar-and-employment-ssissdi-beneficiaries>

The Red Book - A Guide to Work Incentives. Social Security Administration's guidebook on work incentives.

<https://www.ssa.gov/redbook/>

More information about SSA expedited processing can be found at: <https://www.ssa.gov/people/veterans/>